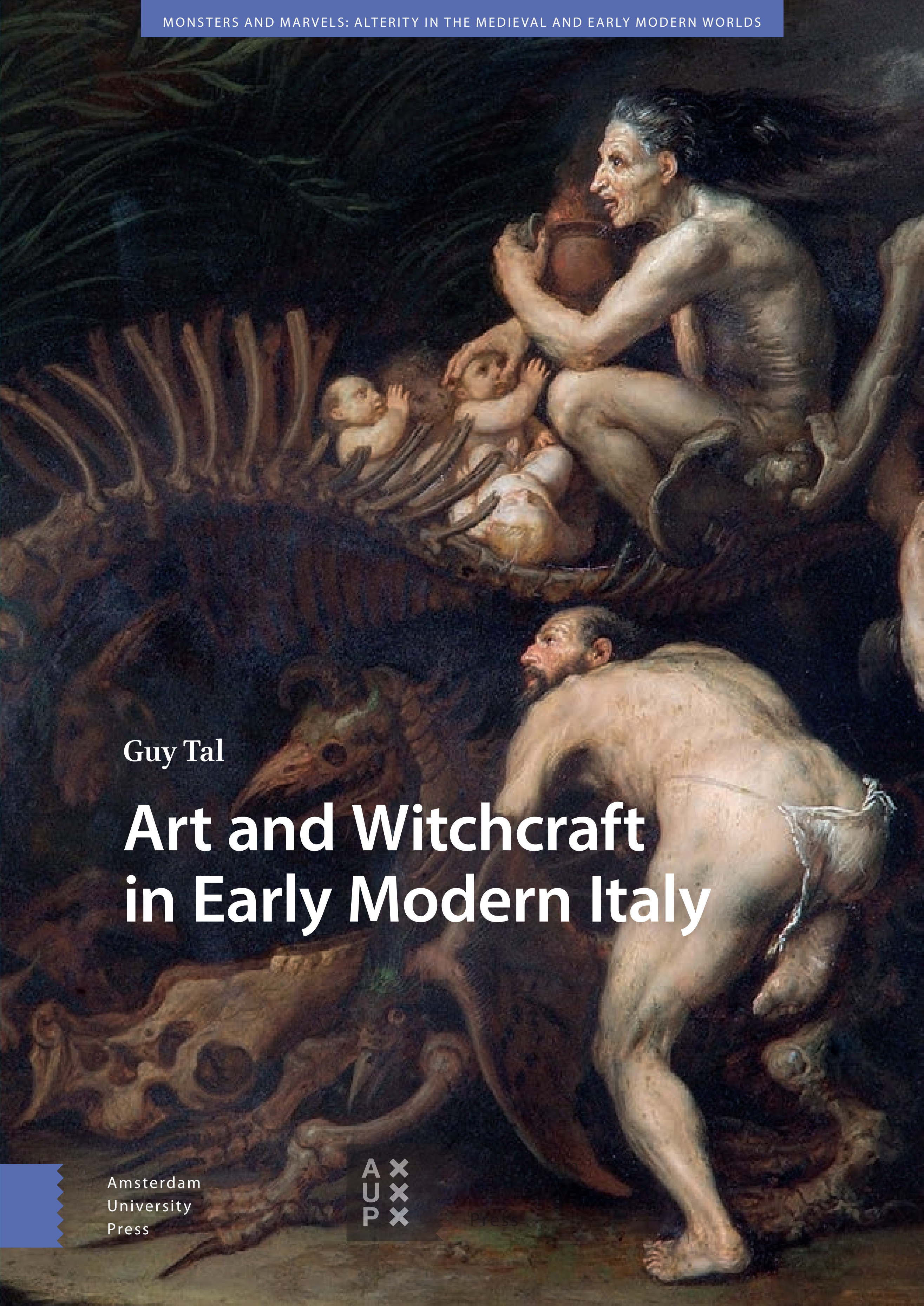
MONSTERS AND MARVELS: ALTERITY IN THE MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN WORLDS



Guy Tal

Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy

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Monsters and Marvels. Alterity in the Medieval and Early Modern Worlds

This series is dedicated to the study of cultural constructions of difference, abnormality, the monstrous, and the marvelous from multiple disciplinary perspectives, including the history of science and medicine, literary studies, the history of art and architecture, philosophy, gender studies, disability studies, critical race studies, ecocriticism, and other forms of critical theory. Single-author volumes and collections of original essays that cross disciplinary boundaries are particularly welcome. The editors seek proposals on a wide range of topics, including, but not limited to: the aesthetics of the grotesque; political uses of the rhetoric or imagery of monstrosity; theological, social, and literary approaches to witches and the demonic in their broader cultural context; the global geography of the monstrous, particularly in relation to early modern colonialism; the role of the monstrous in the history of concepts of race; the connections between gender and sexual normativity and discourses of monstrosity; juridical and other legal notions of the monstrous; the history of teratology; technologies that mimic life such as automata; wild men; hybrids (human/animal; man/machine); and concepts of the natural and the normal.

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Guy Tal

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Introduction

Witchcraft would seem an unexpected—even aberrant—subject matter for modern spectators to find within the rich artistic repertoire of Renaissance and Baroque Italy. How could the image of a loathsome old witch mired in necromantic depravity amidst a bevy of demonic creatures pertain to such a luminous cultural epoch, known best for intellectual prosperity, classical decorum, and ideal beauty? *Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy* seeks to explore the diverse ways in which Italian artists responded to and engaged with the early modern idea of witchcraft. The artworks examined throughout this book relate to such aberrational topics as diabolical worship, infanticide, skull necromancy, nightmares, delusions, psychopathology, hybridity, metamorphosis, and arrant sexual deviancy. Far from presenting witchcraft as an iconographical non sequitur in the artistic canon or as evidence of a latent "Anti-Renaissance," this book sets out to show that witchy frescoes, paintings, prints, and drawings comported with—and indeed bore out the values of—the milieu's artistic, cultural, and intellectual climate.

