

PALACKÝ UNIVERSITY IN OLOMOUC

FACULTY OF ARTS

Department of English and American Studies

**ALL ILL COME RUNNING IN, ALL GOOD KEEP OUT:  
MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT IN ENGLISH RENAISSANCE  
DRAMA**

Master's thesis

Author: Bc. Miloš Buček

Supervisor: Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D.

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I declare that I am the author of this master's thesis entitled 'All Ill Come Running In, All Good Keep Out: Magic and Witchcraft in English Renaissance Drama' with the help of my supervisor and all the sources I have used have been cited and acknowledged.

In Přerov on .....

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Miloš Buček

I would like to express my gratitude to Mgr. David Livingstone, Ph.D. for his advice, valuable information, guidance, and patience, which he has provided while I was working on my thesis.

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## Introduction

The concept of witchcraft and magic in general is something which has been part of human imagination for a long time. Belief in a witch as someone who destroys, causes harm and represents everything that is negative is present across both time and space. In fact, very few human societies seem to be completely free from it. As far as Europe is concerned, witches and magic have consistently been mentioned ever since the ancient Greek civilization in characters such as Circe, who made an appearance for example in the *Odyssey*, through the Middle Ages, due to their appearance in the *Bible*, and well into the early modern period. Although the Enlightenment put a halt to witchcraft being a prominent phenomenon among both popular and elite classes, it never completely vanished and remained a part of the folklore, as manifested in many tales from the nineteenth century by the Brothers Grimm. Moreover, there has been a revival of witchcraft in the late twentieth century in the form of a Pagan Witchcraft or, alternatively, Wicca. It is evident that people have always been aware of witchcraft and, for a long time, believed in the existence of witches and magic. There have been attempts to find out why this belief is so persistent in the human psyche, but that is not particularly relevant for this thesis. What is important, though, is the fact that, while present in every folk culture, beliefs about witchcraft vary, both from region to region, and also from century to century. Probably the most influential work which shaped the perception of witchcraft in the early modern period was a treatise entitled *Malleus Maleficarum*, usually translated as *Hammer of Witches*, written in 1487 by the German inquisitor Heinrich Kramer. It is a book which is considered the catalyst for the infamous witch-hunts which were taking place throughout the early modern period. It is quite fascinating to realize that

the seventeenth century, the very same century which gave birth to the Age of Reason, is also a century in which some of the most violent witch persecutions took place. It was not all bleak, however. By the end of the sixteenth century there were already some scholars growing sceptical about witchcraft possibly being real, one of them being Reginald Scot, author of a book called *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, published in 1584. Thus, two contradicting opinions about the existence of witchcraft put down their roots among the early modern Europeans.

What I intend to research in my thesis is directly linked to this struggle of opinions about witchcraft and their consequences in English literature. I aim to find out exactly how the witchcraft ideas manifested themselves among early modern people, represented by both popular and learned classes, and how these ideas were represented in some of the contemporary plays which became popular and survived to this day.

The timespan studied in this thesis covers mainly the period starting in the last third of the sixteenth century and ending by the middle of the seventeenth century. The main focus is on the reigns of Queen Elizabeth, King James, and King Charles, with the first two mentioned being particularly important because literature under their rule exceptionally flourished. The four plays selected in this thesis cover the years 1606–1633.

Based on what I have mentioned above, it is rather evident what methodology I am going to employ in my thesis. I am going to attempt to create a comprehensive image of witchcraft as it was perceived in the past, and what contemporary experts on this topic think the reasons for this belief were by first analyzing the major works on said topic and then putting the gathered information together by the process of synthesis. As far as the selected plays are concerned, the process will be similar, as I

will once again have to analyze the plays to extract the necessary information and then compare it with the information gathered, as well as with each other, in order to come to the final conclusion of my thesis.

The thesis itself will consist of three parts. First, I would like to discuss the history of witchcraft, that is, what actually witchcraft and magic is and who is considered to be a witch. For this, I will need to cross the boundaries of the studied period, both more into the past as well as into the present. Some of the books which I will be using are *A General Theory of Magic* by Marcel Mauss, *Witches and Neighbours* by Robin Briggs, and *Thinking with Demons* by Stuart Clark. I have chosen these works because of their importance and the impact they have had since they were published, especially the last two mentioned, as they not only critically assemble a vast amount of information about witchcraft but at the same time they are not afraid to break the mould in their approach to witchcraft, which was at the time becoming rather stale.

In the second part I want to dedicate to my research to the realities and perception of witchcraft in early modern England, what was specific for this area and how it was different from the Continental witchcraft beliefs. I will consult two major works dealing with witchcraft in early modern England: *Religion and the Decline of Magic* by Keith Thomas and *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England* by Alan Macfarlane. I will also discuss the influence of Reginald Scot's book on public opinion about witches. Attention will be given to Queen Elizabeth and King James, the latter of which was quite interested in witchcraft and was the author of a philosophical dissertation on the topic of magic called *Daemonologie*. This work, together with Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* is believed to be a major influence on the plays which incorporated the themes of witchcraft into their plots.

Lastly, in the third part I will discuss and analyze four selected plays which either occupy themselves with the phenomenon of witchcraft directly, or contain one or more episodes which involve witchcraft. The most notorious of those plays is probably William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Additionally, I would like to pay attention to a play written by Thomas Middleton and named quite aptly *The Witch*. Middleton's play deals with the phenomenon of witchcraft quite substantially and is quite likely one of the best sources on the contemporary perception of witchcraft among learned men, as he frequently cites passages from Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Lastly, I want to analyze *The Witch of Edmonton*, written by Rowley, Dekker and Ford, and *The Late Lancashire Witches* written by Heywood and Brome. These two plays are inspired by actual witch persecutions which took place in 1621 and 1633 respectively. I am, therefore, interested in finding out how witchcraft-related events and witches in them were portrayed, as opposed to typical stage-witches.

# 1. Definition of Magic and Witchcraft

Thus far, I have been mentioning the words ‘magic’ and ‘witchcraft’ without providing them with a proper definition. Although there is a general consensus as to what magic means and how it is manifested, it is not simple to actually define it. This difficulty, however, did not discourage scholars from trying to provide magic and witchcraft with a definition. Early cultural anthropologists such as Edward Burnett Taylor and James George Frazer perceived magic as a primitive form of human thought and behaviour which was slowly replaced first by religion and then by science. Scholars have later discovered that the relationship between these three phenomena was much more complex, as they were all intertwined and their boundaries fuzzy. Moreover, these phenomena are far from being as simple as having only one way of understanding them, for they have several more or less interconnected subcategories which can make a single definition quite problematic.

Yet none of these problems were of much importance to the late medieval and early modern Europeans, who simply believed in the existence of magic and the supernatural, for it was a convenient way of explaining things they did not understand and which were not part of a religious doctrine. This is truly important, for it was the Church, both Catholic and Protestant, which decided what was considered illegal – that being magic and witchcraft – and what was accepted and part of official religious rites. Unfortunately, clergymen were not always available when something unnatural happened and needed to be taken care of. This was the time when the common folk resorted to other means, which were, more frequently than not, not in accordance with the Church’s expectations. Unsurprisingly, this led to the growth of popularity of the so-called ‘popular magic’, which was then only one step away from being called witchcraft, the ominous term which caused around

100,000 people to be trialled, with something between 40,000 and 50,000 executions.<sup>1</sup>

Because magic and witchcraft are interconnected quite tightly and their relationship is ambivalent, in the following chapters I am going to talk about magic in the strictly theoretical and general sense, with the point of view of the twentieth and twenty-first century people. This will be based predominantly on the work of Marcel Mauss. When I discuss witchcraft, on the other hand, it will be based largely on its representations in the early modern period, with a much greater emphasis on the practical aspects.

### **1.1. What is Magic?**

As has already been stated, defining magic is problematic. It is, however, difficult to accept facts as being ‘magical’ just because they have been called so by the observers or actors themselves. Hence, it is best to do it in small steps, as it has been done in the past by anthropologists such as Frazer, Lehmann, and later on, Mauss, the author of a comprehensive book on magic entitled *A General Theory of Magic*. The first step in the process of the definition of magic was the agreement of many of the early anthropologists that magic is a kind of pre-science.<sup>2</sup> This notion served as a basis for Frazer as well, who defined magical actions as ‘those which are destined to produce special effects through the application of laws of sympathetic magic – the law of similarity and the law of contiguity’.<sup>3</sup> These laws are something which I will come back to later, so here I will only reproduce what Frazer himself says about

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<sup>1</sup> Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*, Second edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2002), 6.

<sup>2</sup> Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* (New York and London: Routledge, 2001), 15. PDF e-book.

<sup>3</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 15.

them: ‘Like produces like; objects which have been in contact, but since ceased to be so, continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed’.<sup>4</sup> Thus, his definition of ‘magic’ becomes synonymous with ‘sympathetic magic’.

The problem with Frazer’s definition is, though, that he still does not say much about what magic actually is. The more satisfying answer has been provided by Marcel Mauss. First, he points out that magic should be used to refer to those things which society as a whole considers magical and not those qualified as such by a single segment of society only, such as the Church.<sup>5</sup> The matter of why people believed in magic is also a vital one and will be answered later, after the definition of magic is provided.

According to Mauss, magic consists of three elements: officers, actions and representations. Officers, or *magicians*, are the people who perform magical actions, whether or not they consider themselves to be professionals; *magical representations* are those beliefs which correspond to magical actions; and actions are *magical rites* performed with the intent of accomplishing a desired result. One of the most important features of magical rites is the fact that they can be repeated, and are effective and creative – they *do* things.<sup>6</sup>

The difference between magical and religious rites is also an essential issue. It is no secret that Christian practice not only tolerated magic, but also absorbed it. Keith Thomas even speaks of ‘the magic of the medieval Church’.<sup>7</sup> According to Frazer, magical rites are sympathetic, normally act on their own, and have a direct

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<sup>4</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 15.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>7</sup> Brian P. Levack, ed, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15. PDF e-book.

action.<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, all of these criteria are problematic, and thus, new ones have to be found. For Mauss, the first feature of a magical rite is its prohibition, for these rites involve the casting of evil spells. Interestingly, it is the fact of the prohibition itself which gives the spell its magical character. On the other end of the spectrum is a sacrifice, which is associated with the religious ritual and which is tackled by magic in a special way. Between these two poles, there is a vast list of activities whose purpose is not simple to tell, for they are ‘neither prescribed nor proscribed in any special way’. Consequently, there are religious practices which are private, and there are magical practices which are licit.<sup>9</sup> Another difference between magical and religious rites is the fact that they frequently have different agents – with the exception of priests, they are not performed by the same person. Even the priest takes special care to do things differently in each case: he turns his back to the altar, performs with his left hand instead of his right, etc.<sup>10</sup> The last difference consists of an entire group of signs, including the choice of place and the way they are performed. While religious rituals are performed openly in a temple or a domestic shrine, magical rituals are performed secretly in woods, secluded and far-away places, in the secret recesses of a house, and usually at night. When the magician has to perform in public, he mutters his spells and tries to hide his actions. Thus, isolation and secrecy are two almost perfect signs of the intimate character of a magical rite.<sup>11</sup> Thus far, it seems that the feature of magical rites is that they are anti-religious and do not belong to organized cults. Although there were some magical cults, such as the cult of Hecate in the Ancient Greece, the cult of Diana and the devil in the magic of the Middle Ages, they only display the influence which religion had

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<sup>8</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 25–26.

<sup>9</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 27.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

on magic.<sup>12</sup> That being said, a reasonable definition of a magical rite can now be formed. As Mauss put it: '[a] magical rite is *any rite which does not play a part in organized cults*—it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite'.<sup>13</sup> These magical rites are procedures used to achieve an outcome through changing or controlling reality.

What is interesting about the notion of magic is the fact that today the terms 'magic' and 'magical' usually have positive connotation, which is something that would be nearly unthinkable in the medieval and early modern people, as for them only God was capable of doing supernatural things and everyone who claimed to be able to do so as well was either a charlatan, or had his powers given to him by demons. It was believed that the essential difference between the prayers of a churchman and the spells of a magician was that the latter claimed to work automatically, while the success of a prayer was dependent on God's favour.<sup>14</sup> When the notion of 'natural magic' appeared during the Renaissance, it opened the door for a new way of thinking about magic: it could be defined as 'the exploitation either of demonic power or of occult powers in nature'.<sup>15</sup> It was still considered a suspicious business, however. Surprisingly, the practice of magic did not always rouse suspicion or lead to prosecution and some of its forms, such as healing, blessing and protection were tolerated, as long as they were free of overtly demonic or pagan elements.<sup>16</sup> This was partly because many of the rituals which were pagan had been Christianized, while at the same time many Christian rituals and beliefs became such

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>13</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 46. PDF e-book.

<sup>15</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 15.

a part of popular culture that it became problematic to distinguish them from magic.<sup>17</sup>

### **1.1.1. Magical Rites**

In this section, I would like to dedicate some time to the description of how magical rites work. Generally speaking, magical rites consist of three main elements – the words, the gestures, and the objects – which, when combined together, should have some effect on the external world.

Magical rites also have some conditions which they should meet in order to be successful. For example, time and place of the ritual are strictly prescribed. Among the most special times for such rites are midnight, sunset or sunrise, the time of the waning or waxing of the moon, or Friday, the day of the witches' sabbath.<sup>18</sup> This is also why astrology became so important for magic, as it provided the necessary means for the calculation of the course of the astral bodies, the conjunctions and oppositions of the moon, the sun and the planets, and the position of the stars.<sup>19</sup> Although some magical rites must be performed in the church, they usually take place in places where religious rituals cannot be performed because they are impure. Such places include cemeteries, crossroads, woods, marshes, and rubbish heaps.<sup>20</sup> Those are places where ghosts and demons can appear and thus are ideal for the performance of magic.

During rituals, special materials and tools are employed. List of the materials prescribed includes remains of a sacrifice, such as the bones of the dead, as well as anything which is usually thrown away as useless, such as left-overs from meals,

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<sup>17</sup> Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition, and Everyday Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 271. PDF e-book.

<sup>18</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 57–8.

filth, nail-pairings, excrement, and foetuses. Then there is a special kind of objects, which are used because they coincide with the nature of the rite: special animals, plants or stones. The last substance used is some material which is applied to bind it all together: wax, glue, plaster, honey, or milk are some examples.<sup>21</sup> Magicians also have at their disposal some tools with magical qualities on their own, of which magic wands are the simplest. As for the magician's clients, they themselves must undergo preliminary rites, such as fasting, staying chaste and pure, anointing their bodies, or wearing special clothes.<sup>22</sup> And finally, after the rite is complete, prescribed actions to assure the success of the rite must take place. These include destroying unused materials, having a bath, and the participants leaving the magical spot without looking behind them.<sup>23</sup>

The rites themselves then comprise of two types of rite – verbal and non-verbal.<sup>24</sup> Non-verbal rites work on a principle known as sympathetic, or symbolic, magic, which I have mentioned earlier. While it may seem that the number of possible symbolic actions is limitless, Mauss claims that in practise the number of symbolic rites is always limited.<sup>25</sup> This could explain why the users of magic are so frequently portrayed performing the same rites and rituals, not because of a limited inventiveness of the supposed witnesses, victims, and also authors, but because the scope of rites was already long established. A major part of non-verbal rites is a sacrificial ritual. As Mauss wrote, '[t]he image of sacrifice has been imposed on magic to such an extent that it has become a kind of guideline, by which the whole procedure is ordered in the mind.'<sup>26</sup> Another part of non-verbal rites which provides

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<sup>21</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 58–59.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

one of the essential features of the popular image of magic, are the substances which provide the means of utilizing objects sympathetically. According to the popular image, every magician has a cauldron, as magic is the art of preparing and mixing concoctions, fermentations, and dishes.<sup>27</sup> The preparation of the ingredients, thus, plays a tremendous role. This act, which resembles chemistry, endows the materials with a magical character and thus contributes to the efficacy of magic.

