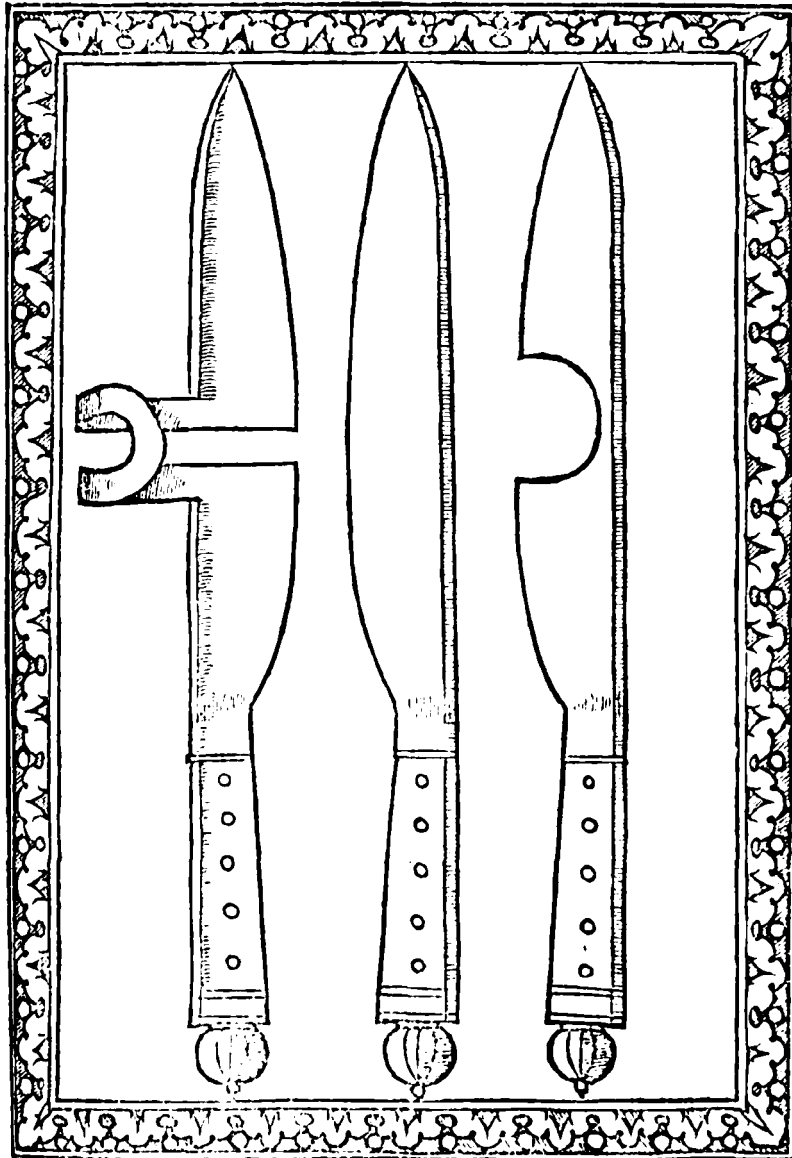


Deception in Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*

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The middlemost knife is to serue for shew; the other two be the knives of deuise.

“Such things as we being bewitched doo imagine, have no truth at all either of action or essence, beside the bare imagination.”

Reginald Scot (1584). *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Book 13, Chapter 20

Introduction

There was no protective glass to filter the ultraviolet. No brass chain to limit my travel. No cotton gloves to eliminate my fingerprints. And no minder to police my behaviour. A grubby white pillow sat incongruously on a black mahogany desk alongside a heavy, braided cord - a page-holder that snaked its way untidily across the tabletop. I reverentially set the book onto the pillow and turned its thick leather cover to expose a page yellowed, mottled and dirty, 400 years of scrutiny fused into the atoms of its paper, smears and stains that now told their own story.

At the top of the page, an illustrated human head symmetrically embellished with foliage and serpents gazed knowingly back at me, perhaps signifying the wisdom that was to follow. Elizabethan text aligned centrally on the page, each line shorter and in a smaller font than the proceeding line. Each paragraph a textual triangle colliding into a subsequent smaller triangle, an upside-down Christmas tree black against the yellow page. Handwritten notes inked in a faded, flowing script accompanied arcane pencil marks in the margins. A violent army of anachronisms assailed my comprehension, the esoteric language and antiquated font and unfamiliar letterforms all conspiring to inhibit straightforward reading. Instead, the text demanded multiple re-readings, referral to an Elizabethan dictionary, and frequent visits online to translate from Latin, Arabic, and Greek into English. Yet, these obstacles only amplified my excitement to be studying a first edition of this work. An authentic original. Not my delivered-next-day gimcrack reproduction.

It is my favourite book on deception. One that I return to regularly, each time unearthing new insights buried deep within its pages. Reginald Scot wrote it in 1584 to "undeceive" judges, witchfinders, and a fearful public, urging them to relinquish their beliefs in witchcraft. The book systematically lays out Scot's case, studiously explaining why the execution of innocent women (around 50,000 in Europe) for the supposed crime of witchcraft was ignorant, unjust, and ungodly. In this essay, I shall explain why I believe it is one of the

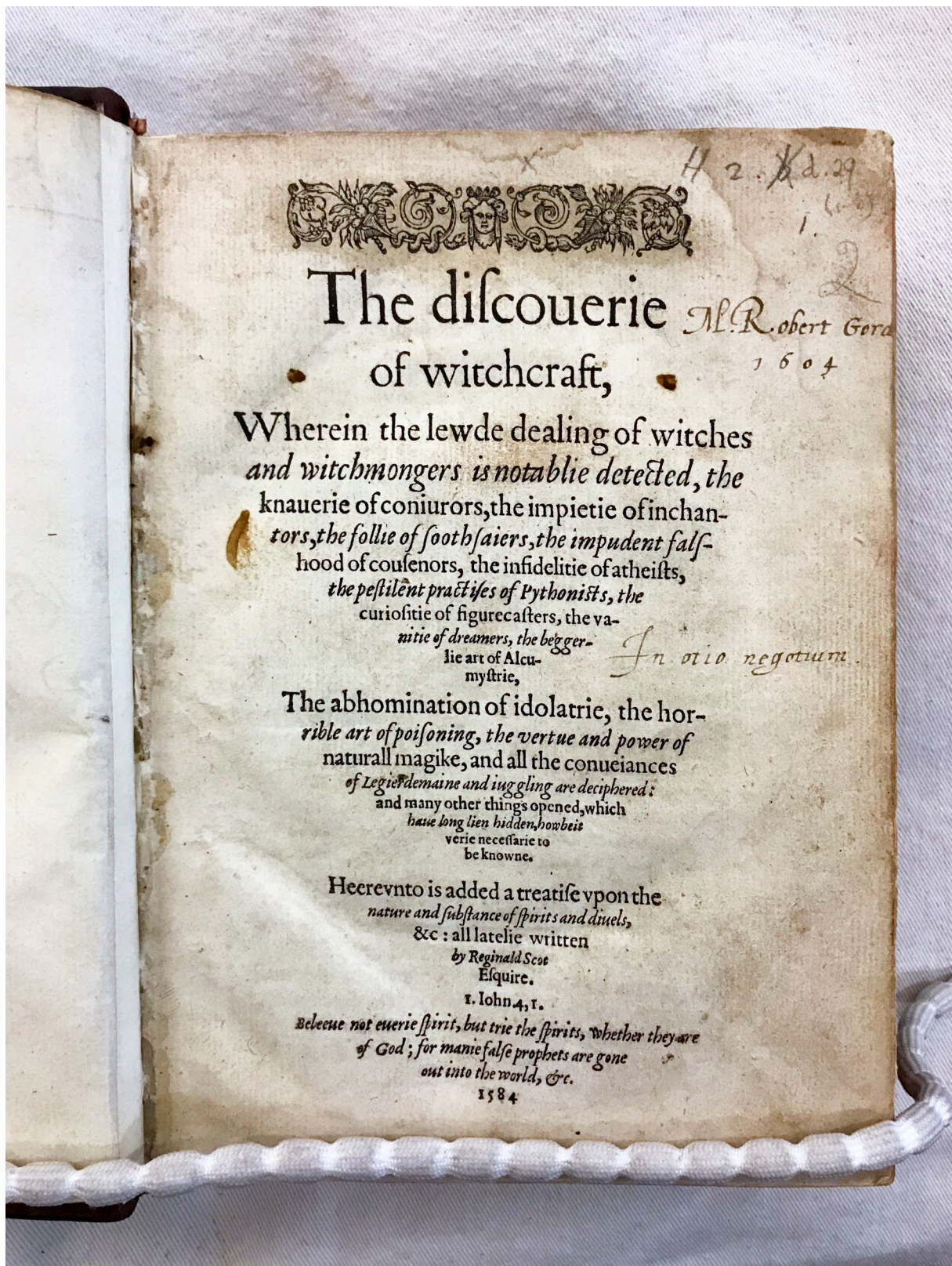
most important books written on the psychology of deception, and why it speaks so forcefully to many related issues today. I will also describe why the first edition copy of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, held by the National Library of Scotland, is so unusual.

Note that the essay uses block quotations from Scot throughout, so that the reader may both gain a sense of his original writing and see for themselves how insightful his thinking is. All excerpts from the book are referenced in regular parentheses, identifying the sub-book and chapter of its source. Scot's original Elizabethan English has been retained in all quotations, however, explanations in square brackets accompany any words or sentences that lack clarity or require translation into modern English.

Historical Context

In 1485, an Austrian woman named Helena Scheuberin went on trial accused of sorcery, having allegedly used magic to murder the nobleman and knight Jörg Spiess. At the time, sorcery was regarded as a minor offence as it was not considered an evil practice. At her trial, the authorities decided that Scheuberin had not committed any crimes, and she was freed without charge.

The trial was in part overseen by German Catholic clergyman and inquisitor Heinrich Kramer, who had travelled to Germany to investigate witches. Kramer was dissatisfied with the outcome of Scheuberin's trial and returned to Cologne to write a treatise on witchcraft that later turned into his book, the *Malleus Maleficarum* or *The Witches' Hammer*, published in 1496 under his Latin surname, *Institoris* (Institoris, 1496). The book proved enormously popular, especially within the Roman Catholic Church where it rapidly became the primary reference for Inquisitors, guiding their beliefs and resultant actions during the Inquisition (the movement by the Catholic church to combat heretical views that ran counter to orthodox religious doctrine).



H 2. Xd. 29
1. (1. 2)
2
The discoverie *M. R. Robert Gora*
of witchcraft, *1604*

Wherein the lewde dealing of witches
and witchmongers is notablie detected, the
knauerie of coniurors, the impietie of inchan-
tors, the follie of soothsaiers, the impudent fals-
hood of coulenors, the infidelitie of atheists,
the pestilent practises of Pythonists, the
curiolitie of figurecasters, the va-
niitie of dreamers, the begger-
lie art of Alcu-
mytrie, *In otio negotium.*

The abhominacion of idolatrie, the hor-
rible art of poisoning, the vertue and power of
naturall magike, and all the conueiances
of Legie demaine and iugling are deciphered:
and many other things opened, which
haue long lien hidden, howbeit
verie necessarie to
be knowne.

Heerevnto is added a treatise vpon the
nature and substance of spirits and diuels,
&c: all lately written
by Reginald Scot
Esquire.

1. Iohn 4. 1.

Beleeue not euerie spirit, but trie the spirits, whether they are
of God; for manie false prophets are gone
out into the world, &c.

1584

Figure 1 – *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), cover page

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Kramer believed that “all witchcraft comes from carnal lust”, and that women’s uncontrolled sexuality, spiritual weakness, and their natural proclivity for evil made them the direct channels of the devil (Institoris, 1496, Part I, Question VI). The *Malleus Maleficarum* defined sorcery as a form of heresy, and it demanded the prosecution of all those who practised it. It specified the use of torture as the most reliable means to obtain evidence of Satanic practice. And it insisted that all proven witches be sentenced to death, as this was the only guaranteed means to extinguish their evils. Over the years that followed, the *Malleus Maleficarum* became widely regarded as irrefutable truth, a view that remained largely unchallenged for almost a century.

In 1519, 33 years after the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (and 24 years after his death), Jacob Sprenger, a Dominican inquisitor and theologian, was added to the book as a joint author. In subsequent editions, he is identified as its sole author. However, according to several researchers (e.g. Klose, 1972; Behringer, n.d.), there is no evidence to suggest that Sprenger had anything to do with writing the book, or with witchcraft trials, or with executions of any kind resulting from the Inquisition. His name has, therefore, erroneously become associated with the book, and, it is notable that Scot refers exclusively to Sprenger when citing the *Malleus Maleficarum*.

In 1531, German doctor, legal scholar, soldier, and theologian, Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa published the first of his three-part series *De Occulta Philosophia, Libri Tres*, or *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (Agrippa, 1531). In it, he discusses the powers of ritual magic, and its relationship to religion, medicine, astrology, herbs, geography, animals, angels, devils, witches, charms, the weather, and a host of other subjects. The book also included detailed descriptions of a range of magical rituals and associated spells, and it became something of a reference book for scholars of the dark arts of magic.