Witchcraft is a subject matter that foregrounds the traditional bifurcated split in early modern Europe between Northern and Italian art. Against the ample stock of Northern scenes of witchcraft produced by Hans Baldung Grien, Pieter Bruegel the Elder, Jacques de Gheyn II, David Teniers II, and scores of other German, Dutch, and Flemish artists, the Italian record is significantly slimmer. Equally, pamphlets, broadsheets, and book illustrations propagating the details of witches' deeds and executions across Northern Europe went unprinted in Italy excepting one illustrated treatise. It should be unsurprising, then, that the vast majority of scholarly publications and exhibitions devoted to witchcraft imagery are weighted towards the study of sixteenth-century German and seventeenth-century Flemish and Dutch images, whose depictions predominate this iconographic niche.[1]

It was not until 1962 that early modern Italian images of witchcraft emerged as a subject of scholarly enquiry. This was when Eugenio Battisti included the chapter

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[1] The English-language monographs are Davidson, *The Witch in Northern European Art, 1470–1750*; Zika, *Exorcising Our Demons*; Hults, *The Witch as Muse*; Swan, *Art, Science, and Witchcraft*; Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*; Roper, *The Witch in the Western Imagination*; Owens, *Abject Eroticism in Northern Renaissance Art*; and De Nile, *Fantasmagorie*. Recent exhibition catalogues include Brinkmann, *Witches' Lust and the Fall of Man*; Petherbridge, *Witches and Wicked Bodies*; and Vervoort, *Bruegel's Witches*. For a valuable state of research, see Zika, "Images and Witchcraft Studies."

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"Nascita della strega" (Birth of the Witch) in his pivotal *L'antirinascimento* alongside others on previously unsung topics (such as automata, astrology, and monstrous statues). Through this, Battisti aspired to uncover the true, untold heterogeneity of sixteenth-century Italian art.[2] Thereafter, art historians sought to examine the subject from myriad directions. Most critical attention has, unsurprisingly, been paid to Salvator Rosa, who produced no less than twenty witchcraft paintings and drawings, significantly excelling other Italian artists working within the genre.[3] Ranked highly amongst individual works attracting keen scrutiny is Dosso Dossi's *Sorceress* (ca. 1518–20) in the Borghese Gallery, Rome—a painting that raises questions regarding the protagonist's identity, her enigmatic accouterments, and the nonstandard composition.[4] In a stimulating article, Patricia Simons pursues the role of classical literature in constructing early sixteenth-century Italian images of the witch.[5] Overviews about the witch figure in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Florentine art and culture, and in Roman Baroque art attest to the topic's richness and breadth.[6] Scholars have also examined the witchcraft scenes of Northern artists painted during their Italian sojourns, including those by Joseph Heintz the Younger (Venice), Adam Elsheimer (Rome), and Jacob van Swanenburgh (Naples).[7] Further studies about the engraving *Lo stregozzo*, the figures of Circe and Medea, and Angelo Caroselli's witchcraft paintings will be expounded as we proceed.

Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy constitutes the first inclusive, single-authored book on representations of witchcraft in early modern Italian art. My first purpose is to expose the variety of Italian representations of witchcraft beyond Dosso's *Sorceress* and Rosa's œuvre. To this end, I shed new light on celebrated works, such as the engraving *Lo stregozzo* and Pellegrino Tibaldi's *Circe and Ulysses*, but I also explore artworks that have thus far gone understudied for disparate reasons. For example, Gioachino Assereto's *Medea Rejuvenating Aeson* is held inaccessibly in a private collection; three paintings of *Witch Alarmed by a Devil* have been contestably attributed to little-known artists; and Parmigianino's *Witch Riding on a Phallus* dodged examination in part for being survived only by later copies, but also for being amongst the bawdier examples of the genre. Moreover, I proffer an original interpretation of images whose association with witchcraft has been overlooked or misunderstood, including Enea Vico's engraving of an old woman spinning with a distaff, Leonello Spada's sketch of a grotesque hag molesting a young man, and paintings of Circe and Medea.

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[2] Battisti, *L'antirinascimento*, 138–57. Two short yet pioneering studies on the witch in Italian art are Peltzer, "Nordische und italienische Teufels und Hexenwelt"; and Catalano, "Oltre Salvator Rosa." See also the assemblage of Italian images in *Roma ermetica*; and a brief survey of Italian images in Bethencourt, "Un univers saturé de magie l'Europe méridionale," 182–86.

[3] For a comprehensive catalogue of Rosa's witchcraft works and a complete bibliography, see Segrave, "Conjuring Genius." See also Tal, "Witches on Top," 13–86; and Tal, "Switching Places."

[4] Macioce, "Figure della Magia," 27–37; Wood, "Countermagical Combinations"; Morel, *Mélissa*, 232–56; and Fiorenza, *Dosso Dossi*, 101–26. See also chapter 1.

[5] Simons, "The Crone, the Witch, and the Library."

[6] On Florence, see Bellesi, *Diavolerie, magie e incantesimi*; and Morel, *Mélissa*, 257–83. On Rome, see Anselmi, "Dipinti a soggetto magico-stregonesco."

[7] On Heintz, see D'Anza, "Uno *Stregozzo*"; Cannone and Gallavotti Cavallero, "Dipinti inediti," 61–66; and Cannone and Gallavotti Cavallero, "Scene di genere," 320–26. On Swanenburgh, see De Nile, *Fantasmagorie*. Elsheimer engraved a nocturnal witchcraft scene during his stay in Rome in 1600–1610; De Nile "'Una carta finta di notte con una Maga." Bartholomeus Spranger painted two sorcery scenes in the 1560s during his stay in Italy; Vervoort, *Bruegel's Witches*, 99–100. For Leonaert Bramer's witchcraft paintings in Naples and Rome, see Langdon, "Salvator Rosa," 330, 340–41.

