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Skotský hon na čarodějnice v letech 1661 a 1662:

Důsledek ekonomické situace nebo práce náboženských fanatiků?

Magisterská diplomová práce

The Great Witch Hunt of 1661-1662:

Result of Economic Situation or Religious Fanatics at Work?

Master Thesis

Vedoucí práce: Prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.

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TÉMA ČESKY:

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VEDOUCÍ PRÁCE:

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ZÁSADY PRO VYPRACOVÁNÍ:

This diploma thesis deals with the Great Witch Hunt of 1661-1662 in Scotland and the reasons this witch hunt happened. The witch hunt of 1661-1662 in Scotland is fairly specific one with a rare character of the crimes for which people were prosecuted as witches. This thesis will focus on possible explanations, why the witch hunts happened and what made them so characteristic. It will explore possible political, social and economic theories for the hunts and explain, why it was most probably the mixture of these that caused them.

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Prohlašuji, že jsem diplomovou práci na téma: "The Great Witch Hunt of 1661-1662: Result of Economic Situation or Religious Fanatics at Work?" vypracovala samostatně pod odborným dohledem vedoucího diplomové práce a uvedla jsem všechny použité podklady a literaturu.

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Content

1. Introduction

The middle of the seventeenth century in Scotland was a turbulent time, there was a civil war raging on, radical changes were happening in the government and of course, the witch trials were staged. In this work I will attempt to closely examine the details of these trials and possible reasons that allowed for them to happen. The phenomenon of witch hunts continues to fascinate, and it is most definitively not something completely in the past.

The first chapter of this work deals with broader background of the witch trials. The historical events influencing the time period are introduced there together with short detailing of the state of society at that time and the relatively newly established judicial system. Lastly, the chapter will also focus on a religion aspect of the issue as that is something that sets Scottish witch trials apart from those happening anywhere else in the world.

The second chapter makes a use of the Survey created by the scholars in Edinburgh University, which allows to search through detailed information taken from the trial documentation. Thanks to this, we can paint the picture of a typical person accused of the crime of witchcraft. And as the crime of witchcraft is a rather broad term, this chapter will also explain the possible crimes this accusation covers.

The reasons why the witch trials happened will be closely examined in the third chapter of this work. For many years, the scholars focusing on this topic tried to come up with a reasonable explanation and the possible theories include everything from remains of old religions, through economic reasons to possible effects of mould in the grain. These theories will be introduced and applied on the Great Witch Hunt of 1661 if possible.

The next chapter marks the start of the literary part of this work. Introducing John Buchan, the author of *Witch Wood (1927)*, will include not only the introduction of his works and possible inspirations and influences but also some information about his life and career outside the field of literature.

In the last chapter I will focus on *Witch Wood* novel and specifically on the motifs of witchcraft used as a key plot device. I will discuss the genre of the book and the interesting portrayal of the forest. To properly demonstrate I will compare John Buchan's book with a short story by James Hogg.

2. History, society, religion, and justice system in Scotland in the seventeenth century

The key to a better understanding of the phenomenon of witch hunting is background information regarding the historical events, the situation in Scottish church and society is necessary, and a better understanding of the Scottish judicial system of that time is absolutely crucial. This chapter aims to describe the circumstances around the witch trials but cannot go into full detail as the seventeenth century was indeed a very complicated period of time.

The seventeenth century in Scotland was the most turbulent time in Scottish history, especially the eras of 1640's and 1660's for those were times of radical changes, times of Restoration of monarchy and of the Civil war. In the beginning of seventeenth century, Scottish King James VI became the James I of England, Scotland and Ireland and unified the country. Under his rule, the golden age of Elizabethan England continued. However, as the century progressed, an increasing number of conflicts crept up.

2.1. Historical and historic events

James I had a keen interest in Scottish issues, even after he became the king of England and Ireland. Although he moved his court to London, he established a postal system and through it exchanged numerous letters with his delegates in the Privy Council and Scottish Parliament.[1] James increased the number and the powers of bishops and in 1618 he introduced a piece of fairly controversial legislative called Five articles. These articles prescribed religious practices that, while in use in England, had been mostly

[1] Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland, 1470-1625* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 191.

abolished in Scotland and were seen as a return to unwanted Catholic practices. The practice of kneeling for the reception of holy communion was met with an especially large wave of resentment and opposition.

James' son, Charles I, despite being born in Scotland, did not develop a relationship with the country. He was considered estranged and uninterested in the Scottish affairs. After he ascended the throne in 1625, he ruled Scotland through Lord Hamilton, often described as very indecisive, and through the Archbishop of St. Andrews, John Spottiswood. Charles never regarded the voices of his critics as important and this proved to be a problem when he attempted to enforce the elements of the English religious settlement in Scotland. The result of this attempt were the Bishops' Wars, both political and military conflict of 1637-1640. In 1640 the Presbyterian Covenanters, who called for the rejection of untried innovations in religion, emerged victoriously and virtually ruling an independent Scottish state. Only four years after the end of Bishops' Wars, the Scottish civil war of 1644-1645 broke out. Scottish Royalists, supporters of Charles I under the leadership of James Graham, 1st Marquis of Montrose, fought the Covenanters that were in power and that sided with the English Parliament. The Covenanters even after a series of defeats eventually won and King Charles I surrendered and was executed.

On 28 October 1651, the Parliament of England passed a declaration, the Tender of Union, stating that Scotland would cease to have an independent parliament and would join the Commonwealth republic. Six years after this declaration an Act of Union was passed in June 1657. These two declarations meant de facto the annexation of Scotland by England. [2] Scottish Parliament was dissolved and replaced by thirty seats in the

[2] "June 1657: An Act touching several Acts and Ordinances made since the twentieth of April, 1653. and before the third of September, 1654, and other Acts," British History Online, accessed April 5, 2017, http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/acts-ordinances-interregnum/pp1131-1142.

Westminster Parliament. The death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658 resulted in a political crisis, followed by the invitation of Charles II back to Britain. Charles II, the King of Scotland by proclamation of Scottish parliament on 5 February 1649, became officially the King of England, Scotland, and Ireland on 29 May 1660 and thus the monarchy was restored.

These continuous disruptions of the developing Scottish state meant that the state did not advance into the modern state phase. There is one practical question on the matter of chaos and changing governments. Laura A. M. Stewart formulates it like this: "Does it matter whether state power emanates from London or Edinburgh?"[3] And the people paying taxes probably did not care to whom they were paying those taxes. Yet there is the important detail, whether the tax is regarded as legitimate. Laura Stewart says:

> The removal of the pivot of executive power to a neighbouring state had political consequences, but His Britannic Majesty was not the sole will of government and his prerogatives had to be exercised, and were experienced, through Scottish offices, institutions, and practices. There was no joint British council or representative assembly to coordinate policy across the archipelago. Scottish and English governing structures remained largely separate, with almost no shared jurisdiction… neither the English Privy Council, nor its Parliament, had jurisdiction over Scottish affairs, although the king personally sought the advice of people who were not Scots and appointed a handful of them to the Scottish Privy Council. For the most of seventeenth century, the government dealt with violent Scots by deploying other, more reliable, Scots to deal with them. Even

[3] Laura A. M. Stewart, "The 'Rise' of the State?' in *Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History,* ed. Jenny Wormald and T.M. Devine (Oxford University Press, 2012), 223.

> Oliver Cromwell resorted to governing Scotland through its own laws and many of its localized administrative structures.[4]

This shows that the situation in Scotland was largely misunderstood by the London-based kings. The royal influence was not as strong in Scotland as they would wish it to be and practically non-existent in regions of the Highlands. However, that did not stop them from attempting to impose legislations that were in sharp contrast to the long-term development in the Scottish church. This must have caused tensions and the unpredictability of the changing governments wrought havoc with the state offices, which include the courts, and this subsequently had to influence the witch hunts.

2.2 Society in Scotland

The seventeenth century brought many radical changes, and these were of course reflected in the society of Scotland. For the first time in three centuries, there was a significant rise in the urban population, which meant more taxpayers. Yet even this rise in population was tempered by outbreaks of bubonic plague during the years 1623 and 1645. Another hindrance to the rising numbers of the population were the Civil war or the agriculture on a poor level and the resulting famines such as the horrendous national famine of 1690's, called the seven ill years.

Despite the fact that Scotland was in political turmoil and damaged by the Civil war there was an effort to modernise. The burghs were losing their importance to the pre-industrial towns and the control of the economy shifted from them to the country as the burghs started losing some of the marketing rights. The Aristocracy took a hit during the Civil war for they often lost big parts of their wealth for the duty of outfitting the army

[4] Ibid.

for the Civil war was theirs. On top of this, the system of apprenticeships was slowly dissolving. Thus, the mobility between social ranks increased. The lairds welcomed this as an opportunity for a better social standing in society and thus new powerful gentry was rising.

The society in Scotland was theoretically patriarchal, at least according to limited sources available to historians. One of the important notions that emerged after the Reformation era was the criminalisation of women[5]. Before the Reformation, the husbands or fathers were held responsible for the crimes of women from their family. This was particularly evident in witchcraft prosecutions but it was not restricted only to the witch trials. Through the 1640s, independent commissions were set up to try women for child murder, and after pressure from the kirk, a law of 1690 placed the presumption of guilt on a woman if she concealed a pregnancy and birth, and her child later died[6]. This meant that women were responsible for their behaviour, which in turn brought about the chance for women to engage in an independent economic activity, particularly for widows, who could be found keeping schools, brewing ale, and trading. The early example, that some of these early female pioneers into business was highly successful, was Janet Fockhart, an Edinburgh merchant and "Wad-wyfe" or moneylender. Widowed Fockhart amassed an estate of the total value of £22,000 before she died in the late sixteenth century.[7] However, in lower classes of the social scale, the rolls of poor relief indicate that large numbers of widows with children endured a marginal existence.

[5] Rosalind Mitchison, *Lordship to Patronage: Scotland, 1603-1745* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 86-88.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Jane E. A. Dawson, *Scotland Re-formed, 1488-1587* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 322.

The rising status of lower and middle classes, however, did not mean that Scotland dealt with its problems of poverty and vagrancy. In the sixteenth century, a series of legislations addressing the problem of beggars, old, and sick, was enacted. These introduced a system of deserving and undeserving poor and established the church as the major element in battling poverty. Parish elders created lists of deserving poor that received help while the undeserving were often punished by being placed in the stocks. The most important change in the seventeenth century was the introduction of compulsory financial help from the local heritors in 1649.[8] The heritors, the privileged land owners, were assessed by kirk to provide help for the poor as opposed to the system of voluntary contributions. Thus, the kirk held significant powers over the gentry class of society.

2.3 Religion and the Kirk

During the sixteenth century, Scotland had undergone a Protestant Reformation under the reign of James VI that created a predominately Calvinist national kirk. James VI favoured doctrinal Calvinism, but also episcopacy (hierarchy of church government, preference of the government of bishops to the government of elder assemblies as in the Presbyterian hierarchy). Following the teachings of Lutheran Scot Patrick Hamilton, George Wishart and, of course, John Knox, a strongly Calvinist kirk was established. The belief in the deep depravity of mankind deserving of eternal damnation and merciful God choosing a selection of humanity for salvation was set out in simple language as to avoid the negative emotions the Catholic church evoked with the Latin language.[9] The early Scotch reformed theology was based on the principle of predestination and during the seventeenth century, topics like predestination, election, reprobation, the value of the

[8] Rosalind Mitchison, *A History of Scotland* (London: Routledge, 2003), 96.
[9] Stewart J. Brown, "Religion and society to c. 1900", in *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Scottish History* ed. Jenny Wormald and T.M. Devine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 80.

atonement and the perseverance of the saints, were of interest to the Scottish common people.

When the son of James VI, Charles I, ascended the throne, he sanctioned a new book of canons making himself the head of the Kirk. Additionally, he attempted to enforce this new English-style Prayer Book in Scotland. Scottish bishops rebelled against Charles' book of canons and were formally expelled from the Kirk. Subsequently, the representatives of Scottish society created the National Covenant, to unite the supplicants and clarify their aims. Covenanters called for the rejection of untried innovations in religion, but the emphasis on Scotland's loyalty to the King stressed in the Covenant was overshadowed by the implication that any moves towards Roman Catholicism would not be tolerated.

The Covenant was signed by a large group of Scottish noblemen, gentry, and clergy during the ceremony in Greyfriar's Kirk in Edinburgh in February 1638. Copies were later distributed throughout Scotland and were met with a wave of support. Those who hesitated were often intimidated into signing. The only resistance was led by Marquis of Huntly in the counties of Aberdeen and Banff. Despite this, the Covenanter movement became the dominant power in the fields of politics and religion.

During the following Bishops' Wars, the clash between the King and the Covenanters, the latter emerged as virtually independent rulers. Scottish Parliament abolished episcopacy and declared itself free from royal control. Charles I managed to win the favour of Scotland by visiting in the autumn of 1640, granting titles to the leaders of the army and accepting the decisions of Scottish Parliament regarding the change of ecclesiastical system. Yet within two years, despite his removal of the sources of the original dispute, his relationship with English Parliament led to the English civil

war (1642–46) with the Covenanters on the victorious side of Parliament. They, however, became increasingly alienated from the Parliamentary regime as time progressed. Scottish defeats by the English in the subsequent Second and Third civil wars led to English occupation and incorporation in a Commonwealth of England, Scotland, and Ireland led by Oliver Cromwell from 1652 and to the imposition of religious toleration for Protestants.