In 1542, the *Witchcraft Act* was established in England by Henry VIII. The act identified witchcraft as a crime that was punishable

by death and forfeiture of a convicted witch’s goods and chattels.

In 1563, Henry’s daughter, Elizabeth I, created a new Witchcraft Act, *An Act Against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts*, that only demanded punishment by death for cases of witchcraft where harm had been inflicted (lesser cases were punishable by imprisonment and pillory). From this period onwards, incidents of murder attributable to witchcraft began to be recorded formally, and such accusations spread rapidly throughout England.

1563 also saw the establishment of *The Scottish Witchcraft Act*, that made both the practice of witchcraft and consultation with witches crimes that were punishable by death. This act remained on the Scottish statute books for the best part of 200 years, until its repeal in 1735.

Also, in 1563, Dutch physician Johann Weyer published *De Praestigiis Daemonum* or *The Delusions of Demons* (Weyer, 1563). In it, he systematically attacked Institoris’s theories about witchcraft and criticised the witch trials that followed. He was also highly critical of the Catholic Church for promulgating superstitions about witches. Weyer argued that witchcraft did not exist and that those who claimed to practice it were suffering from delusions that should be treated as mental illnesses rather than punished as crimes. His book served temporarily to dampen the fervour for finding, prosecuting and executing witches.

However, in 1580, French jurist, political philosopher and MP Jean Bodin published his book *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers*, or *Of the Demon-mania of the Sorcerers* (Bodin, 1580) to attack Weyer’s thinking. Bodin favoured Institoris’s original views, arguing that witchcraft *did* exist and that all rumours relating to witchcraft were true. He cited numerous examples of those who had confessed to being witches (conveniently omitting the role of torture in extracting these confessions). Bodin took seriously the claims of those who were suffering from mental illness and proclaimed themselves possessed by the devil. He also cited exorcisms as proof that witchcraft existed (irrespective of whether

such exorcisms had any basis in reality). As a direct refutation of Weyer, Bodin claimed that any explanation of witchcraft as mental illness was proof that the devil himself had placed his evil falsehoods into the head of the doubter. Further, those who did not share his views on witchcraft did not believe the word of God and were atheists. Bodin's work was translated into several languages and became highly influential, catching the public's imagination and serving to reignite popular zeal for persecuting and prosecuting witches.

The Malleus Maleficarum, *De Occulta Philosophia*, *De Praestigiis Daemonum*, and *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers* provided the literary backdrop to Scot's writing of *Discoverie*, and he referenced them all extensively. The surge of public hysteria resulting from the publication of Bodin's work had led to a significant increase in the use of the *Malleus Maleficarum* to try witches, leading to their execution. It was this environment that provided the context for Scot's writing of *Discoverie*.

Reginald Scot

Reginald Scot was born sometime around 1538 in the village of Smeeth in Kent, although the precise date is unknown. Aged around 17, Scot went to Hart Hall at Oxford University (which in 1740 became Hertford College) to study law. After a year or so, he dropped out. He moved back to Kent where he began researching and writing about the cultivation of hops, managing property that he had inherited, and contributing his engineering knowledge to the construction of a dam in Dover Harbour. Over this period he also found time to become an MP and to father seventeen children with his first wife. Throughout his life, Scot obsessively read rare and esoteric books about philosophy and religion.

Bodin's *Démonomanie* precipitated a surge in collective paranoia regards the existence of witchcraft, leading to the execution of thousands of women (and a handful of men) for this crime. Scot applied his legal education to examine the evidential base for these prosecutions. He studied guidebooks on 'finding' (identifying) witches (including the guidance contained

in the *Malleus Maleficarum*) and he met with women who claimed to be, or were accused of being, witches and studied carefully their abilities (or lack thereof). He spent time in villages speaking to those who believed in witchcraft. And he studied the legal basis for prosecuting witches, involving his attendance at several witch trials.

Scot concluded that the phenomena associated with witchcraft were not the results of pacts made with the devil. Instead, he believed that there were entirely rational explanations for the arising claims and accusations. He agreed with Weyer that some of those accused suffered from mental illness (at the time, described as 'melancholie'). Those suffering could be viewed as different or unusual by society, and such differences taken by Inquisitors as evidence of possession by evil spirits. However, Scot also believed that many cases of witchcraft were not attributable to mental illness, and were instead attributable to faulty reasoning, confirmatory bias, wishful thinking, self-deception, mob-rule mentality, and sometimes outright trickery and deceit.

While Scot's investigation was grounded in rationality and the collection and analysis of evidence, he also rejected witchcraft based on his own Protestant beliefs, arguing that only God could possess the powers that others claimed were used by witches.

Throughout *Discoverie*, Scot attacks Catholicism for promulgating and accelerating the belief in witchcraft, and he held it directly responsible for the execution of innocent women. He further criticised what he viewed as Catholicism's promotion of superstitious rituals that ran contrary to 'legitimate' (i.e. Protestant) beliefs:

“...popish charmes, conjurations, exorcisms, benedictions and curses [are] not onlie... ridiculous, and of none effect, but also... impious and contrarie to Gods word...”

(Introduction to the Reader)

And he further accused priests of maintaining these superstitions primarily to extract money from worshippers:

“All protestants perceive, that popish charmes, conjurations, execrations, and benedictions are not effectually, but be toies [trifling playthings] and devises onelie to keepe the people blind, and to enrich the cleargie.”

(Book 16, Chapter 7).

Despite his scepticism regards witchcraft, Scot shared many of the common beliefs and superstitions of the time, including the healing powers of the unicorn's horn, and that precious stones owed their origin to the influences of heavenly bodies and could affect various outcomes. Other superstitious beliefs were accepted solely upon the authority of other authors he admired, for example:

“Tie a wild bull to a figtree, and he will be presentlie tame; or hang an old cocke thereupon, and he will immediatlie be tender; as also the feathers of an eagle consume all other feathers, if they be intermedled together. Wherein it may not be denied, but nature sheweth hir selfe a proper workwoman. But it seemeth unpossible, that a little fish being but halfe a foot long, called Remora or Remiligo, or of some Echeneis, staieth a mightie ship with all hir loade and tackling, and being also under saile. And yet it is affirmed by so manie and so grave authors that I dare not denie it; speciallie, because I see as strange effects of nature otherwise: as the propertie of the loadstone, which is so beneficiall to the mariner; and of Rheubarb, which onelie medleth with choler, and purgeth neither flegme nor melancholie, & is as beneficiall to the physician, as the other to the mariner.”

(Book 13, Chapter 4)

Despite holding several dubious beliefs, a confluence of Scot's rationality, his legal training, his scholarly study of prior works concerning witchcraft, his religious beliefs (including his anti-Catholicism), and his strong sense of morality and compassion, motivated Scot to document the findings from his investigations in his book, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.

The Book

The Discoverie of Witchcraft was published in 1584 by William Brome of London. The word 'Discoverie' means revelation or exposure, and Scot's book intended to reveal the 'true' (i.e. non-existent) nature of witchcraft. *Discoverie* is a weighty tome, comprising over 600 pages, divided into 16 sub-books. The book's full and formal title hints at the extensive scope of topics it addresses:

“*The discoverie of witchcraft, Wherein the lewde dealing of witches and witchmongers is notably detected, the knaverie of conjurors, the impietie of inchantors, the follie off soothsayers, the impudent falsehood of cousenors, the infidelitie of atheists, the pestilent practises of Pythonists, the curiositie of figurecasters, the vanitie of dreamers, the beggerlie art of Alcumystrie, the abhominacion of idolatrie, the horrible art of poisoning, the vertue and power of naturall magike, and all the conveiances of Legierdemaine and iuggling are deciphered: and many other things opened, which have long lien hidden, howbeit verie necessarie to be knowne. Heereunto is added a treatise upon the nature and substance of spirits and divels, &c. [etc.]: all latelie written by Reginald Scot Esquire.*”

(*Discoverie*, Title Page)

The book is meticulously researched, and in its opening pages, Scot lists two hundred and twelve authors whose works in Latin he had consulted, plus twenty-three authors who wrote in English, as well as other Greek and Arabic writers. The book also draws from information Scot collected from interviews, observations, attending witch trials, studying legal documents, and corresponding and consulting with a wide variety of other experts.

As an aside, one of the English authors listed is 'Gnimelf Maharba' ('Abraham Fleming' written backwards). Fleming was an English clergyman, writer and translator, and his name lends some credibility to the

theory that Scot was influenced by, and perhaps a member of, the Family of Love. This was a mystic religious sect founded in the sixteenth century by Henry Nicholis, which promoted the belief that all things were ruled by nature and not directly by God.

Scot was an outspoken iconoclast, and *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* makes many claims that at the time were highly controversial. For example, Scot stated that there were no real witches in England (he had tried to find anyone who would offer him instruction in witchcraft, without success). He claimed that the Bible makes no mention of witchcraft and that words and spells cannot affect the physical world directly. Whilst there is undoubtedly much duplication of themes across the different books of *Discoverie*, Scot sought to address the issue of witchcraft systematically in the way he went about structuring his arguments and the arrangement of *Discoverie's* different sub-books.

Figure 2 shows the sub-books that make-up *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, and the number of chapters that each book contains. The graph provides some indication of the range of different issues addressed in each book (although it does not reflect the length of each discussion - e.g. the number of pages) for each book. Book 15, which addresses Spirits and Astrology, incorporates the broadest range of issues. It includes a discussion of a wide range of specific spirits and devils that supposedly exist, the numerous forms that they are said to take, the folly of seeking to conjure them into existence, and it presents a wide range of spells, experiments and conjurations. Astrology is also addressed sceptically in similar detail. In conjunction with Book 15, the supplementary book at the back of *Discoverie* entitled 'A Discourse on Devils and Spirits' provides additional details on these issues.

Notably, the other book that contains (by some margin) a significant number of chapters is Book 13. This book discusses natural wonders, and the deceptive methods employed in performance magic and conjuring. It is telling that Scot gave over so much space in *Discoverie* to

describing various deceptive means for manipulating and fooling others.

In the very last book (Book 16), having considered all the evidence and arguments concerning witchcraft, Scot finally defines the term (see the summary of Book 16, later). He states that he has deliberately left his definition of witchcraft until the very end of the book so that the reader can fully understand and appreciate its significance.

Each book will now be considered in turn, beginning with the Epistle.

The Epistle

The book opens with *The Epistle*, a collection of four letters addressed to each of the book's dedicatees. The first is to Sir Roger Manwood, chief baron of the exchequer. The second, to Scot's cousin, Sir Thomas Scot. The third is a joint letter to John Coldwell, Dean of Rochester, and to William Redman, Archdeacon of Canterbury. And the fourth letter is addressed directly to *Discoverie's* readers.

In these letters, Scot presents his rationale for writing the book and appeals to his readers to consider carefully the evidence he sets forth regards the cruelty of persecuting witches. He requests that readers seek-out and weigh up the evidence for themselves rather than relying on first impressions, popular hearsay, or historical tales (as the antiquity of a story is not an indication of its truth):

"O you that are wise and discrete few words may suffice: for such a one judgeth not at first sight, nor reprodueth by heresaie; but patientlie heareth, and thereby increaseth in understanding: which patience bringeth forth experience, whereby true judgement is directed.

Howbeit, how ancient so ever this barbarous conceipt of witches omnipotencie is, truth must not be measured by time: for everie old opinion is not found. Veritie is not impaired, how long so ever it be suppressed; but it is to be searched out, in how darke a corner so ever it lie hidden: for it is not like a cup of

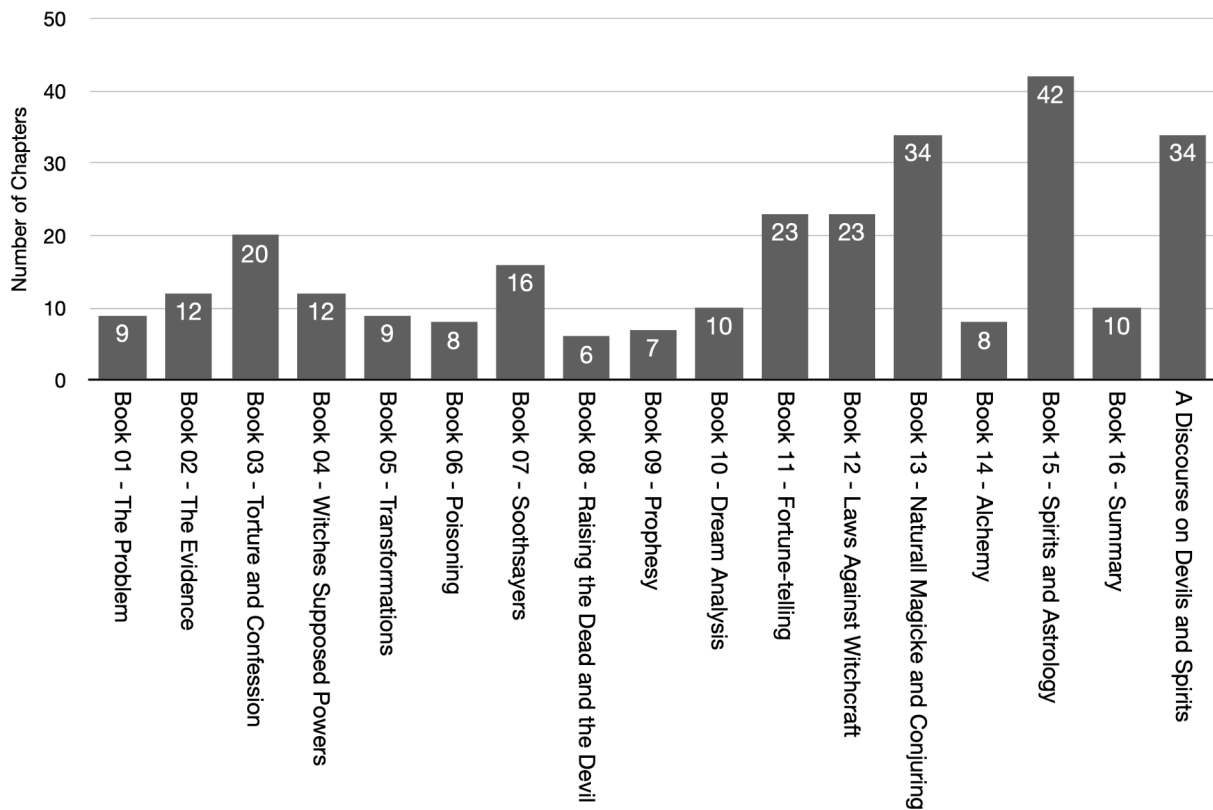


Figure 2 – The Discoverie of Witchcraft - chapters per sub-book

ale, that maybe broched too rathe [stored to mature]. Finallie, time bewraieth [betrays] old errors, and discovereth new matters of truth.”