The second aim of *Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy* is to fashion new ways of reading witchcraft depictions through and beyond conventional iconography. By closely examining individual artworks, I explore the visual devices and pictorial language employed by artists to negotiate witchcraft beliefs and theories. Here, I escape the confines of asking *what* is represented and aim to elucidate *how* images represent. When we, for instance, reflect on the significance of the devil's cropped display, a painting of a hapless witch fleeing a devil gives us more than a moral lesson about heresy—it speaks to the viewer's emotional response and visual representations of the beyond. And the hackneyed portrait of a grotesque witch invites reflection in conjunction with the hybrid monster positioned beneath her. I argue that images of witchcraft—too intractable and ambiguous to really serve a didactic-moralizing function that either exalts the witches' deeds or cautions against them—engage the beholder in an emotional and intellectual experience of seeing and interpreting witchcraft.

Witchcraft in Italy

The prevailing conception of witchcraft amongst educated Europeans, including Italians, as a deleterious and diabolical practice crystallized from the early fifteenth century onwards.[8] Following this concept, witches warranted condemnation on account of two primary transgressions. The first was practicing *maleficia* (harmful magic). This included slaying and injuring humans, thwarting fertility, meteorological interference, and milk poisoning. The second arena of transgression consisted in making pacts with the Devil, a demonic association that occasioned ideas that would besmirch witchcraft as a kind of satanic cult.[9] It was believed that witches, both male and female,[10] congregated to honor the Devil on the sabbath, in gatherings known in Italian as *striacum* (from *stria*, a witch), *cursus* (course), *gioco*, and *ludus* (game).[11] The favored haunt of Italian witches was the walnut tree just beyond the village of Benevento, around seventy kilometers northeast of Naples.[12] Witches arrived to these assemblies on nocturnal journeys, terrestrial or aerial. On the sabbath, witches would evince their Devil-worship, obscenely kissing his buttocks, expressing their outright apostasy from Christianity by trampling a cross, and copulating with demons.[13] Amongst other dastardly pursuits, witches would steal into houses to kill infants, either to suck their blood, extract their fat and blood for magic philters, munch on their corpses on sabbatical feasts, or sacrifice them to the Devil.[14]

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[8] On the elements of the so-called "cumulative concept" of witchcraft, see Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 32–51. Between 1460 and 1525, at least ten treatises denouncing witches were written by Italians; Monter, "Witch Trials in Continental Europe 1560–1660," 44; and Burke, "Witchcraft and Magic," 33, 50n. 4. The regional variants are, to some extent, reflected in Italian treatises; Kieckhefer, "Mythologies of Witchcraft," 99.

These beliefs clearly do not constitute a single, definitive construct of witchcraft but instead synthesize several conceptions culled from Italian treatises, witch confessions, and trial records.[15] Nevertheless, the outline above amply facilitates an understanding of the artworks discussed herewith. Indeed, the artworks in three chapters directly emerged from the concept of diabolical witchcraft. In two other chapters, I elaborate the scope of this concept by incorporating artworks of old women whose identity as witches is contested or witches from ancient myths whose characters served as prototypes in the making of the early modern witch.

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[9] These two components distinguish witchcraft from magic, which refers to a high practice that requires a certain amount of education, and from sorcery, which is not aided by the Devil and so can be beneficial. For various distinctions among these three terms, see Burke, "Witchcraft and Magic," 34; Bailey, "From Sorcery to Witchcraft," 962; and Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 6–7.

[10] The biased view that witchcraft was practiced by women alone has been corrected in recent scholarship; see chapter 5.

[11] Burke, "Witchcraft and Magic," 35; Kieckhefer, "Mythologies of Witchcraft," 97–98; Montesano, *Caccia alle streghe*, 80–85; and Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell*, 43–45. These *cursus* and *gioco* are described in Italian trial records as beneficent gatherings, but they were interpreted by inquisitors as diabolical assemblies.

[12] On Benevento, see, for example, Bartolommeo Spina's *Quaestio de strigibus* (Venice, 1523), in Lea, *Materials toward a History of Witchcraft*, 1:390; Paulus Grillandus, *Tractatus de hereticis et sortilegiis* (Lyons, 1536), in Lea, 1:403–5; and Aretino, "La Cortigiana," 84 (2.6). A map of Benevento showing witches dancing nearby an animalized walnut tree outside the village appears on the frontispiece of the Beneventan physician Pietro Piperno's *De magicis affectibus* (On Magical Afflictions, 1635).

[13] Some of these elements, for example, are confessed by an accused witch in Modena in 1539: Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell*, 118–22.

[14] For Italian witches accused of killing children, see Kieckhefer, "Avenging the Blood of Children," 94–100; and Kieckhefer, "Mythologies of Witchcraft," 87–90.

[15] Richard Kieckhefer argues that any synthetic construct of witchcraft would undermine the existence of regional variants of witchcraft "mythologies" in Europe and even on the Italian peninsula. He demonstrates the different mythologies through fifteenth-century witch trials in Milan and Brescia in contrast to one in Perugia. Kieckhefer, "Mythologies of Witchcraft."

The artworks discussed here demonstrate the wide-ranging beliefs and ideas about witchcraft. In these images, we find the witch traveling to the sabbath, practicing skull necromancy, transforming men into beasts, riding atop monsters, creating toxic potions, sacrificing the young, and communing with the Devil.

Importantly, the artworks showcased in *Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy* correspond to the heyday of witch-hunts on the Italian peninsula. However, since I found no visual evidence in the images themselves to connect them to witch-hunts, I prescinded from imposing any particular "context" on them (whether trials or executions).[16] Nevertheless, it is certainly plausible that witch prosecutions influenced the inception and reception of some of the artworks discussed here. Some preliminary words, then, are in order with respect to the witch-hunts in the states that form present-day Italy.