The national kirk was restored after the Restoration of Monarchy in 1660 and with it, the episcopacy was also brought back. This caused huge problems as one-third of the clergy simply refused to accept it. Some of the ministers, especially in the south-west, started preaching in fields under the open sky and managed to attract often thousands of worshippers. The situation was made even more difficult as the government fluctuated between allowing these practices and persecuting the ministers. This, of course, caused many ministers and the worshippers attending the open field sermons to rebel, particularly big risings happened in the years 1666 and 1679, but both of these rebellions were defeated by the forces of government.

Yet, as Julian Goodare argues, neither the Restoration nor the defeat by the English negated the Scottish revolution: "The revolutionary regime did establish itself and govern largely unchallenged for a number of years; it decisively destroyed the regime of Charles I. And… its achievements were not entirely obliterated in 1660 or at any other date."[10] In the words of J. Goodare: "Ideologically, the Covenanters were challenging the divine right of kings – the most persuasive political concept to emerge from Europe's troubled sixteenth century."[11]

[10] Julian Goodare, "The Scottish Revolution," in *Scotland in the Age of Two Revolutions* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014), 82.
[11] Ibid., 86.

2.4 Justice system

Justice system during the times of political changes is a complicated matter. Yet it is one of the essential elements concerning the witch trials. The modern notion of laypeople about the trials is vague and often completely incorrect. Most people that do not have particular knowledge of the process would imagine, that it was a fairly quick affair, where a mob declared someone a witch and in a very brief time dealt with said witch by burning her at a stake. And while it could be true that such cases existed, when talking about the trials in seventeenth-century Scotland, nothing could be farther from the truth.

First of all, the witch trials were precisely that, trials. Several instances of courts existed that dealt with the accusations of being a witch. These courts ranged from small ad hoc local courts to the high court in Edinburgh. More than one court could be involved in the same case at various stages and often the courts had their own specialized roles. Although the accusations first came to the kirk sessions and courts, these did not have a criminal authority and therefore could not execute the witches. From these courts, the cases had to be passed to criminal courts. These courts then judged the crime of witchcraft as stated in several Witchcraft Acts, namely the Act of 1563 that established the practice of witchcraft and consulting with witches are capital offences[12] and the Act of 1604 that removed the crime of witchcraft from the authority of the ecclesiastical courts[13] and

[12] Marion Gibson, *Witchcraft and Society in England and America, 1550–1750,* (Cornell University Press, 2003), 7.
[13] Ibid., 5-6.

finally the Act of 1649 in which the Presbyterian "lobby" extended the previous Acts to include the crimes of consulting the Devil and familiar spirits.[14]

Most Scottish witches were tried in local criminal courts issued and authorized by the Privy Council or a committee of estates or the parliament, the central bodies that did not themselves hold trials. The local courts usually convened to try one person for one crime. Very little documentation from these trials survived other than the record of the courts being issued. The circuit courts were a step up from the local courts. These were travelling courts that visited different locations and tried the cases that were presented to them. These too often tried witches. Another court that tried numerous witches was in Edinburgh, called the Court of Justiciary. It was the highest criminal court, also called the justice court, that evolved from the tradition of travelling judiciaries after a need for a stable ever-present judge in Edinburgh. This court judged cases from all over Scotland. And finally, there were the regular local courts, such as burgh courts or sheriff courts, but as witchcraft was a serious crime, these courts normally did not try these cases.[15]

The courts described above were in function from the late sixteenth century but in the complicated political situation created by the Bishops' wars and the Civil war, the odds of an accused witch being brought to trial were dramatically reduced. And according to Brian P. Levack: "These chances became even smaller during the two-year period that preceded the Great Hunt [of 1660-1]. For on May 6, 1659, the date marking the end of the Protectorate, the judicial machinery of Scot-land ground to almost a complete halt."[16] Due to this fact, a hypothesis emerged in historian circles that the accused accumulated

[14] John R. Young, "The Covenanters and the Scottish Parliament, 1639-51: the rule of the godly and the 'second Scottish Reformation'", in *Enforcing Reformation in Ireland and Scotland, 1550-1700* ed. Elizabethanne Boran and Crawford Gribben (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 149-50.
[15] Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (London: Longman, 1987), 87–9.
[16] Brian P. Levack, "Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-1662", *Journal of British Studies* 20, no.1 (Autumn 1980): 93.

and there was not a court that could judge them. This legal demand could be satisfied only by the Great hunt of 1660-1661.

The evidence used in the courts could be divided into four main groups. The best evidence was considered to be the confession of the accused. This was very commonly obtained through torture, the most used tactic was sleep deprivation. Before the year 1662, the sleep deprivation method was not regarded officially as torture[17]. It was a very effective method as it caused hallucinations. Apart from confession, a neighbours' testimony could prove the guilt. These usually contained accusations such as a misfortune being caused by the witch that followed after a quarrel. Very common was also the testimony of a different witch. The suspect was often expected to name her or his accomplices, people that were named were then arrested and interrogated. This was very common, especially during the panic years, and it led to a dramatic increase in the numbers of accused. The last group of pieces of evidence contained the findings of the physical search of the witch. The process was carried out by the witch finder or the interrogator himself that searched for the Devil's mark. The procedure is described in more detail in a later chapter.[18]

As stated above, the witches were tried in courts, which means they were judged and it could be concluded by the court that the accused witch is innocent of the crime. In the stereotypical image of witch hunts, this is considered impossible as there is a predominant notion that all witches judged had to be executed. This is not true. The documents from the trials show that it was not uncommon for the accused to be released after proved not guilty. However, even if the accused was judged guilty, the punishment

[17] Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller, and Louise Yeoman, "Survey of Scottish Witchcraft," accessed April 19, 2017, http://www.shca.ed.ac.uk/Research/witches/.
[18] Ibid.

did not necessarily need to be execution. Other possible sentences included banishment, branding, being declared fugitive, excommunication, imprisonment or public humiliation. Although the possibility of finding the accused not guilty existed, according to B. P. Levack, the local courts were more likely to execute the accused than the Judiciary court or the circuit courts.[19]

[19] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt,* 87–9.

3. Who was a witch

Most people, when asked to describe a witch, imagine the stereotypical picture of one. It is usually an old, ugly woman, often with warts, low dental hygiene, accused of anything from magic and malice all the way to cooking children. In this chapter, this stereotype will be tried on the terms of the evidence. Were the witches really only women? Were they always old? Or ugly? And who accused them? Were the accusers always other witches, angry or scared neighbours or zealous ministers of the parishes? The database shows, that the question of who was a typical witch is not so easy to answer. The reality of the witch hunts was not simple. People accused of witchcraft or numerous other charges that were linked with being a witch did not have to be old or even female. The motive for accusing someone was not always based on supposedly witnessed or invented mystical practices or religious rituals. The variables that came into play were often much more mundane, ranging from the colour of the clothes through neighbourhood disputes all the way to political or property motives.

In this chapter, I will make use of the Scottish Witchcraft Survey Database composed by Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller and Louise Yeoman in January 2003. This database is freely accessible on the internet and provides information from the legal documents created during the witch trials in Scotland. It is by no means complete for many documents were destroyed or lost, yet it offers a valuable insight into the details of the trials.

3.1. Survey of 2003

The survey of Scottish witchcraft is an electronic database compiling all people known to have been accused of witchcraft in Scotland between the years 1563 and 1736.

Its authors, Julian Goodare, Lauren Martin, Joyce Miller and Louise Yeoman, had taken into consideration time and place of the trial, the charges, names of prosecutors, lists of evidence and the result of the trial. All of this information was gathered from numerous manuscripts both secular and ecclesiastical. This provides an almost exhaustive answer to the question, who was considered a witch or who could be accused of being one.

The survey is not by any means complete. A lot of data is missing from the source documents. Therefore, the data concerning age, marital status or social standing are not entirely reliable as the Survey offers statistics concerning these informations for roughly ten percent of the accused in some cases. Despite this lack of data, the Survey is the most complete source of evidence from the witch trials available.

If not stated differently, the following data deals specifically with the era of the years from 1640 to 1650, chosen as a rough setting reflecting the Buchan *Witch Wood,* which starts in 1644. However, the data across the whole period of witch hunts do not fluctuate much from the averages mentioned here. This period includes one major witch hunt and one hunt of the smaller scale as well as the period in between that while not exactly calm in regard to the trials, could be considered a norm for the majority of the seventeenth century. Occasionally, this specific time period will be compared with a different time period, namely with the year that shows a sharp spike in the number of trials, i.e. 1661-2. The place of a trial was not taken into consideration in this work as the fact that John Buchan chose Broughton as his inspiration for a setting of Witch Wood is attributed to his familiarity with the village and not to a specific trial case.

3.2. Gender

Witches were almost always women. This stereotype was laid down by the religious authorities even before the spread of witch hunts in Scotland. The best-known

example of work describing the stereotypical witch is the Malleus Maleficarum, first published in Germany in 1487. In this stereotype, women were considered by the Church as weaker (mentally, not only physically) and therefore inferior and more prone to evil doing (or even inherently evil). A. Anderson and R. Gordon argue in their work "Witchcraft and the Status of Women - the Case of England" that using women as scapegoats was made possible by their social standing and as the cases from England suggest, the higher standing women enjoyed in a society, the lower number of witch hunts. According to Anderson and Gordon women generally had higher social status in England than in Scotland or continental Europe. [20] This led to a difficulty in maintaining the stereotypical image of witches that was produced by the Church.

Male witches are practically unheard of and we would be hard-pressed if we wanted to find a male witch in the literature of fiction. However, in the real world the male witches existed or at least men were occasionally accused of being a witch or having dealings with witchcraft. The Survey confirms this as it shows 95 records of a man being accused. It is of course only a small fragment of the whole number of accused, which is 783. Yet, it is still more than 12% out of all the accused, which corresponds to the widely accepted numbers showing that 84% of accused were women.[21]

All of the above-mentioned evidence led some of the first feminist witchcraft researchers to equate the witch hunts with women hunts. It seems an obvious link to make, yet as Swales' and McLachlan's examination of over 600 cases of witch trials held between the years 1563 and 1727 suggests, the number of male victims in non-panic years (i.e. years that did not see the highest numbers of trials i.e. 1628-30, 1649-50, 1658-9 and

[20] Alan Anderson, Raymond Gordon, "Witchcraft and the Status of Women - The Case of England," *The British Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (1978): 171.
[21] Goodare, "Survey of Scottish Witchcraft."

1661-2.) did not vary much and usually did not drop under 17% and did not rise above 21%.[22]

Christina Larner in her book *Enemies of God* states that: "Witchcraft was not sex-specific but it was sex related".[23] In her book, Larner compared the similarities and differences between witch hunting and women hunting and she suggests that the differences are far more significant. "The link is indirect and the two cannot be completely identified,"[24] she states. She, however, does not follow this argument into details. Her statement was commented on by Willem de Blécourt in his "The Making of the Female Witch" (2000), who found Larner's account quite agreeable and states: "Since the notion of women hunting is rather ahistorical (no society hunted women per se), the stress on witch-hunts as witch hunts seems to be reasonable… the equation of witch hunt-ing with women hunting ultimately negates witchcraft; it originated from the disbelief in witchcraft."[25] The disbelief in witchcraft seems to be quite common in the works of scholars proposing theories on why the witch hunts happened and it is a mistake, given how seriously it was regarded during the time of the trials. This will be commented on in the following chapter.

As the crime of witchcraft was indeed considered very real and dangerous, it would be misleading to consider it a non-existent crime. And while the stereotype is defined by femaleness, Larner found, that the criminal prosecution concentrated on the witches and not women. In her words: "Witches were hunted in the first place as witches. The total evil which they represented was not actually sex-specific. Indeed the Devil

[22] J. K. Swales and Hugh V. Mclachlan, "Witchcraft and the Status of Women: A Comment," *The British Journal of Sociology* 30, no. 3 (1979): 351.
[23] Christina Larner, *Enemies of God: the witch-hunt in Scotland* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1981), 92.
[24] Ibid., 197.
[25] Willem De Blecourt, "The Making of the Female Witch: Reflections on Witchcraft and Gender in the Early Modern Period," *Gender & History* 12, no. 2 (2000): 290.

himself was male. Witch-hunting was directed for ideological reasons against the enemies of God, and the fact that eighty percent or more of them were women was, though not accidental, one degree removed from an attack on women as such."[26]

3.3. Wealth, social status, and property

The question of wealth or indeed social status is considerably more difficult than that of gender. As the section on the gender of witches already mentioned, there are researchers that believe the rising social status of women meant that the accusation of witchcraft was less probable. This hypothesis was discredited by previously mentioned Swales and McLachlan in their paper "Witchcraft and the Status of Women", which was based overwhelmingly on evidence and numbers.

Survey's editors recognise that much of the data concerning property and social status is missing from the documentary about the accused, however, they claim that witches were not poor especially not by the contemporary standards. The Survey cites the available data and shows that more than half of the accused (64%) belonged to the middling category, i.e. people that had secure access tenancy of land or were skilled craftsman, tenant farmers, etc. They had to work the land, but they were not poor. People from lower economic categories accounted for nearly one-third (29%) of the accused and people higher on the economic scale, nobility, and lairds accounted for 6%. However, the cases with the accused from higher economic categories were usually closed with the verdict of not guilty.

In the early cases of Scottish witchcraft, it was not at all rare to have a property motive for accusing someone, however, the property motives usually appear in the cases

[26] Larner, E*nemies of God*, 92.

involving people in higher economic categories. One of the most famous cases is that of Katherene Ross, also known as Lady Fowlis, from 1590. Katherene Ross was accused of killing her heirs and trying to kill rival members of her family, especially with poison and wax images. Secondary charges were those of ritual pacts with Fairyland and consulting with a known witch. She was tried three times, one time locally and two times in the central court, and found not guilty. This was a very standard type of early case where witchcraft was used to alter inheritance of land, titles, and property. It remains our guess if the property motive was the actual motive and the ritual pacts with otherworldly entities were added to inspire the image of immorality and evil for Katherene Ross.