The second type, verbal rites, is what people usually call spells, although it is far from being the only kind of verbal rituals. All verbal rites tend to have the same form, for their function tends to also be the same. They are meant to evoke spiritual forces or to specialize a rite. Thus, the magician invokes, conjures up, calls down powers which make the rites work.<sup>28</sup> These spells are composed in special languages, the language of the gods and spirits or the language of magic.<sup>29</sup> It is not surprising then, that many medieval and early modern portrayals of spells are chanted in Latin, as it was by then a language filled with mystery. Furthermore, the chants are frequently using words from Latin prayers, though in order to make them work, they are recited backwards.<sup>30</sup> What plays an important role during verbal rites is the way they are recited. The right intonation is often crucial, for everything has a prescribed rhythm.<sup>31</sup> Interesting is also the significance of numbers, as every movement has to be repeated a certain number of times. Not any number of times, but according to sacred or magical numbers, such as 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13, 20, etc. Moreover, words and actions are performed facing a certain direction, most frequently facing in the direction of the 'victim'.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 66.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 48.

<sup>31</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, , 72.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

The last part of a magical rite is its magical representations, which is at the very least the display of its effects. The most appealing type of display is definitely a change of state, such as driving away illnesses or causing others to get ill. If there is one element which has been leaving people both in awe and in worry, it is the belief that there is a certain relationship between the persons and the things involved in the ritual, as it implies the ability of the magician to control his victims through his ability, his soul, or his demon which has possessed the victim.<sup>33</sup>

Representations of magic also involve three laws, also called the laws of sympathy, which play a vital role in all magical rituals – the law of contiguity, the law of similarity, and the law of opposition. The law of contiguity works on the assumption that part can stand for the whole and separation in no way disturbs this contiguity. Thus, a person can be represented by its teeth, saliva, sweat, nails, or hair.<sup>34</sup> Not only that, for the sympathy is transmitted by touch as well. This implies that all it takes is something the person has come in contact with in order to be able to enchant or bewitch them. The law of similarity works in a similar way as the law of contiguity, for it says that ‘a simple object, outside all direct contact and all communication, is able to represent the whole’.<sup>35</sup> But unlike the law of contiguity, there is nothing which associates the image and the victim besides the convention that it is so.<sup>36</sup> What is important to realize, though, is the fact that both of these laws can be applied not only to persons, but to objects as well. Thus, rain can be represented by poppy flowers, love by a knot, army by a doll, etc.<sup>37</sup> The third law, the law of opposition, has always existed separately in the eyes of magicians, as it is more a law of antipathy than sympathy. It works on the principle that ‘like drives out

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<sup>33</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 77.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 85

like in order to produce the opposite'.<sup>38</sup> For example, the sterilizing knife produces fertility, water produces the absence of dropsy, etc.<sup>39</sup> What all these law generally display, though, is the transfer of properties whose actions and reactions are known beforehand, which is something that explains the nature of magical rites much more clearly. This is also manifested in the popularity of amulets, which served as a substitution for rites once they underwent a ritual of their own.<sup>40</sup> What shows the importance of the notion of properties in magic is the fact that 'one of the major preoccupations of magic has been to determine the use of specific, generic, or universal powers of beings, things, even ideas'.<sup>41</sup> Hence, magician is someone who understands nature and natures. It is also in this matter that magic approximates science the most.

Before moving on, one last issue needs to be mentioned – the invocation of spirits. This includes the souls of the dead, demons (and angels) and gods. What is interesting is the fact that all these spirits involved in magic are stripped of their personality, as magic is interested in them only as wielders of properties and powers.<sup>42</sup>

### **1.1.2. Belief in Magic**

Magic, by definition, is believed. Like religion, it is viewed as a totality. Either you believe in it all or you do not. This is based on its long-lasting tradition. Where there is a literature on the subject, it recites the same facts over and over from text to text.<sup>43</sup> These traditional proofs are sufficient, and stories about magic are believed in the same way as myths. Even when a person has a contrary experience as to the

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<sup>38</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 88.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

existence of magic, it just does not destroy their belief, for it is attributed to counter-magic or an error during the performance of the ritual.<sup>44</sup> People are simply willing to believe, because it is the easiest solution to their troubles. For them, the helplessness in the face of disease and vulnerability to other kinds of misfortune was simply too much, and this is why their belief in the supernatural forces such as magic was so strong.<sup>45</sup> Consequently, the appeal of magic could only be eclipsed when people found a more attractive alternative.<sup>46</sup> This is, however, not the case only for the common folk, as there are proofs that the magician deeply believed in the success of his sympathetic magic.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, the reason why magician pretends like this is caused by the fact that pretence is demanded of him, because people seek him out and beseech him to act.<sup>48</sup> Thus, what a magician believes and what the public believes are two sides of the same coin. The former is a reflection of the latter, since the pretences of the magician would not be possible without public credulity.<sup>49</sup> Therefore, magic is an object *a priori* of belief, although it is not, in the most cases, perceived.<sup>50</sup>

## 1.2. The Relationship between Magic and Witchcraft

As Alan Macfarlane wrote in his book *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, the terms ‘witchcraft’, ‘magic’, and also ‘sorcery’ are ‘notoriously difficult to define’.<sup>51</sup> There is no consensus on their meaning either today or among people living in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, although various attempts to define them have

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<sup>44</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, 114.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 17.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 331.

<sup>47</sup> Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, , 117.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 118.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 119.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>51</sup> Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study*, Second edition (London: Routledge, 1999), 3. PDF e-book.

been made. The problem is that witchcraft in the early modern Europe was perceived differently from region to region, and also from century to century.<sup>52</sup> Macfarlane specifies this for the British Isles by saying that opinions of witchcraft changed between 1560 and 1680 and that attitudes towards witchcraft differed between social and religious groups.<sup>53</sup> There were those who wanted to differentiate between the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ witchcraft and those who wanted to punish equally all who used ‘magical’ power.<sup>54</sup>

After taking into consideration the information provided in chapter 1.1, it would seem that the magician possesses no internal powers of his own and all magic comes from the rites themselves, regardless of the intention of the performer. According to Macfarlane, this does not necessarily apply for the three terms in question. Witchcraft, he says, is ‘supernatural activity, believed to be the result of power given by some external force (for instance, the Devil) and to result in physical injury to the person or object attacked by it. There is not necessarily any outward action or words on the part of the “witch”.’<sup>55</sup> In complete opposition to this is the so called ‘white witchcraft’, which requires outward actions and its ends are ‘good’ rather than ‘bad’. Finally, between these two terms lies ‘sorcery’, which combines the explicit means with the harmful ends.<sup>56</sup> Thus, it would seem that while ‘sorcery’ and ‘white magic’ comply with the established features of magic, which is its dependency on performing rites in order to achieve something, ‘witchcraft’ does not need to involve any rite at all, although nearly all other aspects of magic are present.

Keith Thomas, however, has come up with a slightly different theory, as far as witchcraft and sorcery are concerned. For him, witchcraft is ‘an innate quality, an

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<sup>52</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 101.

<sup>53</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 311.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 311.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

involuntary personal trait ... The witch exercises his malevolent power by occult means, and needs no words, rite, spell, or potion. His is a purely psychic act.<sup>57</sup> Sorcery, on the other hand, is 'the deliberate employment of maleficent magic; it involves the use of spell or a technical aid and it can be performed by anyone who knows the correct formula'.<sup>58</sup> This contrast is however important only in the legal sphere, as it makes witchcraft a crime for which the person is not responsible for, and thus is of limited utility.

In this text, I am going to stick to Macfarlane's use of the terms, but since neither magicians nor sorcerers appear in the works I aim to analyze, the term 'witch' will most frequently refer to members of lower class who practise magic or are thought to do so, as it was the most common perception of witches among the early modern people.

Another problem of witchcraft in relation to magic is the fact that it develops from it. The vernacular terms for *magica* or *ars magica* in Middle English is *wicchecraft* and the same trend can be found in French or German.<sup>59</sup> During this process of development, magician, an educated male, was transformed into an illiterate female witch in the early fifteenth century. The central feature of witchcraft, the pact with the Devil, developed mainly from the condemnation of ritual magic. While in the early modern period people were accused mainly of witchcraft, magic itself could also be prosecuted as a separate crime.<sup>60</sup>

There is one more feature of witchcraft which makes it quite different from magic, and that is that accusations of witchcraft frequently include offences which

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 551.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 551.

<sup>59</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 16.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

are not especially magical, such as theft, arson, poisoning, assault, or harming animals.<sup>61</sup>

### **1.3. The Rise of Witchcraft**

However appealing the phenomenon of witchcraft may be, it is necessary to make one thing clear: historical witchcraft in Europe is an absolute fiction, in the sense that ‘there is no evidence that witches existed, still less that they celebrated black masses or worshipped strange gods’.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, witchcraft was ‘not an objective reality but a set of interpretations, something which went on in the minds’.<sup>63</sup> Witchcraft beliefs, then, ‘appear to have been radically incorrect about what could happen in the real world’.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, witchcraft beliefs were so deeply embedded in early modern social structures and ways of thought that they inevitably tended to become domesticated.<sup>65</sup>

The reason which caused witchcraft to become such a widespread phenomenon is a crucial matter as well. It is not surprising that the answer lies within the bounds of medieval religion. The first accusations of witchcraft took place in the late fourteenth century, when a persecution of a heretical sect called the Waldensians was taking place. There were reports that inquisitors found that some of these heretics, who fled to the Alps, ‘worshipped Lucifer directly, engaged in promiscuous orgies, and sacrificed children’.<sup>66</sup> After this, inquisitors kept spreading the word about the new-found diabolic witchcraft, with the Council of Basel, which was

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<sup>61</sup> Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 6.

<sup>62</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 4.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>64</sup> Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>65</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 353.

<sup>66</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 38.

taking place in 1431–1439, probably serving as the initial point of dissemination.<sup>67</sup> There was not, however, a coherent work on the topic until 1486, when Heinrich Kramer wrote the ‘most infamous of late medieval witch treatises’, the *Malleus Maleficarum*.<sup>68</sup> It was his response to the ‘shabby treatment of the topic, a vindication of his views, a refutation of his critics, and a guide for theologians, preachers, and witch-hunters’.<sup>69</sup> Although there still remained local variations between witches, the essential core of witchcraft as the satanic cult of sorcerers (or witches) was established.<sup>70</sup>

A huge factor contributing to the fact that witches were believed to be so plentiful was the situation of the early modern society. People back then were much less mobile and were forced to interact with their neighbours much more than we do now. It is this fact that people could not easily escape one another, which played a vital role in breeding charges of witchcraft.<sup>71</sup> Thus, witches were the enemy within, they were ‘individuals whom their supposed victims knew all too well, whose reputations were built up over many years by an insidious process of rumour and gossip’.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the *Malleus Maleficarum* claimed that ‘the most powerful cause which contributes to the increase of witches is the woeful rivalry between married folk and unmarried men and women.’<sup>73</sup> Thus, in practice, people lived with witches and their malice as they did with all the other risks of an unpredictable environment.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 42.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>71</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 2.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>73</sup> *Malleus Maleficarum*, by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger, transl. by Montague Summers [online], I, vi. Available at: <http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/downloads/MalleusAcrobat.pdf>.

<sup>74</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*. 353.

Another reason for this was the link between religion, magic and witchcraft throughout the human history. Religious ideas dominated the early modern Europe, which led to the concepts of good and evil, as personified by God and the Devil, to be constantly on the minds of early modern people. This was the foundation of the belief that the world was full of hidden and potent forces, which enabled witches to cause harm due to their connection to these external sources of power.<sup>75</sup> In many aspects, witchcraft is act of inversion. It had the appearance of a proper religion but in reality it was religion perverted.<sup>76</sup> The interconnection of religion and witchcraft can be also seen in the development of Christian moral teachings. Between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, the Seven Deadly Sins were slowly being replaced by the Ten Commandments. This had crucial effect on the perception of witchcraft – first, it had been the crime of harming neighbours by occult means, but later on it was tied firmly to the devil-worship.<sup>77</sup>

### **1.3.1. The Three Elements of Diabolism**

The role of the devil in witchcraft, also called diabolic witchcraft, will be the concern of this section. This is how it was usually believed to go: first, a witch was seduced by the Devil either with sex or money in moments of weakness; then he magically transported them to a witches' Sabbath at which they renounced God, signed a pact with the Devil, and engaged in various sacrilegious, perverted, and obscene activities; and lastly, the witch was transported back home armed with the powers and potions needed to perpetrate *maleficium* and return periodically to Sabbaths.<sup>78</sup>

It is common knowledge that the Devil is a great tempter and seducer. His main weapon in this regard was the psychologically receptive state of his victims.

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<sup>75</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 2.

<sup>76</sup> Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 82.

<sup>77</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 84.

<sup>78</sup> Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 65.

Let it be anger, despair, or anxiety, he always offered the right consoling words, a gift of money, assurances that his followers would not want for anything, and a possibility of revenge.<sup>79</sup> After his victim agreed to his offer, he would take a few drops of their blood to seal the covenant between him and the witch.<sup>80</sup> He would also touch the new witch to impose a mark on them, leaving a either an insensible place or a visible blemish on the skin.<sup>81</sup>

Typically, the pact with the Devil was immediately, or at least within a few days, followed by him taking the witch to the Sabbath to meet others.<sup>82</sup> The idea of secret meetings where orgies take place and evil is planned is probably one of the oldest and most basic human fantasies. Charges of nocturnal conspiracy, black magic, child murder, orgiastic sexuality and perverted ritual were nothing new in Europe when they were applied to witches.<sup>83</sup> But in the early modern period, its alleged purpose was to mock its religious counterpart in the real world. As Clark cites a contemporary author, ‘Satan’s rituals were performed “in the same way, with the same ceremonies, customs and vestments as is done by priests for the holy sacrifice.”’ In general, he tried to make a travesty out of the holy ceremonies.<sup>84</sup>

After the Sabbath, the witch had finally full knowledge of her powers, could perform acts of *maleficium* and knew how to get to further Sabbaths. One of the popular theories was that witches were able to fly to the Sabbath after rubbing ointment or grease on their bodies.<sup>85</sup> Another form of attending the Sabbath was in their sleep. All it required from the witch was to lie on her left side in the name of the

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<sup>79</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 19.

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 246. PDF e-book.

<sup>81</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 20.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>84</sup> Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 85.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, 91.

Devil and all the demons.<sup>86</sup> As far as the power which the witch received from the Devil is concerned, there is one interesting fact. Although the Devil gave witches their power, he himself was able to control other creatures only through their agency, as he appeared to be relatively powerless in our world on his own.<sup>87</sup> Consequently, it was usually the witch who was in charge of deciding whom to afflict and how.<sup>88</sup> Nevertheless, many accused witches in their confessions lament over the control the Devil had over them, and assert that when they tried to defy him, he would threaten them and even beat them.<sup>89</sup>

### 1.3.2. *Maleficium* and Bewitchment

The most typical feature of witchcraft was without a doubt considered to be *maleficium*. This Latin word originally meant ‘wrongdoing’ or ‘mischief’, but later on it came to be associated with harmful magic inflicted via occult means.<sup>90</sup> Although the Devil’s promise of riches and freedom from want was just a lie, the power to harm others was supposed to be very real.<sup>91</sup> What was so powerful about this concept was that it did not need any physical evidence, simply believing in the witch’s ability to do evil could give her real power through ‘psychosomatically induced symptoms’, and thus any misfortune could be attributed to the doings of a witch.<sup>92</sup> All it took was to make her somehow envious or angry, and thus desiring revenge, for she rarely attacked without a cause.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, it was the ill-will and personal hostility which were the standard preconditions for bewitchment.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Peter Dinzelbacher, *Svěťice, nebo čarodějky? Osudy „jiných“ žen ve středověku a novověku* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2003), 171.