(The Epistle)

Scot anticipates that the book will inevitably attract criticism from those who are incapable of shaking their pre-existing beliefs, suggesting that they will work hard to find fault with his ideas:

“Some be such dogs that they will barke at my writings, whether I mainteine or refute this argument... I am sure that they which never studied to learne anie good thing, will studie to find faults herat. I for my part feare not these wars, nor all the adversaries I have; were it not for certeine cowards who (I knowe) will come behind my back and bite me.”

(The Epistle)

He also notes that ignorance and custom will be the greatest adversaries to his findings, and highlights the religious

imperative of surfacing new knowledge and understanding over the perpetuation of old and erroneous superstitions:

“My greatest adversaries are yong ignorance and old custome. For what follie soever tract of time hath fostered, it is so superstitiouslie pursued of some, as though no error could be acquainted with custome. But if the lawe of nations would joine with such custome, to the maintenance of ignorance, and to the suppressing of knowledge; the civilest countrie in the world would soone become barbarous, &c [etc.]. For as knowledge and time discovereth errors, so dooth superstition and ignorance in time breed them. And concerning the opinions of such, as wish that ignorance should rather be mainteined, than knowledge busilie searched for, because thereby offense may grow: I answer, that we

are commanded by Christ himselfe to search for knowledge..."

(The Epistle)

Scot raises early his concern (which extends throughout the book) that the prosecution of witches targets some of the most vulnerable women in society:

"Because they, which are commonlie accused of witchcraft, are the least sufficient of all other persons to speake for themselves; as having the most base and simple education of all others; the extremitie of their age giving them leave to dote, their povertie to beg, their wrongs to chide and threaten (as being void of anie other waie of revenge) their humor melancholicall to be full of imaginations, from whence cheefelie proceedeth the vanitie of their confessions..."

(The Epistle)

Importantly, Scot states upfront that he does not question whether witches exist *per se* (he acknowledges, for example, that some individuals, without torture, may claim to be a witch). However, he questions fundamentally whether any individuals truly possess the powers commonly attributed to witches:

"My question is not (as manie fondlie suppose) whether there be witches or naie: but whether they can doo such miraculous works as are imputed unto them."

(The Epistle)

Book 1

In Book 1, Scot sets out the problem and expresses his concern regards what he considers to be the invalid and illegal persecution of some of the most vulnerable people in society. He identifies the types of women typically accused of witchcraft, and suggests that many women can readily be persuaded by others to believe that they are witches via suggestion and repetition (note that Scot exhibits the blatant sexism, ageism and anti-Catholicism that was rife in 16th Century England):

"One sort of such as are said to bee witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious, and papists; or such as knowe no religion: in whose drousie minds the divell hath gotten a fine seat; so as, what mischeefe, mischance, calamitie, or slaughter is brought to passe, they are easilie persuaded the same is doone by themselves; inprinting in their minds an earnest and constant imagination hereof. They are leane and deformed, shewing melancholie in their faces, to the horror of all that see them. They are doting, scolds, mad, divelish; and not much differing from them that are thought to be possessed with spirits; so firme and stedfast in their opinions, as whosoever shall onelie have respect to the constancie of their words uttered, would easilie beleieve they were true indeed."

(Book 1, Chapter 3)

Scot questions why witches only perform their acts alone and at night, rather than in front of witnesses during the daytime, or at their request. And he asks why spirits and devils only seem to appear to the aforementioned women, rather than to those who are considered more credible:

"If witches could doo anie such miraculous things, as these and other which are imputed to them, they might doo them againe and againe, at anie time or place, or at anie mans desire: for the divell is as strong at one time as at another, as busie by daie as by night, and readie enough to doo all mischeefe, and careth not whom he abuseth. And in so much as it is confessed, by the most part of witchmoongers themselves, that he knoweth not the cogitation of mans heart, he should (me thinks) sometimes appeere unto honest and credible persons, in such grosse and corporall forme, as it is said he dooth unto witches:

which you shall never heare to be justified by one sufficient witnessse.”

(Book 1, Chapter 6)

In an insightful section in Book 1, Scot highlights how confirmatory bias and strong belief can override contradictory evidence, enabling such evidence to be explained-away:

“...when anie one is coosened [fooled] with a coosening toie of witchcraft [a simple trick that is presented as witchcraft], and maketh report thereof accordinglie verifieng a matter most impossible and false as it were upon his owne knowledge, as being overtaken with some kind of illusion or other (which illusions are right enchantments) even the selfe-same man will deride the like lie proceeding out of another mans mouth, as a fabulous matter unworthie of credit. It is also to be woondered, how men (that have seene some part of witches coosenages detected, and see also therein the impossibilitie of their owne presumptions, & the follie and falsehood of the witches confessions) will not suspect, but remaine unsatisfied, or rather obstinatelie defend the residue of witches supernaturall actions: like as when a juggler [magician] hath discovered the slight and illusion of his principall feats, one would fondlie continue to thinke, that his other petie juggling knacks of legierdemaine [magic] are done by the helpe of a familiar [supernatural assistant]”

(Book 1, Chapter 7)

Scot then expresses his contempt for the cruelties that accused women are made to suffer:

“And bicause it may appeare unto the world what trecherous and faithlesse dealing, what extreame and intolerable tyrannie, what grosse and fond absurdities, what unnaturall & uncivil discourtesie, what cancred and spitefull malice, what outrageous and barbarous cruelty, what lewd and false

packing, what cunning and craftie intercepting, what bald and peevish interpretations, what abhominable and divelish inventions, and what flat and plaine knaverie is practised against these old women.”

(Book 1, Chapter 9)

Scot again requests compassion from his readers for these women. And, despite the additional effort required, he suggests that readers consider for themselves the purported evidence, and urges them to consider how they might feel if they had been accused of these crimes:

“I praie you therefore, though it be tedious & intolerable (as you would be heard in your miserable calamities) so heare with compassion, their accusations, examinations, matters given in evidence, confessions, presumptions, interrogatories, conjurations, cautions, crimes, tortures and condemnations, devised and practised usuallie against them.”

(Book 1, Chapter 9)

Book 2

In Book 2, Scot identifies the claims made about witchcraft and considers the evidence available for each. He lists Bodin's 15 crimes that constitute witchcraft (Book 2, Chapter 9) and refutes each in turn, providing explanations as to why the crime is unjust, unreliable, and where alternative statutory laws are a more appropriate basis for prosecution. Scot also notes (in Book 2, Chapter 10) that the only way for a woman accused of witchcraft to escape an Inquisitor's hands is to bribe them. The inquisitor will justify this as having exchanged punishment of the body for punishment of the purse – a form of exchange known in Catholic doctrine as an *Indulgence*.

Book 3

Book 3 discusses the unreliability of torture as a means to obtain confession and addresses the relationship between mental illness ('melancholie') and witchcraft. Scot notes the powerful effects that such illness

may have on a person's senses, judgements, beliefs, and imagination, stating that:

"If anie man advisedlie marke their words, actions, cogitations, and gestures, he shall perceive that melancholie abounding in their head, and occupieng their braine, hath deprived or rather depraved their judgements, and all their senses: I meane not of coosening witches, but of poore melancholike women, which are themselves deceived. For you shall understand, that the force which melancholie hath, and the effects that it worketh in the bodie of a man, or rather of a woman, are almost incredible. For as some of these melancholike persons imagine, they are witches and by witchcraft can worke woonders, and doo what they list: so doo other, troubled with this disease, imagine manie strange, incredible, and impossible things."

(Book 3, Chapter 9)

Scot also addresses how mental illness can lead a population to view the sufferer as unusual or different, and how a sufferer may erroneously confess to crimes that they have not committed:

"The strange and divers effects of melancholie, and how the same humor abounding in witches, or rather old women, filleth them full of mervellous imaginations, and that their confessions are not to be credited."

(Book 3, Chapter 11)

He notes that mental illness can create illusory hallucinations:

"...imagination, proceeding of melancholie doo cause illusions."

(Book 3, Chapter 17)

And, on this basis, he argues that even a witch's confession is insufficient to take away her life:

"That the confession of witches is insufficient in civill and common lawe to take awaie life."

(Book 3, Chapter 18)

At the end of Book 3, Scot warns readers about the salaciousness that follows in Book 4, despite its source material having been produced by religious authors. Book 4 discusses, amongst a range of other topics, seduction by, and sexual relationships with demons, witches' general lechery, spells that can supposedly steal-away and restore a man's penis, and witches' spells that can induce adultery. He states that he is ashamed to think about such things, but is doing so only to condemn them. Scot warns his readers that:

"But in so much as I am driven (for the more manifest bewraieng [betraying] and displaieng [displaying] of this most filthie and horrible error) to staine my paper with writing thereon certeine of their beastlie and bawdie assertions and examples, whereby they confirme this their doctrine (being my selfe both ashamed, and loth once to thinke upon such filthinesse, although it be to the condemnation thereof) I must intreat you that are the readers hereof, whose chaste eares cannot well endure to heare of such abhominable lecheries, as are gathered out of the bookes of those witchmongers (although doctors of divinitie, and otherwise of great authoritie and estimation) to turne over a few leaves [pages] ..."

(Book 3, Chapter 20)

Book 4

Book 4 questions how witches can wield powers that, according to the Bible, are only possessed by God. The chapter also addresses witches' purported sexual relationships with Incubi and Succubi, offering logical explanations for the claims that are made.

Scot questions why God created people with physical bodies to interact with the world, yet witches are alleged to conjure-up disembodied and ethereal spirits that

can interact with the world without physical bodies (Book 4, Chapter 1). He also criticises the *Malleus Maleficarum*'s Catch-22 stipulation concerning the means for identifying a witch, that "Either she is old and barren, or yoong and pregnant." (Book 4, Chapter 2).

In an interesting section that analyses the likely cause of people's experience of being visited in the night by Incubi and Succubi (demons that seduce and have sex with those that are asleep), Scot discusses the phenomena of sleep paralysis:

"But in truth, this Incubus is a bodilie disease (as hath beene said) although it extend unto the trouble of the mind: which of some is called The mare, oppressing manie in their sleepe so sore, as they are not able to call for helpe, or stir themselves under the burthen of that heaueie humor, which is ingendred of a thicke vapor proceeding from the cruditie and rawnesse in the stomach: which ascending up into the head oppresseth the braine, in so much as manie are much infeebleed therebie, as being nightlie haunted therewith. They are most troubled with this disease, that being subject thereunto, lie right upward: so as, to turne and lie on the one side, is present remedie. Likewise, if anie heare the groning of the partie, speake unto him, so as he wake him, he is presentlie releued."

(Book 4, Chapter 11)

Book 5

Book 5 examines claims of witches transforming into animals (including werewolves) and spirits, and offers explanations for how these erroneous beliefs may have arisen.

Scot asks why, when a person transforms themselves into an animal, their body (including their head and their brain) transforms, but their mind somehow remains human (Book 5, Chapter 4). In this case, he suggests that they have not turned into an animal, but into a hybrid between human and animal. This situation

raises a host of questions - such as, what would a hybrid want to eat? For example, a prevailing belief in the sixteenth century was that witches could transform themselves into wolves so that they could steal and eat babies. If this was true, would the witch's mind, residing inside the body of the wolf, be happy to eat an infant's raw human flesh? And if the witch's mind had instead been transformed fully into that of a wolf, how would the wolf's mind know that it need to re-transform itself back into a human? Similarly, if a witch were to transform a human into an ass, would the creature suffer from human or ass-related diseases and afflictions?:

"The bodie of man is subject to diuers kinds of agues, sicknesses, and infirmities, whereunto an asses bodie is not inclined: and mans bodie must be fed with bread, &c [etc.]: and not with hay."