On the other hand, there is a documented case from the year 1659 involving Helen Moorheid, who was accused of maleficium by her brother in law. There is a strong theme of neighbourly dispute and the property motive concerning liferent and inheritance. Helen was of the middling category, and the rent that she demanded she was paid after the death of her husband, should have been calculated from his land. While this was quite a rare case, it shows, that property motives in witchcraft trials were not limited to the higher social standing of the accused but concerned also the middling class.

The survey shows that in the first half of the seventeenth century only a handful of cases labelled with property motive were processed. All of them are from the years between 1613 and 1615 and all are tied together. The editors of the survey suggest that it was a dynastic struggle. Apart from the political and property motives, maleficium and consulting a witch as well as poisoning are also mentioned as other motives for the crime. It therefore seems that property motives were only a secondary reason for one to be accused and the social standing and the economic standing of the accused was not the most important feature when on trial.

3.4. Prototypical physical features and other tests

One of the characteristic features of stereotypical witch was the witches mark, also called devil's mark. This term was sort of an umbrella term for any permanent mark on victim's body, usually a mole, supposedly created by the devil after a midnight initiation ritual as an indication of obedience and service to him.[27] According to *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* by Richard M. Golden, the mark first appeared to play a role in distinguishing a witch in the 16th century. The peak of popularity of the mark could be dated to a period between the years 1640 and 1650. However, by the end of 17th century, the mark practically disappeared. [28]

The second type of a mark was "witches' teat". Witches' teat was a hard lump under the skin, very similar to a wart in looks. Deborah Willis believes that this mark was associated with the perversion of maternal power by witches.[29] There are numerous mystical rituals and creatures tied with the witches' teat, most commonly imps or familiars.

Tasked with finding these marks were witch finders equipped with pins or blades. It was believed that if cut or pricked, the mark would not bleed thus confirming that the person bearing the mark was a witch. Later the mark was not necessary and if none was found, the victim was pricked with a pin until an insensitive spot was found and this too confirmed that the person is a witch. Among the most famous of witch finders in Britain

[27] Rosemary Guiley, *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft* (New York: Facts on File, 1989), 99.
[28] Richard M. Golden, *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition Vol.4* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2006).
[29] Deborah Willis, *Malevolent nurture: Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 264.

was in England Matthew Hopkins, whose career flourished during the English civil war, and in Scotland John Kincaid, operating during the same time period.

In panic years, according to B.P. Levack[30], this initial mark searching and pricking could and did easily became torturing of the victim. In his work "State building and witch hunting in early modern Europe" Levack suggests that this torture was carried out by the local clergy or magistrates without a permit from central courts in trying to acquire an initial confession.[31] The question of torture will be explained in detail in the following chapter.

Another infamous way how to prove one was a witch was ducking also called the water test. The accused was put in water to see if they floated. If they sank, they were seen to be innocent and removed from the water. If they floated they were seen to be guilty. This test was only rarely used in Scotland, but few cases are mentioned in the legal documents[32].

3.5. Possible charges alias what was it the witches did, exactly?

The Survey of Scottish Witchcraft Database offers the authentic reasons for the accusation, those that were stated in legal documents. These charges range from demonic pacts all the way to consulting a witch (and not necessarily being one) or property motives. From today's point of view, some of them may seem very silly, but Scottish people of the seventeenth century took their superstitions (and religion) very seriously.

[30] Brian P. Levack, *Witchcraft, women and society* (New York: Garland, 1992), 43.
[31] Brian P. Levack, "State-building and witch hunting in early modern Europe," in *Witchcraft in early modern Europe* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), 106.
[32] Goodare, "Survey of Scottish Witchcraft."

The most common reason for somebody to end up on trial was a simple consulting a witch or being named by a witch. This accusation is infamously linked to torture, as the names of other witches were often extracted from the accused by using violence. The Survey shows a shocking number of two hundred and ninety cases of the accused being implicated by another witch, accused of consulting a witch was only one person, Issobell McKaw, in between the years 1661 and 1662.

Another wide range of possible accusations dealt with the devil. There were accusations of devil worship and subsequent devil presence during the rituals as well as pacts with the devil that were supposedly finalized by the appearance of a devil's mark on the body of the witch entering into a pact. Linked to the devil worship were demonic possessions and other elements that were supposed to take place during the rituals. The Survey shows records of one hundred thirty-nine cases.

Similar practices were also attributed to the fairies. While the fear of fairies sounds ridiculous nowadays, Scottish folk firmly believed into their existence. Fairies, or the Good Neighbours, are creatures of Gaelic mythology and as such were assigned a wide range of abilities and powers. An interesting aspect of witchcraft in 16th and 17th century Scotland was a fact that witches seldom came into their gifts and powers through pacts with the Devil. Much more common were cases in which persons in green or grey bestowed the witches with spells or magic in general to accomplish or help with accomplishing a task the fairy or ghost presented. Accusations of meeting with fairies, asking their help or being bewitched by them were just as damning as those involving the devil. As MacCuloch explains in his paper "The Mingling of Fairy and Witch Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Scotland": "The official orthodoxy of Europe had long regarded all spirits as either angelic or demoniac. Fairies, elves, brownies, water-

sprites, forest and woodland folk, were certainly not angels; therefore they must be demons."[33] And as the description of a man or woman in all green clothes was usually enough to convince people that they were dealing with a fairy, these accusations were not that rare. The survey shows seventeen cases specifically linked with fairies between the years 1661 and 1662. However, as the ministers considered fairies demons, there is no way to know, whether the cases labelled as devil and demon pacts were not linked also with fairies.

The accusations indirectly linked to fairies were more common and included folk healing, white magic, or unorthodox religious practices. The survey shows us ten cases, including the famous case of Isobel Gowdie, who described Queen and King of Fairyland and numerous rituals and ritual objects in detail. People believed that the healing powers and magic were obtained from the fairies or from rituals worshiping the fairies. These cases did not necessarily include witchcraft accusations but were seen as a similarly horrible crime.

All the previous charges did not directly involve witchcraft or maleficium. Causing harm using magic, often a curse or illness, was what made witch a witch. These attacks usually had very ordinary reasons rooted in neighbourhood disputes or business quarrels. The attack mentioned in the survey are for example causing a male to swell and suffer from childbirth pains or killing a woman, who did not return a cauldron as in the case of Margaret Hutchison from 1661. The Survey shows twenty-seven cases.

In conclusion, it seems that to become accused of witchcraft or any crime linked with being a witch was immensely easy especially in the panic years. Numerous cases

[33] Canon J. A. Macculloch, "The Mingling of Fairy and Witch Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Scotland," *Folklore* 32, no. 4 (1921): 230.

cite quarrels and revenge as the source of the maleficium or meeting a person in green clothes as the reason for believing one was in a pact with unholy powers. From today's point of view this is incomprehensible, yet in the seventeenth century in Scotland witchcraft was believed to be very real and immensely feared. In the following chapter, the possible reasons for witch hunts will be more explained in detail and some of the themes discussed in this chapter will reappear.

4. Possible reasons the witch trials happened

The historians do not agree on the answer to an essential question about witch hunts: why the witch trials happened and what could be the possible main cause for so many victims during such a short period of time. There are no complete records of the trials, but from the little information there is, the historians deduce that more than 660 people was killed during the years 1661-2 for all possible reasons linked to witchcraft, devil worship or harmful magic. While the scholars now agree that the witchcraft phenomena can be explained only by more than one interconnected motives, the opinions on what those motives are differ. Below are listed some of the theories explaining the reasoning behind the trials, both the ones that are now considered outdated and those that seem to be the true answer to our initial question. The primary aim of this chapter is to explain the theories of possible reasoning behind the witch trials and deduce whether they are applicable on the witch hunt of 1661-1662.

In the first part of the chapter the smaller scale influence will be discussed. These theories were not intended to explain away the whole phenomena of witch hunts but they bring important aspects of the trials into light. In the second part of the chapter the theories dealing with the witch hunts based on larger scale of features will be introduced. And finally, at the very end of the chapter, I will explain why these theories are or are not applicable on the Great Witch Hunt of 1661-1662 and why.

4.1 Smaller scale influences

Scottish witch trials are often contrasted with English ones and from these comparisons Scottish trials always emerge as harsher, more barbaric, and more uncontrolled. However, the arguments supporting these comparisons crumble when we

introduce modern knowledge of the trials. One of the main arguments is that torture was used during Scottish trials and not during English ones and as I explain in the following segment, the issue is not that black and white.

Another influence was often (and occasionally still is) cited by the feminist scholars that consider witch trials a result of hate towards women. This argument is nowadays rejected, however, the fact that most of the witches were women still needs an explanation. This issue will be commented on in following section.

4.5.1 Question of torture

Torture was already briefly mentioned in previous chapter as a mechanism of obtaining confession from the accused witch. It was not however considered as a possible propelling power for the witch hunts in general. Many scholars consider the question whether judicial torture was used in Scotland as very simple and the positive answer to it plays a role in many comparisons between the English trials and Scottish ones. The main problem lays in the definition of distinct types of torture and in the timing of the usage. There are six elements that need to be precisely defined: Physical coercion applied to obtain a confession as part of the trial, sleep deprivation or waking/watching of the witch again in the process of extracting a confession, search for witch marks (pricking), poor treatment of the accused (jail conditions, lack of food), possible violence caused by a crowd and finally the method of execution.

The assumption as mentioned above has been that judicial torture was used frequently in Scottish witch trials and it was the reason for the high numbers of witches in the trials. Stuart MacDonald in his paper "Torture and the Scottish Witch-hunt: A Re-examination" argues, that "the role judicial torture played as a motivating factor in the

intensity of the witch-hunt has been exaggerated"[34]. MacDonald shows that the term torture was used as an umbrella term for all the above-mentioned elements of it and criticises scholars for not making the distinction. "There is no clear evidence in all of the 420 known cases from Fife of direct torture or judicial torture being used. It is tempting to fall back on issues such as the silence of the records and the paucity of sources."[35] The argument that judicial torture (or direct torture according to Larner) was widely used is based on a handful of cases such as the North Berwick witches, Alison Balfour of Orkney, an incident that happened during Cromwellian occupation and few others. As MacDonald argues, in at least half of those the torture has been applied illegally and the case of North Berwick is a special one, as it dealt with the supposed attack on the King James VI. Often, the sources describing the scale of the torture were quoted with errors.[i]

On the other hand, the trial documents very often mention the watching or waking the witch. This method of sleep deprivation caused hallucinations and was seen as an excellent technique of obtaining confessions. These methods were however used in England too for they were not seen as "proper" torture. Church found this method very important, to the point that it recorded very precisely the costs of items necessary to the process of waking a witch, such included candles or ale for the guards[36]. Church courts were very precise with the circumstances in which such waking took place. The records of Pittenweem show the instructions from a hunt in 1643:

[34] Stuart Macdonald, "Torture and the Scottish Witch-hunt: A Re-examination," *Scottish Tradition* 27 (2002): 96.
[35] Ibid., 100.
[36] Alfred E. Truckell, "Unpublished Witchcraft Trials," in *Witchcraft in Scotland*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Garland Pub., 1992), 361-362.
[i] Such as the report from *Mercurius Politicus* of the 1652 trial in Leith, that mentions seven witches illegally tortured, that was incorrectly quoted as mentioning 60 witches brutally tortured in *Memorials of the English Affairs* by Bulstrode Whitelocke.

> The quhilk day, for the better trial of the witches presently apprehended, to the effect they may be better the watchit and preservit from information of their friends, it is ordainit that ane of the bailies or or counsell sall ever be present at the taking off and putting on of the watches, three several times in the 24 hours, and sall injoyn the watches silence; and sall appoint the ablest man of the watch to command the watch until his return. The same day the bailies and clerk, or any twa of them, with concurrence of the minister, are ordainit to try and examine ye witches privately, and to keep their depositions secret, because heretofore, so soon as ever they did dilait any, presently the partie dilaittit got knowledge thereof, and thereby was presently obdurate, at least armit, for defense.[37]

The church courts were allowed to use sleep deprivation as a method of confession extraction without any special permission from the courts of higher instances. And while the courts could possibly apply the judicial torture too, MacDonald argues, that in these cases the courts needed explicit permission, which is then recorded in the trial documents.[38]

The evidence presented shows, that the application of torture in Scotland probably was not widely in use and when used legally, it was recorded. The fact that all the data from the trials is not available means that it cannot be undeniably stated that torture in Scottish trials was not used, it however also means, that it cannot be simply stated that it was. The evidence shows, that while cases of illegal torture existed, they were considered brutal and barbaric (as can be seen in previously mentioned article in Mercurius

[37] David Cook, *Annals of Pittenweem: Being Notes and Extracts from the Ancient Records of That Burgh* (Anstruther, 1867), 49.
[38] MacDonald, *Torture and the Scottish Witch-hunt*, 104.

Politicus). MacDonald concludes his research paper with following statement: "In Scotland it was possible to use torture as part of a trial process in order to get the suspects to confess, yet few cases of where this was actually done have been described. In Fife, where we have evidence of 420 cases of suspected witches, no evidence has been found of judicial torture."[39] If we take this to be true, then Scottish and English trials do not differ in the methods used and therefore the application of torture cannot be considered as the force behind the high numbers of Scottish witches.