From the first accusation of witchcraft in 1385 to the last in 1723, men and women alike were tried for witchcraft (*stregoneria*) in both secular and ecclesiastical tribunals.[17] These indictments were for either illicit magic or diabolical worship or both. Almost entirely in the northern regions of the Alpine territories, Lombardy, and Emilia, the first wave of witch prosecutions transpired between 1500 and 1530. When the Congregation of the Holy Office of the Inquisition (known as the Roman Inquisition) was reconstituted in 1542 to repress Protestant "heresy," the number of witch trials drastically declined. Following the abating of Protestantism, illicit magic became the most common heretical category handled by the Inquisition.[18] However, in its second peak, between 1580 and 1640, the number of death sentences dwindled owing to more lenient treatment of witches. In total, the Italian witch-hunts were neither as expansive nor as devastating as those in the countries beyond the Alps. It is estimated that the total number of trials held by the Roman Inquisition for witchcraft, necromancy, love magic, and other forms of illicit magic was between 22,000 and 33,000. Of the approximately 45,000 executions of male and female witches across Europe, around 700 executions occurred on the Italian peninsula: about 70 percent occurred in the Alpine regions, 20 percent in the Po River valley,

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[16] One exception of an artwork directly associated with witch-hunts is a drawing sketched by Anthony van Dyck during his travels in Italy. Under the inscription "una striga in Palermo," an old witch wearing a tall conical *coroza* decorated with a devil is condemned by the Spanish Inquisition in the *auto-da-fé* of May 19, 1624. McGrath, "Una striga in Palermo"; and Jaffé, "New Thoughts on Van Dyck's Italian Sketchbook."

[17] The studies on Italian witch-hunts that I consulted are Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice*; Tedeschi, *The Prosecution of Heresy*; Di Simplicio, *Autunno della stregoneria*; Del Col, *L'inquisizione in Italia*; Duni, *Under the Devil's Spell*; Seitz, *Witchcraft and Inquisition in Early Modern Venice*; Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 231–54; and Montesano, *Caccia alle streghe*. For two valuable surveys on Italy, see Herzig, "Witchcraft Prosecutions in Italy"; and Duni, "Witchcraft and Witch Hunting." On the Italian terms for witchcraft, including *sortilegio* and *fattucheria*, see Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice*, 3–4.

[18] Around 40 percent of the defendants were charged with illicit magic. In Naples, this became the most common charge; Tedeschi, *The Prosecution of Heresy*, 87–126.

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and another 10 percent south of the Emilia-Romagna region.[19] The cities in which the artworks of *Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy* originated—Rome, Florence, Bologna, Parma, and Genoa—saw very few death penalties. As for the identity of the denounced, the commonplace stereotype finds little to recommend it historically. Indeed, some regional inquisitorial records indicate that incriminated elderly women were equal in number to young women, and in some cases accused males outnumbered women *tout court*.[20]

What, then, was the Inquisition's attitude towards witchcraft painting? Post-Tridentine prohibitions regarding the content and role of art reverberate in Cardinal Gabriele Paleotti's 1582 *Discorso intorno alle imagini sacre e profane*, published in Bologna. He forbade pictures showing "necromancy, augury, sortilege … magical arts, incantations, images with unknown signs, binding with herbs, bones of the dead, braided hair, and similar observances reprobated in the canons."[21] It appears that this prohibition was rarely enforced. Indeed, the only known case of banning witchcraft paintings concerns Jacob van Swanenburgh, Rembrandt's first teacher. In 1608, Swanenburgh was arrested by the Neapolitan Inquisition for hanging a large painting of cavorting witches and demons outside his workshop in one of Naples' busiest districts. Incensed with this public exhibition of such an egregious and heretical scene, the inquisitors interpreted the passersby's interest not as a natural curiosity for fanciful scenes but as a condemnable taste for witchcraft.[22] Away from the prying public eye, however, cardinals, noblemen, and merchants in Venice, Genoa, Rome, and Naples enriched their private collections with the witchcraft paintings of Italian and Northern European artists.[23]

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[19] For the number of prosecutions and executions across Europe, see Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 23. For the figures in Italy, see Duni, "Witchcraft and Witch Hunting," 86.

[20] Between 1550 and 1650 men amounted to almost 40 percent of those accused of illicit magic by the Venetian Inquisition, and two-thirds of the defendants in Naples. Monter, "Women and the Italian Inquisitions," 80; and Martin, *Witchcraft and the Inquisition in Venice*, 226. For young and old women accused of witchcraft, see Martin, 228.

[21] Paleotti, *Discourse on Sacred and Profane Images*, 169.

[22] Swanenburgh's (evidently convincing) defense led to his full exoneration. His interrogation is transcribed in Amabile, "Due artisti ed uno scienziato," 490–97. For a compelling analysis of Swanenburgh's defense, see De Nile, "Spoockerijen," 195–201.

[23] The Genoese art collector Giovanni Carlo Doria purchased a "stregaria" by Bartholomeus Spranger, and the Grand Constable of the Kingdom of Naples Lorenzo Onofrio Colonna possessed as many as four paintings of "Stregoneria," probably by Bruegel, and another by Pietro Testa. The Roman banker and merchant Carlo de Rossi was a keen collector of Salvator Rosa's works, including canvases portraying scenes of witchcraft. In Venice, the chronicler Giovanni Nani owned a "Strega et un mago che fanno strigarie" by Pietro della Vecchia, and the publisher Giovanni Battista Combi possessed an "Una scena di stregoneria" by Joseph Heintz the Younger. See Getty Provenance Index, s.v. "witchcraft." On Cardinal Francesco Barberini's ownership of a witchcraft painting, see chapter 5.