(Book 5, Chapter 5)

Scot is intrigued that the descriptions of such transformation never mention what happens to the physical structures of the human body. For example, when a witch turns a man into a mouse, where does the 'rest' of his body go? Besides, why do witches transform a human into an animal, and then transform that animal back into a human - yet there are never any accounts of a witch starting with an animal and turning it into a human?

Scot also states his overriding concern that God would not allow a human, created in his image, to be transformed into a beast:

"What a beastlie assertion is it, that a man, whom God hath made according to his owne similitude and likenes, should be by a witch turned into a beast? What an impietie is it to affirme, that an asses bodie is the temple of the Holy-ghost? Or an asse to be the child of God, and God to be his father; as it is said of man?"

(Book 5, Chapter 5)

In Book 5, Chapter 9, Scot identifies four types of women mentioned in the Bible who may have provided the basis for the popular (although mistaken) belief that

biblical scripture discusses witches. These consist of conjurers and illusionists, poisoners, fortune-tellers, and cunning women that “mumble certeine secret words”.

Book 6

Book 6 considers that, whilst it is feasible for a human to kill another by poisoning, a human cannot kill another with words or spells alone. Scot examines the origins of the Catholic doctrine that no witch should be allowed to live and suggests that the belief most likely originated from a mistranslation of Greek into Latin that “no *poisoner* should not be allowed to live”.

In Book 6, Chapter 2, Scot powerfully raises the paradoxical problem that if witches have such mighty powers, why do they not exercise these powers to avoid their own prosecution and execution?

And in Book 6, Chapter 8, Scot deconstructs Bodin's arguments against Weyer (how Bodin “rideth over him”) and identifies how Bodin has deliberately misinterpreted Weyer's translation of Latin and Greek texts. He also notes that Bodin instead offers his alternate personal translations to suit his interpretations and pre-existing beliefs.

Book 7

Book 7 examines historical and biblical accounts of fortune-tellers and explains why their prognostications are so seductive. The book also addresses demonic possession and exorcism (Book 2, Chapter 3), with Scot stating that he has investigated over 200 claimed cases. The book also considers biblical examples of raising the dead.

In each of these areas, Scot considers the origins of such beliefs. For example, he states:

“But you shall understand, that these bugs [erroneous beliefs] specialle are spied [seen] and feared of sicke folke, children, women, and cowards, which through weaknesse of mind and

bodie, are shaken with vaine dreames and continuall feare.”

(Book 7, Chapter 15)

Scot discusses how adults' beliefs in the supernatural are formed during their childhood, as a result of their parents encouraging them to fear everything from:

“bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurers, nymphes, changlings, Incubus, Robin good-fellowe, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hell waine, the fierdrake, the puckle, Tom thombe, hob goblin, Tom tumbler, boneles, and such other bugs, that we are afraid of our owne shadowes...”

(Book 7, Chapter 15)

He highlights how context and imagination can affect belief in even the sturdiest person, and suggests that even a polled (hornless) sheep can be perceived as frightening under certain circumstances:

“... in so much as some never feare the divell, but in a darke night; and then a polled sheepe is a perillous beast, and manie times is taken for our fathers soule, specialle in a churchyard, where a right hardie man heretofore scant durst passe by night, but his haire would stand upright.”

(Book 7, Chapter 15)

Book 8

Book 8 notes that the frequently cited occurrence of miracles, prophesies, and oracles, including those mentioned in the Bible, seem mysteriously to have all but ceased. Scot notes:

“But the credit they had, depended not upon their desart [literally, ‘desert’ - i.e. the benefits they delivered], but upon the credulitie of others.”

(Book 8, Chapter 6)

Scot states that others explain contemporary cases of prophesy as the work of witches. He concludes Book 8 by sarcastically quoting from scripture about false idols, saying that:

“...let them shew what is to come, and I will saie they are gods indeed.”

(Book 8, Chapter 6)

Book 9

Book 9 builds on the themes in Book 8, questioning the credibility of miracles, oracles and prophecies, exemplifying that they never make any specific or testable claims about the future. Insightfully, the book also explains why astronomers, weather forecasters, and physicians *are* able to make viable and credible scientific predictions.

In Book 9, Chapter 2, Scot discusses why studying and forecasting the weather is not a practice associated with witchcraft but is entirely permitted according to biblical texts (as considering the weather does not detract from following a Christian vocation). As evidence, Scot draws comment on weather forecasting from Luke 12, 14; and Matthew 16. 2,3:

“When you see a cloud rise out of the west, streight waie you saie a shewer commeth: and so it is. And when you see the southwind blowe; you saie it will be hot, and so it commeth to passe. Againe, when it is evening, you saie faire weather, for the skie is red: and in the morning you saie, to daie shalbe a tempest, for the skie is red and lowring”

(Book 9, Chapter 2)

Similarly, Scot contends that studying astronomy and the phases of the moon to inform practices of agricultural and animal husbandry, does not constitute witchcraft:

“Surelie it is most necessarie for us to know and observe diverse rules astrologically; otherwise we could not with oportunitie dispatch our ordinarie affaires... The poore husbandman perceiveth that the

increase of the moone maketh plants and living creatures frutefull: so as in the full moone they are in best strength, decaying in the wane, and in the conjunction doo utterlie wither and vade. Which when by observation, use and practise they have once learned, they distribute their businesse accordingly; as their times and seasons to sowe, to plant, to proine, to let their cattell blood [blood], to cut, &c. [etc.]”

(Book 9, Chapter 2)

Finally, in Book 9, Chapter 6, Scot examines witchfinder's answers when they are challenged about their beliefs and suggests that they always answer by (often incorrectly) citing biblical verse.

Witchfinders never provide direct and contemporary real-world evidence that witches have engaged in evil practices.

Book 10

In Book 10, Scot states that dreams have natural causes, that witches cannot control them, and that they provide no sound basis for divination. He discusses dream analysis in some detail, and posits rational explanations for the unusual imagery that dreams contain, including the influence of events in the outside world, plus the inner world of fantasy and imagination:

“Howbeit, physicallyl dreames are naturall, and the cause of them dwelleth in the nature of man. For they are the inward actions of the mind in the spirits of the braine, whilst the bodie is occupied with sleepe: for as touching the mind it selfe, it never sleepeth. These dreames varie, according to the difference of humors and vapors. There are also casual dreames, which (as Salomon saith) come through the multitude of businesse. For as a looking glasse sheweth the image or figure thereunto opposite: so in dreames, the phantasie & imagination informes the understanding of such things as haunt the outward sense.”

(Book 10, Chapter 2)

However, as dream imagery consist of real memories combined with fantasy and imagination, such imagery should never be interpreted as having significant meaning.

“Certeinlie men never lightlie faile to dreame by night, of that which they meditate by daie: and by daie they see divers and sundrie things, and conceive them severallie in their minds. Then those mixed conceits being laid up in the closset of the memorie, strive together; which, bicause the phantasie cannot discerne nor discusse, some certeine thing gathered of manie conceits is bred and contrived in one together. And therefore in mine opinion, it is time vainelie emploied, to studie about the interpretation of dreames.”

(Book 10, Chapter 4)

Book 11

Book 11 provides a critique of fortune-telling and superstitions, the ineffectiveness of animal and human sacrifices for influencing the future, and it discusses why astrology is baseless, despite its veneer of science. The book also examines the nature of causality and explains how words cannot directly cause physical effects in the natural world. Scot contends that where curses or spells proceed unpleasant events, the link between the two is entirely coincidental.

Scot explains how people form superstitions (such as believing in bad luck if they spill salt or wine) based on some assumed causality between unconnected events - this reflects contemporary thinking on the psychological basis of superstition:

“Amongst us there be manie women, and effeminat men (marie papists alwaies, as by their superstition may appeere) that make great divinations upon the shedding of salt, wine, &c [etc.]: and for the observation of daies, and houres use as great withcraft as in anie thing. For if one chance to take a fall from a horsse, either in a slipperie or stumbling waie, he will note the daie and heure, and count that time

unluckch [*sic* - unluckie/unlucky] for a journie. Otherwise, he that receiveth a mischance, will consider whether he met not a cat, or a hare, when he went first out of his doores in the morning; or stumbled not at the threshold at his going out; or put not on his shirt the wrong side outwards; or his left shoo on his right foote, which Augustus Cæsar reputed for the woorst lucke that might befall.”

(Book 11, Chapter 15)

However, making a causal connection between such unrelated events is foolish:

“But sure it is meere casuall, and also verie foolish and incredible, that by two neezings, a man should be sure of good lucke or successe in his businesse; or by meeting of a tode, a man should escape a danger, or atchieve an enterprise, &c. [etc.]”

(Book 11, Chapter 19)

Scot also describes how we become so focussed on understanding the future that we neglect to study the past and the present.

He states that, for most people, if they are caught telling one lie, it is assumed that everthing they subsequently say is a lie, irrespective of the degree of truth involved. However, if a diviner tells one truth, then all their subsequent lies will be accepted as true:

“And our foolish light beleefe, forgetting things past, neglecting things present, and verie hastie to know things to come, doth so comfort and mainteine these cousenors; that whereas in other men, for making one lie, the faith of him that speaketh is so much mistrusted, that all the residue being true is not regarded. Contrariwise, in these cousenages [falsehoods] among our divinors, one truth spoken by hap giveth such credit to all their lies, that ever after we beleeve whatsoever they saie; how

incredible, impossible or false
soever it be.”

(Book 11, Chapter 22)

people, and to the furtherance of the
gospell...”

(Book 12, Chapter 1)

Book 12

Book 12 begins by considering the
purported basis by which spells and
enchantments differ from regular words:

“In these inchantments, certeine
wordes, verses, or charmes, &c
[etc.]: are secretlie uttered, wherein
there is thought to be miraculous
efficacie. There is great varietie
hereof: but whether it be by
charmes, voices, images,
characters, stones, plants, metals,
herbes, &c [etc.]: there must
herewithall a speciall forme of words
be alwaies used, either divine,
diabolicall, insensible, or papisticall,
whereupon all the vertue of the
worke is supposed to depend.”

(Book 12, Chapter 1)

In Book 12, Chapter 1, Scot notes that
whilst supposedly magical words cannot
directly change the physical world, they
can affect it indirectly (even in matters of
life and death):

“I grant that words sometimes have
singular vertue and efficacie, either
in persuasion or disuasion, as also
diverse other waies... Death and life
are in the instrument of the toong
[tongue]...”

(Book 12, Chapter 1)

He also notes that the Bible's rejection of
enchantment does not relate to the use of
magical words, as this would include
prayer:

“That which is forbidden in the
scriptures touching inchantment or
witch craft, is not the wonderfull
working with words. For where
words have had miraculous
operation, there hath beene alwaies
the speciall providence, power and
grace of God uttered to the
strengthening of the faith of Gods

Book 12 addresses the significant issue
that the Bible does not make any mention
of witchcraft, and therefore there can be no
biblical sanction against it. Scot suggests
that the criminalisation of witchcraft may
have originated in the Roman *Law of
Twelve Tables* from 450 BC, which provides
the foundation for most Western legal
systems. The twelve tables outlawed the
antisocial use of magic, including the use
of magic directed against the stealing of
corn or the inhibition of its growth, which
was punishable by death. Roman
intolerance of magic reflected suspicion
regards its secrecy, mystery, foreign
provenance, and its connection to
paganism.

The book reviews the ancient poetry cited
in publications such as Institoris's *Malleus
Maleficarum*, Bodin's *De la Démonomanie
des Sorciers*, and other writings, that
supposedly provide proof that witchcraft
exists. The book further provides an
extensive review of charms that are reputed
to bring about luck, provide protection, and
right certain wrongs. In summing-up his
views on lucky charms, Scot suggests:

“Let us then cast awaie these
prophane and old wives fables.”

(Book 12, Chapter 23)

Book 13

Book 13, one of the longest in *Discoverie*,
discusses two forms of magic - natural
magic (or the wonder) that can be found in
nature (*'natural magicke'*), and performance
magic in the guise of conjuring.

For clarification, consistent with the
language of the time, Scot employed the
term *magic* to refer to magic spells, curses,
potions, summoning spirits, etc. (i.e. what
we today would call *black magic*). The
terms *magician* and *conjurer* applied to a
person who practices *magic*. The term
juggling refers to what we today would call
performance magic (i.e. close-up or stage
illusions, etc.), that was performed by a
juggler (what we would refer to as a
magician). *Knacks* referred to the sleights

and secret moves employed by a *juggler* to achieve their effects.

In Book 13, Scot discusses the magic to be found in the natural world, including phenomena such as:

“...how the world was made, and the power of the elements, the beginning and the end, and the middest of times, how the times alter, and the change of seasons, the course of the yeare, and the situation of the starres, the nature of living things, and the furiousnesse of beasts, the power of the wind, and the imaginations of men, the diversities of plants, and the vertues of roots, and all things both secret and knowne, &c. [etc.]”