4.5.2 Targeting of females

The fact that more than three quarters of the victims of witch hunts were women was the source of many works on how the witch trials were an expression of hatred towards women. As I mentioned in previous chapter, this was proved to be incorrect e.g. in the paper by J. K. Swales and Hugh V. McLachlan. Although this link between the trials and hatred of women was proved to be incorrect, the numbers of female victims still require an explanation. Sierra Dye in her paper "To Converse with the Devil? Speech, Sexuality, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland" proposes a relation between the authorities' attempts to control the power of speech and female words based on the notion that the crime of witchcraft was added to the accusations only in later stages of the trials and that the women were at first accused only of quarrelsome personality.

Dye based her research on the notion, that simple misogynistic targeting of women would not result in comparatively large number of men being also accused of witchcraft. In her paper, she establishes a link between neighbourhood quarrels, personal reputation, the crime of common scold and the power of witch's curses. The common scold was a crime committed almost exclusively by women and consisted by the offense

[39] Ibid., 110.

caused by a troublesome or angry woman, who broke public peace by quarrelling and arguing. Christina Larner observed that "a witch was a neighbour. She was most likely a mature female, though not necessarily elderly or solidary…She was likely to be quarrelsome."[40] Dye uses several cases as evidence that "quarrelsomeness or 'irascibility' came to be identified as one of the most important characteristics of Scottish witch"[41]. This is reflected also in the stereotypical image of a witch. Witches used words, curses, mumblings, and mutterings to cause illness, ill luck or other sufferings. Dye argues, that it was therefore the witch's words that most needed to be controlled.

A quarrelsome woman was seen by her neighbours as someone who violates the social and moral standards. The long-standing belief and a good and moral woman is one that is silent played a significant role. According to Dye: "In uttering spells and words like these, witches violated their gender norms by breaking their silence and capitalizing on the power of words."[42] What separated a quarrelsome woman from a witch was a single event of misfortune happening to her enemy. In a period of poor hygiene and non-existent health care, agriculture on a low level, it then does not take much for one to be labelled a witch if she has a reputation of quarrelling.

While the witch's neighbours were concerned by the public peace and safety, Dye argues, that the prosecutors from higher classes had different concerns. According to her, the fact that diabolical features of witchcraft appeared only in the later stages of the trials demonstrates "the courts concern with documenting and disciplining the supposed deviant sexuality of accused witches"[43]. This belief is based on evidence provided by

[40] Christina Larner, "Witch Beliefs and Witch-Hunting in England and Scotland," in *Witchcraft in Scotland*, ed. Brian P. Levack (New York: Garland Pub., 1992), 252.
[41] Sierra Rose Dye, "To Converse with the Devil? Speech, Sexuality, and Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland," *International Review of Scottish Studies* 37 (2012): 15.
[42] Ibid., 17.
[43] Ibid., 10.

several cases. The link between disorderly speech and relationship with the Devil is far simpler that it would seem at a first glance. A witch could gain her powers only through her relation to the Devil (or other otherworldly creatures such as fairies, however, in the religious doctrine all of the creatures were seen as demons or the Devil). Therefore, if one was a witch, it was given, that one had relation with the Devil, for they simply could not gain their powers any other way. This claim is supported also by Brian Levack and others[i].

The prosecutors of higher social standing had according to Dye a specific reason for targeting individuals with the power of speech. "Words were power in the early modern period, and not just for witches. As part of a primarily oral culture, a person's honour was often linked to the reliability of their words. In addition, authority and power of all sorts were often characterized by ritual performances of speech…"[44] The everyday life revolved around the ritualized speech: prayers, weddings, public speeches such as preaching or even the witch trials themselves and thus: "…local officials and ministers also benefitted from the silencing of others, claiming the right to speak on behalf of the state as well as God in persecuting and prosecuting those accused of witchcraft. The structure of the state ensured that both local elite and aristocratic elite would work together – not separately – and profit from silencing the voices of the disempowered."[45]

4.2 Witch-cult hypothesis

The witch-cult hypothesis is a discredited hypothesis pioneered by German scholars in the early nineteenth century, later adopted by French historian Jules Michelet and others, but made famous by Margaret Murray, an Egyptologist working under Flinders Petrie at University College London. While Murray's hypothesis became very

[i] See Levack's "The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661–1662" or Larner's *Enemies of God*.
[44] Dye, "To Converse with the Devil", 34.
[45] Ibid., 35.

popular both in academic circles and among the general public, the experts on early modern witch trials viewed it as pseudo historical and the hypothesis was discredited by in depth research in 1960's and 1970's. Still, this hypothesis had great influence on literary works and on the actual pagan and Wicca movements.

The hypothesis argued that the early modern witch trials were an attempt to suppress a pre-Christian, pagan religion that was supposedly surviving despite the Christianisation of Europe. The pagan religion was according to the hypothesis supporters centred around the Horned God of fertility (referred to as Devil by Christian persecutors) and the nocturnal worshipping rituals. This was based on very selective evidence from the trials and on the belief, that the confessions extracted from the witches by torture were truthful.

The idea of organized witch religion dates all the way back to *Malleus Maleficarum (1486),* however the early modern scholars found this theory doubtful and leaned to the notion that witch trials were partly influenced by the folk customs and stereotypes. The first, who came up with witches as organized cult and witch trials as an attempt to destroy it, was Karl Ernst Jarcke, German professor of criminal law. In 1828 he edited German trial records from seventeenth century for publication in legal journal. In the comments, he included a theory, that witchcraft was pre-Christian religion that survived in the rural areas and was seen as Devil worshipping cult by the Christians. He suggested that this pre-Christian religion then degenerated after the condemnation of Church and the rejection from wider public then caused the boom of witch trials. Professor's theory was extended by German historian Franz J. Mone who suggested that the witch cult had roots in ancient Dionysus and Hecate cults.

However, the supporters of this hypothesis were not able to present convincing evidence that would explain why no mentions of this pre-Christian cult exist between the Christianization and the witch trials.[46] Ronald Hutton in his book *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft (1999)* pointed out the political conservatism of Jarcke and Mone and suggested that the theory of aggressive witch cult could be paralleled in the conservative fear of secret societies as revolution inciting movements.[47]

4.2.1 Margaret Murray

Margaret Murray was an Egyptologist but during First World War, while the research in Egypt was not possible, she reoriented herself to witchcraft in Great Britain. Her first published work on witchcraft was an article in journal Folklore in 1917. Later she wrote more works on the topic, one of them being a book titled *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe (1921)*. Here Murray described her concept of witch cult with great detail. In the preface, she mentions that she "have confined [her]self to an intensive study of the cult in Great Britain. In order, however, to obtain a clearer understanding of the ritual and beliefs… [she has] had recourse to French and Flemish sources, as the cult appears to have been the same throughout Western Europe."[48]

The cult Murray describes was once supposedly worshipping both male and female deity, however "at the time when the cult is recorded the worship of the male deity appears to have superseded that of the female"[49]. During the witches meeting this god

[46] Norman Cohn, *Europe's Inner Demons: An Enquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-hunt* (London: Chatto-Heinamann, 1975), 104.
[47] Ronald Hutton, *The triumph of the moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 136-137.
[48] Margaret A. Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (S.l.: Forgotten Books, 2016), 5.
[49] Ibid., 13.

was personified usually by a man or an animal. To become a member of the cult a person had to undergo a admission ceremony, where they had to state that they join out of their free will and will serve their deity. In some cases, the new members were baptized into the faith or had to sign a covenant. Murray claims the religion was practised in covens of thirteen members and had several specific rituals and celebrations. According to Murray, this witchcraft cult was: "a joyous religion; and as such it must have been quite incomprehensible to the gloomy Inquisitors and Reformers who suppressed it."[50]

Apart from the detailed description, Murray also addresses the critical objections. According to her, the uniformity of confessions shows the reality of occurrence, not as the critics claim, the valueless evidence given in answer to leading questions.[51] And in answer to the criticism regarding the confessions being extracted under torture, Murray writes: "In most of the English and many of the Scotch trials legal torture was not applied; and it was only in the seventeenth century that pricking for the mark, starvation, and prevention of sleep were used. Even then there were many voluntary confessions given by those who, like the early Christian martyrs, rushed headlong on their fate, determined to die for their faith and their god."[52] However, today the leading experts accept that torture was used in the search of evidence and as the approach to the sleep deprivation method shows, what we consider torture today did not necessarily have to be considered torture in the seventeenth century.

Murray's hypothesis was publicly accepted and even favoured at first, number of historians incorporated her hypothesis into their published works. After Murray's death however, her work came to be criticized and in the 1970's the witch cult theory was

[50] Ibid., 15.
[51] Ibid., 16.
[52] Ibid.

definitively rejected by the academic circles. While her theory was seen as the best explanation of the witch trials at the time she wrote her works, in the 1970's her conclusions were judged baseless and lacking evidence.

4.3 Economic reasons

Several theories on the economic aspect of witch hunts were proposed. As mentioned in previous chapter, more than half of the accused were of the middling economic category, i.e. not rich, working the land but not poor. The witches that were found guilty and executed usually lost their possessions to the court. This suggests a notion that the low-level officials serving in the courts could be the ones to profit. The witch finders also got paid for the witches they found. However, witch finders did not operate in large numbers. Even if we accept it as a viable source of income for several people, it hardly qualifies as the sole and main reason for the witch hunts. Furthermore, the witch finders or prickers did not operate during the whole era of witch hunts, but only in a very specific short time of it. If we take into consideration the financial means necessary for the court to imprison the accused before the trial, to organise the evidence, pay the pricker and then hold the court itself and possibly even organise the execution, it is debatable whether the confiscated goods of the witches were enough to pay for the processes.

However, Anna Mitschele, a postdoctoral sociology researcher, proposes a different economic theory. In her work "Identity and Social Structure in Early Modern Politics: How Opportunities induced Witch Trials in Scotland, 1563 - 1736" she argues that the increased possibility of social mobility was the reason for witch hunts. She points out, that while Scottish lairds, called gentry after their English counterparts, formed the land holding higher economic category, they did not hold hereditary titles and did not

have seats in the parliament. Despite that, they were in specific situations considered nobility. According to Mitschele, from the sixteenth century a chain of changes both in economy and in society of Scotland enabled the development of more powerful gentry. The decrease in secular land value due to inflation and stable or even increasing monetary payment from ecclesiastical land meant that clever merchant could be richer than a lord. Additionally, bureaucratic shifts in state offices that provided new positions propelled the gentry into a new, more powerful position in the society. This in turn caused a change in their "identity" as Mitschele calls it, for according to her, the gentry tasted the new power and "understood themselves as those responsible for the establishment of social order"[53]. In addition to this, Mitschele proposes that the newly established powerful gentry "acted strategically at the points in time when they hoped that their efforts would be rewarded with office posts"[54].

Mitschele applied this theory, that the micro economic changes in job opportunities incites witch hunts as a way to earn respect and a state office position, on the Scottish witch hunts throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century. She explains the spikes in numbers of trials in panic years with immense success and logically describes the end of witch hunting based on the central authorities being less welcoming of witch hunts and encroaching on local authority. Mitschele's theory, however, still has problematic areas. It does not explain why there were no great witch hunts in between the panic years. Another problem is, that the witch finders did not gain positions in state office despite being key figures in the witch trials. This theory also builds on the notion that it was the gentry who pushed for the trials, while the evidence suggests that the initial accusation often came from the immediate neighbours of the witch. Finally, Mitschele

[53] Anna Mitschele, *Identity and Social Structure in Early Modern Politics: How Opportunities Induced Witch Trials in Scotland, 1563-1736*, (Master's thesis, Columbia University, 2013), 166.
[54] Ibid.

does not consider the relationship between the gentry and the kirk. As the rising gentry would often gain positions in kirk offices and would be part of kirk sessions as elders, it would have made them difficult to control by the ministers and create conflicts and tension. Regardless of these problems, the theory presents one possible propelling power of the witch trials that fits the available evidence very well, at least in the case of 1661-1662 witch hunt.

4.4 Health issues as an argument

4.4.1. Mould in the grain

An interesting hypothesis was presented by Mary Kilbourne Matossian in 1981 in her paper "Mold Poisoning: An Unrecognized English Health Problem, 1550-1800". While doctor Matossian does not deal directly with neither Scotland nor witchcraft, she touches up on the issue in her work. In her paper, she focuses on the question of high children mortality in England between the years 1550 and 1800 as a result of specific fungal poisoning after consuming infected rye. Her hypothesis is interesting to the research of witchcraft not as a possible explanation of the phenomena but as supporting evidence for the people's belief in witches.

Doctor Matossian shows concrete numbers for England and builds a solid case, the problem of course is if her analysis can be applied also to Scotland case. And the answer is no or at least not conclusively. However, as was already mentioned, the hypothesis is not directly linked with the issue of witchcraft and therefore despite the shortcomings in data (no reliable national census is available for the population of Scotland) I will mention doctor's Matossian findings at least as a possible background

and possible explanation why the belief in witchcraft was very real and why were witches considered very dangerous.