The Italian Image of the Witch

Walter Stephens asserts that "the witch was a hybrid figure," a creature contrived from activities that had previously been ascribed to societal pariahs and heretics.[24] Heterogeneity was specifically ascribed to the Italian witch by two of the celebrated nineteenth-century writers whose work glorified the Italian Renaissance. For his part, Jacob Burckhardt in *The Civilization of the Renaissance Italy* (1860) sought to reconcile the apparent contradiction of witchcraft with his appraisal of Italy as the cradle of humanism. He did this by holding to account two other cultures for the practice of witchcraft in Italy: ancient Rome and contemporary Germany.[25] According to Burckhardt, ancient superstitions proliferated in the Renaissance thanks to the support of Italian humanists, primarily through astrology and magic, but also through "the primitive and popular form" of witchcraft.[26] This "classical" form of witchcraft, which was especially perpetrated in the region of Perugia, grew exacerbated at the end of the fifteenth century as witch-hunts erupted in the German territories. While the German conception of witchcraft, which included the witches' aerial journey, copulation with the incubus, and malicious magic, managed to exert influence in the northern regions of Italy, it did not extend to central and southern Italy. There, another kind of witchcraft, corresponding to a different set of ideas, had already taken its hold. This purely "Italian" witch, according to Burckhardt, was characteristically benign, seeking to enhance people's pleasures through love magic. Burckhardt's attempt to classify witches into Italian and German has been criticized as biased: Italian trial records and treatises describe witches besmirched with diabolical features that Burckhardt would have considered German.[27] More accurately, John Addington Symonds wrote in *Renaissance in Italy* (1875–86) that the Italian witch "*combined* the Locusta [a notorious poison maker] of ancient Rome with the witch of medieval Germany." Not unlike her German counterpart, Symonds's *strega* is "a loathsome creature" expert in magical poisons and claiming to operate magic by the aid of devils.[28]

The Italian witch images in *Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy* furthermore evince eclecticism, taking inspiration from the broadest of sources, including contemporary Italian art and culture, Greco-Roman literature, and Northern European imagery. The classical tradition played a central role in the conceptualization and reinforcement of early modern beliefs about witchcraft, primarily by peddling the idea that women are predisposed to its practice.[29] This is corroborated by the ancient derivation of two common terms for a witch in early modern Italian: *strega* and *stria* (the former remains the word for "witch"). These terms allude to a creature in the Roman tradition called a *strix* or *striga*, which is variously described as a bird or a woman shapeshifted into a bird who emits the high-pitched vocalizations of a screeching owl and who snatches infants from their cradles at night and drinks their blood.[30] The classical witch finds expression in the book in two ways. First, images of unspecified witches carry allusions through certain motifs and visual forms of rhetoric to ancient witches such as Lucan's Erichtho and Horace's Canidia.[31] Second, the tremendous impact of the classical tradition on early modern beliefs about witchcraft is explored in a chapter devoted to the enchantresses Circe and Medea, whose fables feature prominently in Italian art. I intend to show how the mythological paintings are linked, implicitly or intentionally, to early modern ideas about witchcraft.

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[24] Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 322. On the origins of witchcraft beliefs in medieval heretical sects, see Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons*.

[25] Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance Italy*, 356–80.

[26] Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance Italy*, 368.

[27] Baroja, *The World of the Witches*, 99–101; Burke, "Witchcraft and Magic," 32–33; Herzig, "Witchcraft Prosecutions in Italy," 258–60; and Simons, "The Crone, the Witch, and the Library," 278–79.

[28] Symonds, *Renaissance in Italy*, 185. However, he also distinguishes between the German-type Alpine witch and the classical-type Perugian witch, a distinction that resonates in Kieckhefer's varying mythologies of witchcraft in these two territories.

Italian artists also drew direct inspiration from Northern European images of witchcraft, including prints by Albrecht Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien, illustrated books of classical poems and witchcraft treatises, and paintings of Northern artists made during their Italian sojourns. In some cases, I address comparable aspects between Italian and Northern images not necessarily to argue for direct influence but to pinpoint those concepts that evolved simultaneously yet independently in different European regions, just as regional conceptions of witchcraft coincided on certain beliefs.[32] While, therefore, a book dedicated to the witch in Italian art may imply *some* kind of idiosyncrasy or distinctiveness, her figure is far from alienated from her European cohorts.

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[29] Marina Montesano explores the impact of Greek and Latin texts on the burgeoning concept of witchcraft in *Classical Culture and Witchcraft in Medieval and Renaissance Italy*.

[30] On strix in classical literature, see Oliphant, "The Story of the Strix." Another word for "witch" was *lamia*, a monster sometimes described in ancient and medieval texts as a night demon, ghost, or equine-legged woman, who slaughters and devours infants at night, and tempts attractive men. Šedinová, "La raffigurazione della 'Lamia.'" See also Hutton, *The Witch*, 69–71, 194; and chapter 2. Other terms for a witch include *malefiche*, *masche*, *fattucchiere*, and *maliarde*; Black, *The Italian Inquisition*, 295n. 11. For the terms for a witch in classical texts, see Spaeth, "From Goddess to Hag," 41–42; and Paule, *Canidia*, 8–14.

[31] Margaret Sullivan argued that Dürer and Baldung's works of witches were not a direct reaction to witch prosecutions and witch manuals but emerged solely from ancient literature. Sullivan, "The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien." It is hard to believe that viewers of these artworks did not also consider the newly evolving idea of the witch.

[32] Two prints were copied (in reverse) by Italians: Dürer's *Witch Riding on a Goat* was engraved by Benedetto Montagna around 1507; Zucker, *The Illustrated Bartsch*, 432, cat. no. 52. Baldung's *Preparation for the Witches' Sabbath* was produced as a color woodcut by Lucantonio de' Uberti in 1516 and Giovanni Francesco Camocio in the 1560s; Zdanowicz, "A Note on Salvator Rosa," figs. 2–3.