<sup>87</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 89.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>90</sup> Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 51.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

The most frequent forms of bewitchment typically involved causing harm to people and animals.<sup>95</sup> Thus, people attributed to bewitchment sudden and unknown sicknesses, various misfortunes and accidents, mental illnesses, complications during childbirth, marital problems, and even their poverty. Because early modern people were extremely reliant on their domestic animals, many of their diseases and accidents were attributed to witchcraft as well. This typically involved cows not being able to give milk, which was a matter of life and death for their owners.<sup>96</sup>

When it comes to the act of bewitchment itself, it was usually done in one of two ways. The first was by administering the powder, which was usually supplied to them by the Devil, when in close proximity to their victims.<sup>97</sup> The second form of bewitchment came directly from the witch, as an emanation of evil spirit. This includes the transmission through the ‘evil eye’, a sort of a trance-like gaze,<sup>98</sup> by pinching or striking their victim, or forcing them to consume their food or drink.<sup>99</sup>

### **1.3.3. Forms of Counter-Magic**

Although witches were deemed extremely powerful, this does not mean that there was no way to battle their powers. This counter-action can be divided into three stages, mutually interdependent yet distinct. Before the witch attacked, certain precautions could be taken to safeguard likely victims of witchcraft; once witchcraft was believed to have been used, cures could be sought; and lastly, attempts could be made to locate the witch and either force her to withdraw her power or have her punished.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 6.

<sup>96</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 51–79.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>98</sup> Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 25.

<sup>99</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 95.

<sup>100</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 103.

If someone wanted to make sure they would not be bewitched, there were two main methods of doing so. The first was regulating one's life so that it was unlikely to be attacked, for example severing connections with the person or moving away from the area.<sup>101</sup> This was because witches were usually believed to be people who were always dropping in for small loans, or to inquire about personal affairs.<sup>102</sup> It was dangerous to give or lend them food, accept gifts from them, and even cooperate with them in everyday activities.<sup>103</sup> The second way was taking magical precautions, such as wearing magical charms around the neck or carrying them in the pocket, or being ardent in religion.<sup>104</sup>

When witchcraft was already in effect, the victim could either try to handle it on their own, or consult experts, the so called 'white witches' or 'cunning folk'. Before any action could be taken, it was necessary to confirm that witchcraft was truly in effect and then to identify the witch. This was typically done through gut feeling, logical deduction, or magical divination.<sup>105</sup> One of the popular methods of dealing with witchcraft was using fire as a cure. Burning parts of the bewitched objects and applying pieces of red-hot metal were common responses to the bewitching of livestock and dairy-products.<sup>106</sup> What was frequently employed to counteract the magical attack was a range of religious activities, including excessive praying and other ceremonies meant to mobilize spiritual defences.<sup>107</sup> The cunning men and women, on the other hand, were consulted primarily in the matters of health and lost property, as they were well-versed in the arts of divination and beneficent

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<sup>101</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 103–4.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 103, 106.

<sup>105</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 56.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

magic.<sup>108</sup> Unfortunately for the common people, popular precautions and remedies were condemned as idolatrous and superstitious by the clerics, who perceived counter-witchcraft as indistinguishable from the actual witchcraft.<sup>109</sup> The basis for this was the fact that the techniques for healing and harming resembled each other incredibly closely.<sup>110</sup> But in practice, the common folk were usually not paid much attention by the clergy and thus could relatively safely perform their activities.

In cases where the victim was a person, when they did not want to confront the witch, a possible alternative was to obtain such items as bread, salt, vegetables, or ashes from their household, typically through a servant. Consuming these should improve the condition of the bewitched.<sup>111</sup> Another common method to break bewitchment was either to burn a piece of thatch taken from the witch's house, or to heat a tile from her roof, which would either cure the bewitched, or, more commonly, summon the witch to the spot.<sup>112</sup> It is not surprising that all of these methods are working according to the laws of sympathetic magic, as they have been described in Chapter 1.1. After compelling the witch to appear, the intention was to plead or threaten the witch in an attempt to obtain a cure. The threat of a legal action or execution was usually enough, for the witches more often than not yielded to pressure.<sup>113</sup>

#### **1.3.4. The Portrayal of Witchcraft in Popular and Learned Beliefs**

The next point of discussion is concerned with what people believed witches were capable of and what were the differences (if there were any) in their perception between the common people and the educated elite.

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<sup>108</sup> Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 272.

<sup>109</sup> Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 442.

<sup>110</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 22.

<sup>111</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 98.

<sup>112</sup> Dianne Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 122. PDF e-book.

<sup>113</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 98.

First, some general beliefs about witchcraft among the early modern people need to be presented. As far as witchcraft itself is concerned, it was generally believed that, in the words of Keith Thomas, it was 'a method of bettering one's condition when all else had failed. Like most forms of magic, it was a substitute for impotence, a remedy for anxiety and despair. It differed from the others in that it usually involved acts of malice towards other people.'<sup>114</sup> Although everyone could resort to it, it was usually the poor and helpless who did so, for it was their last resort. Consequently, the popular image of a witch 'was that of a person motivated by ill-will and spite who lacked the proper sense of neighbourhood and community.'<sup>115</sup>

Although witchcraft served as a means of accounting for nearly all inexplicable misfortunes of daily life, it is noteworthy that some effects stayed excluded. This concerns mainly large epidemics and fires, which were not blamed on witches, unless they targeted only one or a few individuals.<sup>116</sup>

The existence of a set of popular beliefs distinct from those of the elite is one of the most notorious controversies regarding witchcraft.<sup>117</sup> However, to think that popular and learned culture were in a simple opposition is incorrect, as 'judges, clerics, and peasants shared much of their cultural experience' and their ideas were always interacting.<sup>118</sup> It was a continuous cycle, in which the elite was learning of popular traditions, integrating and developing them, and returning them back into popular culture, which integrated and developed them in turn.<sup>119</sup> Moreover, demonologist frequently drew heavily on stories they heard from common people.<sup>120</sup> There are, however, some distinctions which can be made about the popular and

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<sup>114</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 623.

<sup>115</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 17–18.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 668.

<sup>117</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 59.

<sup>118</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 22.

<sup>119</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 60.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

learned views. The first is their attitude to the demonic. While the learned classes, including the clerics and magistrates, focused on the pact with the Devil, making it an act of heresy and apostasy, the ordinary people focused on the acts of *maleficium*, which they did not attribute to the demonic forces, unless taught so. However, by the early modern period, the idea that one could make a deal with the Devil to attain some temporal end was part of the common culture.<sup>121</sup> Thus, as Clark put it, ‘there were two “languages” of witchcraft, one concentrating on sorcery, the other on diabolism, and they expressed two different sets of interests’.<sup>122</sup> Secondly, there were differences in how the two classes perceived witches. Clark calls them paradigms. The learned witchcraft paradigm perceived witches as people who threatened patriarchal order, while the popular witchcraft paradigm perceived them as demanding and vindictive towards their neighbours.<sup>123</sup>

As it was indicated above, the main occupation of the learned was with the diabolical side of witchcraft. Therefore, it is best to look now into the popular witch beliefs, as they seem to tell much more about what people thought witches were or were not able to do. As far as the common people were concerned, witchcraft was ‘believed to involve a personalized attack, motivated by specific enmity’.<sup>124</sup> There were many ways in which these attacks manifested. The so-called ‘night witches’ were thought ‘to “press” people in their beds, devour souls of babies in their cribs, abduct adults while they slept, and harass people by appearing in spectral form’.<sup>125</sup> Human witches were supposed to be capable of the same, but in addition to that could summon other spirits and send them to do evil or keep them as ‘familiars’. They were believed to be able to control small animals and to change into them. This

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<sup>121</sup> Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 177.

<sup>122</sup> Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 442–3.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 111

<sup>124</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 53.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

was especially true about cats.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, they were able to cause injury through sympathetic magic (for example by using puppets or nail clippings), via curses, gestures, the evil eye, breath, physical contact, or poisons.<sup>127</sup> Witches were also able to cause a wide variety of misfortunes: these included general calamities, typically in the form of a bad weather, or causing afflictions which targeted only one person. They disrupted one's economic activities and domestic processes, such as churning butter or brewing beer, caused impotence in men and infertility in women, or lack of milk in cows. Most frequently, though, they were blamed for illnesses and deaths suffered by adults, their children, or their domestic animals.<sup>128</sup> The idea that witches could fly was also of popular origin.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, people believed that witches were able to travel without actually moving, which could nowadays be called teleportation. A linked belief was that 'witches knew far too much about other people's business, reporting secrets that they could not have known or overhearing conversations from far off'.<sup>130</sup> Being one-eyed was also considered to be a sure sign of witchcraft, and a popular belief was that women with one blue eye and one dark eye were witches.<sup>131</sup>

The Devil in the popular culture was not as powerful and usually worked through natural processes. Therefore, most of the spells made no reference to him. However, his direct role in *maleficium* increased during the early modern period.<sup>132</sup>

When common people wanted to seek a person who would help them against witchcraft, they usually went to what was called 'the cunning folk', the popular version of witches. They generally practiced magic in order to either gain

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<sup>126</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 91.

<sup>127</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 54.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 54–5.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>130</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 91.

<sup>131</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 265.

<sup>132</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 56–7.

information about the world or to exert some influence about it.<sup>133</sup> Their magic appears to have been defensive or neutral in nature, although they were never safe from the charges of witchcraft. People who went to the cunning folk for help wanted to gain information about the identity of people who had bewitched or stolen things from them, the location of people and objects that have gone missing, the prospects of their marriage, and the outlook for the future more generally.<sup>134</sup> This wide spectrum of activities is usually called divination. Besides this, the cunning men and women were also frequently employed to make love charms and aphrodisiacs.<sup>135</sup>

I would like to end this chapter about witchcraft with an example of a typical witchcraft story. It is the suspect's version of an incident, as it was told to the inquisitors:

On 18 March 1612 a young woman called Alizon Device went out from her home in the Forest of Pendle in Lancashire to beg, and walked along the road at Colne Field towards the neighbouring village of Colne. On the way there she met a pedlar and asked him to sell her some pins. But the pedlar refused to open his pack for her, and would not sell her any. Almost immediately a black dog appeared to Alizon Device and said to her, 'What wouldst thou have me to do unto yonder man?' Alizon asked, 'What canst thou do at him?' The dog replied that he could lame the pedlar and Alizon responded with ferocious brevity: 'Lame him'. The pedlar fell down lame and Alizon was later arrested and tried for her attack on him by witchcraft.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft*, 215.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>135</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 277.

<sup>136</sup> Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1. PDF e-book.

## 1.4. It Could Be Witches, Some Evil Witches

Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.

(Exodus 22:18)

The story given above serves as a link to the last major part of this chapter, which involves the image and perception of witches, most importantly their gender-related issues.

At the time when witchcraft persecution was at its peak, gender was ‘a bundle of shared assumptions’.<sup>137</sup> Thus, the association between witchcraft and women was just a reflection of this way of thinking, which ‘was built on entirely unoriginal foundations’. These included the Aristotelian notions of women being just ‘deformed’ males and Christian hostility to women as originators of sin.<sup>138</sup> This also led the demonologists to see weak-mindedness, a lack of intellectual and rational strength, as a primary characteristic of the witch, for it led to them being seduced by the Devil. It is not surprising that weak-mindedness was strongly, though not exclusively, associated with women.<sup>139</sup> Although women were associated with witchcraft since Antiquity, what contributed to this the most was the *Malleus Maleficarum*, in which Kramer blamed witchcraft largely on female sexuality.<sup>140</sup> Famous French demonologist living in the sixteenth century, Jean Bodin, even proclaimed that ‘women were fifty times more likely than men to succumb to the temptation of witchcraft’.<sup>141</sup> It would be incorrect to think, however, that it was inconceivable for demonologists to think of a male witch.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 249.

<sup>138</sup> Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 114.

<sup>139</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 456.

<sup>140</sup> *Malleus Maleficarum*, I, vi.

<sup>141</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 449.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 454.

As a matter of fact, most early witchcraft cases involved leading members of the elites,<sup>143</sup> which meant that they initially involved more men than women and that many accusations against women came from women.<sup>144</sup> Even later on, there does not seem to be anything which would prevent people from believing in male witches as well.<sup>145</sup> There were even areas where male witches formed the majority. These include today's Iceland, Normandy, Estonia, and Russia. Moreover, in Finland and Burgundy, the numbers were relatively even.<sup>146</sup> Probably the greatest proportion of male witches was found in Iceland, where they constituted a surprising 90 percent.<sup>147</sup> Generally speaking, though, in early modern Europe, men made up 20–30 percent of those tried for witchcraft.<sup>148</sup>

Another interesting fact is that men constituted a majority among the cunning folk. In England, for example, they made up two-thirds of all white magic practitioners.<sup>149</sup> Unfortunately for them, it appears that they were usually treated more harshly, although the attack was on male and female cunning folk alike.<sup>150</sup>

It is true that female witches were, in general, much more common. The main reason is probably that the disputes which lead to witchcraft accusations stemmed from areas of responsibility which were in the early modern household perceived as female.<sup>151</sup> Woman was most importantly a mother and a housewife. She was seen as a producer of children and the one who organized and maintained the household economy.<sup>152</sup> Thus, constant themes include food, usually its exchange or failed exchange, and losing control over women's domestic responsibilities, such as

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<sup>143</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 55.

<sup>144</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 63.

<sup>145</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 160.

<sup>146</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 449.

<sup>147</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 226.

<sup>148</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 464.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 452.

<sup>150</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 241.

<sup>151</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 463.

<sup>152</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 94.

spinning and dairying.<sup>153</sup> Women were also the protectors of their home's boundaries, which, if crossed, could lead to terrible consequences, because a witch could either put something in the victim's house or take something from there.<sup>154</sup> The witch was also seen as an antimother, someone who causes infertility and death.<sup>155</sup> Therefore, women were afraid of witches for the sake of their born and even unborn children. Moreover, in their fantasies, the witch used the childbirth ceremony to harm the vulnerable woman. For this reason, midwives were immensely important to many households, for their job was to keep witches at bay. Unfortunately for them, when the childbearing did not go well, they were accused of being witches themselves. However, the idea that midwives constituted the majority of those accused, although popular in the past, has not been supported by much evidence.<sup>156</sup>

The typical appearance of a witch is one of the more intriguing issues related to witchcraft. Seventeenth century English minister John Gaule claimed during the 1646 witch-hunts that

Every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furred brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue, having a rugged cloak on her back, a skull-cap on her head, a spindle in her hand, an a dog or cat by her side, is not only suspected but pronounced for a witch.<sup>157</sup>

This reflects the elite idea that witches were mostly identified by the populace by their ugliness, as 'the ugly old witch with warts and a beard is a figure who refuses to be controlled or managed'.<sup>158</sup> And it was often the case that many of the accused

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<sup>153</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 96.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>157</sup> John Gaule, *Select Cases of Conscience touching Witches and Witchcraft* (London, 1946), 4–5.

<sup>158</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 127.

were ‘pathetic old women whom their neighbours found obnoxious’.<sup>159</sup> As for their age, it is true that women over 50 and widows are heavily over-represented.<sup>160</sup> The reason for this may be that early modern people believed that witch’s power was supposed to peak between the age of 40 and 60, since witchcraft was understood as exercise of magical power.<sup>161</sup> However, it was also believed that witchcraft could be passed on either as a skill to a family, or by heredity. This implies that there were meant to be many young witches, which is reflected in the fact that the offspring of a suspected witch were at risk of being suspected as well.<sup>162</sup> Moreover, a witch was frequently suspected of witchcraft for many years, and only accused once her husband died.<sup>163</sup>

#### **1.4.1. Influential Witches of the Past**

##### **1.4.1.1. Circe**

During the Renaissance, which in England was a period largely corresponding with the period this work is interested in, Circe, a Greek goddess of magic, has solidified her position as ‘one of the best-known symbolical figures’,<sup>164</sup> as well as ‘the moralized myth most typical of the Renaissance’.<sup>165</sup> Having first appeared in Homer’s *Odyssey*, she left a lasting impression on many Renaissance artists. For example, John Milton seems to have been obsessed with ‘fair-haired Circe, fearful

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<sup>159</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 16.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>161</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 461.