The hypothesis is based on few presuppositions: the type of grain people used to consume was predominantly rye before they switched to wheat in later years, the rye was often stored poorly or left on the field throughout the winter, and that these conditions allowed the mold to grow in the grain. The mold poisoning then could develop into fevers, hallucinations, nausea, or epileptic fits, which fit the descriptions of bewitchment. "The more dramatic symptoms - convulsions, epileptic-like fainting fits, hallucinations, temporary blindness, deafness, and speechlessness, insanity, and gangrene - were reported in pamphlets and court records because these were believed to be symptoms of 'bewitchment'. The village folk healers who used magic, 'witches', were blamed for them. Some detailed descriptions of cases of 'bewitchment' are available and they are very similar to those of "slow nervous fever."[55] According to Matossian's data, the witchcraft persecution declined after 1620 also thanks to the switch from rye to wheat. This however did not happen in Scotland: "…rye continued to be cultivated farther north during the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, and as late as 1697 six alleged witches were executed in Scotland for 'bewitching' an eleven-year-old girl with classic symptoms of ergotism [mould poisoning]."[56]

Another interesting point doctor Matossian mentions is the high mortality between the years 1661 and 1662 due to epidemic of alimentary toxic aleukia caused by fungus growing in poorly stored grain. This epidemic was especially severe as it targeted not only the children and teens but also the elderly.[57] This could be seen as one of the reasons

[55] Mary Kilbourne Matossian, "Mold poisoning: an unrecognized English health problem, 1550–1800," *Medical History* 25, no. 01 (1981): 77.
[56] Ibid., 79.
[57] Ibid., 83.

for the severe witch hunts, however the hypothesis cannot be confirmed as the data necessary is not available. Nevertheless, in the very least this information can illustrate that the danger perceived to be caused by witches was very real.

4.4.2. Deviant behaviour and social control systems

Elliott P. Currie in his paper "Crimes without Criminals: Witchcraft and Its Control in Renaissance Europe" does not focus on Scotland but on the differences between the continental witch hunts and those happening in England. His paper was published in 1968 and since then the differentiation between the "continental" and "English" models of witch hunts has been rejected by the scholars as overly simplified. Elliot Currie nevertheless brought up an interesting point regarding the nature of the crime of witchcraft. He argues, that witchcraft was essentially a thought crime: "What was critical was the pact [with the Devil] itself; not the assumption or use of the powers which it supposedly conferred, but the willful renunciation of the Faith implied by the act of Covenant with the Devil."[58] While this notion overshadows the actual belief in witches and in magic, it is a stepping stone for one of the major theories, theory of state making, that will be discussed little bit later.

The concept of witches as criminals against the order and against the authority is visible in the efforts to systematically control it. As Currie argues, the fact that specially established offices for prosecuting witchcraft existed shows that the higher authority, church, had an interest in controlling the behaviour of the people.[59] This is however in sharp contrast with the situation in Scotland. While there were specifically appointed travelling courts that dealt with the accusation of witchcraft, these courts did not focus

[58] Elliott P. Currie, "Crimes without Criminals: Witchcraft and Its Control in Renaissance Europe," *Law & Society Review* 3, no. 1 (1968): 8.
[59] Ibid., 11.

merely on witches but tried a range of different crimes also. If the state officials after restoring Monarchy and episcopacy in Scotland aimed to "cleanse" the nation of critics and opponents, the easiest way would be following the example from the continent. This however did not happen. No special office for dealing with witchcraft was established.

While Curries theory does not fit within the modern knowledge of witchcraft, it represents one of the important stepping stones on the way to the state making theory. In addition, it also shows that the situation in Scotland was dimensionally different from the ones in England and other countries, which be addressed in later sections of this chapter.

4.5 State making and a godly society

The theory of state as the central force fuelling the witch persecution appeared as an antithesis to the bottom-up approach that argued that it was the common people that propelled the trials. Julian Goodare in his book *The Scottish Witch-hunt in Context* dispels the notion, that these two concepts – bottom-up process and top-down process – are mutually exclusive. In fact, he argues, it is most probable that these two concepts were working simultaneously. "…we should recognize the harmonious co-operation between kirk session identifying witches and privy council authorising trials. Both shared the same general goal: to identify and punish witches in order to purge the land of ungodliness."[60] It is however necessary to note that Goodare does not consider the bottom-up process as one commanded by the will of common folk but as one under the rule of ministers and elders of the kirk sessions.

An older notion of top-down process can be found in the theory presented by Stuart MacDonald in his work *Threats to a Godly Society: The Witch-hunt in Fife,*

[60] Julian Goodare, *The Scottish witch-hunt in context* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2002), 134.

Scotland 1560-1710 (1997). He argues that it was the elite part of the society, such as the clergy, the burgesses, the local lairds, and the nobility, that held the reins of witch hunts, namely the clergy and the lairds. MacDonald based his theory on local documents and he himself admits that much of the information is simply missing. Often, the data about who was the one that started a hunt is the data unavailable. Nevertheless, MacDonald claims "most cases in Fife fa11 into the third category, where it was the church courts which initiated actions against various individuals"[61] and that the church was the propeller of witch hunts. The aim was, according to MacDonald, creating a godly society.

MacDonald's argument is based on the strong and powerful position of the kirk courts and argues with claims such as: "The power of church courts in this process can be seen from the fact that some people did not want to appear before a church court at all."[62] These claims about the role of church are on the other hand quite commonsensical when seen with additional information already mentioned in previous section of this chapter. Given that the kirk sessions were allowed to use and often used the sleep deprivation technique to convince the accused to confess, it is not surprising that the accused tried to find a way how to avoid these courts especially when the possibility of a secular court existed.

The claim that kirk ministers were the ones initiating the trials has an opponent in previously mentioned Anna Mitschele, who cites her research in parishes and explains that while one would expect the ministers to be most zealous "I find no evidence indicating that witchcraft accusations had anything to do with role behavior – at least not among ministers."[63] She follows with: "...most ministers in my sample, eighty-five

[61] Stuart Macdonald, *Threats to a godly society: The Witch-hunt in Fife, Scotland, 1560-1710* (Ottawa: National Library of Canada, 1999), 303.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Mitschele, *Identity and Social Structure*, 72.

percent of them in fact, never saw a woman or man from their parish in front of a commission to try cases of witchcraft."[64] Her data shows MacDonald's data can be truthful at the local level at best.

4.6 The Great Witch Hunt of 1661-1662 explained

The witch hunt of 1661-1662 was the second biggest nationwide witch hunt in Scotland's history. It is estimated that during the two years more than 660 people was tried for being witches. The Survey gives us the following data about this hunt; There are 647 case records from this period, 82 of them are cases with male accused, 290 records are of cases dealing with the accused by another witch, 32 cases concern people that were on trial at least once before. There were at least two records of cases where the accused pointed at more than ten other people and claimed they are witches. One of these cases was that of James Welch, estimated 15 years old begging boy from Haddington, who claimed to be led to a meeting with the Devil fifteen times by his mother. He denounced 85 people from East Lothians. The notes on the case mention, that he was under pressure from the interrogators. James was deemed too young to be put on trial and was instead arrested. And finally, in the case of 248 records, we only know that the trials took place and occasionally who judged the accused but we do not know specific characteristics of the crime or the result of the trial.

Above mentioned numbers show several things. Nearly half of the accused were on trial due to the method of sleep deprivation used to extract confession and additional accusations of other witches. One third of these cases then could be credited to James Welch, a minor who mentions alcohol being consumed during the meetings with the Devil. Additional 32 people were already on trial once before and were found not guilty

[64] Ibid.

and now they were accused again. If we subtract these cases from the total number of cases, we get 325 cases based on evidence provided by witnesses or victims, Devil's marks, or confession of the accused. Without the 248 cases that do not specify the characteristics we are left with 77 cases. Out of these cases, 19 were based on the Devil's mark found on the accused, 5 were accusation made by the neighbours, 16 cases were due to property motive, 3 cases show ties with white magic, folk healing and prophecies, 5 cases were tied with meeting fairies and 7 witch maleficium. The majority of the cases then deal with some version of a pact with the Devil.

The evidence suggest that the entire process started and for a relatively long time was confined to Lothian area of Scotland, namely the East Lothians. Earl of Haddington was the one who petitioned the parliament for a commission which goal was to look into the witchcraft infesting his lands[65]. His wish was granted after three months and the cities of Musselburgh and Dalkeith became the epicentres of the witch hunts. The hunts continued throughout the year 1661 and into year 1662, although some reluctance on the side of courts to judge the witches is noted already in the first year in of the hunt. The question of credibility of the confessions gained by using torture was being raised and several cases, that note the accused being declared not guilty by the court only to be accused again[66], show the restraint on the side of the court.

B. P. Levack in his work "The Great Scottish Witch Hunt of 1661-1662" suggests, that for the machinery of trials to be set in operation a fear of witchcraft among the influential members of the society. These influential members however seem to be from

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[65] "*Procedure: commission for judging witchcraft*", The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707, accessed April 21, 2017, http://www.rps.ac.uk/trans/1661/1/194.

[i] Cases of Janet Cock or Margaret Hutchinson from 1661. More details available in the Survey.

the secular part of the society, as Levack mentions, that the kirk ministers "did not make as great a contribution to the Great Hunt as some historians have argued".[67] It would seem that it was the gentry, the earls, the lords and similar that set the operation in motion.

Although Levack in his paper often indirectly mentions the role of common people it seems he is not interested in including them as one of the propelling forces. When Levack explains the accusations of maleficium, he mentions this: "These were, of course, serious charges, and they were probably the reason why Haddington's tenants threatened to leave his lands if the witches were not prosecuted."[68] Levack assign Haddington's petition to parliament on his fears of the witches' pact with the Devil, but is quite clear, that it was the common folk who presented the first accusations and evidence. Let's entertain the notion that it was the common people who were the force behind the hunts and the local courts helped by torturing additional accusations from the witches and thus the machinery of the trials was set in motion. Why were people seeing so many witches around them? Why the deep fear? Several cases note that the witches were accused as early as 1654 but were not brought to trial so what changed in 1661?

One of the possible reasons could be the leftover tensions from the war. Accusations of neighbourly disputes sprout from all sort of altercations, be it angry shouting at someone's husband or betting money on someone's wife being a witch.[69] Quarrels in time of changes would not be uncommon, however, for a woman to be quarrelsome in these times was dangerous. These tensions could possibly be made worse

[67] Levack, "The Great Scottish Witch Hunt," 96.
[68] Ibid., 98.
[69] Ibid., 96.

by the floods and reportedly uncommonly wet and stormy months during the years of the hunt, especially in the winter.[70]

Additional argument concerns the judicial system of that time. During the war courts were not always available and if they were, they were in the hands of the English judges appointed by Cromwell. Levack argues that English judges were more lenient in the issues linked to witchcraft and that many of the accused were released[71]. This no doubt had an effect on the people accusing the witches and therefore when the situation changed and "understanding" Scottish judges took over the courts, people must have felt they can finally get their justice.

In conclusion, while the gentry had a significant role in issuing the courts and the ministers and elders of the kirk in providing the evidence through the sleep deprivation torture method, the accusations still came from the common people. I argue that it was the mixture of tensions from the war, anxiety from the change of the regimes coupled with uncommonly wet weather and hopeful feelings that Scottish judges in the court sessions will provide the justice the English judges denied them that led the common people to raise so many accusations of maleficium and witchcraft.

[70] UK Web Archive, accessed April 21, 2017, http://www.webarchive.org.uk/ukwa/target/286294101/source/search.
[71] Levack, "Great Scottish Witch Hunt", 92.

5. John Buchan – historian, politician, and novelist

John Buchan, 1st Baron of Tweedsmuir, was born on 26 August 1875 in Perth, Scotland. He was the first son of a Calvinist Presbyterian minister. As well as a writer, John Buchan was a historian, editor, lawyer, government administrator, MP, and a director of a publishing house. He viewed his writer career as inferior and strived to make his name in the politics arena. However, despite this attitude, he became a very successful writer best known for spy novels such as his thriller *The thirty-nine Steps* (1915), which later inspired Alfred Hitchcock's film *The 39 steps*. In his works, he often drew inspiration from Scotland and Scottish landscape, which he held very dear. John Buchan spent his last years in Canada and never really missed Scotland, for as he said Canada is "simply Scotland on an extended scale."[72] He died in Montreal, Quebec on 11 February 1940.

5.1. Early life and education

Buchan grew up in Kirkcaldy in Fife but spent many summers with his grandparents in Broughton near the Scottish borders. His younger sister documented their childhood in a book *Unforgettable, Unforgotten*, published in 1945. In this book, she mentions their love of long walks, local scenery, and wildlife. The landscape and local geographical names often inspired Buchan's works as can be seen for example in the

[72] Tom Zytaruk, "Surrey high school to celebrate its centenary Saturday with a visit from Scottish nobility," Surrey Now (July, 2013), accessed October 22, 2016. http://thenownewspaper.staging.glacier.atex.cniweb.net:8080/news/surrey-high-school-to-celebrate-its-centenary-saturday-with-a-visit-from-scottish-nobility-1.517942.

name of the hero of numerous of his books – Edward Leithen – which Buchan borrowed from Leithen Water, a tributary of River Tweed.

At age 17, Buchan was awarded a scholarship to the University of Glasgow, where he studied classics. During his studies, he wrote poetry and edited the works of Francis Bacon, which were published in 1894. Only a year later he was awarded a scholarship to Oxford and published his first novel *Sir Quixote of the Moors*. During his first days in Oxford, Buchan wrote that he found the life there "conventional and comfortable". The atmosphere of Oxford clearly proved very beneficial as Buchan publish 5 novels and won both the Stanhope essay prize and the Newdigate Prize for poetry during his studies.

5.2. Writing, Political career, and Family

After graduating Buchan started his career as a diplomat and in 1901 became the private secretary to Alfred Milner, the High Commissioner for Southern Africa and Governor of Cape Colony at that time. Milner gathered around himself a group, which was informally referred to as Milner's kindergarten. This was a group of Britons, who served in the South African Civil Service under Milner and later themselves attained prominent positions. His time in Africa was reflected in many of his works.