Heterogeneity is moreover apparent in view of the visual evidence. The figure of the witch is so dynamic within Italian art that no single depiction of the Italian witch can be described as representative. The visual stereotype of the witch as an ugly old woman made only few, albeit remarkable, appearances in Italian art before her figure's recurrent depiction by Salvator Rosa. Even the two old witches in the relatively contemporary images discussed in chapters 2 and 3 are dissimilar: one is manic and denuded, while the other is accoutered and cheerless. Adding visual diversity to depictions of the witch figure are the young witch and the male witch (*stregone*); both make an appearance in the book, especially in chapters 4 and 5.

The Challenge of Interpretation

Rather than rationalizing witchcraft or being tempted to explain it away, scholars have long conceived of witchcraft as "a cultural phenomenon with a reality of its own."[33] A groundbreaking step towards such an understanding of witchcraft was taken in Stuart Clark's seminal *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*. There, he explores the relationship between the tenets of witchcraft and other areas of early modern thought, as well as the language systems through which witchcraft authors promulgated their theories. These included forms of symbolism, classification, different lexicons, metaphor, narrative facets, and rhetorical devices.[34] Of those scholars who have examined witchcraft imagery using this approach, the cultural historian Charles Zika is the most prominent and prolific. Zika very influentially investigates the cultural meanings of witchcraft images by analyzing the plethora of visual codes and themes that artists developed and adapted with the intention of clarifying and interpreting the concept of witchcraft and its visual and ideological connotations, including, but not limited to, the cauldron, the ride, death, cannibalism, and moral disorder.[35] Throughout this book, I elaborate upon Zika's pioneering insights, including his remarks about gender reversal within witchcraft. I am, nevertheless, more interested in the significations of the more unusual and less explored visual strategies that artists employed in composing these works, such as the rarely seen gargantuan phallus and frame-elided devil.

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[33] Clark's introduction to *Languages of Witchcraft*, 6.

[34] "Language" is the first section in Clark, *Thinking with Demons*. See also Clark, "Introduction," 9.

[35] Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft*.

Moreover, and indeed at variance with Zika's approach (which hails from traditional visual culture), art-historical concerns take precedence in my analysis. A central issue in my study is artistic invention and imitation. Claudia Swan and Linda Hults have argued forcefully that artists saw witchcraft as affording the perfect framework to exercise their imagination whilst promoting their inventive prowess.[36] Endorsing their view, I contend that artists recognized an opportunity in the subject of witchcraft not only to exercise their imagination but also to vaunt their imitative and emulative skills by hinging on works of their peers and predecessors. Along with the inventive and imitative forms of artistic practice, my study foregrounds aesthetic motivations, artistic theories and practices, problems of authorship and dating, and, above all, hermeneutic readings of the works.

In *Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy*, I examine the tight interconnections between content and visual rhetoric. Artists codified the demonic world of witchcraft through various signs—especially inversion, hybridity, and liminality—while negotiating a rich gamut of theoretical concerns: varieties of magic, witches' powers and demeanor, illusory mechanisms in magic, devils' corporeality and appearance, medical explanations, and antidotes against witchcraft. While many of these issues are discussed in demonological treatises, some of these texts, especially those written in Latin, were probably unfamiliar to the artists and viewers. However, these texts provide contemporary viewers and readers with access to the intellectual framework of witchcraft that the erudite spectator of the time would also have known through book learning and hearsay. In utilizing these texts, my intention is not, therefore, to confine the images to instructive documents or textual equivalencies of beliefs and theories. Rather, I intend to plot some discursive paths that can provide the erudite viewer with critical points of departure in the artworks' interpretation.

While we may decode the systems of symbols and motifs that typify the realm of witchcraft, some of these aspects shall inevitably remain ambiguous—and for good reason. Any depiction of witchcraft is inherently indecisive. This is, not least, thanks to the inclusion of mutable substances, cryptic procedures, phantasmic visions, demonic illusions, and delusions—a veritable catalogue of misdirection designed to obfuscate the mechanism and purpose of magic, the chronology of events, and the boundaries between reality and illusion. Moreover, the witch's identity, appearance, and intentions were known to be inconstant, flighty, wily, and inveigling to the extent that the French judge in witch trials Pierre de Lancre implores us to read his 1612 treatise as "one discourse that bears as its title the inscription *A Portrait of the Inconstancy of Witches*."[37] Accordingly, the artworks

[36] Hults, *The Witch as Muse*, xiv, 34–39; and Swan, *Art, Science, and Witchcraft*, 14, 195–96.

[37] De Lancre, *On the Inconstancy of Witches*, 5.

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stir multivalent readings in particular ways. We shall see, for instance, how the depiction of a magic procedure at a certain moment calls its expected outcome into doubt, how innovative monsters bereft of a fixed referent foster competing meanings, and how partial information excites the viewer's imagination and occasions ambiguous identities. Indeed, it is this interpretative leeway that can be discovered in uncanny, mutable depictions of witchcraft, thereby reflexively reinforcing its identity as an enigmatic enterprise.

On my analysis, which is less concerned with what artists intended by their artworks and whether their meanings are formally circumscribed, I am interested in what interpretative routes would have been available to their intended audiences as afforded and encouraged by their work's formal semantics. To this extent, my approach is informed by Joseph Koerner's hermeneutical reading of Hans Baldung Grien's witchcraft images, whereby the contradictions and uncertainties of subjectivity intermingle in an unsettling, and ultimately *unsettled*, process of interpretation.[38] Despite the limitations of reception theory, confining the meaning of an artwork to authorial intention risks stunting and eviscerating the artwork's full semantic fecundity, thereby deracinating it of myriad nuances.[39] In this context especially, clinging to an encoded authorial intent would frustrate and conflict with the very core of witchcraft, whose essential imprecision necessarily implants semantic possibility, as (generously) does its depiction.