<sup>162</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 277.

<sup>163</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 461.

<sup>164</sup> Rosemund Tuve, ‘Image, form and theme in “A Mask”’ in *Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 130.

<sup>165</sup> Douglas Bush, *Pagan Myth and Christian Tradition in English Poetry* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1968), 130.

goddess with a human voice'.<sup>166</sup> In Milton's and other Renaissance works, Circe represents conflicts of pleasure with virtue.<sup>167</sup>

Nevertheless, since the medieval period, Circe figured mainly as a witch in writings about witchcraft. She appeared in writings of St. Augustine, Boethius, Isidore de Seville, Heinrich Kramer, sixteenth-century Dutch sceptic Johannes Weyer, seventeenth-century English demonologist John Cotta, and many others.<sup>168</sup> Interestingly enough, while writers of Renaissance witchcraft treatises 'admit that poets do not always tell the truth, [they] claim that the ancient poets do offer reliable testimony on witchcraft'.<sup>169</sup> Thus, in the early modern period, Circe became the archetype in demonological discussions of transformation. Although demonologists generally believed that this power was just a demonic deception, it seems that popular opinion accepted the fact that witches could transform at least themselves into animals.<sup>170</sup>

In Renaissance fictions, Circe, or at least her presence, usually embodies the simultaneous attraction and threat offered to men by her magical female sexuality.<sup>171</sup> According to Lenora Leet Brodwin, Circe offered in the *Odyssey* three 'temptations': bestial enslavement, degradation of masculinity, and carefree happiness. The first two involve a female subversion of male authority, the last one a perilous offer of irresponsible pleasure.<sup>172</sup> It is probably in virtue of these temptations that Circe can be felt so frequently in Renaissance texts. Her presence seems to permeate Shakespeare's *Comedy of Errors* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*,<sup>173</sup> and Spenser in

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<sup>166</sup> Homer. *The Odyssey*, translated by Ian Johnston (Arlington: Richer Resources Publications, 2007), 191.

<sup>167</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 189.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 189–90.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 195–7.

his *The Faerie Queene* seems to portray three Circean witches: Duessa and Acrasia, who both offer pleasure and sex, and Mutabilitie, who personifies female rebellion.<sup>174</sup> Lastly, an important part of the iconography of Circe was ‘the very tool of her power to transform and weaken’ – her magic cup, which contained mixtures used to subdue and control her victims. It appears in the *Odyssey*, in *Metamorphoses*, as well as in *The Faerie Queene*.<sup>175</sup>

To conclude, a Circean offer of perilous pleasures shows one of the ways magic and witchcraft were seen in the early modern period. As Gareth Roberts puts it: ‘[t]he devil seduced witches, witches seduced men, witchcraft itself was seduction to and of mankind’.<sup>176</sup>

#### **1.4.1.2. Hecate**

Hecate is another witch who seems to be referred to quite frequently in the early modern period. For one thing, she was believed to be a patroness of black arts. In early modern drama, she was regarded as ‘the Greek and Roman goddess of witchcraft. Associated with the night, the moon, liminal spaces, sorcery, crossroads, magic and the dead, she took a triple or many-faced form.’<sup>177</sup> Her main feature was her threesomeness. She was believed to have three faces: ‘That of these three faces, which was on the right side, was the face and head of a horse, figuring the swiftness of the Moon in ending her revolution. The left was of a dog, noting that when she hideth herself from us she is then *Proserpina* with her hellish hound: the middle was of a boar, signifying her jurisdiction in fields and forests.’<sup>178</sup> These heads were also

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<sup>174</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 200–2

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 204.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 200.

<sup>177</sup> Marion Gibson and Jo Ann Esra, *Shakespeare’s Demonology: A Dictionary* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014), 126.

<sup>178</sup> Thomas Middleton, *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 1126.

imagined as facing in three different directions.<sup>179</sup> Moreover, her threesomeness was pronounced in the fact that she was believed to be three goddesses in one: ‘For, in heaven she is called *Luna*, in the woods *Diana*, under the earth *Hecate*, or *Proserpina*’.<sup>180</sup> Similar to Circe, these forms are closely tied with female sexuality – Luna was associated with maternity, Diana with fertility, and Proserpina with sterility.<sup>181</sup> For this thesis, Hecate is especially important, since she appears as a character in two of the plays I am interested in – *Macbeth* and *The Witch*. Therefore, I am going to analyze some of her appearances in Renaissance works in more depth in another part of this text.

## 1.5. Summary

The aim of this chapter was to provide a comprehensive image of magic and witchcraft. It was explained how magic is understood by scholars, what tools it uses and what rules it follows. The difference between magic and witchcraft was elaborated, based on the categorization by Macfarlane. The development of witchcraft is outlined, and the most important features and forms are described. These include the elite belief in the Sabbath, the gathering of witches in order to make future plans and to copulate with demons, the popular fear of *maleficium*, the witches’ ability to cause harm, and some of the ways how to counter this power. An attention is also paid to the question of gender, since most people at that time were convinced that witchcraft is mainly a matter of women. Lastly, two influential witches, Circe and Hecate, are inspected, for they served as a source for many of the witch-related stereotypes.

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<sup>179</sup> Thomas Middleton, *The Collected Works*, 1127.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 1126.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 1126.

## 2. Early Modern England and Witchcraft

Macfarlane has stated that

English witchcraft appears to be very different from that on the Continent and in Scotland. The methods of detecting and trying witches differed from country to country and, partly as a result of this, the type of person believed to be a witch, the numbers accused, the punishments inflicted, and the myths which surrounded their activities differed.<sup>182</sup>

It is true that in the late medieval times, England was intellectually isolated from the Continent. There was no Inquisition, no Roman Law, and the Papal authority was not strong enough. Because of it, the influence of the *Malleus Maleficarum* spread there relatively slowly.<sup>183</sup> Thus, English writers had to cope with the matter of witchcraft in their own way. Among these writers was Reginald Scot, author of England's first work on demonology and witchcraft,<sup>184</sup> who will be the point of discussion later on. Because of England's isolation, many Anglo-Saxon scholars have assumed that English witchcraft needs be distinguished from that on the Continent. These authors believed that there was a contrast between English persecution, which originated among the ordinary people and which focused on *maleficium*, and the Continental persecution, which concentrated on the demonic pact and was driven by the elites.<sup>185</sup> However, subsequent research has shown that although there are some specifics to English witchcraft, the English experience of witchcraft was not really unique.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 6.

<sup>183</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 522–3.

<sup>184</sup> Philip C. Almond, *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and 'The Discoverie of Witchcraft'* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011), 2. PDF e-book.

<sup>185</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 9–10.

<sup>186</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, xx.

There is, however, a strong case for seeing English witchcraft not as an exception to the Continental model but as a variant of it.<sup>187</sup>

As a result, some aspects can be traced which were specific to the situation in England. As it was mentioned above, it took quite some time for the idea of witchcraft as a devil-worship to arrive to the British Isles. As a consequence, witchcraft was not seen as a heresy but as an activity of doing harm to others by supernatural means.<sup>188</sup> This also meant that in England, witchcraft was prosecuted as an anti-social crime rather than a heresy.<sup>189</sup> Secondly, in the period between 1560 and 1650, England was experiencing a considerable social and economic change, which had a major effect on witchcraft accusations. Besides suffering, two other problems played a big role in witchcraft accusations: poverty and old age. Macfarlane claims that this happened because ‘the informal institutions which had dealt with the old and poor, Church relief, the manorial organization, and neighbourly and kinship ties were strained’.<sup>190</sup> This led to the institution of a national poor laws system in the 1590.<sup>191</sup>

It is apparent that charity was a particularly painful issue for the late sixteenth century English villagers. This led Thomas and Macfarlane to the conclusion that refusal of alms was especially prominent in English witchcraft accusations. Thus, a ‘charity denial’ model, which they deemed to be stereotypical for English witchcraft, was created. According to this model, an impoverished widow/witch asks her wealthy neighbour for a charitable help, is rejected, and curses him as she is leaving. Afterwards, any misfortune happening to the neighbour is blamed on the witch.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 285.

<sup>188</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 525.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

<sup>190</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 205.

<sup>191</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 120.

<sup>192</sup> Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 3.

However, as Marion Gibson found out from studying early modern English pamphlets, a common witchcraft story from the Jacobean period depicted not a refusal of charity, but ‘a charitable generosity rewarded by ingratitude and aggression’, which was typically reported by victims of high social status.<sup>193</sup> Therefore, a claim can be made that the prevailing view of the English witchcraft sees witches as ‘harmless old beggars who had the misfortune to be caught in a changing social system and thus to arouse the guilt of their neighbours’.<sup>194</sup>

As for the political development in relation to witchcraft, there were three Acts of Parliament which specifically aimed at treating witchcraft – in 1542 (repealed in 1547), 1561 (repealed 1604), and 1604 (repealed 1736).<sup>195</sup> What is interesting is that the first two acts did not refer to a diabolical compact and instead put an emphasis on the maleficent nature of the witch’s activities.<sup>196</sup> In Henry VIII’s Act of 1542, it was made a felony, and therefore a capital offence

to conjure spirits or to practise witchcraft, enchantment or sorcery, in order to find treasure; to waste or destroy a person’s body, limbs or goods; to provoke to unlawful love; to declare what had happened to stolen goods; or ‘for any unlawful intent or purpose’.<sup>197</sup>

In 1563, an ‘Act agynst Conjuracions Inchantments and Witchcraftes’ was passed. In this act, the penalty for ‘Invocacon of evill and wicked Spirites, to or for any Intent or Purpose’ and for using ‘Witchcrafte Enchantement Charme or Sorcerie, whereby any p[er]son shall happen to bee killed or destroyed’.<sup>198</sup> This Act was also more lenient than the previous Act, since the gravity of the offence depended upon

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<sup>193</sup> Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 3.

<sup>194</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 65.

<sup>195</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 525.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 525–6.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 525.

<sup>198</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 14.

the degree of the injury suffered by the witch's victim.<sup>199</sup> A reduced penalty was also prescribed for magic designed to find treasure and lost goods, or to provoke to an unlawful love.<sup>200</sup> Thus, a first offence typically resulted only in a year's imprisonment and forfeiture of goods, and second to a life sentence.<sup>201</sup>

This Act was replaced by a new one shortly after James' succession to the throne, which was entitled 'An Act against Conjurat[i]on, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits'.<sup>202</sup> The Act of 1604 was more severe than its predecessor, for injuring a person or his property was punished by death for the first offence instead of the second, and all offences which were previously punished by life sentence after the second offence were now punished by death. Moreover, men were forbidden to 'consult covenant with entertaine employ feede or rewarde any evill and wicked Spirit'.<sup>203</sup> Also, a new offence was added: dead bodies were not to be taken out of their graves 'to be imployed or used in any manner of Witchcrafte, Sorcerie, Charme or Inchantment'.<sup>204</sup>

The matter of the English monarch's attitude towards witchcraft was also quite crucial. When Elizabeth, who was a Protestant, ascended to the English throne, it caused a massive influx of English Protestants who had previously fled. They brought with them the Continental notion of witchcraft and the fear of it.<sup>205</sup> Consequently, the reign of Queen Elizabeth I was a period when witchcraft was persecuted the most. Surviving records suggest that witchcraft prosecutions and executions peaked in the 1580s and 1590s.<sup>206</sup> Moreover, in virtue of Elizabeth's

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<sup>199</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 526.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 526.

<sup>201</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 15.

<sup>202</sup> Marion Gibson, *Witchcraft and Society in England And America, 1550–1750* (London: Continuum, 2003), 5.

<sup>203</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 15.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>205</sup> Almond, *England's First Demonologist*, 14.

<sup>206</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 185.

problematic position politically, she was convinced that witches were interested in removing her from the throne, which led to many trials.<sup>207</sup> How sensitive about witchcraft she was can be depicted by the Act of 1581, which forbade prophesying the queen's future 'by witchcraft, conjurations, or other like unlawful means'.<sup>208</sup> However, even Elizabeth herself was called a witch by the Catholics, for her mother, Anne Boleyn, had been actually accused of witchcraft and everyone knew that witchcraft descended in the female line.<sup>209</sup>

The attitude of King James I was also rather interesting. First, an ardent believer in the practice and dangers of witchcraft, he slowly lost his enthusiasm for persecution.<sup>210</sup> And after he became the king of England, he grew quite sceptical and started seeing witches as frauds or unjustly accused women, helping to save many witches from being sentenced.<sup>211</sup> His interest in witchcraft started during his honeymoon visit to Denmark. As it happened, a group of witches at North Berwick, closely associated to his enemy, the earl of Bothwell, claimed to have raised storms in an attempt to destroy the king.<sup>212</sup> This led to a period of executions in Scotland in which he was personally involved. In 1597, he wrote his *Daemonologie*, a study on demonology and witchcraft, in which he argued for the reality of the Devil and also expressed his belief in divine right monarchy.<sup>213</sup>

Although James I grew sceptical about the reality of witchcraft and even helped save numerous women from being sentenced as witches, for example saving six alleged witches from death at Leicester in 1616, one of the most famous English trials took place during his reign – the Lancashire trial of 1612, concerning witches

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<sup>207</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 185.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>210</sup> Pauline Croft, *King James* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 27. PDF e-book.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 172.

<sup>212</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

from the area around the Pendle Hill. These trials were recorded by Thomas Potts, a clerk participating in the trials, who published the account of the process in his book *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*.<sup>214</sup> During these trials, nineteen persons were tried and most of them convicted and hanged.<sup>215</sup> By far the biggest English witch-hunt happened during the reign of Charles I in years 1645–47, which was conducted by Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne, making it the only English prosecution stimulated from above.<sup>216</sup> These trials claimed between 120 and 200 victims and were special for England for their abnormal proportion of executions, the geographical concentration, and the presence of the witch-finders.<sup>217</sup> There is, however, evidence that most persecutions in England did not originate in a campaign led by clerics and lawyers, but by ordinary people, who seem to have been quite enthusiastic about it.<sup>218</sup>

## **2.1. England's Peculiarities**

Although it has been proven that English witchcraft was not much different from the Continental one, there were some trends which are considered specific for this area.

The first point is that English witch beliefs were not much concerned with the Devil, for the witches were rarely thought to make pacts with the Devil, and to have sexual intercourse with him. What witches were meant to do usually was to inflict harm on their neighbours or their goods.<sup>219</sup> Additionally, the more blatant sexual aspects of witchcraft were an uncommon feature in the English trials, except for the Hopkins period.<sup>220</sup> Although it is true that about 90 percent of suspects were

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<sup>214</sup> Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 1.

<sup>215</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 45.

<sup>216</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 544.

<sup>217</sup> Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 139.

<sup>218</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 546.

<sup>219</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 239.