(Book 13, Chapter 2)

Scot suggests by studying the natural world, one can acquire knowledge enabling the performance of feats that others would consider to be witchcraft:

“...a man may learne the properties, qualities, and knowledge of all nature. For it teacheth to accomplish maters in such sort and oportunitie, as the common people thinketh the same to be miraculous; and to be compassed none other waie, but onelie by witchcraft. And yet in truth, naturall magicke is nothing else, but the worke of nature.”

(Book 13, Chapter 3)

Early on in Book 13, Scot notes that equivoque (ambiguous language) can be used to deceive without lying:

“And hereby is to be noted, that even a part of this art, which is called naturall or witching magicke, consisteth as well in the deceipt of words, as in the sleight of hand: wherein plaine lieng is avoided with a figurative speech, in the which, either the words themselves, or their interpretation have a double or doubtfull meaning”

(Book 13, Chapter 11)

Scot marvels at a range of other natural phenomena, include the amazing properties of water and rivers, the powers of precious stones (reflecting Scot's superstitious beliefs), the abilities of beasts, birds, and plants, dubious claims about the capabilities of the human body, the magical powers of love and attraction, and further dubious claims regards abilities obtained by consuming and using animal bones.

Scot discusses the use of placebos as natural magicke and describes sucking a pebble as a cure for seasickness. He also explains how the prescribers of placebos often seek personal credit for their curative properties:

“An excellent philosopher, whome (for reverence unto his fame and learning) I will forbear to name, was overtaken by his hostesse at Dover; who merrilie told him, that if he could reteine and keepe in his mouth certaine pibbles [pebbles] (lieng [lying] at the shore side) he should not perbreake [vomit] untill he came to Calice [Calais], how rough and tempestuous so ever the seas were. Which when he had tried, and being not forced by sicknes to vomit, nor to lose his stones, as by vomiting he must needs doo, he thought his hostesse had discovered unto him an excellent secret, nothing doubting of hir amphibologicall [ambiguous or equivocal] speech: and therefore thought it a worthie note to be recorded among miraculous and medicinable stones; and inserted it accordinglie into his booke, among other experiments collected with great industrie, learning, travell, and judgement. All these toies [trifling playthings] helpe a subtill cousener [swindler] to gaine credit with the multitude.”

(Book 13, Chapter 15)

In closing his discussion of natural magicke, Scot describes how some people may seek to take credit for other natural phenomena (i.e. that they have brought them into existence) so that they can gain a reputation for having God-like powers:

“But as these notable and wonderfull experiments and conclusions that are found out in nature it selfe (through wisdom, learning, and industrie) doo greatlie oppose and astonish the capacitie of man: so (I saie) when deceipt and illusion is annexed thereunto, then is the wit, the faith, & constancie of man searched and tried. For if we shall yeeld that to be divine, supernaturall, and miraculous, which we cannot comprehend; a witch, a papist, a conjuror, a cousener, and a juggler may make us beleeveth they are gods: or else with more impietie we shall ascribe such power and omnipotencie unto them, or unto the divell, as onelie and properlie appertineth to God.”

(Book 13, Chapter 16)

Building on this point, Scot describes how powerful deception can be in enabling a deceiver to simulate supernatural powers. However, as only God genuinely possess such powers, if a layperson claims that they have these powers, then we know that they must be lying or cheating:

“By confederacie or cousenage (as before I have said) I may seeme to manifest the secret thoughts of the hart, which (as we learne in Gods booke) none knoweth or searcheth, but God himselfe alone. And therefore, whosoever beleeveth that I can doo as I may seeme to doo, maketh a god of me, and is an idolater. In which respect, whensoever we heare papist, witch, conjuror, or cousener, take upon him more than lieth in humane power to performe, we may know & boldlie saie it is a knacke [trick] of knaverie [cheating]; and no miracle at all. And further we may know, that when we understand it, it will not be woorth the knowing. And at the discoverie of these miraculous toies [trifling playthings], we shall leave to wonder at them, and beginne to wonder at our selves, that could be so abused with bables [other playthings].”

(Book 13, Chapter 16)

Note that the line “And further we may know, that when we understand it, it will not be woorth the knowing.” speaks to a fundamental point of deception. Simple means can achieve powerful effects. And when one learns the secret method behind a case of deception, one invariably feels let down by its simplicity and cannot believe that they have been fooled by it.

The last form of natural magicke that Scot discusses is the wide variety of powerful illusions that can be created by viewing the world through different types of glass. The illusions include distortions, visual magnification and reduction, creating multiples images, focusing sunlight to create fire, and various refraction effects such as making it look as if people are hovering or flying through the air (Book 13, Chapter 19).

Prefacing a detailed review and discussion of conjuring effects, Scot notes that the supposedly real magic performed by witches in private cannot compete with the simulated magic that is performed by magicians in the open. And while witches only talk about performing magic, magicians can demonstrate it:

“These magicians did rather seeme to doo these woonders, than worke them indeed. And if they made but prestigious shewes of things, I saie it was more than our witches can doo... To conclude, it is to be avouched (and there be proofes manifest enough) that our jugglers approach much neerer to resemble Pharaos magicians [Jannes and Jambres, the magicians mentioned in the Book of Exodus], than either witches or conjurors, & can make a more livelie shew of working miracles than anie inchantors can doo: for these practise to shew that in action, which witches doo in words and termes.”

(Book 13, Chapter 20)

From Chapter 22 onwards, the remainder of Book 13 describes and explains the methods underpinning conjuring effects, including the psychological principles upon which they rely.

A selection of the extensive range of effects described includes sponge-ball multiplications, coin vanishes, transformations, and penetrations (e.g. coin through table), object transformations and teleportations, card effects, including dealing aces, card transformations, mind-reading a spectator's thought-of card, card to nut, a spectator drawing a card that has only been thought of by the magician, psychokinetic effects (such as making objects fall from shelves), transforming a box of one grain into another grain, effects with laces and streamers (including removing beads from a lace whose ends are held by a spectator), colour changing books, and a range of torture effect (eating a knife, stabbing a dagger into one's head, cutting off part of one's nose, and cutting the head off a spectator and laying it on a platter before restoring him back to full health).

Some of the stranger effects described include putting a spectator into a trance and then influencing them to strip naked and dance (Scot mentions the option to halt the routine before the spectator is fully exposed!). Additional effects include finding a stolen horse and making a gaggle of goslings tow a log through a pond.

On the deconstruction and explanation of these effects for teaching, Scot writes:

“All other parts of this art are taught when they are discovered: but this part cannot be taught by any description or instruction, without great exercise and expense of time. And for as much as I professe rather to discover than teach these mysteries, it shall suffice to signifie unto you, that the endeavor and drift of jugglers is onelie to abuse mens eies and judgements. Now therefore my meaning is, in words as plaine as I can, to rip up certeine proper tricks of that art; whereof some are pleasant and delectable, other some dreadfull and desperate, and all but meere delusions, or counterfet actions, as you shall soone see by due observation of everie knacke by me heereafter deciphered.”

(Book 13, Chapter 22)

A wide range of magic sleights and techniques are described for card work, including palming, card marking, false shuffles and cuts, stock controls, forces, colour changes, peeks, etc. Also described are different forms of thread work, gimmicks (secret devices) and gaffs (everyday items containing secret modifications) - including instructions for their design; equivoque, pre-show and instant stooging, etc. All the techniques described are commonly used in magic today.

On using these sleights and techniques effectively, Scot states that:

“These feats are nimble, cleanly, & swiftly to be conveyed; so as the eies of the beholders may not discern or perceive the drift.”

(Book 13, Chapter 23)

Scot states that he has learned about these techniques by spending time with a number of well-known magicians, including Brandon (personal magician to Henry VIII), Bomelio Feats, Steeuen Tailor (and his confederate, Pope), John Cautares, and Kingsfield. Other magicians are also referenced regards the effects that they developed (e.g. Clarvis).

It is clear that Scot studied in detail the theory of these various effects and moves, and he could also perform some of them for himself:

“For if time, place, and occasion serve, I can shew so much herein, as I am sure Bodin, Spinæus, and Vairus [authors of pro-witchcraft books], would sweare I were a witch, and had a familiar divell at commandement.”

(Book 13, Chapter 34)

Importantly, Scot goes on to discuss how, once you have thoroughly learned the patterns underpinning the achievement of various magic effects, it becomes possible to use the patterns to design entirely new effects:

“The conclusion, wherein the reader is referred to certeine patterns of instruments wherewith diverse feats

heere specified are to be executed. Herein I might wade infinitelie, but I hope it sufficeth, that I have delivered unto you the principles, and also the principall feats belonging to this art of juggling; so as any man conceiving throughlie hereof may not onlie doo all these things, but also may devise other as strange, & varie everie of these devises into other formes as he can best conceive.”

(Book 13, Chapter 34)

He also presents diagrams of various gimmicks and gaffs that he finds difficult to describe in the text, and further reinforces that idea that the principles underlying their deceptiveness can support the development of new devices:

“And bicause the maner of these juggling conveiances are not easilie conceived by discourse of words; I have caused to be set downe diverse formes of instruments used in this art; which may serve for patternes to them that would throughlie see the secrets thereof, and make them for their owne private practises, to trie the event of such devises, as in this tract of legierdemaine are shewed.”

(Book 13, Chapter 34)

In concluding Book 13, Scot states that magicians should never exploit their skills to claim possession of God-like powers. Instead, they should freely admit that they possess no supernatural powers, and should only use magic for the purposes of entertainment:

“And so long as the power of almightie God is not transposed to the juggler, nor offense ministred by his uncomlie speach and behaviour, but the action performed in pastime, to the delight of the beholders, so as alwaies the juggler confesse in the end that these are no supernaturall actions, but devises of men, and nimble conveiances...”

(Book 13, Chapter 34)

Book 14

Book 14 deconstructs the folly of alchemy (turning base metals into silver or gold) and explains why its promise seduces people so strongly. Scot begins by analysing how the language used by alchemists is deliberately technical and obscure, to ostacise the unlearned, and to “bring credit to cousenage [falsehood]”:

“And bicause the practisers heereof would be thought wise, learned, cunning, and their crafts maisters, they have devised words of art, sentences and epithets obscure, and confectious so innumerable (which are also compounded of strange and rare simples) as confound the capacities of them that are either set on worke heerein, or be brought to behold or expect their conclusions.”

(Book 14, Chapter 1)

He exemplifies at length the complexity of the language used by alchemists, including terms such as: subliming, amalgaming, engluting [eluting], imbibing, incorporating, cementing, ritration, terminations, mollifications, and indurations of bodies, matters combust and coagulat, ingots, tests, &c. [etc.]. He also provides a long list of the chemicals that alchemists claim to use in their work.

When describing the deceptive methods used by alchemists to convince the public that they can successfully achieved transmutation, he identifies the potential for making one object appear to be another:

“...the verie nature and kind of things cannot be changed, but rather made by art to resemble the same in shew and likenesse: so that they are not the verie things indeed, but seeme so to be in appearance...”

(Book 14, Chapter 6)

Scot also describes various forms of covert exchanges to swap real and false metal samples. One strategy includes coating a precious metal in wax to protect it before handing it over to the purchaser. But when the purchaser later removes the wax, the metal turns out to be valueless. Other

strategies include claiming that a purchaser's gold has somehow transformed back into lead, supplying gold-coloured low-value metals in place of real gold, casually (and apparently without care, given the supposed limitless supply) giving people free but tiny samples of real precious metals so that they will be convinced to pay more for the transformation of substantial quantities, etc.

Scot concludes Book 14 by analysing why the allure of gold renders people so vulnerable to being conned, how people come to worship gold as if it is holy, and why so many have become penniless chasing after the folly of alchemy. In doing so, he also lists a subset of the various adverse outcomes (or "mischeefes and miseries") that arise from the pursuit of such riches:

"For what reason can there be, that the hunger of gold should be counted holie, the same having (as depending upon it) so manie milians of mischeefes and miseries: as treasons, theftes, adulteries, manslaughteres, trucebreakings, perjuries, cousenages, and a great troope of other enormities, which were here too long to rehearse. And if the nature of everie action be determinable by the end thereof, then cannot this hunger be holie, but rather accurssed, which pulleth after it as it were with iron chaines such a band of outrages and enormities, as of all their labor, charge, care and cost, &c [etc.]: they have nothing else left them in lieu of lucre, but onlie some few burned bricke of a ruinous fornace, a pecke or two of ashes, and such light stuffe, which they are forced peradventure in fine to sell, when beggerie [poverty] hath arrested and laid his mace on their shoulders."

(Book 14, Chapter 7)

Book 15

Book 15 discusses the purported forms and characteristics of spirits and angels, and it lists and analyses a wide range of demons in Chapter 2. The book further

discusses and refutes astrology, and it provides detailed descriptions of the methods supposedly used to raise the dead and summon spirits. Notably, Scot invites readers to try these methods for themselves, to see that they do not work. As will be discussed later, the inclusion of such instructions set the publication of *Discoverie* on a somewhat different course from that intended by Scot.

