



“For a Charm of Powerful Trouble”

*In the poisoned entrails throw,  
Toad, that under cold stone,  
Days and nights, has thirty-one  
Sweltered venom sleeping got,  
Boil thou first i’ th’ charmed pot.  
Fillet of a fenny snake,  
In the cauldron boil and bake.  
Eye of newt and toe of frog,  
Wool of bat and tongue of dog,  
Adder’s fork and blindworm’s sting,  
Lizard’s leg and owlet’s wing,  
For a charm of powerful trouble,  
Like a hell-broth boil and bubble.*

*Scale of dragon, tooth of Wolf,  
Witch’s mummy, maw and gulf  
of the ravined salt-sea shark,  
Root of hemlock digged i’ th’ dark,  
Liver of blaspheming Jew,  
Gall of goat and slips of yew  
Slivered in the moon’s eclipse,  
Nose of Turk and Tartar’s lips,  
Finger of birth-strangled babe  
Ditch-delivered by a drab,  
Make the gruel thick and slab.  
Add thereto a tiger’s chaudron  
For th’ ingredient of our cauldron.  
Cool it with a baboon’s blood.  
Then the charm is firm and good.*

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE (1564–1616)  
MACBETH, ACT 4, SCENE 1, LINES 5–91:23–58:22–34:37–38  
Folger Library edition  
New York: Washington Square Press, 1922

This most famous speech from Shakespeare’s Scottish play has inspired many a grimace and generations of Halloween chants, but few have noted that it reads much like a recipe. The directions to “boil,” “bake,” and “bubble,” the indications of the time of night to harvest the “slips of yew,” the specificity of the various parts to be added to the “poisoned entrails”—fillet, toe, wings, and tongue—all resemble instructions seen in recipes throughout this exhibition. Really, given the range of ingredients found in seventeenth-century medicine, it is not until the third section and the inclusion of human body parts that the recipe becomes otherworldly, gruesome, and menacing.