<sup>220</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 679.

women,<sup>221</sup> it was not as much a reflection of the battle of the sexes as of the economic and social situation. The idea that witches might renounce God and depend upon the Devil, however, was present from the start. The fact was that Elizabethan witches were simply not believed to be in direct touch with Satan.<sup>222</sup> This is evident also in the lack of mentions of the witches' Sabbath, which was rarely mentioned in trials before 1612, and even afterwards only sporadically.<sup>223</sup> English witchcraft, therefore, was neither a religion nor an organization, as malevolent magic was performed by individuals rather than groups at Sabbaths.<sup>224</sup> Nevertheless, it was the fear of maleficium which underlay most of the accusations and trials.<sup>225</sup> An interesting note is that although English *maleficium* was conducted similarly to anywhere else in Europe, the cases of interfering with the weather and 'frustrating sexual relations between human beings' were quite rare.<sup>226</sup>

One of the most typical features of the English witchcraft was the notion of animal familiars, which had long been a staple of English witch beliefs.<sup>227</sup> They believed that a witch possessed a familiar imp or devil, who would take the shape of an animal – a cat, a dog, a toad, a rat, or even a wasp or butterfly – who performed magical services for his mistress and was either given to the witch by the Devil, or purchased or inherited from another witch.<sup>228</sup> These familiars clearly performed in the English witch beliefs the role of the Devil.<sup>229</sup> As Macfarlane observed, 'even in witchcraft, the English obsession with pet-keeping emerged'.<sup>230</sup> They were believed to suck blood from their mistresses through teats in their genitalia, which left on

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<sup>221</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 226.

<sup>222</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 528.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 529

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, 616

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, 534.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 519.

<sup>227</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 248.

<sup>228</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 530.

<sup>229</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 23.

<sup>230</sup> Alan Macfarlane, *Culture of Capitalism* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1987), 248.

them special marks.<sup>231</sup> Thus, English witches were more linked to the witch's mark instead of the Devil's mark – where European witches were demonic lovers, English witches were demonic mothers.<sup>232</sup> The English witch was also sometimes believed to have other physical peculiarities, in addition to the witch's mark. These include the rumours that the hair of a witch could not be cut off, that a witch sitting in bright sunshine would leave no shadow, and that witches could shed no tears.<sup>233</sup>

Lastly, it is important to note that the prevailing stereotype of an English witch as an economically marginal elderly female without a living husband fails to 'embrace fully the diverse, contingent and chaotic circumstances surrounding real accusations'.<sup>234</sup> They were not necessarily the poorest members of the community, but were in general less well off than their accusers. On one hand, they were sufficiently poor to warrant reliance on alms, and on the other, to be suspected of harbouring resentments against those who refused them.<sup>235</sup> Most frequently, accusations were not made randomly, but were targeted against women with whom the victim had recently some dealings and who lived nearby.<sup>236</sup>

On a final note, witchcraft in England drew a great deal of interest among the contemporary elites, as England produced an exceptionally rich witchcraft literature, covering the religious, legal, medical and sociological facets of the topic with remarkable thoroughness.<sup>237</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 249.

<sup>232</sup> Almond, *England's First Demonologist*, 84.

<sup>233</sup> Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 552.

<sup>234</sup> Barry, Hester, Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, 258.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 259.

<sup>237</sup> Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours*, 178.

## 2.2. Reginald Scot

And at this daie it is indifferent to saie in the English toong; She is a witch; or, She is  
a wise woman.

(Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, V, ix)

Reginald Scot is rightfully considered the most radical sceptic of the entire period.<sup>238</sup>

His book entitled *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, published in 1584, was England's first work on the topic of demonology and witchcraft. The English clergyman John Webster named Scot, together with the German physician Johannes Weyer, the two persons who so 'strongly opposed and confuted the many wonderful and incredible actions and power ascribed unto Witches'.<sup>239</sup>

Scot was born in or before 1538 in the village of Smeeth in Kent and died on 15 September 1599. Although he was a gentleman, he was not very wealthy.<sup>240</sup> He was, however, aware of the witch persecutions taking place both in Kent and in England, which were a consequence of the legislation against witches enacted in 1561. He was familiar with many trials which occurred and was convinced that many of the accused women were innocent. Additionally, on the title page of his work, he refers to himself as 'Esquire', which could mean that he was a Justice of the Peace, thus making his interest in witchcraft something more than that of an amateur. Thus, it were the poor and powerless, especially older women, who motivated him to express his opinions. As he wrote in his book,

they which are commonlie accused of witchcraft, are at the least sufficient of  
all other persons to speake for themselves; as having the most base and simple  
education of all others; the extremitie of their age giving them leave to dote,

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<sup>238</sup> Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, 211.

<sup>239</sup> John Webster, *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (London, 1677), 9.

<sup>240</sup> Almond, *England's First Demonologist*, 11–12.

their povertie to beg, their wrongs to chide and threaten (as being void of any other waie of revenge), their humour melancholicall to be full of imaginations, from whence cheeflie proceedeth the vanitie of their confessions...<sup>241</sup>

Scot, however, did not deny the reality of witches. He believed in the Bible, which mentions the word ‘witch’ several times. Yet his witches were different from those who made an appearance in the Bible, as he denied them the attribution of those powers which belong only to God. Nor did he cede to witches the power to do good.<sup>242</sup> His scepticism about witchcraft was ‘grounded in the doctrine of divine providence, and in the conviction that the belief in witchcraft was a genuine failure of faith’.<sup>243</sup>

Reginald Scot was also a firm believer in the fact that to cry ‘witch’ was to create one. He had no doubt that if the number of witch-hunters was reduced, the number of witches would diminish as well. With reference to *Malleus Maleficarum*, he wrote that ‘[these] are no jestes, for they be written by them that were and are judges upon the lives and deaths of those persons’.<sup>244</sup> He also asked ‘whether the evidence be not frivolous, & whether the proofs brought against them be not incredible, consisting of gheses, presumptions, & impossibilities contrarie to reason, scripture and nature’.<sup>245</sup> Contrary to other demonologists who were driven by a will to believe, Scot was driven by a will to unbelieve.<sup>246</sup>

Scot also recognized that the power of witchcraft was as dependent upon its customers as it was upon its suppliers. He blamed those who sought the services as well as those who provided them. He also provided an explanation of why witchcraft

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<sup>241</sup> Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), Epistle, xxiii.

<sup>242</sup> Almond, *England’s First Demonologist*, 29.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>244</sup> Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, IV, iv (62). Page references are to the modern edition by Brinsley Nicholson (London, 1886).

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, Epistle, xiii.

<sup>246</sup> Almond, *England’s First Demonologist*, 79.

had such an influence on the common people. He believed they have been infatuated ‘by poets, liars, and couseners, bewitched by tales told by old, doting women, their mothers’ maids and morrow masse preests, and have so unthinkably and uncritically accepted all of it over such a long period of time “that they thinke it heresie to doubt in anie part of the matter”’.<sup>247</sup> For him, his greatest adversaries were ‘yoong ignorance and old custome’.<sup>248</sup>

Moreover, he also played an important part in creating a stereotype of a witch. As he put it,

one sort of such as are said to bee witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious, and papists; or such as knowe no religion: in whose drousie minds the divell hath gotten a fine seat... They are leane and deformed, shewing melancholie in their faces... They are doting, scolds, mad, divellish... These miserable wretches are so odious unto all their neighbors, and so feared, as few dare offend them or denie them anie thing they aske... These go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe; without the which they could hardlie live... It falleth out many times that neither their necessities, nor their expectation is answered or served... Thus, in the processe of time they have all displeased hir, and she hath wished evill lucke unto them all; perhaps with curses and imprecations made in forme.<sup>249</sup>

While Scot accepted the fact that women were more likely to be deluded into thinking that they had witchcraft powers, he denied the existence of supernatural

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<sup>247</sup> Almond, *England's First Demonologist*, 53.

<sup>248</sup> Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Epistle, xiv.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, I, iii (5–6).

powers.<sup>250</sup> Thus, he had to come up with an explanation why women were more likely to come deludedly to believe in such powers. His solution was to explain these delusions through melancholy, the dominance of black bile in the body, which was seen as a flaw in the imagination.<sup>251</sup> For him, the falsity of voluntarily made confessions arising from melancholy was reinforced not only by the natural impossibility of those things which witches claimed to do, but by the improbability of their having done so.<sup>252</sup> Moreover, women were more likely to be witches because they had greater inner rage than men and were less able to moderate their fury, as their capacity to rage was exacerbated by their menstrual cycle.<sup>253</sup> Thus, Scot explains witchcraft ‘as the outcome of a disordering of the witch’s body and mind’ – as a mental illness.<sup>254</sup>

Lastly, one thing which Reginald Scot did not intend to do but which he unintentionally caused needs to be mentioned. Despite his best intentions, his work had been used as a popular source of magic shortly after its publication, because he included there long lists of magic charms and rituals, ‘sufficient to enable any aspiring cunning person to set up shop in a professional way’.<sup>255</sup>

### **2.3. Witchcraft as a Stage Topic**

It has been already shown that, according to the records, witchcraft prosecutions peaked under Elizabeth, began to decline under James, and declined even more under Charles. This pattern, however, does not correlate with the treatment of witchcraft as a stage topic at all. While Elizabethan stage was almost silent about witches as the

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<sup>250</sup> Almond, *England’s First Demonologist*, 59.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>254</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 65.

<sup>255</sup> Almond, *England’s First Demonologist*, 146.

nation and the court were quite busy dealing with them, Jacobean stage was preoccupied with witches just as the nation was losing interest in them.<sup>256</sup> Therefore, plays concerning witches were not too popular until their boom in 1597. This was followed by another boom around 1611, and then around the Lancashire witch-trials in 1633.<sup>257</sup> What enabled the witch-plays to be staged was probably the fact that the tensions around the figure of Queen Elizabeth were finally resolved and it was no longer necessary to worry about portraying a powerful but evil female figure.<sup>258</sup>

Playwrights, however, perceived in witchcraft mainly its potential for theatricality, for it frequently involved reciting lines, opening books, acting out rituals, using props, etc.<sup>259</sup> On the other hand, staging witchcraft could also prove to be quite problematic, for many people still believed that all incantations involve interactions with the powers of darkness. For example, during a staging of *Dr Faustus*, the actors fled because they were convinced that there were one too many devils among them.<sup>260</sup> Also, witchcraft was used as a weapon for the opponents of the theatre, who claimed that ‘plays were first invented by the Devil’, and that ‘only men enchanted by Circe or Medea would dress as women’.<sup>261</sup>

The way playwrights dealt with witchcraft was quite varied, for they did not have much idea about popular belief structures, and thus did not stick to a popular understanding of the witch. Consequently, their plays do not reflect any single discourse on witchcraft but manufacture many literary witches on their own.<sup>262</sup> What this caused was for the gap between the popular and elite culture to widen.

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<sup>256</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 184.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 180–1.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 185, 194.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

The stage witch first emerged during the Elizabethan period from a mass of supernatural figures: sorcerers and sorceresses, classical witches, wise women, prophetesses and fairies.<sup>263</sup> Therefore, people were not interested in their fate much, since they perceived them as only one of the many supernatural characters who could be used to further the plot. Because the popular culture did not have a clear definition of a 'witch', it was the elite who tried to make witches distinct from other supernatural figures. Playwrights reflected their effort, and by the end of the sixteenth century, a witch emerges as a clear and recognizable stage 'type'.<sup>264</sup> *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* had much to do with it, as it became a source for Shakespeare, who used witchcraft in every one of his plays, be it as a topic, a metaphor, a joke, a story, a half-formulated reference point, a piece of the plot.<sup>265</sup>

It was suggested that playwrights of the Elizabethan era had to be extremely cautious about their portrayal of witches and magic. These plays include John Lyly's *Endimion, or the Man in the Moon*, the most classical of Elizabethan witch-plays, and *Mother Bombie*; Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, in which the character of friar Bacon is a necromancer, and also *Alphonsus* and *Orlando Furioso*, two plays with witches portrayed in a very classical way;<sup>266</sup> another play worth mentioning here is Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus*, in which magic and the Devil play a very essential role.

During the reign of King James, witchcraft was frequently treated in masques, a form involving a lot of singing, dancing and acting; and also antimasques, which were initiated by James' wife Anne of Denmark. Of these the most famous example is Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens*. For Jonson, witches represent opposition,

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<sup>263</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 183.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*, 187–9.

and so he casts them into the space of otherness.<sup>267</sup> Besides the plays I am going to write about in the next chapter, another influential example, which to some extent deals with the topic of witchcraft, is John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*.

As far as William Shakespeare is concerned, he had the opportunity to be active during the reign of both Elizabeth and James. Thus, he could serve as a prime example of the development of witchcraft in English drama. From the Elizabethan period, his *Henry VI, Part I* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor* could be mentioned. In the former, the character of Joan la Pucelle (Joan of Arc) is believed to be a witch, and in the latter, John Falstaff, when disguised as 'the fat woman of Brentford', is called a witch several times. His plays from the reign of James include *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*, his two plays in which characters are actually accused of witchcraft. In the first, Othello is accused of enchanting Desdemona, for her father is convinced only witchcraft could be the cause of her infatuation with him; in the second, Paulina, Sicilian noblewoman and a close friend of the queen, is called a witch after she brings to King Leontes his daughter, whom he rejects as a bastard.

## **2.4. Summary**

In spite of the fact that England's witchcraft is not as different from the one on the Continent, it still possesses a number of features which are typical for this region, a fact which can be attributed to the isolation of the British Isles. These include the popularity of animal familiars, the 'charity denial' model of witchcraft, and the England-specific witch's mark. As a result of the isolation, the book of a sceptic named Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of witchcraft*, became the first major work on witchcraft in England and served as a source and inspiration for many writers and scholars. England underwent a major change in the treatment of witchcraft after the

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<sup>267</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 202.

change of rulers, for the Elizabethan period was a time of the greatest persecutions, while the reign of the Stuart monarchs is marked by an increasing scepticism. The popularity of the witch-plays, however, does not reflect this development, for they are scarce during the reign of Elizabeth I and are increasingly more popular once James I ascends the throne.

### 3. Witchcraft in the Selected Plays

In this chapter, I intend to analyze four plays in which witches and witchcraft played a vital part – Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616), *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) by Rowley, Dekker and Ford, and *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1633) by Heywood and Brome. As it happens, each of these plays represents a different decade, with the first three plays being created under the rule of James I, and the fourth during the reign of his son, Charles I. This could potentially demonstrate how this topic was treated in the English drama as the time went on, because, as I tried to show in Chapter 2.3, the perception of witchcraft in reality and on the stage went in two opposite directions. There can, however, be seen a surge of interest in this topic during the times of larger-scale persecutions, which could explain the emergence of witchcraft plays based on real events. These are represented by the last two plays listed.

My goal in this chapter is to find out how witches were portrayed in these plays: what was their appearance, their role in the plot, what they aimed to achieve, what they actually achieved, and how they ended up. I want to compare these findings with what I learned about witchcraft, as I have described it in Chapters 1 and 2. After this comparison, it should be evident whether the authors based their knowledge on a prevailing stereotype of witchcraft or some part/s of this stereotype, or if they came up with their own version of witchcraft, meant specifically to appease the audience.

### 3.1. *Macbeth*

Fair is foul and foul is fair:  
Hover through the fog and filthy air.

(*Macbeth*, 1.1.11–12)

*Macbeth* is probably Shakespeare's most Jacobean play – it is set in Scotland, it is interested in witches, and depicts the Stuarts' ancestor Baquo (the passage about Banquo's heirs in Act 4, Scene 1 is actually a tribute to King James).<sup>268</sup> Its creation was also most likely sparked by the attempt to kill the king on November 5, 1605, called the Gunpowder Plot.<sup>269</sup>

Not only is the play dealing with the supernatural forces, but it is itself believed to have a power on its own, for many people believe that it is cursed. The basis for this is the rumour that Shakespeare included in the play several incantations taken from an authentic black-magic ritual. This made some people exceptionally displeased with him, which led them to place a curse on all the productions of the play. Ever since then, the list of catastrophes accompanying the play grew longer and longer. It went so far that simply saying the name of the play inside a theatre is believed to lead to an inevitable disaster and an immediate counter-action must be performed in order to nullify it.<sup>270</sup>

The witchcraft in this play is portrayed mainly by the characters of the three witches, but they are not the only ones, as the character of Hecate also makes an appearance, and not an insignificant one. Moreover, the character of Lady Macbeth also shows signs of being connected to witchcraft. Therefore, my focus will be on all of them.