After his return to London, Buchan became the editor of The Spectator. Be became a partner of the publishing firm Thomas Nelson and Sons and rejuvenated the publishing house by issuing pocket editions of great literature. In 1907 John Buchan married Susan Charlotte Grosvenor, cousin of Duke of Westminster. Susan loved the countryside just as much as he did and was an accomplished author herself. They settled

in Elsfield Manor in Oxfordshire. Together they had four children, Alice, John, William, and Alastair.

In 1935 John Buchan was appointed Governor General of Canada by King George V. Buchan then departed for Canada, where he was determined to travel through the country, including the arctic regions, and promote unity. Despite the fact that he had taken his work very seriously and was burdened by the problems created by the abdication of King Edward and following the royal tour of Kind Albert through Canada, Buchan continued to write. Among his works from this time is his autobiography *Memory Hold-the-door (1940)* and numerous works on the history of Canada and his view of it.

5.3. Death, Legacy, and Works

John Buchan died on 11 February 1940 after suffering a fainting spell while shaving and striking his head, which resulted in a concussion and swelling. After three brain operations, John Buchan had died in Montreal Neurological Institute. After lying in state in the Senate chamber on Parliament Hill, Buchan was given a state funeral at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa. His ashes were then returned to the United Kingdom aboard of HMS Orion, collected by his sons and taken to Elsfield Church, where they were buried.

John Buchan wrote over hundred of works among which are nearly thirty novels, several collections of short stories, four books of poetry and biographies of Sir Walter Scott, who was Buchan's great inspiration, or Oliver Cromwell. Despite the large number of works, he is best known for his spy thrillers. His novel *the Thirty-nine Steps* was repeatedly adapted for film and television. As Buchan himself writes in his memoirs, the adventure spy stories were supposed to keep his mind off the tragedies of the war and so he invented "a young South African called Richard Hannay, who had traits copied from

my friends, and I amused myself with considering what he would do in various emergencies… I had no purpose in such writing except to please myself, and even if my books had not found a single reader I would have felt amply repaid."[73]

5.4. Influences

Nearly all of Buchan's works of fiction reflect his circumstances. His time spent in South Africa resulted in his non-fiction work *The African Colony (1903)* and experiences from the First World War were mirrored in the Hannay novels such as *Mr Standfast* (1918).

Buchan's love for nature and hiking shines through in all of his novels but his love for Scottish countryside is best seen in *Witch Wood,* where paints magical pictures of an old forest in all the seasons. He masterfully shows the duality of the forest, both as the source of scary evil mysteries and as a magical paradise, that calms the soul and instils wonder into the hearts of visitors.

Apart from the above, it is R. L. Stevenson Buchan cites as the great influence on himself and other young men of his time, especially students of Scottish Universities. And while Buchan admits it was an over-mastering influence, he adds that it was benign and only short-lived one. While during his earlier year in the university, Stevenson was an idol both in his writing and in his birth, as he was of Scottish origin and had the same

[73] John Buchan, *Memory Hold-the-door* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd, 1940), accessed January 15, 2017, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks12/1201761h.html.

mixed heritage of Covenanter and Cavalier, in his later years Buchan admitted to a period of revulsion, which as he adds since had passed.

5.4.1. Witch Wood

Witch Wood novel was set in the Scottish Borders and it is worth mentioning that a large portion of the dialogs in the book is in Lowland Scots. Buchan himself cites his research on Montrose and his love for Scottish landscape and his summers spent in Broughton as the main inspirations for writing it: "The best, I think, is Witch Wood, in which I wrote of the Tweedside parish of my youth at the time when the old Wood of Caledon had not wholly disappeared, and when the rigours of the new Calvinism were contending with the ancient secret rites of Diana. I believe that my picture is historically true, and I could have documented almost every sentence from my researches on Montrose."[74] This enabled Buchan to use historically accurate timeline co-joined with an invented legend of a hero preacher battling against a diabolical cult over-shadowed by the Wood.

Buchan's fascination with Montrose manifested relatively little in terms of Montrose's character in the book. Montrose makes a cameo and provides a little mystery as he is first introduced under a disguise, but otherwise is a faraway persona and only appears in discussions and gossips of the local Woodilee inhabitants. Yet this serves as a

[74] Ibid.

great source of realism, as the "lowly peasant" would have only a small chance to actually see the people that played on the stage of the state politics.

Witch Wood is a very effective mixture of Victorian romance as we have the hero, Mr. Sempill, with a chivalric code of conduct on a mission to rid the quite Woodilee of the Devil worshippers

And of course, the Scottish landscape plays a major role in his Witch Wood. As Buchan writes in his autobiography:

> ...another [influence] was the Border country, which I regarded as my proper home.... There is a graciousness there, a mellow habitable charm, unlike the harsh Gothic of most of the Scots landscape. I got it into my head that here was the appropriate setting for pastoral, for the shepherds of Theocritus and Virgil, for the lyrists of the Greek Anthology, and for Horace's Sabine farm. I was wrong in fact; if you seek the true classical landscape outside Italy and Greece you will find it rather in the Cape Peninsula, in places like the Paarl and Stellenbosch. But my fancy had its uses, for I never read classical poetry with such gusto as in my Border holidays, and it served as a link between my gipsy childhood and the new world of scholarship into which I was seeking entrance.[75]

Buchan's love for Scottish Borders shines through every description in the book.

Buchan considered *Witch Wood* his best novel and it is not hard to see why, as it accumulates his love for nature, hiking and Scottish countryside, his very loved childhood

[75] Ibid.

home of Broughton, his fascination with lord Montrose, the mysterious plot involving witchcraft, the passionate love story and cunning escapes from danger.

5.5. Critical Attention

John Buchan as an author has attracted very little critical attention, apart from a biography by Janet Adam Smith and several essays by G. Himmelfarb and A. Sandison. While his spy novels attracted lasting attention of the readership and have even been filmed and "his biographies and histories have a scholarly reputation for style and insight"[76], yet as Graham Law claims: "Buchan has always been something of an academic embarassment."[77] As G. Law explains, Buchan's writings as a whole cannot be easily sorted into available categories. "…his fiction refuses alike the categories of the juvenile, the popular, and the serious; his politics, from the viewpoint of a contemporary liberal consensus, compound the balanced, the naive, and the scandalous."[78]

The lack od critical attention will be mentioned again in the chapter dealing with analysing specific motifs of Buchan's *Witch Wood.*

[76] Graham Law, "The Romance of Empire: John Buchan's Early Writings," 6, accessed February 3, 2017, http://www.f.waseda.jp/glaw/arts/re.pdf.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Ibid.

6. Witch Wood Analysis

Witch Wood is a 1927 historical novel written by John Buchan set during the 1640's in the Scottish Borders. A large part of the book is written in Lowland Scots. The protagonist is a young newly-ordained minister of the Church of Scotland, David Sempill, who comes to little village Woodilee. Woodilee village passionately supports the Covenant movement, Sempill, on the other hand, is less committed and less sure of his sympathies. Besides of the plague breaking out in the parish and the anxieties caused by the ongoing War of Three Kingdoms, David Sempill has to deal with his sympathies to Marquess Montrose, fighting in the war on behalf of the Royalists and King Charles I, while the rest of the village is fervently against them. On top of this all, David uncovers a heretic group of devil worshippers in the nearby forest and while fighting them uncovers the hypocritical Covenanting dogmatists who control the Kirk. It is this last theme of witchcraft and heresy that I will focus on in this analysis.

To better illustrate the arguments, I will compare John Buchan's *Witch Wood* with "The Hunt of Eildon" a short story by James Hogg, which deals with similar witchcraft motifs and is, in general, better known. Both authors have a lot in common, both were Scottish and used Scots language in their works, both adored the landscape of Scottish border and set these particular works of theirs there. "The Hunt of Eildon" is a short story, where the supernatural aspect plays a significant role, however, the tone and atmosphere of the story, despite similar motifs, is very different to Buchan's *Witch Wood*.

6.1. Genre

The genre of the novel deserves at least a short mention, as it is a very layered issue. While Buchan was almost painstakingly careful to adhere to as much historical canon as possible, to merely call the novel a historical one is a very simplified approach.

In the very centre of the story is religious and social commentary where the historical setting is masterfully used by Buchan to, as Pilvi Rajamäe in her "Bewitched by Bigotry: John Buchan's Witch Wood" puts it, "…show to what effect bigotry and uncritical zeal can distort a creed the central message of which is *caritas* as opposed to hate."[79]

However, apart from the social criticism and historical realism, there is the fantastical to tackle. While most of the fantastical events of the novel can be easily explained by the human agency, there are some scenes that could be found arguable. Most notably the forest scene, when the protagonist first stumbles onto the place of the heretic ritual and while he tries to leave, he twice ends up in the very beginning. While even this scene could be explained away as a result of the protagonist's confusing mental state, author's stress on the atmosphere of the forest enclosing this scene makes it much harder to believe.

There is nothing in the story that cannot be explained in terms of human action. While it revolves around the notion of witchcraft, there are no magical acts. Kate MacDonald while agreeing with this argument proposes that *Witch Wood* can be considered a Gothic fantasy novel. She cites the "Introduction" to The *Routledge Companion to Gothic* by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, who list the Gothic characteristics as: "imperilled heroines, dastardly villains, ineffectual heroes, supernatural events, dilapidated buildings and atmospheric weather."[80] According to Kate Macdonald, *Witch Wood* definitely has these characteristics: "...there are villains with no conscience, the hero struggles to overcome his opponents, the events depicted certainly

[79] Pilvi Rajamäe, "Bewitched by Bigotry: John Buchan's Witch Wood," *Interlitteraria*, no. 1 (2009): 197, accessed July 2017. https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=79716.
[80] Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy, *The Routledge Companion to Gothic* (London: Routledge, 2009), 1.

appear to be supernatural to other characters, and there are unstable locations. The heroine is imperiled by wicked gossip, and finally killed by the plague."[81] Thus while the central narrative aims to explain specific events in Scottish history, the novel can certainly be considered a Gothic fantasy, where "…Gothic horror is produced by a communal fantasy of the efficacy and reality, or not, of witchcraft."[82]

The novel has also some characteristics of a detective story. During Sempill's investigation into the witch coven, he behaves as a clever detective, setting a trap for the witches and collecting evidence. Buchan became famous for his spy/detective novel *The Thirty-Nine Steps* and in *Witch Wood* he masterfully combines the historical setting, seemingly supernatural events, and the thrill of finding out a culprit.

And finally, the novel detailly shows the protagonist character development. In the beginning, Buchan carefully depicts David Sempill as a young and naïve man, fighting for what he thinks is right. The readers follow David through several events that cause David's disenchantment with his beliefs and disillusionment with fellow humans and by the end of the novel, they find David a hardened soldier who gave up on his parish and left for the abroad. This strong undercurrent makes the novel feel like a growing-up novel almost, despite the fact that the readers do not see David Sempill grow physically he definitely grows and changes mentally.

James Hogg's "The Hunt of Eildon" on the other hand combines supernatural and religious motifs with literary precedents such as *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* The supernatural plays a key role in "The hunt of Eildon" and is indeed supernatural. The

[81] Kate MacDonald, "Witchcraft and Non-conformity in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926) and John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927)," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23, no. 2 (2012): 225.
[82] Ibid.

characters of Mooly and Scratch are in the end revealed to be of probably elvish origin and throughout the story, they perform magical feats such as changing people into boars.

The central story plot has the atmosphere of a crime fiction, the plot being the poisoning of the King by his own advisors that is thwarted by King's loyal beagles, but also the subplot following Croudy, a sullen shepherd, accusing a fair maiden Pery of witchcraft after a case of mistaken identity can be considered a good example. The supernatural aspect of the story is used both as a cause and as a resolution to the conflicts in the story.

Hogg mixes Border traditions and superstitions with actual supernatural characters, a detective/crime story of a planned attack with an almost comical instance of mistaken identity that turns bad very quickly to be finally resolved in an almost mythical shape change for a couple of lovers. The whole story is much more anchored in the supernatural elements and therefore be labelled as a supernatural crime fiction. Buchan's *Witch Wood* is on the other hand quite firmly set in the completely ordinary village and while the stories share their detective aspects, the supernatural elements set them apart quite clearly.

6.2 Plot, setting and characters

As it was already stated above, the main protagonist of *Witch Wood* is David Sempill, the embodiment of naïve Christian love for fellow people and idealistic freshly-ordained minister. David arrives at the village of Woodilee to become the minister of the parish that is fervent in its support of the Covenant. David's commitment to the strict doctrine is less passionate and he quickly finds himself attracted to the faith of Mark Riddel, a Royalist and follower of Lord Montrose.

To escape the religious fanatism of the parish, David frequently explores the landscape that is known to him from his young years. He meets a local man, behaving quite madly, and is warned about exploring the forest of Melanudrigill. The local man explains that there is nothing in the forest for a religious man like David. However, David does not heed this warning and braves the forest several times. On one of his walks, he meets a young girl, Katrine Yester, the niece of the local laird. At first, David thinks her to be a fairy but quickly realizes that this thought is foolish, and Katrine is just as human as he is. They quickly become friends and start meeting in the forest for conversations. Later on, they become secretly engaged.

The forest is also the place, where David first sees the pagan ritual performed by the heretics of the village. He stumbles onto the diabolic ritual by pure chance and sees people dancing around the fire wearing animal headpieces. David's later attempts to identify the leader of the group are unsuccessful, however, he manages to mark the leader's robe with aniseed oil. Next day, he sees Ephraim Caird's wife burning clothes with a strong aniseed smell to them. Despite the fact that Ephraim Caird is a prominent elder of the Kirk, David presents the evidence of his heresy to the presbytery, a religious court. The presbytery rejects his claim as unreliable. When Ephraim Caird retaliates and accuses David of harbouring a fugitive and for keeping the company of an unknown woman, David is found guilty and excommunicated.