The question about the reality of witchcraft—not from our modern perspective but as a subject of early modern debates—grows animated through visual representation. Scholars are today divided on the question of whether images substantiate the existence of witches on the premise that "seeing is believing"[40] or dissuade it by dint of their whimsical content.[41] My reply would be that, unless the image is accompanied by some explanatory text that serves to adjudicate on the issue, a gullible or skeptical stance must be visually evinced.[42] In other cases, which account for the majority of the works examined here, the beholder would be predisposed to entertain various scenarios that vacillate between plausible and phantasmagorical:[43] Does the image portray what the witches, victims, or bystanders *believe* they see, or are we being invited into an objective reality, that is, to take the depiction at face value? If the image is fictive, does it then count as an illusion or delusion of the senses caused by the devil or as a product of the witch's delusionary mind? Could the image comprise aspects of the real *and* the illusory, albeit with blurred boundaries?

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[38] See the chapter "The Crisis of Interpretation" in Koerner, *The Moment of Self-Portraiture*, 317–62.

[39] On reception theory, see Kemp, "The Work of Art and Its Beholder"; and Shearman, *Only Connect*.

[40] Emison, "Truth and *Bizzarria*," 630–33; and Stephens, *Demon Lovers*, 123.

[41] Claudia Swan sees Jacques de Gheyn II's works as pictorial manifestations of theories that present witchcraft as the product of deluded imaginations; Swan, *Art, Science, and Witchcraft*, 123–24, 138, 154–94. See also Zika, "The Cruelty of Witchcraft," 45.

[42] Tal, "Skepticism and Morality"; and chapter 4.

[43] Clark asserts that "in witchcraft matters belief and doubt … varied according to specific issues and were spread out along a continuous spectrum of reactions to witchcraft phenomena." Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 182.

An interrelated challenge lies in the determination of the response that a witchcraft scene is apt to have on a spectator. On Richard Kieckhefer's account, magic sits at a crossroads between humor and seriousness. He remarks that "it is seldom easy to know for sure whether a medieval audience would have been amused or shocked by such material."[44] One may argue that an image may have shocked the credulous and amused the skeptical. Subjectivity, however, only gets us so far. For example, Swanenburgh's witchcraft paintings were suspected by the Inquisition as being heretical. In his defense, however, the artist maintained that he devised the works out of sheer pleasure and as a joke, a claim that his interrogators must have believed given his exoneration.[45] While scholars have pointed out that early modern artists, like poets and playwrights, appreciated both the facetious and horrifying potential of witchcraft *qua* subject matter, they have only rarely explained the means through which these images found subjective, emotional traction.[46] I address this lacuna through my examination of the artworks.

An issue that cannot be ignored, and one to which I diligently attend in this book, is gender. Although men could also be victims of witch-hunts, Italian artists—like their Northern European counterparts—typically portrayed the witch as female. Linda Hults's *The Witch as Muse: Art, Gender, and Power in Early Modern Europe* offers a pivotal study on the figure of the witch from a gendered perspective. Despite the various persuasive arguments in the scholarship that misogyny was not the only—nor even the central—motive for witch-hunts, Hults's argument is predicated on the idea that images of witchcraft were intensely misogynistic.[47] Her primary contention is that the figure of the female witch, who reifies the dangerous potential of imagination and fantasy, was adopted by male artists to flaunt their productive and reasoned use of these faculties.[48] Endorsing Hults's view, my focus here is on the different strategies adopted by artists to underscore the witch's female sex as the source of both her powers and her depravity. At the most basic level, artists emphasized a binary conceptualization of gender by portraying female witches who enchant, dominate, seduce, attack, deride, emasculate, and castrate male victims. Artists further inverted the figure of the virtuous woman and overturned ideas relating to normative sexual roles by drawing on established topoi such as the Power of Women and the Ill-Matched Couple. Moreover, they used their art to offer symbolic analogies between the witch and the monster, and also negotiated the role of gender in demonological discourses. Although representations of the witch oscillated between overtly humorous and more somber depictions, the witch emerges in these artworks as a cipher for patriarchal anxieties and fantasies about women.

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[44] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 1–2.

[45] Amabile, "Due artisti ed uno scienziato," 61–62: "Perche anco me imaginava di dare piacere alle gente che lo vedessero … perche questo io lo teneva per una burla et l'hò fatto per fare ridere le gente" (because I imagined myself giving pleasure to the people who saw it … because this was what I kept for a joke and I did it to make people laugh).

[46] Baroja, *The World of the Witches*, 216–18; Sullivan, "The Witches of Dürer and Hans Baldung Grien"; Swan, *Art, Science, and Witchcraft*, 134; and Roper, *The Witch in the Western Imagination*, 27. Among the humorous aspects that scholars have identified in witchcraft imagery are the upside-down world shared by the demonic and the carnivalesque, and the witch's grotesque body. On these aspects, see Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*.

[47] Hults, *The Witch as Muse*, 10–15.

A predominant motif that stirs ambivalence and throws the beholder into perplexity is the monstrous creature. *Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy* probes a bizarre cluster of monsters: a witch-bestridden giant, tailed phallus; a morphologically unprecedented chimera of two avian heads and a skeletal leonine body; and the clawed extremities of an unseen devil who penetrates onto the pictorial scene. Such hybrids as these have been paid scant critical attention. This is perhaps because it is tempting to see them merely as nominal demonic agents. However, to view these hybrids only through an iconographic lens is to ignore those formal and compositional aspects that distinguish one creature from another, and to undermine the crucial issues of intention, production, and reception. An important contribution in the right direction was made by Hults and Swan, who saw composite monsters as evidencing artists' inventive prowess and capacity for *fantasia*.[49] While I elaborate on this critical path in the book, I depart from their approach in two ways. First, I do not treat all hybrids as a unified group; instead, I aim to attend to their individuality. Second, I extend and expand the monster's interpretative possibilities, as well as the spectator's experience thereof.