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<sup>268</sup>Michael Dobson and Stanley Wells, *The Oxford Companion to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 271.

<sup>269</sup>A.L. Rowse, *The Annotated Shakespeare* (New York: Greenwich House, 1988), 1948.

<sup>270</sup>Robert Faires, "The Curse of the Play," *The Austin Chronicle* (October 13, 2000), accessed April 24, 2018.

In my analysis, I will be using the version of the play included in *The Annotated Shakespeare*, edited by A.L. Rowse.

### **3.1.1. The Weird Sisters**

The three witches in the play, also called the ‘Weird Sisters’, make their presence known to the audience right from the beginning. In the first scene, they are shown planning their next move, their next mischief. This scene sets the tone not only for the further portrayal of the three witches, but for the entire play, for within the first four lines of the play, it foreshadows what is going to happen:

***First Witch.*** When shall we three meet again

In thunder, lightning or in rain?

***Second Witch.*** When the hurlyburly’s done,

When the battle’s lost and won. (1.1.1–4)

The first act also shows quite a bit about the witches themselves. Apart from their apparent enjoyment of chaos and turmoil, they also reveal the existence of their familiars – Graymalkin, a cat, and Paddock, a toad. It is no surprise that cats and toads were believed to be probably the two most common animal familiars. Moreover, the witches are portrayed leaving the scene together, by the means of flying. This is something which becomes typical for them throughout the play, as they are always shown leaving together in a mysterious way. After their two meetings with Macbeth, they vanish unseen into the air, which leaves Macbeth quite perplexed.

In scene 3 of the same act, the Weird Sisters appear again, this time to meet Macbeth. Before that happens, the audience is given a glimpse of what they have been doing in the meantime. While one sister was killing swine, another was insulted

after asking a sailor's wife to give her some chestnuts, and as a consequence has been planning her revenge on the sailor, with which her sisters are more than happy to help. This is an excellent example of the refusal of charity leading to a curse by the witch, although in this case it seems that the witches are much more proactive and are going to personally arrange that the sailor is going to have a hard time on the sea, although the curse is present as well. The swine-killing, although mentioned only in one brief sentence, depicts what was many villagers' experience with witchcraft. They were not preoccupied with prophecies, potions, or conjurations, but with them being hurt or their property being damaged. The first witch going around the village and killing other people's swine portrays just that, although in her case she does not seem to have any motive for this act, which in reality was rare.

After their conversation, the witches celebrate Macbeth's arrival by a dance:

*All.* The weird sisters, hand in hand,  
Posters of the sea and land,  
Thus do go about, about:  
Thrice to thine and thrice to mine  
And thrice again to make up nine. (1.3.32–6)

The symbolism which numbers have for the witches becomes apparent by now, as many actions and chants need to be repeated a certain number of times to be successful. During the dance, numbers three and nine are mentioned, while in the sailor's curse (1.3.21–5), number nine plays a prominent role.

When Macbeth and Banquo finally come across the sisters, Banquo cannot hide his disgust at their appearance, claiming they 'look not like the inhabitants o' the earth' and describing them as having rough fingers, skinny lips and beards. Although the description is not very detailed, many similarities with a popular image

of the witch can be seen – the Weird Sisters are said to be ugly and old. Although bearded women were likely not frequent, if they appeared at all, in the popular belief they were automatically considered witches.

The witches' prophecy, which sets the events of the play into motion, is initially looking quite harmless, for they simply greet Macbeth, giving him titles he does not yet have. Similar thing applies for Banquo as well. They are, however, being quite evasive in everything they say and when the two warriors inquire to know more, they disappear. Although no magic is at work here, the power which words have is quite tangible. It is the words which are the cause of everything that transpires later on in the play, and not witchcraft. The fact that they were uttered by witches, however, probably gave them much more credibility than if Macbeth heard them from anyone else. It is Banquo who is questioning what they have just heard and contemplating whether it can be attributed to eating 'the insane root/That takes the mind prisoner' (1.3.84–5). His doubt does not end with this thought, as he continues with this contemplation:

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,  
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,  
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's  
In deepest consequence. (1.3.123–6)

Thus far, the Weird Sisters were shown as creators of mischief without having to actively do anything. Their power lies in their evil intentions and their words, which are taken extremely seriously by Macbeth. The effect of their words, however, can be related to *maleficium*, as it was perceived by the contemporary audience. It was already mentioned that believing in the witch's ability to do evil could give her real power through 'psychosomatically induced symptoms'. This

implies that all that the witches had to do was to say that Macbeth will be a king and he will consequently do everything in his power to make it happen. He would act as if he was bewitched.

It is evident from the first scene of the play that the witches enjoy bad weather and seem to be accompanied by it. It makes sense, therefore, to attribute the sudden changes of weather accompanying the ominous events which are about to happen to the witches as well. This would make it another one of their indirect interventions. It would also reflect their distorted sense of humour, which is once again something which is attributed to evil characters, including witches. Prime example of the weather giving bad omens can be found in Act 2, Scene 3, in Lennox's report, just before King Duncan is killed by Macbeth:

*Len.* The night has been unruly: where we lay,  
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,  
Lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death,  
And prophesying with accents terrible  
Of dire combustion and confused events  
New hatch'd to the woeful time: the obscure bird  
Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth  
Was feverous and did shake. (2.3.54–61)

The fourth act begins with what is likely one of the most famous witchcraft scenes. The cauldron scene incorporates many features of a magical rite, which is something which was closely tied to witchcraft, although mostly through the Continental notion of the Sabbath. The first thing to note is that this scene takes place in a cavern. It was already mentioned that magical rites usually take place at secluded and far-away places, which is exactly the case here. Secondly, the rite itself involves many aspects

which were mentioned in Chapter 1.1.1. First of all, there is the cauldron, one of the most typical tools used during a magical rite. The list of ingredients thrown into the cauldron is substantial, consisting in large part of the body parts of repulsive animals. There are, however, some ingredients which suggest that the final product will be especially evil in nature, mainly the ‘Finger of a birth-strangled babe/Ditch deliver’d by a drab’ (4.1.30–1). A baby delivered in a ditch was most likely to be unbaptized, and unbaptized children were extremely valued by witches, because of their vulnerability to evil, and were used for their potions. At Sabbaths, such babies were said to be boiled to make ointments used for flying.<sup>271</sup> The act of casting ingredients into the cauldron is accompanied by an incantation, which consists of the list of ingredients being said aloud by the witches, with the most memorable part ‘Double, double toil and trouble/Fire burn and cauldron bubble’ being repeated three times. The number three plays once again an important role, as it can be also traced in the number of omens which announce it is time for the ritual and in the number of conjurations which Macbeth witnesses when meeting the Weird Sisters for the second time.

The final product of this ritual is a potion whose purpose is to produce prophecies meant to lead Macbeth to his downfall. When Macbeth finally appears, he starts by calling the witches ‘secret, black, and midnight hags’ (4.1.48). When he demands answers for his questions, he is offered to hear them from the witches’ masters, who are apparitions conjured from the cauldron. Through these, the witches are once again playing with Macbeth’s mind and deluding him into a false sense of security. Their role as manipulators and mischief makers is thus highlighted for the second time. They are, however, using a different method, for Macbeth hearing the

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<sup>271</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 211–12.

messages from the apparitions rather than from them makes the prophecies much more powerful. This time, Macbeth is not only told how to avoid a certain doom, but the message is accompanied by a vision which suggests how it is eventually going to end. Macbeth, though, seems to misunderstand or ignore these visual messages and, therefore, does not know that the witches are playing tricks with him. It is only a few moments before his death that he realizes his mistake:

*Macb.* Accursed be the tongue that tells me so,  
For it hath cow'd my better part of man!  
And be these juggling fiends no more believed,  
That palter with us in a double sense; (5.8.17–20)

There is one more thing to be said about the cauldron scene in relation to witchcraft and womanhood. The scene could be understood as a representation of women as housewives in the early modern period, which involved cooking and taking care of babies. The rite itself is quite similar to the act of cooking, as the incantation resembles a recipe. It is chanted in rhyme, as were many books of housewifery in that period.<sup>272</sup> This made it easier to memorize them. The baby in the scene is already dead, which can be related to the notion of a witch as a bad mother and someone who brings death into the household.

### 3.1.2. Hecate

When Hecate makes her first appearance in the play, she seems to be disappointed with the three witches. The chief reason for this is that they did not involve her in the Macbeth affair, although she is also upset that they chose someone so unreliable as their target. Because she is their mistress and presumably the most powerful witch of

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<sup>272</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 212.

all, she offers them help to make sure Macbeth does his part. She is shown to be more knowledgeable than the witches, since she tells them that he will come to them to learn about his destiny, and orders them to prepare their mind-altering spells and charms. Her role in the upcoming meeting is going to be crucial, as she has the most important task of them all:

I am for the air; this night I'll spend  
Unto a dismal and a fatal end:  
Great business must be wrought ere noon:  
Upon the corner of the moon  
There hangs a vaporous drop profound;  
I'll catch it ere it come to ground:  
And that distill'd by magic sleights  
Shall raise such artificial sprites  
As by the strength of their illusion  
Shall draw him on to his confusion: (3.5.20–29)

After she divulges her plan to the witches, she sings a song ('Come away, come away') and then disappears to meet her familiar spirit.

Her next appearance is during the cauldron scene, where she commends the witches for their work and encourages them to sing another song with her ('Black spirits'), which will make all that they put into the cauldron enchanted, and then disappears once again.

These two songs also appear in Middleton's *The Witch*. It is possible that it was him who added them to the original text,<sup>273</sup> since Shakespeare scholars came to

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<sup>273</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 214.

the conclusion that at least the second Hecate's appearance was added after the play was written.<sup>274</sup>

### 3.1.3. Lady Macbeth

Although Lady Macbeth is not a witch, she is not portrayed as a traditional woman either. She is shown as a manipulative person who has a control over her husband. She also seems to want to get rid of her sexuality and her ability to have children. This is similar to the situation of witches, who are also perceived as 'unsexed', mainly by old age.<sup>275</sup> Lady Macbeth is not old, however, and thus is asking supernatural powers to do this job for her. Her speech is the only invocation to the powers of darkness in the play:

Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-ful  
Of direst cruelty! make thick my blood;  
Stop up the access and passage to remorse,  
That no compunctious visitings of nature  
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between  
The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,  
And take my milk for gall, your murdering ministers, (1.5.41–9)

Moreover, a moments before she decides to take her own life in the final act, she is shown trying to wash her blood-stained hands, but is unsuccessful, because the murder cannot be wiped out. These blood spots could be interpreted as a form of a witch's mark, which is not only a sucking place for familiars, but could also appear

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<sup>274</sup> <http://shakespeare-navigators.com/macbeth/T41.html>. Accessed April 26, 2018.

<sup>275</sup> Levack, *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft*, 131.

in the form of unexplainable bruises or wounds. Therefore, before her death, Lady Macbeth could have been marked as a witch, or at least though herself to be one.

#### 3.1.4. Summary

The witches in *Macbeth* are distinguished from other characters in several ways. Firstly, they all speak in rhyming couplets, mostly short in length. This applies not only for the Weird Sisters, but for Hecate as well, although her lines seem to be a little longer, which may be a sign of her superior powers. Secondly, the witches seem to be the only characters without a specific goal in mind, their purpose being only to cause mischief and chaos, which is a source of fun for them. This is highlighted by their seemingly random choice of Macbeth as their victim, which is implied from the speech Hecate gives them in Act 4, Scene 5. Thirdly, they are easily distinguished from others by their appearance, despite the fact that not much information is given it.

There is one instance, however, of them being treated more or less like regular commoners. During their first meeting with Macbeth and Banquo, the two warriors are not afraid of them in the slightest, and do not seem to acknowledge them for being more than three old women. In Banquo's case, this may be attributed to the influence of King James, who, by the time the play was written, was becoming rather sceptical about the reality of witchcraft, and Banquo is supposed to have been his predecessor. Banquo is also much more cautious about believing what they are saying than Macbeth is. Macbeth, on the other hand, seems to be disturbed only by their sudden vanishings.

It was already mentioned that Shakespeare was, as far as witchcraft is concerned, heavily influenced by *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* and most likely by James' *Daemonologie* as well. He, however, seems to stray far away from

*Daemonologie*'s continental notion of witchcraft, with the emphasis on the diabolical pact, as this theme is nowhere to be seen in the play. Moreover, *Macbeth*'s witches seem to be mostly a combination of randomly chosen pieces of witch-lore, as they do not conform to either the popular or the elite image of witchcraft. They are not portrayed as the annoying neighbours, as the common people experienced them to be, although they are still at least occasionally killing livestock and begging for food. While the witches are not associated with the Devil, which was what the elite feared most, their prophecies are more connected to the elite culture, especially the English monarchs. For Elizabeth, prophecies were so dangerous that she banned them altogether, while for James, it were the questions of meaning and truth that he had begun to understand as central to witchcraft.<sup>276</sup>

In conclusion, the witches in *Macbeth* do not seem to be portrayed in one specific way, and although all the individual pieces of information are based on contemporary witch-lore, together they are meant mainly to create a sensation and appease the higher classes, especially the king.

### 3.2. *The Witch*

Now I go, now I fly,  
Malkin, my sweet spirit, and I.

(*The Witch*, 3.3.59–60)

Thomas Middleton wrote *The Witch* in a time when witchcraft plays were drawing much attention. He attempted to use this witch-vogue, initiated by Jonson's *The Masque of Queens* and continued by *Macbeth*, to his advantage. The play, however, did not achieve much success, despite the fact Middleton chose similar approach as

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<sup>276</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 207.

the plays which were successful. Moreover, he incorporated into the play real events, namely the Essex divorce and the Overbury poisoning trial, both being related to a person named Frances Howard.<sup>277</sup> It was, perhaps, because of the fact that the play was not seen as original and only as a recapitulation of a story from somewhere else, that it did not draw much attention.

Although this comedy is entitled *The Witch*, the witch Hecate is involved in only one of the three plots of the play, in which Sebastian procures from her a spell which is supposed to help him win the favour of his married lover. The rest of the plot is based on the story of Frances Howard, a twice married noblewoman, who was in 1616 tried for the poisoning of Sir Thomas Overbury. More importantly, her name was also linked with witchcraft, as there were rumours that in 1613 she had sought out a wise woman in order to get rid of her husband, the Earl of Essex, and be able to marry the Earl of Somerset.<sup>278</sup> She was also believed to have resorted to cunning men and women in the matters of causing impotence to her husband, procuring the love of the Earl of Somerset, and obtaining poisons.<sup>279</sup>

I will be using the version of the play included in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, edited by Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino.

### **3.2.1. Hecate and Her Coven**

Hecate is not the only witch in the play, for she leads her own coven, consisting of four other witches: Stadlin, Hoppo, Hellwayn, and Puckle.<sup>280</sup> She is a mortal woman whose life is magically prolonged to last 120 years, with her having three years left. She also has a son called Firestone, who serves as the play's clown, and a familiar spirit in the form of a cat, named Malkin.

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<sup>277</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 214–15.

<sup>278</sup> Thomas Middleton, *Collected Works*, 1124.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 1125.

<sup>280</sup> These names come from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, VII, v and VII, xv.