Having seen the Kirks method of dealing with the accused witch that David found to be innocent woman David's excommunication only adds to his disillusionment with the Kirk. When David leaves the hearing, he meets Ephraim Caird near the forest and snaps. He forces Caird to lead him to the altar in the woods and presents him with the choice between God and the devil. This proves to be too much for Caird, who runs away

in terror. And David is never again seen in the village after this. The prologue reveals that David Sempill left with Mark Riddel, the fugitive and Royalist, to Leith and boarded the first available ship heading out of Scotland.

In contrast, James Hogg's "The Hunt of Eildon" follows a relatively straightforward plot line that can look a little bit tangled, however at a second glance proves to be very linear.

In the centre of the story is an attack against the King, planned by his own entourage and advisors. This plot is ultimately foiled by King's loyal dogs, Mooly and Scratch. At the end of the story the two royal beagles are revealed not to be dogs but two maidens of probably elven origin who only came to save the King. This central plot is somewhat in the background of the story as the key character the readers follow is Croudy, a sullen shepherd, and his loyal dog Mumps.

Croudy gets mixed in the plot by being turned into a boar by one of the elvish maidens. He mistakenly believes her to be Pery, a young maid that is in love with Croudy's neighbour Gale but flirts with Croudy to make Gale jealous. The story follows Croudy the boar all the way to his capture. For a time, it seems that Croudy will be killed and eaten by a gluttonous Gudgel but he is saved at the very last moment and turned back into a human thanks to his loyal dog Mumps, that never left his side and cried so pitifully that the elvish maiden decided to help. After being changed back, Croudy accuses Pery of witchcraft, for he believes it to be her who changed him into a boar. While the royal court leaves Melrose, for the King is shaken by the murder attempt, Pery stands on trial and is found guilty. Only Gale, her love, beliefs her not to be a witch and stays at her side after unsuccessfully trying to change Croudy's mind about the accusation. In the end, the justice is served by the elvish maidens. They turn the couple of lovers into moorfowl and

Croudy into a brindled cat. The story ends by recounting Pery's faith, for she was shot and eaten in her bird form, and after this, the very last scene is about the elvish maidens leaving the human world by stepping into a fairy ring in the woods.

6.3 The role of the forest

In the very beginning of *Witch Wood* first warning against the forest around Woodilee appears. This warning is given to David Sempill by an old, seemingly insane, a man called Gibbie. Gibbie calls the forest by several names, among them Black Wood or simply the Wood or Melanudrigill. David Sempill translates the name as "place of dark waters."[83] Gibbie tells him he translated it wrong and warns him not to speak this name to other people and not to mention he knows the name from him. The rest of the conversation revolves around the dangers of the Wood, David Sempill learns that nobody dwells in the forest and he is advised that should he wish to travel, he should avoid the forest, as there is "nocht for a man o' God in the Wud".[84]

While the majority of the story takes place in other locations, Melanudrigill forest is the place where most of the plot-driving events happen. Its presence is felt from the very first chapter of the book all the way to the last. During Sempill's first journey through the forest, the atmosphere is established. David rides through at night and in a hurry as to get to a dying woman in different village. The Black Wood, while at first appearing ordinary, suddenly scares David as if "something cold seemed to have descended."[85] He battles with this oppressive atmosphere by reciting psalms but "his voice…seemed not to carry a yard. It was forced back on him by the trees."[86] It seems as the forest is closing on

[83] John Buchan, *Witch wood* (London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1927), 22, http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks03/0301331h.html.
[84] Ibid., 22
[85] Ibid., 24
[86] Ibid.

him. Owls and moths scare David's horse, there is no echo, and the ground seems to be breaking apart.[87] Yet David manages to cross the black parts of the Wood uninjured and afterwards, in a thinner part of the Wood his mood improves and the journey through the forest seems like an ordinary journey again. Despite David's first unpleasant experience with the wood, he returns frequently to walk through it again and his walks are a source of relaxation and serenity for him.

These two polar opposite characters of the forest become even more extreme; after David stumbles onto the heretic ritual the forest becomes truly evil in his mind, however when he meets Katrine there and falls in love with her, the forest truly lives up to its nickname given to it by Katrine:

> "I call this Paradise," she said, "because it is hard for mortals to find. You would not guess it was here till you stumbled on it." "It's away from the pines," he said. She nodded her head. "I love the dark trees well enough, and on a day like this I am happy among them. But they are moody things, and when there is no sun and the wind blows they make me sad. Here I am gay in any weather, for it is a kindly place. Confess, sir, that I have chosen well."

This duality plays a significant role in the message of the novel and the name of the forest reflects it. Throughout the story, the atmosphere of the forest mirrors the people and their actions in it. When David goes for a walk, the forest around him is a calming presence, when he meets with Katrine, the forest indeed becomes a Paradise, secluded, private and full of beauty. During the heretic ritual, the forest becomes corrupt and repugnant for

[87] Ibid.

hiding such depravity. In this way, the motif of a forest acts as a mirror that subtly amplifies and enhances the atmosphere.

The Wood appears to have many faces. Out of those, one is good, and it shows itself in the Paradise, second is more nefarious for the Wood hosts the group of Devil worshippers committing sins in its middle. Furthermore, the Wood seems to be more than just an ordinary forest due to its dark atmosphere that closes up on travellers and scares them with silent echo. Buchan makes use of both the man-made horror (torture of the accused witch by a false pricker) and the seemingly supernatural one (David not able to leave the altar). He develops the story with the Devil cult as a focal point, yet he never forgets to include the heavy shadow of the Wood that hangs over everything although it has hardly any connection to the evil committed by the cult. This duality of wickedness creates a very peculiar, suffocating atmosphere.

The comparison with "The Hunt of Eildon" is not really applicable here because, in Hogg's short story, the forest is almost never mentioned. The most significant reference is at the end of the story that details the elvish maidens leaving the human world. Hogg specifically mentions forest when the maidens are "…walking out to the fairy ring in the verge of the wood, vanished from the world for ever."[88] This brief mention can be taken as a certain contrasting device. The whole story is set in the city, in the world of humans. The forest is the gate to the supernatural world here, the wild element contrasting with the tame and organised city. However, the forest here plays only a small role nonetheless.

[88] James Hogg, "The Hunt of Eildon" in *Tales and Sketches* (Glasgow: Blackie and Son,1838), 47.

6.4 Depiction of witchcraft: Historically accurate?

Buchan combines two different concepts of witchcraft. First of the concepts is the organized witch cult, i.e. a group of people that believe to be witches gathering in a special place to perform prescribed rituals to either ensure some positive outcome for themselves or to accomplish a negative outcome for those who are not participating. The second concept Buchan uses is that of folk superstition. He introduces this concept in the very beginning of the book by mentioning Good Folk, the power of names and a few pages later a pagan funeral custom[89] and after that focuses on people's superstitious beliefs about the forest, however, the one occurrence while seemingly insignificant, can explain important aspects of the story.

The folk customs Buchan introduces at the beginning of *Witch Wood* are very obviously inspired by the ancient Greek rituals. When describing the dead wife of a shepherd, Buchan mentions several customs: "The shepherd of the Greenshiel might be an old exercised Christian, but there were things in that place which had no warrant from the Bible. A platter full of coarse salt lay at the foot of the bed, and at the top crossed twigs of ash... The dead woman lay with cheeks like wax, a coin on each eye, so that for the moment her face had the look of a skull."[90] Similar customs could not survive if the Kirk did not wish them to exist. It would be all too easy to accuse anybody of ungodly behaviour and have them labelled as a witch simply by pointing out customs such as those mentioned above. Kate MacDonald mentions the possibility that people of Woodilee could perhaps even be prohibited from changing the old ways:

> The people are under pressure not to change… but this pressure comes not just from the promotors of witchcraft but also from the Kirk. Resistance to

[89] Buchan, *Witch Wood*, 27.
[90] Ibid.

> change is endemic in such an enclosed and cut-off community. When the spiritual guidance of the people controls their moral and social guidance as well, any move towards change, of any kind, can be nipped in the bud with accusations of being against the Kirk or just of being plain ungodly.[91]

The folk customs are taken very seriously by the people of Woodilee. In the very beginning of the novel, where crazy Gibbie mentions the dangers of the wood, he also mentions that he received his name from the Good Folk. Good Folk is the term used for mythological elves, later called fairies. Despite the name the creatures are often described as very mischievous or even one-dimensionally evil. The Character of Gibbie plays into a long-lived concept of crazy people associated with elves or even kidnapped by elves and later returned to human society.

Buchan very clearly shows that people do not consider this level of belief in supernatural as heresy or even as something strange. These are their everyday small rituals, things have simply always been this way and as far as they are concerned, they do not need to change. The elves or salt and twigs on a dead body are simply a different level of witchcraft; one that is so ingrained and considered helpful and right that nobody feels the need to challenge the status quo about it.

The people of Woodilee however distinctly recognize a different level of witchcraft. There are two separate instances of witchcraft in the novel's plot. The one with slightly lesser impact on the plot is the case of a local woman, Bessie Todd, being accused of being a witch. Bessie Todd is not an insignificant character in the story, she is mentioned several times, most importantly as one of the heretics dancing in the Wood,

[91] MacDonald, "Witchcraft and Non-conformity," 231.

where David sees her and surely identifies her. However, she is described as a half-witted woman. Her identification as a witch comes to David's attention after he returns from the Presbytery examination, where he is asked to explain his improper behaviour towards some Royalist soldiers. David's maid Isobel promptly informs David that John Kincaid, the witch pricker, found a witch and that it is none other than Bessie Todd. She gives detailed description of the process the woman was put through by the pricker: "The pricker fand the Deil's mark on her back, and stappit a preen [pin] intil it up to the heid and nae bluid came, and they burnt her feet wi' lichtit candles, and hung her by the thumbs frae the cupples till they garred her own to awesome deeds."[92]

The second occurrence of the witchcraft motif is the devil cult that is central to the plot. The first ritual David sees in the Woods is described thus:

> The draped altar was hidden by figures—human or infernal—moving round it in a slow dance. Beyond this circle sat another who played on some instrument. The moss stilled the noise of movement, and the only sound was the high, mad piping… For as he watched the dance he saw that the figures were indeed human, men and women both—the women half-naked, but the men with strange headpieces like animals. What he had taken for demons from the Pit were masked mortals—one with the snout of a pig, one with a goat's horns, and the piper a gaping black hound… As they passed, the altar was for a moment uncovered, and he saw that food and drink were set on it for some infernal sacrament.[93]

[92] Buchan, *Witch Wood*, 200.
[93] Ibid., 82-83.

Buchan was very clearly inspired by Margaret Murray and her book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* that came out six years prior to his *Witch Wood* when he created Ephraim Caird and his group of heretics from the Wood. The scene incorporates several motifs Murray mentions as typical for witch cults of western civilizations, specifically animal masks ("The witches never admitted in so many words that the Devil was a man disguised, but their evidence points strongly to the fact. In some cases the whole body was disguised, in others a mask was worn, usually over the face."[94]), music and dancing ("The English trials hardly mention music, possibly because the Sabbath had fallen into a decadent condition; but the Scotch and French trials prove that it was an integral part of the celebration. The Devil himself was the usual performer, but other members of the society could also supply the music, and occasionally one person held the position of piper to the Devil. The music was always as an accompaniment of the dance; the instrument in general use was a pipe…"[95]) and the sacrament ("The Scotch witches, like the Swedish, performed the rite after the manner of the Reformed Churches."[96]). The nocturnal rituals taking place on big pagan holidays are the most obviously inspired by Murray, however, Buchan also inserted the reference to Baal[97]. Baal can be linked to Hebrew Bible where it appears in the form of Ba'al Zabûb[98], which is considered to be the source for Beelzebub, one of the names Christians use for Satan. The altar in the Wood is for Baal, for Satan. This could be a hint that the heretics are clearly enemies of God, however, it also seems to be hinting at another Murray's argument, that the cults could possibly be the remains of a much older religion.[99] Even the bird sacrifice Buchan uses

[94] Murray, *Witch-cult*, 34.
[95] Ibid., 84-85.
[96] Ibid., 94.
[97] Buchan, *Witch Wood*, 91.
[98] 2 Kings 1:2-3.
[99] Murray, *Witch-cult*, 96-102.

in one of the descriptions of a ritual[100] is in detail described in Murray's work in the chapter concerning the Rites.[101] Thus it is obvious that Buchan built his witch cult according to Murray's hypothesis.

The description of "pricking a witch" is very accurate to historical sources available to the historians. As was already mentioned in chapter four of this work, prickers operated in a very small time-frame of Scottish history. It is known that John Kincaid was a real person and a pricker, working roughly in the 1640's and arrested for using false pins and retractable knives in 1650.[102] The usual process started with finding the Devil's mark, a spot where the witch did not bleed when pricked and ended with confession extracted by torture such as hanging from one's toes, sleep deprivation and beatings.

Buchan interwove all the different witchcraft concepts very tightly. Everybody in the village follows some old customs, "the old ways" as they are often called. Therefore, this concept of witchcraft is normalized. Nobody would think to bring a pricker and accuse the old shepherd of witchcraft just because he gave his dead wife two coins for her journey to the underworld, not even the Kirk elders. After this, it is only a small step from leaving coins for the dead to performing rituals in the Wood. After accepting the folk customs, it is quite easier to accept or silently ignore the rituals.