Monsters are semantically heavy beings. Their interpretability is even signaled etymologically by the hypothesized Latin derivation from the verbs *monstrare*, to show, and *monere*, to warn.[50] As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen proclaims in the first of his seven compelling theses on the subject, "The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,' a glyph that seeks a hierophant."[51] On Cohen's cogent analysis, the act of reading recognizes the essential role of the viewer as, fundamentally, an interpreter of monsters, acknowledging the vast range of reactions—from the visceral to the cerebral—that monsters are apt to provoke. Intending to broaden and problematize the meaning of the monster, I propose to examine the dynamics of invention and convention surrounding morphology; their narrative, figurative, and symbolic potential; their cultural and demonological significations; the devil's variable appearance and liminality; and the tension between hybridity and metamorphosis. In some cases, the monster reveals itself as the key to unlock the meaning of the entire scene, while in others, it serves as a quasi-autonomous site of reflection on subjects related to witchcraft, creativity, and imagination.

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[48] Hults, *The Witch as Muse*, xiv, 14–16, 36–39.

[49] Hults, *The Witch as Muse*, 47–52; and Swan, *Art, Science, and Witchcraft*, 154–56.

[50] Salisbury, *The Beast Within*, 144; and Verner, *The Epistemology of the Monstrous*, 2–7.

The artworks examined in *Art and Witchcraft in Early Modern Italy* ultimately defy reduction to a comprehensive narrative, a pellucid statement of beliefs, a firm moral or didactic lesson, or an unequivocal stance towards witch persecutions. Rather, these images invite interpretative multiplicity that results from, and emblematizes, the perplexing experience of trying to make sense of manifestations of witchcraft. Ostensively, this book cultivates and perpetuates the dialectic between the coherent and the ambiguous as upheld and exemplified in the images that comprise its study.

Structure of the Book

This study offers a series of five case studies, focusing respectively on a witch stereotype, two individual works, an artistic genre, and a particular iconography. Although arranged in roughly chronological order, the chapters neither coalesce into a sequential narrative nor do they offer a linear survey on the subject. The first three chapters focus on old witches that feature in prints and drawings that, barring one, fall between 1520 and 1550; the following two chapters consider young witches of both sexes portrayed in paintings and frescoes from 1550 to 1650.

We begin our study with the question of who a witch is. In chapter 1, "Old Women under Investigation: The Drab Housewife and the Grotesque Hag," the viewer assumes the role of an inquisitor tasked to scrutinize the woman's body to locate the markers of witch-hood. An analysis of two different images of old women—Enea Vico's engraving of a dull housewife spinning with a distaff and Leonello Spada's sketch of a furious grotesque hag—confounds our assumption that the former is not a witch while the latter is.

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[51] Cohen, "Monster Culture," 4. On the interpretive perspective of monsters, see Huet, *Monstrous Imagination*; Knoppers and Landes, *Monstrous Bodies/Political Monstrosities*; Williams, *Monsters and their Meanings*; and Morgan, *The Monster in the Garden*.

Each of the two subsequent chapters examines a print of an old witch on her nocturnal ride; one witch flagrantly presides over a procession of monsters and naked men; the other sits, dejected, atop a gigantic phallus. Chapter 2, "Chimerical Procession: The Poetics of Inversion and Monstrosity," forges an interpretation of the engraving *Lo stregozzo*. Tentatively attributed to Giulio Romano, the *Stregozzo* constitutes a self-conscious display of artistic creativity. Various figures in the print connote, ideologically and pictorially, both the artist and the witch. Chapter 3, "Priapic Ride: Gigantic Genitals, Penile Theft, and Other Phallic Fantasies," explores another image that renders the disorderly realm of witchcraft inverted, monstrous, and mutable, while at the same time bawdy. I unpack Parmigianino's *Witch Riding on a Phallus* as a multilayered commentary on witchcraft lore and praxis by reading the graphic phallus as both literal and figurative, real and fantastic.

Baroque art was especially fecund as the evolutionary ground for unconventional themes and paintings of dramatic and violent witchcraft scenes. To this end, chapter 4, "Magical Metamorphoses: Variations on the Myths of Circe and Medea," delves into the fables of Circe transforming men into beasts and Medea rejuvenating Aeson. An examination of a select cluster of paintings and frescoes reveals that artists such as Alessadro Allori, Pellegrino Tibaldi, and Anton Maria Vassallo prescinded from making clear-cut displays of these myths, instead preferring to suspend, negate, or ridicule the magic performed by Circe and Medea. In chapter 5, "A Visit from the Devil: Horror and Liminality in Caravaggesque Paintings," the prevailing stereotype of the omnipotent, malignant witch is confounded in an oft-neglected group of four paintings that show the witch (who is either male or female) being alarmed by the devil's arrival. It is argued that the cropped figure of the devil constitutes the paintings' emotional and intellectual apogee. The epilogue recaps some of the critical threads that run throughout the book by way of a brief examination of Salvator Rosa's pendants *Witch* and *Soldier*.

Collecting these artworks under one title does not thereby classify them under a definitive, unified "genre" of witchcraft. A cursory glance across the reproductions in the book reveals that they are utterly diverse. Indeed, we do not find a univocal pictorial definition of a witch from this period, nor is there a standard witchcraft "scene." Moreover, the Italian artworks are dispersed over a long time span with intermittent gaps and a real paucity of material interconnections between them. More positively, however, the present study does explore how artworks that varied in form, subject matter, scale, medium, and mode of representation nevertheless converge on the ideas and beliefs relating to the new *conception* of witchcraft. For example, then, while there are no visual nor iconographical affinities between the Homeric sorceress Circe transforming Ulysses's comrades into animals and a crone astride a colossal phallus, the two works do revolve around kindred themes and discourses: the veracity of transformations, the boundaries between the real and the fantastic, and the delusions of the witch. The case studies presented here can stand autonomously but also enjoy rich interrelations. Altogether, they constitute a captivating quilt of images that sheds light on the critical role that art played in early modern Italy in developing, complicating, and problematizing notions surrounding witchcraft *qua* phenomenon, and, eventually, casting our understanding and perception of Italian Renaissance and Baroque art into fanciful and bizarre new colors.

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