The existence of witches seems to be a general knowledge in this play, as they are mentioned in the first scene of Act 1 by a gentleman named Almachildes, who is in need of their charms and tricks to help him in his love affair. He seems to know where they reside as well, so they already must have a reputation by this point. It is not Almachildes, however, who is the first visitor to the witches' house, but Sebastian. He comes to them also in a love-related issue, for he needs them to part his love, Isabella, from her husband Antonio. Sebastian immediately expresses his unwillingness to 'enter this damned place', being aware that witches are wretched things. He is, however, in such a dire situation that he has 'no spare time to fear [Hecate]'. His bold request makes such an impression on Hecate, that she agrees to help him, seemingly for free. She offers him the skins of snakes and serpents, which, when knit with charmed knots and conveyed to the desired house, will make sure that 'neither the man begets nor woman breeds'. It is not in her power, however, to part them utterly immediately:

We cannot disjoin wedlock:

'Tis of heaven's fast'ning. Well may we arise jars,

Jealousies, strifes, and heart-burning disagreements,

Like a thick scurf o'er life, as did our master

Upon that patient miracle; but the work itself

Our power cannot disjoint. (1.2.170–5)

The miracle she is referring to is one of the diabolically inflicted sufferings of Job, to whose story Reginald Scot paid extended attention. Nevertheless, it is the first sign that her power is not unlimited. When Sebastian leaves, Hecate elaborates on why she helped him:

I know he loves me not, nor there's no hope on't.

'Tis for the love of mischief I do this;

And that we're sworn to—the first oath we take. (1.2.179–81)

Shortly afterwards, Almachildes makes his appearance at Hecate's cottage. Hecate seems excited by his arrival, for he is 'the man that [she] lusted to enjoy'. Almachildes, similarly to Sebastian, starts by insulting the witches. Additionally, he appears to be inebriated, probably to make himself bolder for the visit. Hecate, however, is not disconcerted by his behaviour, and even starts flattering him. She offers him many types of love-charms, including a potion from a remora, a sucking fish, and the bones of a green frog. Here, Middleton is clearly using information from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*:

'The toies, which are said to procure love, and are exhibited in their poisoning cups, are these: the haire growing in the nethermost part of a wolves taile, a wolves yard, a little fish called *Remora*, the braine of a cat, of a newt, or of a lizzard: the bone of a greene frog, the flesh thereof being consumed with pismers or ants...'<sup>281</sup>

To repay Hecate for her services, Almachildes gives her a few toads in marzipan. It is a rather poor repayment, but Hecate is pleased by it and even offers him to sup with her. Almachildes's reply is related to one of the witch stereotypes, for he says: 'Dost think I'll eat fried rats/And pickled spiders?' (1.2.225–6). To this, Hecate reacts by conjuring a worthy supper, happy that Almachildes is going to stay.

Act 1, Scene 2, provides insight into Hecate's activities as a witch even before she is visited by Sebastian and Almachildes. Hecate makes her first

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<sup>281</sup> Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, VI, vii (98).

appearance in the play equipped with serpents and a human infant. Moreover, her first lines constitute an incantation of spirits:

Titty and Tiffin, Sucking

And Pidgin, Liard and Robin!

White spirits, black spirits, grey spirits, red spirits!

Devil-toad, devil-ram, devil-cat, and devil-dam!<sup>282</sup> (1.2.1–4)

Afterwards, she begins making preparations for the witches' flight in the witching hour, when the moon rises and the witches take to the sky. This includes tending the flames, putting the serpents in a brazen dish, boiling the 'unbaptized brat' and preserving its fat, as it is the essential ingredient in the ointment which makes them fly. Hecate does not see flying only as a form of travelling, for she says that 'When hundred leagues in air we feast, and sing/Dance, kiss, and coll, use every thing' (1.2.25–6). This whole concept is once again taken from Scot.<sup>283</sup>

Another one of Hecate's agendas is concerned with her revenge. She had been denied 'often flour, barm and milk, goose-grease and tar, when [she] ne'er hurt their charmings, their brewlocks, nor their batches, nor forespoke any of their breedings' by some farmer and his wife. This implies that the two were aware of her being a witch, and refused to be charitable towards her despite the fact that she did no harm to them. This was clearly a mistake, for Hecate has already started bewitching their livestock. Moreover, she is planning to hex the farmer and his wife as well, since she has ordered Stadlin to put their picture into the fire and to stick

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<sup>282</sup> This incantation comes from Chapter 33 of *A Discourse of duels and spirits*, which Reginald Scot appended to *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.

<sup>283</sup> Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, III, i (31–2); Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, X, viii (148).

magic needles into a heart of wax.<sup>284</sup> This nicely portrays what was perceived as a typical English rural witchcraft, based on the refusal of charity.

The Devil is also mentioned for the first time, as it is hinted that Hecate had made a pact with him in exchange for her powers and long life, which is supposed to last 120 years. This is reiterated in her son's exclamation: 'Truly the devils's in her'. On one hand, he is well aware of her being a villain, but on the other, he seems to be of the same mould, for he asks her to give him leave to 'ramble abroad tonight, with the nightmare, for I have a great mind to overlay a fat person's daughter'. This request reveals their incestuous relationship, for Hecate laments:

You're a kind son;

But 'tis the nature of you all, I see that.

You had rather hunt after strange women still

Than lie with your own mothers. Get thee gone. (1.2.95–8)

Instead of her son, she is to lie with her familiar cat this night. It appears that although women were believed to be incredibly lustful in the early modern society, Hecate is surpassing all expectation. Whether this is a part of her being a witch, or simply a character trait, is hard to tell. It seems, however, to have been passed on to her son as well.

Just before Sebastian appears, she starts chanting another incantation involving names of many supernatural creatures, and sinks into a trance.<sup>285</sup> When Sebastian asks for her help, she starts by displaying some of the powers she and her fellow witches have, namely their ability to raise storms, harm cattle and damage property.

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<sup>284</sup> Again inspired by Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, XII, xvi (208–10).

<sup>285</sup> This time borrowed from Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, VII, xv (122).

Thus far, the picture of Hecate and her powers has been presented in this scene in a detailed fashion. Although other people contempt her, she seems to be dealing with the fact quite well. She and the witches in her coven are capable of a great amount of maleficent spells, a fact which is highlighted by the fact that she is 117 years old. As it was mentioned in Chapter 1.4, witches get more powerful the longer they practice the art, which would make Hecate an extremely experienced and powerful witch. Moreover, the witches seem to be interested in large part in harming the common folk, a fact which is corresponding with the idea of witches being mainly annoying neighbours. Hecate also appears to be rather lustful, since she expressed desire for both of her visitors and also embarks on sexual adventures during her flights.

After Almachildes's return from his visit of the witches, he recalls that by the time he got back to his lodging, he already felt 'as hungry as a tired foot-post', despite the fact that the witch made him eat some of every dish. This indicates that all the food which Hecate conjured to persuade him to stay there was merely an illusion, although one masterly done. The charm which he received from Hecate, on the other hand, seems to be no illusion at all, for it has an effect on Amoretta shortly after he slips it into the bodice of her dress. After he leaves, she realizes how much she is fond of him. However, this does not last for long, as shortly afterwards the charms falls to the floor. The person who picks it up is the Duchess, whose name happens to be Amoretta as well. Since the charms seem to work on anyone named Amoretta, it is the Duchess who is under the love spell now. The fact that the magical charm does not work exactly as intended is one of the comical aspects of the play and should be attributed mainly to this fact, although it is likely that it also reflects a general distrust towards witchcraft, for the powers come from the Devil,

who is a well-known trickster. When Almachildes returns, unaware of what has transpired in his absence, he starts conversing with Amoretta, hoping that the charm is already in effect. If it does not, he claims there must be the devil in it and that he will never trust a witch anymore, nor sup with them the next twelve month. It appears that he is not ignorant of the possibility of him being tricked. His wish seems to have come true, as Amoretta had decided to deceive him and appears to be infatuated by him.

Hecate's spell for Sebastian is also not behaving quite as was expected, for her impotency charm appears to impede Antonio's ability to be sexually involved with Isabella only. This fact soon raises suspicion, since Antonio is having a mistress, and Isabella, being irritated by her impotent husband, decides to expose him.

The second time Hecate and her coven make an appearance in the play, they are getting ready for a night-time flight. As the witches are gathering, Stadlin discloses that on her way, she had an encounter with a bat, who hung at her lip three times and drank her fill. As the witches sans Hecate are taking off, Sunstone remarks that the topic of their conversation is all related to fowls, and that the witches themselves will be a 'company of foul sluts', once again connecting their night journeys with sexual activity. He also indicates that some people are probably going to die tonight. Hecate, who is still on the ground, inquires from Sunstone what ingredients he has obtained, although it is not explained for what purpose. The contents of his basket include some eggs and herbs known for their use in medicine, which were all cropped by moonlight, as it increases their magical powers. The herbs reflect the witchcraft's inversion, as herbs used for curing sicknesses are in the hands of the witches going to be used to achieve evil ends. After this conversation, the

witches start singing ‘Come away, come away’, a song which appeared also in *Macbeth*. This time, though, the entire text of the song is presented. During the song, Malkin, ‘a spirit like a cat’ descends and joins Hecate. Their sexual relationship is suggested in the lines: ‘There’s one comes down to fetch his dues/A kiss, a coll, a sip of blood’ (3.3.49–50). Moreover, the idea that familiars drink the blood of their mistresses is apparent here. As the witches fly away, they express their joy

To ride in the air

When the moon shines fair

And sing and dance and toy and kiss! (3.3.62–4)

The third, and last, time Hecate appears in the play is when the Duchess is in need of her help, for she has grown tired of Almalchides and wants to get rid of him. This indicates that the charm must have stopped working at some point. In this scene, which resembles *Macbeth*’s cauldrons scene, Hecate is described to enter with ‘necromantic equipment, including a cauldron’. As for Almachildes, the Duchess requires a death sudden and subtle, which Hecate offers in the way of making his picture out of wax and burning it in a blue fire kindled with dead man’s eyes. This solution is, however, too slow for the Duchess, as it will take about a month. She starts doubting Hecate’s abilities, which makes her both mad and eager to display her powers. She recites a charm in Latin,<sup>286</sup> which she follows by boasting of her power:

Can you doubt me then, daughter?

That can make mountains tremble, miles of woods walk,

Whole earth’s foundation below, and the spirits

Of the entombed to burst out from their marbles,

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<sup>286</sup> originally appearing in Book VII of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and later translated and quoted by Scot. Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, XII, vii (181–2).

Nay, draw yon moon to my involved designs? (5.2.28–32)

After the Duchess is assured that Almachildes will die, she departs. The spell is, however, not done yet. First, Hecate orders Sunstone to bring the necessary ingredients and to stir the contents of the cauldron while she begins the charm. The Charm Song is a song which is also invoked in *Macbeth*, but only by the title ‘Black Spirits’. Similarly to the cauldron scene in *Macbeth*, the recitation of the charm looks almost like a recipe:

[STADLIN] Here’s the blood of a bat.

HECATE Put in that, O put in that.

[HOPPO] Here’s libbard’s bane.

HECATE Put in again.

[STADLIN] The juice of toad, the oil of adder.

[HOPPO] Those will make the younker madder.

HECATE Put in. There’s all, and rid the stench.

FIRESTONE Nay, here’s the three ounces of the red-haired wench.

(5.2.70–7)

Once the charm is over, the witches go show reverence to the moon, and exit the stage dancing the Witches’ Dance.

### 3.2.2. Summary

Since the play is a comedy, despite Hecate’s assurances that her spell will work, Almachildes appears in the last scene not being hurt at all. Therefore, although Hecate shows great confidence in her abilities, none of her actions in the play have any effect on its outcome nor affect the actions of any character. She is proven powerless within the play, for Middleton has reduced her only to a symbolic figure.

This may have been caused by his over-reliance on Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, for nearly everything occult-related in this play uses *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* as its source material. It appears that Middleton adapted not only Scot's knowledge of witchcraft, but also his scepticism and contempt for popular beliefs. This is evident in some of instances, for example in the list of supernatural creatures which Middleton uses in Act 1, Scene 2. This list is included in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Book 7, Chapter 15, as a list of 'bugs' with which our 'mother's maids have so terrified us'.

As a consequence, Middleton's representation of witchcraft is via such lists, specifically lists of objects and ingredients. These are used as a necessary part of witchcraft itself, rather than as illustrations of particular spells.

As for the witches, one of their main characteristics in the play is their lustful and mischievous nature, something which was first emphasized in *Malleus Maleficarum*. Although this holds true for the majority of women appearing in the play, this fact is even more highlighted in the witches, since many of their activities and conversations are underlain with a sexual context. Hecate, for example, is shown being sexually involved with her son and her familiar, as well as having a desire for Almachildes and Sebastian. The witches' coven also seems to take turns sexually abusing Mayor Whelpley's son and engage in various obscene activities during their flights.

Interestingly, Middleton portrays his witches more as mischievous cunning women than as actual witches. Firstly, there appears to be almost no secrecy about them, for the characters in the play visit them whenever they have a problem. Therefore, their activities, besides going on sexual adventures, involve fulfilling their customers' desires, often for no reward whatsoever. The witches are also not

secretive about their powers, for Hecate is shown several times boasting about what her and her fellow witches can achieve. The most powerful witchcraft scene in the play, however, takes place in front of no witnesses, so it is apparent that Hecate does keep some of her activities private. Besides providing services for her customers, which in the play constitute mainly of making love charms and potions, Hecate still finds time to do some typical witchcraft, as she was refused charity by a farmer and his wife and plans a revenge on them by bewitching their property. Because of all that, Hecate practices what could be called 'village witchcraft'. The only influence of the elite views is the one mention of the pact between Hecate and the Devil.

Unlike the Weird Sisters, Hecate and her coven are not distinguished from other characters by the way they talk. Their lines are written in the same form as everyone else's, except for their two songs during which they are using rhyming couplets.

In conclusion, Middleton's witches are satirized to the point that they cannot be taken seriously, in spite of the fact that their activities are based on the real image of witchcraft, as perceived by common people and mocked by Scot. What Middleton offers is a display of elements of witchcraft which are not forming a cohesive whole, and thus making witchcraft only an object of wonder and curiosity.

### **3.3. *The Witch of Edmonton***

'Tis all one

To be a witch as to be counted one.

*(The Witch of Edmonton, 2.1.116–7)*

This play, written by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, was inspired by the story of Elizabeth Sawyer, an old woman executed for witchcraft on April 19,

1621. This affair was recorded by Henry Goodcole in his pamphlet *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer* (1621). When writing about her charges, Goodcole reports this:

On Saturday, being the fourteenth day of Aprill, Anno Dom 1621 this Elizabeth Sawyer late of Edmonton, in the County of Middlesex Spinster, was arraigned, and indited three severall times at Justice Hall in the Old Baily in London, in the Parish of Saint Sepulchers, in the ward of Farrington without: which Indetements were, viz. That shee the said Elizabeth Sawyer, not having the feare of God before her eyes, but moved and seduced by the Divell, by Diabolicall helpe, did out of her malicious heart, (because her neighbours where she dwelt, would not buy Broomes of her) would therefore thus revenge herselfe on them in this manner, namely, witch to death their Nurse Children and Cattell.<sup>287</sup>

Elizabeth Sawyer pleaded not guilty, but when she was searched, a witch's mark was discovered on her. Consequently, she was found guilty and sentenced to death.<sup>288</sup>

*The Witch of Edmonton* is, therefore, one of the plays which tried to capitalize on the sensational story of a witch and her trial. It does not, however, portray the trial itself, instead focusing on her turn to witchcraft after she was unjustly accused of it and treated badly by her neighbours. For that reason, Elizabeth makes a pact with the Devil, who appears in the form of a dog named Tom and who assists her in her revenge.

The version of the play used is from *A Woman Killed with Kindness and Other Domestic Plays*, edited by Martin Wiggins.<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> Henry Goodcole, *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conviction and condemnation and death* (London, 1621), Bv.

<sup>288</sup> Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*, 71–2.