Scot is highly dismissive of those who believe that demons and evil spirits exist in corporeal (bodily) form and, as a result of his explanations, "you shall see how fooles are trained to beleeeve these absurdities". He suggests that such beliefs result either from being persuaded or conned by others that demons and spirits are real, or from being encouraged by witchmongers or Catholics to adopt these ideas based on the strength of their personal convictions and their reference to biblical scripture. Scot dismisses each of these options:

"He that can be persuaded that these things are true, or wrought indeed according to the assertion of couseners, or according to the supposition of witchmongers & papists, may soone be brought to beleeeve that the moone is made of greene cheese."

(Book 15, Chapter 5)

In discussing how the stories told by others can easily shape a person's beliefs, Scot cites a rhyming couplet (translated from Latin):

"So light of beleefe is the mind of man, And attentive to tales his eares now and than."

(Book 15, Chapter 12)

He is no less dismissive of the wide range of inconsistent and often conflicting rituals and ceremonies for summoning spirits and raising the dead, which he described as:

"a disordered heap, which are so far from building up the endeavors of these blacke art practitioners, that they doo altogether ruinate & overthrow them, making them in

their follies and falshoods as bare and naked as an anatomie.”

(Book 15, Chapter 21)

Scot also expresses his disdain that an ignorant and gullible population can believe that such ceremonies might work:

“As for these ridiculous conjurations, last rehearsed, being of no small reputation among the ignorant... they bring no such thing to passe, as is surmised and urged by credulous persons, couseners, liers, and witchmongers.”

(Book 15, Chapter 21)

Scot is himself incredulous that anybody should be able, merely by saying a few magical words, to summon and remove spirits from hell, where damnation without redemption is supposedly eternal. He questions how the summoner can trap a demon and prevent it from harming them, using nothing more than a chalk circle drawn on the floor, or by entrapping the demon in a crystal. Further, the summoner can also supposedly command the demon to tell the truth and to do their bidding. Scot questions why God would enable ordinary people to have such powers, that even he does not possess:

“And the divels are forced to be obedient unto them, and yet cannot be brought to due obedience unto God their creator.”

(Book 15, Chapter 21)

Scot asks why, when he personally has tried-out these rituals in an attempt to summon spirits, it has not worked:

“I weet [ask] of our witchmongers the reason, (if I read the conjuration and performe the ceremonie) why the divell will not come at my call? But oh absurd credulitie!”

(Book 15, Chapter 26)

And he suggests that believers, even if they are wise and learned, should try-out these rituals for themselves, to discover first-hand that they do not work:

“Even in this point manie wise & learned men have beene & are

abused: wheras, if they would make experience, or dulie expend the cause, they might be soone resolved...”

(Book 15, Chapter 26)

Several chapters compare the ineffectiveness of rituals for raising the dead to the ineffectiveness of the exorcism rituals practiced by Roman Catholics. Scot also asks why exorcists never seem to use their skills to exorcise their internal demons! He further challenges practitioners of these rituals to demonstrate and provide evidence of their powers, after which even he will come to believe in them:

“Let me heare anie of them all speake with new toongs, let them drinke but one dramme of a potion which I will prepare for them, let them cure the sicke by laieng on of hands (though witches take it upon them, and witchmongers beleeve it) and then I will subscribe unto them.”

(Book 15, Chapter 29)

Again, he notes that the primary goal of those who use conjuring tricks to supposedly demonstrate supernatural powers, is to obtain money:

“But if they, which repose such certeintie in the actions of witches and conjurors, would diligentlie note their deceit, and how the scope whereat they shoote is monie (I meane not such witches as are falselie accused, but such as take upon them to give answers, &c [etc.]: as mother Bungie did) they should apparentlie see the cousenage [trickery]. For they are abused, as are manie beholders of jugglers [magicians], which suppose they doo miraculously, that which is doone by slight and subiltie.”

(Book 15, Chapter 29)

He also urges people to believe their own eyes, rather than rely on old wives' tales about the effectiveness of these rituals, suggesting that practitioners' falsehoods are easier to detect than those used in performance magic:

“But in this matter of witchcrafts and conjurations, if men would rather trust their owne eies, than old wives tales and lies, I dare undertake this matter would soone be at a perfect point; as being easier to be perceived than juggling.”

(Book 15, Chapter 29)

Scot proposes several natural explanations for why people believe they have encountered demons or spirits, including mental illness, fear, having been raised in an over-protective environment, experiencing visual anomalies, catching sight of one's own reflection, and possessing an overactive or distorted imagination:

“Anie thorough melancholie doo imagine, that they see or heare visions, spirits, ghosts, strange noises, &c [etc.]: as I have alreadie proved before, at large. Manie againe thorough feare proceeding from a cowardlie nature and complexion, or from an effeminate and fond bringing up, are timerous and afraid of spirits, and bugs, &c. Some through imperfection of sight also are afraid of their owne shadowes, and (as Aristotle saith) see themselves sometimes as it were in a glasse. And some through weakenesse of bodie have such unperfect imaginations.”

(Book 15, Chapter 39)

Towards the end of Book 15, Scot reprints a letter sent to him by a doctor identified as ‘T.E.’, who requests Scot's assistance. The doctor is imminently facing execution for the practice of witchcraft. However, he now confesses that his demonstrations of the “wicked sciences” were nothing more than “meere cousenings [tricks] and illusions” performed to a gullible public.

Book 16

In the last Book of *Discoverie*, Book 16, Scot provides a summary of his key arguments proving the non-existence of witchcraft, and his rationale for opposing the execution of women for these supposed crimes.

He begins by suggesting that all pro-witchcraft authors have inconsistently and selectively drawn their arguments from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, and for new material have had to resort “...to their grandams maids to learne more old wives tales, whereof this art of witchcraft is contrived.”

His final, withering, comment on the *Malleus Maleficarum* sums up his broader view on witchcraft:

“And yet God knoweth their whole booke containeth nothing but stinking lies and poperie. Which groundworke and foundation how weake and wavering it is, how unlike to continue, and how slenderlie laid, a child may soone discerne and perceive.”

(Book 16, Chapter 1)

Having considered all the available evidence for witchcraft (and lack thereof) presented in Books 1-15, Scot finally defines the term ‘witchcraft’ in the hope that readers can now discern its truth for themselves:

“Witchcraft is in truth a cousening [deceptive] art, wherin the name of God is abused, prophaned and blasphemed, and his power attributed to a vile creature. In estimation of the vulgar people, it is a supernaturall worke, contrived betweene a corporall old woman, and a spirituall divell. The maner thereof is so secret, mysticall, and strange, that to this daie there hath never beene any credible witnes therof. It is incomprehensible to the wise, learned or faithfull; a probable matter to children, fooles, melancholike persons and papists.”

(Book 16, Chapter 2)

Scot goes on to identify three additional proofs that witchcraft does not exist, that have not been sufficiently addressed elsewhere in the book. First, witches in other countries use different words to conjure-up devils and spirits, so how is it that these different words all seem to accomplish the same thing? Do different spirits speak different languages, or are they all multilingual? And given that English

witches renounce their Christian God, does this mean that witches in non-Christian countries similarly renounce their gods too? For example, do Islamic witches renounce Allah (which, paradoxically, would thereby move them closer to Christianity)? Second, he cites several cases of witches who claimed to have supernatural powers, but who later confessed (sometimes on their deathbeds) that they had none, or that they had been faking such powers. Third, he cites cases of victims who paid witches for their supernatural assistance, but when out to the test, their powers mysteriously failed to materialise. These witches provided no support and refused to pay back their victims' money.

Scot reiterates the need for an evidence-based approach to testing the validity of witchcraft. He exemplifies this by describing an empirical test he conducted that caught-out a blind, dumb and deaf man lauded for his God-given powers to read canonical biblical texts (parts of the Bible that are central to Christian faith). Yet, it was claimed, he could not read any of the Apocrypha (parts of the Old Testament that are not considered canonical).

“That man (forsooth) though he was (as is said) both blind, dumbe & deafe, yet could he read anie canonicall scriptures; but as for apocrypha, he could read none: wherein a Gods name consisted the miracle. But a leafe of apocrypha being extraordinarilie inserted among the canonicall scriptures, he read the same as authentike: wherein his knaverie [trickery] was bewraied [betrayed].”

(Book 16, Chapter 4)

Scot summarises his two principal arguments against witchcraft. First, witches supposedly have powers that only belong to God, and sometimes (such as when summoning demons from hell) even appear to extend beyond God's capabilities:

“And when Christ himselfe saith; The works that I doo, no man else can accomplish; whie should we

thinke that a foolish old woman can doo them all, and manie more?”

(Book 16, Chapter 5).

Second, witchcraft does not feature in the Bible, and therefore there can be no biblical sanctions against its practice:

“Also, when Christ knew not these witches, nor spake one word of them in all the time of his being here upon earth, having such necessarie occasion (if at leastwise they with their familiars could doo as he did by the spirit of God, as is constantlie affirmed) whie should we suppose that they can doo as they saie, but rather that they are deceivers”

(Book 16, Chapter 5).

In Book 16, Chapter 7, Scot identifies what he considers correct beliefs regards the various phenomena he has discussed:

“By this time all kentishmen know (a few fooles excepted) that Robin goodfellowe [a demon] is a knave [a lie]. All wisemen understand that witches miraculous enterprises, being contrarie to nature, probabilitie and reason, are void of truth or possibilitie. All protestants perceive, that popish [Catholic] charmes, conjurations, execrations, and benedictions are not effectuall, but be toies [trifling playthings] and devises onelie to keepe the people blind, and to inrich the cleargie. All christians see, that to confesse witches can doo as they saie, were to attribute to a creature the power of the Creator. All children well brought up conceive and spie, or at the least are taught, that juglers [magicians'] miracles doo consist of legierdemaine [sleight of hand] and confederacie [use of accomplices]. The verie heathen people are driven to confesse, that there can be no such conference betweene a spirituall divell and a corporall witch, as is supposed.”

(Book 16, Chapter 7)

Towards the end of the book, Scot seeks to differentiate his specific claims from other beliefs that he does not wish to challenge:

“But because I am loth to oppose my selfe against all the writers heerin, or altogether to discredit their stories, or wholie to deface their reports, touching the effects of fascination or witchcraft; I will now set downe certeine parts thereof, which although I my selfe cannot admit, without some doubts, difficulties and exceptions, yet will I give free libertie to others to beleeve them, if they list; for that they doo not directlie oppugne [question the truth or validity of] my purpose.”

(Book 16, Chapter 8)

Beliefs that he does not wish to attack include the potential abilities of African witchdoctors, the potential for someone to become bewitched by another person's eyes, and the bewitching powers of love.

A Discourse on Devils and Spirits

The very last part of *Discoverie* is a stand-alone appendix providing a detailed review of various devils and spirits, the different forms that they allegedly take, and how various philosophers view them. The section aims to expose the incredible inconsistency and incompatibility of different accounts and explanations provided in books including the Bible, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers*, and a wide variety of other religious and philosophical works.

Inconsistencies exist regards claims and denials that life exists after death, where spirits come from, the different classes of spirits and devils that notionally exist, the extensive range of contrasting, opposing, and often contradictory views about the guises adopted by devils and spirits when they return to earth, whether devils and spirits have bodily form, and contradictions regards how spirits possess and take over a person's mind and or body.

Scot reiterates that he does not deny that spirits and devils may exist, merely that they are spiritual and non-visible entities and do not have corporeal form:

“I denie not therefore that there are spirits and divels, of such substance as it hath pleased GOD to create them. But in what place soever it be found or read in the scriptures, a spirit or divell is to be understood spirituallie, and is neither a corporall nor a visible thing.”

(Discourse, Chapter 17)

Scot then lists a range of potential challenges to his assertion that devils and spirits do not exist corporeally and answers each one, in turn, showing that they have no merit.

He ends his discourse by stating that even the Holy Spirit cannot have corporeal form and that it instead exists as a divine, ubiquitous and universal presence:

‘I will in no case have it thought, that the holie spirit is in us, as a bodie placed in a place terminable; but to attribute thereunto, as dulle belongeth to the deitie, an ubiquitie, or universall presence; not corporallie and palpable; but effectuallie, mightilie, mysticallie, divinellie. &c. [etc.]’

(Discourse, Chapter 34)

The Reception and Impact of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*

Critics

Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* was a remarkable achievement. In it, Scot drew together a vast range of views concerning beliefs in witchcraft, including religious, legal, political, philosophical, sociological, cultural, and psychological perspectives on its various phenomena. However, Scot's resultant conclusion that witchcraft did not exist received an extremely negative reception upon the book's publication.

At the time, religious fervour and hysteria about witchcraft were rampant and on the ascendancy, and the book's message that such beliefs were but “Erroneous Novelties and Imaginary Conceptions” did not sit well with popular opinion. Scot was accused by

various authors of impiety, atheism, defending the practices of witchcraft, confounding the evils of sorcery with mere conjuring, and even of conspiring with the devil (e.g. Gifford, 1587; Holland, 1590; Pickering, 1608; Cotta, 1616; Cooper, 1617; Bernard, 1627; Glanvill, 1666; Casaubon, 1668).