Very important part of the narrative against witches in the 17th century was the fact that a witch could hide anywhere. Buchan masterfully worked this into his story, when he put the coven leader Caird on a position of the village elder. This simple plot twist has several impacts; the very first is the social pressure this creates for the rest of

[100] Buchan, *Witch Wood*, 126.
[101] Murray, *Witch-cult*, 96-102.
[102] Levack, *The Witch-Hunt*, 52.

the inhabitants of the village. The respected elder of the village overlooks the pagan rituals, therefore, it is instantly much more difficult for anyone to come forward to accuse the cult of ungodly behaviour. Because Ephraim Caird is a local employer he single-handedly makes it possible for the cult to exist and for it to keep hidden. The second consequence of Ephraim Caird being both respected leader of the village and evil leader of the witch cult is the exposed hypocrisy of the Kirk

In the story, the motif of witchcraft provides the most important plot turning point device. Buchan described the distinct levels of witchcraft as closely to historically accurate as he could, by using the newest witch-cult theories accompanied by colourful depictions of the ingrained "old ways" that even the Kirk could not silence completely. This creates a very vivid picture of the society that is everything but black and white. That what can appear as very a clean-cut fight between good and evil is very effectively interrupted by social politics of the Ephraim Caird and the economic interest of the pricker John Kincaid. Buchan also accomplished to toe the blurred line between the fantastic and the man-made supernatural. Everything in Witch Wood can be easily explained away as man-made while also allowing for some doubt.

6.5. Witchcraft as a metaphor for a cry for help

Buchan's *Witch Wood* was published during a boom of novels using witchcraft as a central motif. This concentrated effort of writers to include witchcraft appeared in the British literature around the middle of the 1920s. Stella Benson started this period in 1920 by publishing her novel *Living Alone*, which was quickly followed by *Lolly Willows* (1926) by Sylvia Townsend Warner, *Flecker's Magic* (1926) by Norman Matson, Catherine Dodd's *Three Silences* (1927), *The Book of Sanchia Stapleton* (1927) by Una L. Silberrad or Esther Forbes's *A Mirror for Witches* (1928). The list however certainly

does not end with them. While most of the authors used then-present-day setting, Buchan, Dodd, Forbes and Silberrad used the seventeenth century as their setting.

Out of the mentioned authors, only Buchan and Warner have retained any attention. Both their novels enjoy the position of respected texts even if they did not receive any intense attention from literary critics. According to Kate Macdonald, this is largely due to their topic: "…witches are not generally academically respectable."[103]

While the witches in *Witch Wood* are considered the villains, it is peculiar, that the protagonist does not exactly strive to destroy them. David Sempill in all his morality goes through the proper circles to fix their behaviour as if helping someone who is ill or simply misinformed. Kate Macdonald in her work "Witchcraft and Non-conformity in Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* (1926) and John Buchan's *Witch Wood* (1927)" focuses on the topic of non-conformity and raises an interesting detail concerning the possible link between witchcraft and drug taking:

> Buchan extends the idea of witchcraft in *Witch Wood* as a recreational corrupting force through a very specific use of vocabulary. The phrase used for becoming a witch, or taking part in the coven's activities is "taking the Wood" (24), that is, taking *to* the Wood, the sinister forest Melanudrigill where the coven rituals are held. "Taking" was the active verb associated with drug abuse in the 1920s, and also reflects the modern phraseology of addiction. "Taking" suggests that those who indulge in witchcraft, or have been trapped in its practice with no way out, are users: they imbibe, receive, ingest.[104]

[103] Macdonald, "Witchcraft and Non-conformity," 219.
[104] Ibid., 229.

If we take this concept to be true, witchcraft would be the drug. Something prohibited but very seducing, promising easy fixes for difficult problems with no drawbacks. If you take to the woods, your problems will be solved, you will be taken care of, you will be, in short, saved. However, leaving the Wood will prove destructive, for being a witch is a crime as poor Bessie Todd finds out after being accused of being one.

In the previous part of this chapter, I used a definition of a witch cult, namely: a witch cult is a group of people that believe to be witches gathering in a special place to perform prescribed rituals to either ensure some positive outcome for themselves or to accomplish a negative outcome for those who are not participating. However, in the story, the cult does not seem to have any specific reason for their ritual. The description mainly focuses on the dancing and music performed, which as David Sempill puts it: "To one accustomed to the open movement of country jigs and reels the thing seemed the uttermost evil…"[105] The whole picture painted by David is coloured by his bias as a minister. Kate Macdonald briefly mentions the question of pleasure of witchcraft: "In *Witch Wood*, seeking pleasure is often an illicit activity, because the Calvinist Kirk objected on principle to enjoyment for its own sake. The celebrations of the Woodilee coven, their anticipation and the aftermath, are a source of enjoyment for the participants. It may have been wicked, but it was pleasure, and distraction, in a life of poverty and relentless labor."[106] The whole cult is painted evil on the basis of not worshipping God and on the basis of enjoying the parts of life considered immoral by the Kirk.

From today's point of view, the witches are the victims, from the witch cult in the wood that was never mentioned as doing something truly evil apart from taking part in a masquerade dance, to the poor Bessie that was tortured because of her status of a witch.

[105] Buchan, *Witch Wood*, 83.
[106] Macdonald, "Witchcraft and Non-conformity," 227.

And while during Bessie's trial people of the Woodilee feel some level of shame, when the trial clearly goes too far, it is hard not to notice that some villagers are there to enjoy the cruel proceedings. "When witches, or supposed witches (because it is clear that Bessie Todd was a fearful old woman who stood no chance against a professional torturer), are the victims of gross injustice, our sympathies are for them."[107]

If we take this rather modest evidence, the witches of *Witch Wood* are the true victims of the story. A group of mostly poor villagers seeking a few moments of freedom in dancing and music, led by a fierce leader protecting them against a minister that considers their behaviour as an immodest breaking of Calvinist rules. To join once means to stay, for the freedom of the wood is quite addictive even if looking into the eyes of a preaching minister can become very hard.

[107] Ibid., 228.

7. Conclusion

As this work could be divided into two clear section, this conclusion will inevitably follow this dual nature. In the first half of this work, I detailly described the possible reasons why the Great Scottish Witch Hunt od 1661 happened. In the past, the scholars usually tried to show, that there was one main reason for it. It is only in the latter years that the discussion about a possible mixture of reasons appeared. I follow this supposition in showing that the years before this witch hunt proved to be especially trying for the Scottish people. This is paired with the evidence that a person most likely to be accused does not follow our stereotypical image of a witch shows that witch trials cannot be considered easily sorted proceedings. In the chapter dealing with characteristics of people accused of witchcraft, it is established that witch trials were often a way how to resolve arguments and quarrels. And in 1661 in Scotland, in the time of a civil war, there were plenty of reasons for arguments.

The second part of this work shows the brilliance of John Buchan in depicting the rather complicated conditions of the era closely preceding 1660s in Scotland. Buchan describes the almost magical land of the Scottish Borders and uses its atmosphere to create both an enchanting and terrifying setting for his story. Especially important in this process is the motif of a forest that plays a significant role in establishing the stage for key plot-driving moments. The analysis of this motif uses examples of these moments to show the duality and unpredictability of the forest used to enhance the atmosphere of the story.

While building the witch cult, Buchan managed to use the scholar's theories of his time to paint a very vivid picture of the witches in his *Witch Wood*, while not slipping into black and white preaching. The witches are painted in the shades of grey and can

easily be considered either evil or victims. As the stereotypical picture of witches is indeed that of evil magic-wielding women, in my analysis I point out that Buchan did not follow the stereotype. His coven leader is a prominent village elder, a man of elevated position, his witches do not do anything supernatural and from a certain point of view, they can appear as the victims of the story. I attempt to follow this point of view despite the lack of secondary sources, for Buchan, while known, did not receive intense attention of the critics.

Resumé

Cílem této diplomové práce bylo najít hlavní příčiny čarodějnických procesů, které proběhly ve Skotsku v roce 1661, a které jsou dnes považovány za jedny z nejkrutějších vůbec.

První kapitola přibližuje nelehkou dobu, kdy se procesy odehrály. Kořeny možných důvodů jejich vzniku sahají hluboko do historie a pochopení této historie je klíčové. Sedmnácté století ve Skotsku bylo dobou války a převratů. Po vcelku klidné vládě Jakuba I. Stuarta, přišla vláda jeho syna Karel I., který si ke Skotsku nikdy vztah nevytvořil. Jeho necitlivý zásah do náboženského života Skotů vyústil ve války biskupů, které byly rychle následovány občanskou válkou, která byla ukončena až popravou panovníka. Když byla v roce 1660 po deseti letech monarchie obnovena, země se začala pomalu zotavovat z předchozích válek.

Tyto nepokoje nevyhnutelně zapříčinily rozvrat společnosti, který se dá považovat za nejdůležitější podmínku vzniku čarodějnických procesů. Nicméně obvinit kohokoli z čarodějnictví i přesto nebylo na mnoha místech nic jednoduchého. Počátky soudnictví, jak ho známe dnes, umožnily osvíceným soudcům některá obvinění jednoduše smést ze stolu. I přesto se ovšem v roce 1661 strhla vlna procesů.

Z dokumentů, které se dochovaly, se můžeme dozvědět, jak vypadala průměrná obviněná osoba a mnohé může překvapit, že nejde o stereotypický obraz čarodějnice. I když v počtu obviněných převažují ženy, muži v něm figurují taktéž v nezanedbatelných číslech. K obvinění stačilo stýkání se s podezřelou osobou a v letech paniky působili i lovci čarodějnic, placení za jejich odhalení. Nicméně nejcitovanějšími důvody k procesu jsou hádavá povaha a újma způsobená magií.

Čarodějnické procesy byly obvykle připisovány na vinu jedné hlavní příčině. Až v posledních letech se objevil názor, že šlo pravděpodobně o souhru více příčin. Rok 1661 ve Skotsku je zvláštní právě akumulací mnoha menších katastrof, které čarodějnické procesy mohly přímo i nepřímo silně ovlivnit. Mučení v soudním procesu bylo považováno za běžnou věc, i když nemáme důkazy, že bylo využíváno často. Navíc šlo o dobu, kdy se ženám dostalo více práv, mohly vlastnit majetek a spravovat jej bez pomoci muže. To mohlo spustit i ekonomické důvody k procesům, jelikož majetek odsouzených většinou připadnul soudu. Existují i důvody si myslet, že rok 1661 byl zvláštní i z pohledu počasí a zvýšené množství srážek mohlo způsobit uhnívání skladových zásob a z toho plynoucí nemoci pro obyvatelstvo. Šlo pravděpodobně o více nahromaděných okolností, které vyústily v jedny z nejkrutějších procesů s čarodějnicemi.

Tato doba se stala i inspirací pro Johna Buchana, který do ní zasadil svůj román Witch Wood a mistrně vystihl komplikovanou situaci. Jeho čarodějnice se vymykají stereotypům a jsou nepochybně založeny na teoriích o čarodějnických procesech z jeho doby. Buchan poukazuje na jistou pokryteckost a krutost tehdejší společnosti, jeho kritika se ale velmi snadno dá nazvat nadčasovou.

V této práci poukazuji především na Buchanovo zobrazení čarodějnictví jako takového, to však zahrnuje jak určitou fantastičnost prostředí, do kterého svůj příběh umístil, tak popis rituálů skupiny čarodějnic tak i detailní popis počátku jednoho procesu s obviněnou čarodějnicí.

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Anotace

Autor: Vendula Heczková
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Název práce: Skotský hon na čarodějnice v letech 1661 a 1662: Důsledek ekonomické situace nebo práce náboženských fanatiků?
Vedoucí práce: Prof. PhDr. Michal Peprník, Dr.
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Abstrakt

Cílem této diplomové práce bylo najít hlavní příčiny čarodějnických procesů, které proběhly ve Skotsku v roce 1661, a které jsou dnes považovány za jedny z nejkrutějších vůbec. První kapitola přibližuje nelehkou dobu, kdy se procesy odehrály. Sedmnácté století ve Skotsku bylo dobou války a převratů. Tyto nepokoje nevyhnutelně zapříčinily rozvrat společnosti, který se dá považovat za nejdůležitější podmínku vzniku čarodějnických procesů. Čarodějnické procesy byly obvykle připisovány na vinu jedné hlavní příčině. Až v posledních letech se objevil názor, že šlo pravděpodobně o souhru více příčin. Rok 1661 ve Skotsku je zvláštní právě akumulací mnoha menších katastrof, které čarodějnické procesy mohly přímo i nepřímo silně ovlivnit. Tato doba se stala i inspirací pro Johna Buchana, který do ní zasadil svůj román Witch Wood a mistrně vystihl komplikovanou situaci. Jeho čarodějnice se vymykají stereotypům a jsou popsány v poslední kapitole.

Klíčová slova: čarodějnice, čarodějnické procesy, Skotsko, Buchan, Witch Wood, 1661

Annotation

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to find the main reasons that allowed the witch trials of 1661 to happen. The Great Scottish Witch Hunt is considered one of the worst to ever happen. This work aims to detailly explain the historical background of wars and civil unrest and following collapse of the society, which could be considered one of the most important conditions for the trials to take place. Year 1661 in Scotland is specific because of a certain accumulation of number of conditions and small-scale disasters that directly or indirectly influenced the trials. In the last two chapters there is also an analysis of a literary work inspired by this era, namely John Buchan's *Witch Wood*.

Key words: witches, witch trials, Scotland, Buchan, Witch Wood, 1661