It is also clear that the book had the opposite impact to what Scot had intended. Philip Almond, Professor of Religion at the University of Queensland University (Almond, 2014) has found that *Discoverie's* detailed account of the practice of witchcraft, together with its explicit descriptions of the rituals and artefacts involved, resulted in the book becoming a popular grimoire, or book of spells. *Discoverie*, therefore, acted as an accelerant for those interested in pursuing the practice of witchcraft. The book inspired (and sections of it ended-up populating) subsequent pro-witchcraft books, and counter to Scot's intentions, *Discoverie* initially served in part to help strengthen the hold of witchcraft throughout Europe.

James VI/I

The most vociferous and widely read critic of Scot's work was Scotland's King James VI (who, following the union of the Scottish and English crowns in 1603, became King of England and Ireland as James I). James believed that witchcraft was a form of Satanism and that anyone who practiced sorcery was an instrument of the devil and must be punished:

“...such assaultes of Sathan are most certainly practized, and that the instrumentes thereof, merits most severly to be punished.”

(Stuart, 1597)

He took a personal interest in prosecuting witches, and in 1590, six years after the publication of *Discoverie*, he attended the North Berwick witch trials. The trials involved the first mass prosecution of witches in Scotland, who stood accused of raising a storm at sea in an attempt to kill James and his new wife on their return voyage to Scotland from Denmark. The trials ran for two years, with over one

hundred people tried, most of whom were tortured into confession and (presuming that they survived such torture) subsequently executed by strangulation and burning.

Based on his experience of attending the trials, James published his book *Daemonologie* in 1597 (Stuart, 1597). It took the form of a Socratic dialogue established between two characters, Philomathes and Epistemon, who debate and eventually agree upon the existence of sorcery and witchcraft.

Daemonologie was a direct response to both Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* and Wyyer's earlier *De Praestigiis Daemonum*. On the opening page, James lambasts:

“...the damnable opinions of two principally in our age, wherof the one called SCOT an Englishman, is not ashamed in publike print to deny, that ther can be such a thing as Witch-craft: and so mainteines the old error of the Sadducees, in denying of spirits. The other called WIERVS, a German Phisition, sets out a publick apologie for al these craftes-folkes, whereby, procuring for their impunitie, he plainly bewrayes himselfe to haue bene one of that profession.”

(Stuart, 1597, p. 3)

Popular mythology has it that James was so outraged with Scot's *Discoverie* that on his accession to the English throne in 1603 he ordered all copies to be publicly burned. This event features in many papers and books written about Scot and the history of witchcraft. However, other research by Almond (Almond, 2009) has found no historical record that this event ever occurred. Almond has traced the origins of the story to a work published by the Dutch Calvinist Theologian Gisbertius Voetius in 1659, entitled *Selectarum Disputationem Theologicarum* (Voetius, 1659). The book does reference the burning of one copy of *Discoverie*. However, whilst James was inclined to order the burning of books that he did not approve of, there is no evidence that he did so on this occasion. As Almond states:

“...it is not impossible that King James might have taken out his disapproval of the *Discoverie* by having it ritually and publicly destroyed. But it is more probable that, almost fifty years after these events, Voetius came falsely to believe that James had burned *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* because he knew that this was the sort of thing that James did to books he disliked. And if so, a tradition was invented.”

(Almond, 2009)

In 1604, a year after James's accession, he approved a new witchcraft statute superseding the English *Act Against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts* and the *Scottish Witchcraft Act*, both from 1563 (although, as stated earlier, the Scottish act remained on the statute books until 1735). The new bill was entitled *An Act Against Conjuraton, Witchcraft and Dealing With Evil and Wicked Spirits*. It extended the scope of the crime of witchcraft to include both maleficent magic and demonological elements; and it created harsher penalties for those convicted under the new guidelines (see discussion by Bercovice, 2015).

James's role in furthering the surge of women executed for witchcraft was significant, but is difficult to quantify, and estimates of the death toll in Europe resulting from prosecutions vary considerably. Ben-Yehuda (1980) suggests that from the early decades of the 14th century until 1650, continental Europeans executed up to 500,000 witches, 85% or more of whom were women. More conservative estimates put the number of deaths at around 50,000 (Gaskill, 2010, p. 76). Almost all of those executed were women, the elderly, midwives, Jews, poets, gypsies, those who were not considered sufficiently pious, and others who were otherwise considered undesirable by locals or Inquisitors.

Scot did, however, also have his supporters.

Supporters

Writer Gabriel Harvey, in his *Pierce's Supererogation* from 1593, wrote that:

“Scotte's discoovery of Witchcraft dismasketh sundry egregious impostures, and in certaine principall chapters, and speciall passages, hitteth the nayle on the head with a witnesse; howsoever I could have wished he had either dealt somewhat more curteously with Monsieur Bondine [Bodin] or confuted him somewhat more effectually.”

(Harvey, 1593)

Nicholas Gyer's book on medical bloodletting, *English Phlebotomy* (Gyer, 1592) adopted Scot's approach to the use of evidence and argumentation to counter superstition. Gyer sought to explain that his work was concerned with healing the sick in accordance with the wishes of God and in doing so, he was not describing or promoting demonic practices. Gyer dedicated his book to Scot, writing:

“To the right Worshipfull, Master Reginald Scot, Esquire; dayly increase of wealth, Worship and wisdom, in the true feare of GOD.”

(Gyer, 1592)

Scot also had a significant influence on Samuel Harsnett, an English writer on religion, who later became Archbishop of York. Harsnett participated in two important witchcraft trials - those of Mary Glover in 1602 (a 14-year-old blind and deaf girl, whose seizures were interpreted as signs of demonic possession); and Anne Gunter in 1604 (who similarly suffered from fits). In these cases, Harsnett referenced *Discoverie* and encouraged scepticism regards the prosecution's claims of witchcraft. Both trials ended in the accused receiving pardons.

Scot's work later found significant favour with several influential writers, and his work became cited as causing a reduction in the belief in witchcraft. In 1656, English physician and humanist Thomas Ady wrote *A Candle in the Dark: Or, A Treatise Concerning the Nature of Witches and Witchcraft* (Ady, 1656). Scot's *Discoverie*

heavily influenced Ady's book. There are copious references throughout, and Ady states that he sought to reinforce and reinvigorate interest in Scot's ideas:

"Mr. Scot published a Book, called his Discovery of Witchcraft, in the beginning of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, for the instruction of all Judges, and Justices of those times; which Book did for a time take great impression in the Magistracy, and also in the Clergy, but since that time England hath shamefully fallen from the Truth which they began to receive; wherefore here is again a necessary and illustrious discourse for the Magistracy, and other People of this Age, where I intreat all to take notice, that many do falsly report of Mr. Scot, that he held an Opinion, that Witches are not, for it was neither his Tenent, neither is it mine; but that Witches are not such as are commonly executed for Witches."

(Ady, 1656, p. 2)

Scot found additional support from English cleric, physician and chemist, John Webster, in his work *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (Webster, 1677). Webster makes many references to Scot, and vigorously defends him against the accusations levelled against him by authors including James VI/I, stating that:

"...the other known (as not living so very many years ago) to be a godly, learned, and an upright man, as his Book which he calleth, The Discovery of Witchcraft, doth most largely make it appear, if his Adversaries had ever taken the pains to peruse it. So that all rational persons may plainly see, that it is but a lying invention, a malicious device, and a meer forged accusation."

(Webster, 1677, p. 9).

Other clergymen supporting Scot included Francis Hutchinson, Bishop of Down and Connor in Ireland, who drew and quoted from *Discoverie* in his book *Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft* from 1718 (Hutchinson, 1718), and Unitarian Minister, antiquarian, and deputy Keeper of Public

Records, Rev. Joseph Hunter, who, in 1838, wrote:

"In fact, I had no notion of the admirable character of this book till I read it this September 1839. It is one of the few instances in which a bold spirit opposes himself to the popular belief, and seeks to throw protection over a class of the defenceless. In my opinion, he ought to stand very prominent in any catalogue of Persons who have been public benefactors."

(Hunter, 1838, Chapter 5)

Scot's work had further impact on several playwrights, who referenced him and lifted text directly from *Discoverie*, including William Shakespeare (Kapitaniak, 2017), Thomas Nashe (Brown, 2017, pp. 363-367), and Thomas Middleton (Hand, 2008). Diarist Samuel Pepys also notes, in his entry for 12th August 1667, that he went:

"... to my booksellers, there and did buy Scott's discourse of Witches"

(M.R.P., 1981)

Isaac Disraeli included a lengthy discussion of *Discoverie* in his book *Amenities of Literature: Consisting of Sketches and Characters of English Literature* (Disraeli, 1842, pp. 29-37), asserting that Scot had personally opened the door to writing critically about erroneous, but deeply held and popular beliefs:

"...this singular work may justly claim the honour in this country of opening that glorious career which is dear to humanity and fatal to imposture."

(Disraeli, 1842, p.29)

In later years, Scot also gained recognition for his contribution to the science of mental health. In an 1885 lecture by Professor William Tennant Gairdner at the University of Glasgow entitled "*On Insanity*", Gairdner refers to Scot's explanation that some cases of witchcraft were due to insanity:

"Nothing, however, can be more clear than that Scot, however indebted to Wier (and both of them, probably, to Cornelius Agrippa,

whose life has been so pleasantly portrayed for us by Mr. Henry Morley), was far in advance of either in the clearness of his views and the unwavering steadiness of his leanings to the side of humanity and justice. The book stands brightly out amid the darkness of its own and the succeeding age, as a perfectly unique example of sagacity amounting to genius..."

(Gairdner, 1885)

introduction and notes of Dr. Nicholson."

(Editorial, 1886, p. 258)

Another edition published by John Rodker in 1930 sold well and can readily be purchased from online antiquarian book sellers for about £300.

Irrespective of whether the 1584 first edition of the book was, or was not, burned in public by James VI/I, copies are now extremely scarce and sell for in excess of £65,000 when they come up for auction.

Later Editions

Following its first publication in 1584, many subsequent versions of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* were released. Significant amongst these was the 1665 third edition, that included nine anonymously authored new chapters added to Book 15, and a second book of seven chapters added to the *Discourse on Devils and Spirits*. Davies (2013) suggests that these editions served to reframe *Discoverie* as a grimoire to bolster sales of the book. Sadly, the additions all ran counter to Scot's arguments and promoted the validity and existence of witchcraft.

Another noteworthy edition is the 1886 republication by Dr Brinsley Nicholson, who at the time was the UK's Deputy Inspector-General. This edition included a supplementary introduction, a biography of Scot, explanatory notes, an analysis of the book's impact on Shakespeare, and a glossary. Brinsley produced the edition as he felt that Scot had made an early and valuable contribution to the science of mental health, and that his name was now all but lost to both the public and the medical profession. In a review and discussion of this edition, the editor of the *Journal of Mental Science* writes:

"We have said enough, we hope, to induce those who have never read or even glanced at the work of a man who must ever be regarded with feelings of admiration and gratitude, and who was in advance both in knowledge and boldness of even the physicians of his day, to repair their neglect of so remarkable an author, and read him with the additional advantage of the excellent

Lessons About Deception From *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*

The Discoverie of Witchcraft is the first book that systematically adopts a comprehensive and multidisciplinary approach to analysing deception. It draws from a broad international set of sources and considers religious, legal, political, philosophical, sociological, cultural, and psychological perspectives on the topic. Scot's resultant understanding of deception reflects today's contemporary thinking, and his insights are staggering.

Unlike many philosophers who merely view deception as lying, Scot recognises that deception has many different forms. He discusses structural deception, fooling the eye versus fooling the mind, optical and other sensory types of illusion, individual versus collective deception, self-deception versus intentional transactional deception between actors, and multiple lingual forms of deception including lying, paltering, equivoque, and suggestion. His inclusion of emotion as a central component of deception is novel, and he addresses how feelings may rapidly become amplified in groups, fallaciously instilling fear and hatred that may quickly morph into persecution and execution. His long section on magic and conjuring, the first account of conjuring published in the English language, also contains many useful and practical principles that underpin deceptive practice.

Whilst Scot's analysis of deception is extensive, it is also highly fragmented, and deceptive principles and mechanisms are not drawn together into a unified model or framework. This makes comprehension of his analysis of deception challenging, and it is perhaps easy to see why *Discoverie* tends to be overlooked as a critical reference on deception.

While many magicians do refer to *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, I suspect that, as a result of its challenging nature, few have actually read it (and those that have are likely only to have skimmed through the second half of Book 13). However, more significant insights about deception can be gained by studying other parts of the book.

A small selection of the many deceptive concepts that Scot discusses include:

- There are recurring patterns in the strategies used to fool people, and such patterns can be used to both analyse other cases of deception and to design new deceptive actions and devices (Book 13, Chapter 34).
- Rather than seeking to present pre-formed beliefs to a target that stand less chance of being accepted, deceivers can exploit a target's confabulation and imagination to lead them to create a false belief for themselves (Book 1, Chapters 3, 7; Book 3, Chapters 11, 17; Book 7, Chapter 15; Book 10, Chapter 4; Book 11, Chapter 20; Book 15, Chapter 39).
- Deception can target and amplify collective belief formation, through falsehood, rumour, exaggeration and distortion (The Epistle; Book 1, Chapter 3; Book 5, Chapter 3; Book 7, Chapters 7, 15; Book 8, Chapter 6; Book 11, Chapter 15; Book 13, Chapters 12, 16; Book 16, Chapter 2).
- There is a difference between fooling the eye (attention and perception) versus fooling the mind (sensemaking), (Book 13, Chapters 12, 22).
- Our sensemaking about the external world is dependent upon our sensory systems. These systems can easily be fooled, leading us to formulate erroneous beliefs about the world (Book 4, Chapter 1, Book 13, Chapters 19, 24).
- Deception leads people into making assumptions about the existence of false causal relationships (Book 3, Chapter 11; Book 11, Chapters 17, 19) and erroneous belief can result from deceptive causes (Book 3, Chapter 11).
- Deception can exploit misleading language patterns including equivocal, paltering, and the use of confusing language (Book 13, Chapters 11, 15, 23; Book 14, Chapter 1).
- Suggestion can be used to frame and induce erroneous sensemaking (Book 16, Chapter 5).
- Confirmatory and availability biases affect how we search for information, and deceivers can exploit these tendencies (Book 7, Chapter 15; Book 13, Chapter 19).
- People are inclined to explain-away disconfirming information that goes against their pre-existing beliefs (Book 1, Chapter 7).
- Objects can be disguised and manipulated to resemble other objects (Book 14, Chapter 6).
- People make assumption about the truthfulness of communications based on its source and its historical accuracy. This means that deception is more effective if it follows non-deceptive actions (Book 11, Chapter 22).
- Confederates, stooges and cut-outs can enhance the deceptiveness of certain actions (Book 13, Chapters 12-14).

- Deception creates and exploits expectations (Book 7, Chapter 15; Book 14, Chapter 1; Book 15, Chapters 39-40)

Morally, Scot seems to have been genuinely concerned about the welfare and treatment of some of the most vulnerable women in society, who were routinely prosecuted and executed solely on the basis of being different. He also believed strongly that such executions went against the word of God, reflected in his remorseless, and at times uncomfortable, lambasting of Roman Catholicism.

His humanitarian desire to preserve life through better, evidence-based education of the public, witchfinders, and judges, comes across strongly throughout *Discoverie*. He wanted to enhance the integrity of people's sensemaking about witchcraft, encouraging them to study actively the evidence for themselves and to employ reason, rather than be passively swept along by mass religious hysteria and superstition.

It is telling that at the very end of *Discoverie*, Scot concludes by addressing the natural, magical, and bewitching powers of love, acknowledging that:

“For if the fascination or witchcraft be brought to passe or provoked by the desire... ..the imagination of a beautifull forme resteth in the hart of the lover, and kindleth the fier wherewith it is afflicted.”

(Book 16, Chapter 10)

Whilst the Elizabethan language of *Discoverie*, its inclusion of many esoteric texts and references, and Scot's frequent incorporation of biblical passages and citations make the book challenging to read, its 400+ year-old insights make it a critical work for any serious scholar of deception.

Back to the Library

The National Museum of Scotland holds several first edition copies of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. The most intriguing copy is unusual as it contains an explicit record of its provenance. As

depicted in Figure 3, it has been signed on its inside cover by its owner, Robert Gordon, and is dated 1604. Written in the same hand are the words “*In otio negotium*”, Latin for “In the leisure business”.

Sir Robert Gordon, 1st Baronet (1580–1656) was a Scottish politician and courtier, known as the historian of the noble house of Sutherland. In 1606 he was appointed a gentleman of the privy chamber to James VI/I and was knighted. According to the Dictionary of National Biography (Stevenson, 2004), Gordon had a reputation for his “impressive library”, and the books in his collection became dispersed in an auction in 1816. His portrait hangs in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, and is shown in Figure 4.

This copy of *Discoverie* is also unusual as it has been bound together with a first edition copy of James VI/I's *Daemonologie*, which Gordon also signed. 15th-century books were often sold unbound so that readers could commission their own bindings to suit their taste and budget. Given the strong relationship between the books, it makes sense that Gordon would have bound these together. The bound together copy of *Discoverie* and *Daemonologie* is shown in Figure 5.

Resources

For those interested in learning more about *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, the following resources may be helpful.

An excellent biography of Scot by David Wooton, that draws from a range of useful sources can be found at <https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-24905?rskey=C8N0i9&result=1>. Note that the article requires library or institutional access. See also the biographical notes in Nicholson's 1886 third edition (see below).

A high resolution scanned PDF of the 1584 first edition can be purchased from Conjuring Arts, here: <https://store.conjuringarts.org/product/the-discoverie-of-witchcraft-1st-edition-by-reginald-scot-pdf>

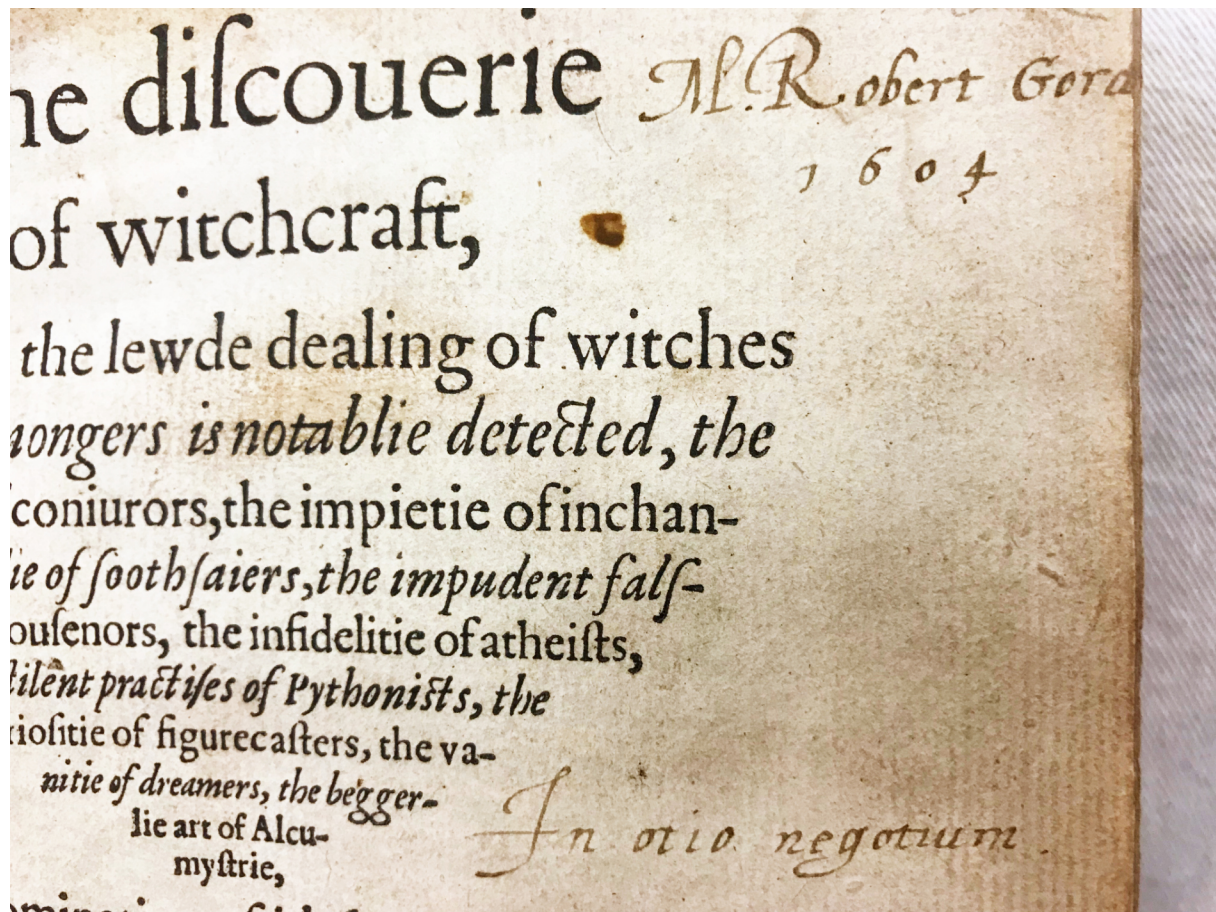


Figure 3 – Sir Robert Gordon's inscription (1604), on his copy of *Discoverie*

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A good number of different formats of the Brinsley Nicholson third edition from 1886 are available for free from <https://archive.org/details/discoverieofwitic00scot>. Note that the EPUB version is especially helpful as it includes an index and embedded links, which make the book highly navigable. In addition, this version uses modern characters which makes comprehension significantly easier (although the Elizabethan spellings remain). A selectable PDF of the 1886 edition is also available on this page.

For an analysis of *Discoverie* in terms of the social, political and religious context in which Scot wrote it, I can recommend the book *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and 'The Discoverie of Witchcraft'* by Philip Almond (2014).

And a modern English version of the conjuring section of *Discoverie* produced by Neil Alexander can be found at https://www.academia.edu/10610590/THE_DISCOVERIE_OF_WITCHCRAFT_A_Modern_English_Rendering_Of_Those_Portions_Of_The_16th_Century_English_Text_Dealing_With_Legerdemain INTRODUCTION



Figure 4 – Portrait of Sir Robert Gordon (1621)
National Gallery of Scotland
(Public Domain)

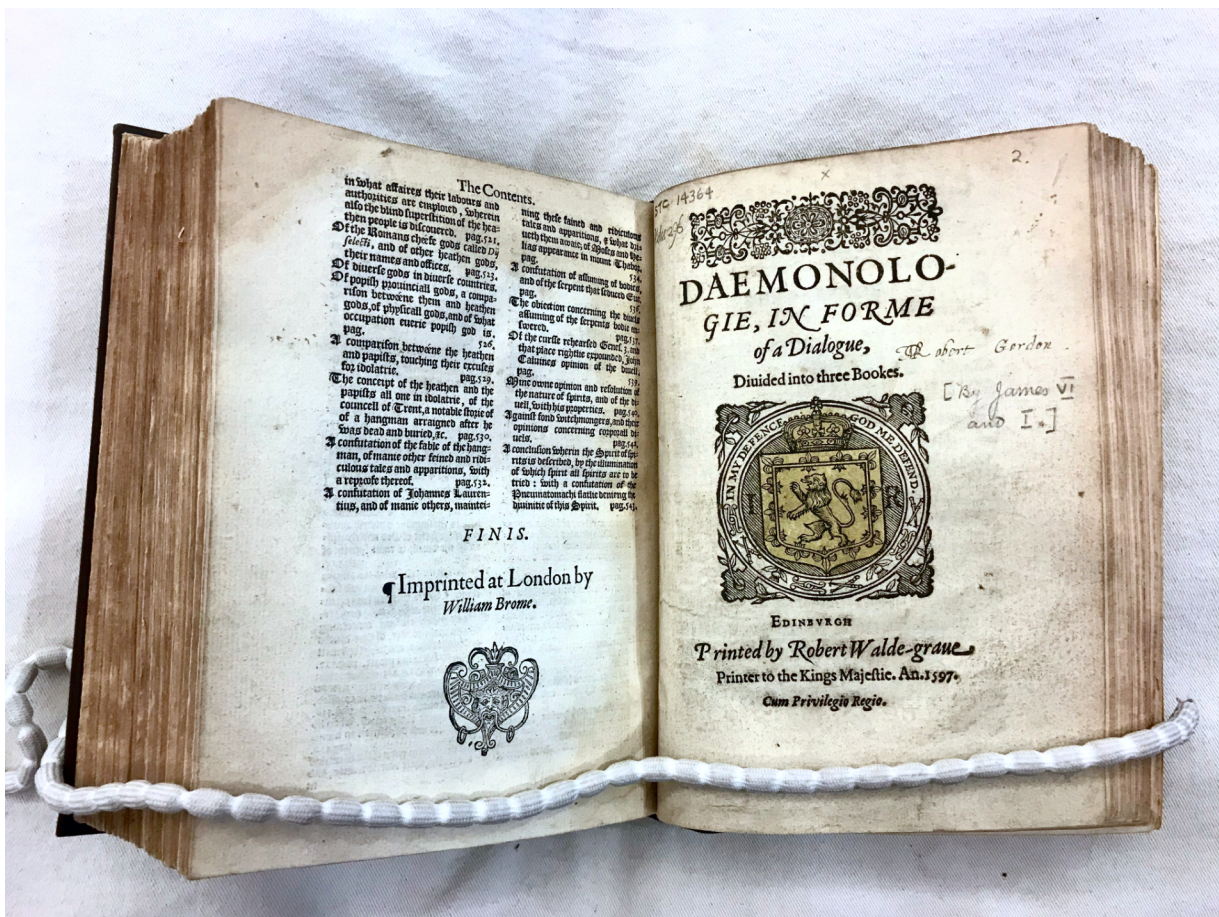


Figure 5 – James VI's *Daemonologie* (1597) bound at the back of Scot's *Discoverie* (1584)

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