### 3.3.1. Elizabeth Sawyer

When Elizabeth Sawyer, the so-called Witch of Edmonton, makes her first appearance in the play, she is no witch whatsoever. She enters the scene gathering sticks and lamenting her unfortunate situation and the reason she is so despised:

'Cause I am poor, deformed and ignorant,  
And like a bow buckled and bent together  
By some more strong in mischiefs than myself,  
Must I for that be made a common sink  
For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues  
To fall and run into? Some call me witch,  
And, being ignorant of myself, they go  
About to teach me how to be one (2.1.3–10)

It is apparent that the reason for her unpopularity is primarily rooted in her appearance and social situation, being poor, old and deformed. She is obviously being treated rather harshly, which in turn makes her defend herself by cursing. This, however, gives people a reason to attribute all misfortunes which befall them to her. Elizabeth Sawyer is, thus far, only a victim of stereotypes. Although she appears to have done nothing bad to her neighbours, she cannot escape their unjust accusations for the sole reason of having the countenance of a witch.

Her situation is reflected in her encounter with Old Banks, her chief adversary, who starts calling her a witch and insulting her the moment he sees her. When she tries to retaliate by cursing him, she is mercilessly beaten. At this moment, her situation becomes so dire that she starts contemplating becoming a real witch:

Abuse me! Beat me! Call me hag and witch!

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<sup>289</sup> Martin Wiggins, *A Woman Killed with Kindness and Other Domestic Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008). PDF e-book.

What is the name? Where and by what art learned?

What spells, what charms or invocations

May the thing called familiar be purchased? (2.1.33–6)

Shortly after, she is mocked by a group of Morris dancers, which only increases her desire for revenge. She recalls hearing stories of familiars, how they suck their masters' blood and do their bidding in return, but she is unable to recall how to obtain one.

At that moment, a black dog enters the scene, introducing himself to Elizabeth as the Devil, claiming that since she proved to be a loyal servant, he will give her just revenge against her foes. He will do any mischief for her, in exchange for her body and soul. This pact she has to seal with her own blood. If she refuses, he will tear her body into a thousand pieces. Having nowhere else to turn for help, Elizabeth accepts the offer. The completion of the pact is accompanied by thunder and lightning. She is, however, still doubtful about the truth in what she has just heard. In response, the dog claims that the Devil 'is no liar to such as he loves'. When Elizabeth commands him to kill Old Banks, it is disclosed that the Devil's power is not limitless, for he cannot kill people who still have some goodness in them. As a consequence, he is sent to harm Banks' corn and cattle. Before his departure, he teaches Elizabeth a short incantation which she can use should she need his services.

This encounter between the witch and the Devil is both similar and different from the traditional idea of a diabolical pact. On the one hand, the Devil appears in the moment of despair, when the future witch is emotionally vulnerable. He promises her a better life and power, and makes her sign the pact in her own blood. The Devil also proves to be a masterful trickster, for he promises revenge while concealing the

fact that it is not in his power to kill people. On the other hand, however, there is no mention of the Sabbath at all, and Elizabeth is not endowed with any occult powers. All that she learns is a short incantation which she is to recite should she need to do harm. Moreover, their relationship is not according to the belief which the demonologists held – that it was the witch who was in charge and who decided whom to afflict and how and that the Devil was only an agent of evil. The relationship portrayed here represents the version which was described by the accused witches, who claimed that the Devil had complete control over them and even threatened them when they tried to resist him. In this play, the Devil is able to do any mischief he wants, regardless of what Elizabeth or anyone else wants.

After her initiation, Elizabeth encounters Cuddy Banks, one of the Morris dancers and Old Banks' son. She is ready to hear more insults, but Cuddy ensures her he is nothing like his father and does not think she is a witch. He offers her money as a recompense for his treatment of her and asks for her help, for he has been bewitched by Kate Carter. This bewitchment which he speaks of is, however, only love. He has fallen in love with Kate and wants Elizabeth to arrange that she loves him back. When Elizabeth questions his faith in her ability to do so, he lets her know that he believes she can do it and when he sees it done, he shall be persuaded too. It appears that although Cuddy refused to call Elizabeth a witch in the beginning of their encounter and denied sharing the same views as his father, he was still influenced by the general opinion of her and believed she practices witchcraft, although he has his doubts, saying to himself: 'I think she'll prove a witch in earnest' (2.1.234). The word 'witch', therefore, has for him two meanings: the first one is used as an insult, and the second one implies a profession. He refuses to use the first meaning in relation to Elizabeth, but calls her Mother Witch several times after he

has made his request. Elizabeth decides to help him, but only because she plans to use him as a means of accomplishing her revenge, for her help involves tricking Cuddy with illusions. Her part in this trick is, however, complete after she summons the dog and tells him what is to be done.

Elizabeth's change of behaviour is a signal that she decided to stop being a helpless victim and chose instead to be an active participant in her revenge. She finally starts behaving like the person her neighbours wanted her to be, even if it means betraying the trust of the only person who was not mean to her, although the reason for his behaviour is not clear. Over the course of the play, however, he appears to be the only person not corrupted by evil, so it is likely that his behaviour is genuine.

Elizabeth Sawyer makes her next appearance in Act 4, Scene 1, after the Devil caused a lot of mischief in the village. She is being blamed for it all by the villagers, especially Old Banks. It is interesting that the villagers place all blame on Mother Sawyer because she is the only witch in town, when earlier one of the Morris dancers claimed that there are three or four witches in Edmonton, besides Elizabeth (3.1.12–13). Nevertheless, the villagers decide to confront the witch and burn her for what she has done. They summon her by burning a handful of thatch plucked off of her hovel. This is not surprising, as it was a common method of dealing with witchcraft among the common people. Just as the thatch starts burning, Elizabeth appears, cursing everyone around. Her arrival is considered by many as a proof that she is indeed a witch and Elizabeth gets attacked. After a Justice of the Peace, who serves as a voice of reason, arrives to the scene, Sawyer and Banks begin to verbally attack one another. The Justice puts an end to this, claiming that it is not up to the villagers to be the judges of the law. Sawyer denies being a witch to the Justice, but

asserts that '[i]f every poor old woman be trod on thus by slaves, reviled, kicked, beaten, as I am daily, she, to be revenged, had need turn witch' (4.1.77–9). As she tries to defend herself as an innocent victim, claiming there are worse sorts of people than witches, she starts being rude to the Justice of the Peace and his companion, turning them completely against her. They, seeing her as a quarrelsome old woman, come to the conclusion that she must indeed be a witch.

This characteristic of hers is elaborated immediately afterwards, when she offers her teat to the Devil-dog but apologizes that she is dried up from cursing and cannot give him blood right away. This is an implication that she is a choleric, overflowing with the hot blood, which is dried up by her furies.<sup>290</sup> She also inquires whether the dog has done all that she asked him to do. These activities include laming horses, stealing babies, and spoiling butter. Moreover, she had her revenge on Ann Ratcliffe, a woman who nearly lamed her sow. It is apparent that Sawyer is interested mainly in harming other people's households as a revenge for what they have done to her, which once again highlights the social aspect of witchcraft.

The fact that she is only an old, quarrelsome woman is reintroduced in Act 5, when Sawyer does not see the dog for three days, and is, therefore, unable to act against those who scorned her. This can be seen in her lamentation

I am called a witch,  
Yet am myself bewitched from doing harm.  
Have I given up myself to thy black lust  
Thus to be scorned? (5.1.2–5)

When the dog finally appears, he is white instead of black. This serves as an indication that he has lost interest in Sawyer and will aid her no more, thus sealing

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<sup>290</sup> Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, 242.

her fate. Desperate Elizabeth, chasing the dog out, decides to not confess to anything. After helpless Elizabeth is sent to jail, the Devil discloses that her death was part of his wages, once again proving that he is, first of all, a trickster. After facing even more accusations, Elizabeth Sawyer finally resigns, proclaiming: 'I repent all former evil/There is no damned conjuror like the devil' (5.3.50–1).

### **3.3.2. The Devil**

*The Witch of Edmonton* is the only play of the four, in which the Devil is not only mentioned, but also physically present and active. As was already suggested in the chapter above, throughout most of the play, the Devil takes on the form of a black dog called Tom. The only exception is Act 5, in which he changes his colour to white. These are not the only forms he can take, for he discloses to Cuddy that he can change into any shape, but 'chiefly those coarse creatures, dog or cat, hare, ferret, frog, toad' (5.1.115–6). This not only corresponds to the list of the most common familiars which were believed to serve witches, but also to the idea that, in the English witch beliefs, familiars performed the role of the Devil, as it is presumably the Devil himself who serves as a familiar in order to do mischief.

The Devil is, therefore, the only character in the play capable of supernatural activities. He is not only the agent of Elizabeth Sawyer's revenge act, but is shown doing harm on his own as well. It seems that where there is some mischief, there is Tom as well, influencing people's behaviour to the worse. An example of this is Frank Thorney, who starts thinking about killing his wife only after Tom appears nearby. He then helps Frank tie himself to a tree without him realizing it. Moreover, when the Morris dancers have a performance, Tom is there to have some fun by bewitching a fiddle, which makes no sound as a consequence. The effect of the spell

is, however, tied to his presence, as the fiddle becomes functional as soon as Tom leaves.

The Devil is portrayed mainly as a seducer and trickster, accordingly to popular beliefs. Although he approaches Elizabeth Sawyer claiming he will help her achieve her revenge, he is ultimately the cause of her downfall, for the rise of misfortunes in Edmonton pushes the villagers into action against Elizabeth. Tom, therefore, tricked Elizabeth twice – first, when no actual harm was done to her chief enemy, Old Banks, and then, when he left her at a time she needed him most.

Lastly, the Devil serves as proof that, despite the execution of Elizabeth Sawyer, the world is still full of evil. The Devil was not defeated and, although Cuddy chased him away from Edmonton, he only changed his location, this time choosing to go to London and corrupt souls there.

### **3.3.3. Summary**

The fact that this play was inspired by real-life events appears to have made it different in some aspects from the first two plays. It puts a great emphasis on the persecution of alleged witches. This persecution was initiated in the first place by the need of the villagers to attribute their misfortunes to someone, long before Elizabeth Sawyer has become a real witch. What started as a mere insult, slowly turned into a real accusation, once the matter became more serious. The factors contributing to her being believed to be a witch were her old age and withered appearance, as well as her quarrelsome nature, which made her extremely unpopular among her neighbours. Although she claims she is being treated unjustly and throughout the course of the play pleads to be innocent, it nevertheless appears that it is because of her insufferable behaviour that she has drawn so much negative attention. The charges of witchcraft are, therefore, based primarily on her position as an obnoxious neighbour.

The villagers are relentless in their pursuit of Elizabeth as a witch, which ultimately leads to her execution, since her quarrelsome nature has turned even the unbiased Justice of the Peace against her.

As for the witchcraft in the play, Elizabeth is not capable of performing any kind of *maleficium* on her own. She can only recite a short incantation and hope her familiar, the Devil, does what she wishes. She is shown cursing a lot as well, but her curses have no real power, despite the fact that the villagers believe they have. Elizabeth's understanding of witchcraft seems to be related to animals, for when she expresses her desire to turn into a witch, she starts remembering what she knows about animal familiars and how to summon one. Additionally, her revenge frequently takes form of harming animals and their products, which was in the early modern society often a matter of life and death. Lastly, her verbal curses frequently mention animals as well. On the other hand, Sawyer is represented by the other villagers as a 'beast'.

Elizabeth Sawyer is not, however, perceived as an evil character by everyone in the village, for the good-natured Cuddy Banks approaches her when he is in need of her services. He wants her either to 'unwitch' him, or to witch another with him, for he has fallen in love. This act of suddenly falling in love is described as a spell of sorts, in virtue of the inexplicable ways in which love works. Sawyer's only customer thus comes to her as people would come to typical village witches – seeking help in the matter of love. Unfortunately for Cuddy, Elizabeth is not only capable of such action, but she also decides to use him as a way of getting revenge on his father, her chief enemy. His trust in her and her abilities is thus met with her malice and evil character, although he finds out that he has been tricked only in the final act of the play.

In conclusion, this play portrays witches, represented by Elizabeth Sawyer, as essentially helpless creatures, for the pact with the Devil brings them no real power. On the contrary, Sawyer is poor and pitiable, is neither feared nor respected, and the villagers bully her. The reason for this might be to persuade people that seeking such pact is not beneficial and that being a witch leads only to misfortune.

### 3.4. *The Late Lancashire Witches*

What new device, what dainty strain,  
More for our mirth now than our gain,  
shall we in practice put?

(*The Late Lancashire Witches*, ll. 514–16)

Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood wrote their Caroline-era comedy, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, during the Lancaster trial of 1633–34, which was a sequel to the Pendle witches trial of 1612, one of the most memorable early modern English witch trials. Although the trial of 1633–34 was much less well-known, its fame spread much faster and the number of accused witches arose to nineteen. Ultimately, all of the accused were reprieved, for the charges against them were invented, although some of the accused witches died in prison.<sup>291</sup>

The adaptation of these events ended up as a great success, which can be found in a record of a contemporary gentleman, Nathaniel Tomkyns, who said about his experience this:

The subject was of the slights and passages done or supposed to be done by these witches sent from thence hither and other witches and their Familiars; Of their nightly meetings in severall places: their banqueting with all sorts of meat

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<sup>291</sup> Robert Poole (ed.), *The Lancashire Witches: Stories and Histories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 123–4, 148. PDF e-book.

and drinke conveyed unto them by their familiars upon the pulling of a cord: the walking of pailles of milke by themselves... the transforming of men and weomen into the shapes of severall creatures and especially of horses by putting an inchaunted bridle into ther mouths: their posting to and from places farre distant in an incredible short time.<sup>292</sup>

In my analysis of the play, I will be using the Online Edition of the Collected Plays of Richard Brome.<sup>293</sup>

### 3.4.1. The Coven in Lancashire

The coven of witches in the play consists of six women: Mistress Generous, Meg/Peg, Goody Dickieson, Maud, Mall Spencer and Gill. While all the members of the coven play an important part, the coven's leader, Mistress Generous, plays the most prominent role, for she is a wife of a hospitable gentleman, which makes her an unlikely candidate for a witch.

The role of the witches, as well as their characteristics, is made clear from the moment they make their first appearance. Their purpose is best expressed by these lines, which are uttered at their meeting:

*Meg.* What new device, what dainty strain,  
More for our mirth now than our gain,  
shall we in practice put? (ll. 514–16)

There are several examples of the witches' mischievous activities in the play, ranging from minor harm, like causing a farmer's field to yield no crop, to quite impactful

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<sup>292</sup> Herbert Berry, 'The Globe bewitched and *El hombre fiel*', *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England 1* (1984), 212–13 (abbreviations expanded).

<sup>293</sup> Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, Quarto and Modern Text, edited by Helen Ostovich, *Richard Brome Online* (<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/brome>, 2 May 2018). Line references are to the Quarto Text.

curses. While most of their bewitchments are caused only for fun, their grand scheme, on which I will elaborate shortly, was inflicted as a response to an insult, making it a personal revenge.

One of the forms of amusement which occupies the witches in Act 2 is their plan to spoil the hunters' sport. The hunters set out to kill a hare, and the witches want to make them look like fools by Meg transforming into a hare and Gill with her familiar into a pair of greyhounds, intending to mingle with the hunters' dogs and to lead them away.

Not everything which the witches in the play do is meant to harm others or amuse them. For Mall, who works as a dairy-maid, is in love with Robert/Robin, a servant of Master Generous. When he is tasked to obtain for his master a bottle of an excellent wine, a task which is impossible for him, because he would have to manage to get to London and back in only a few hours, Mall gladly offers her help. Robin is sceptical, in spite of the fact that he has seen her make her broom sweep the room without hands a couple of days ago. He, therefore, has an idea that she is a witch, but is ignorant of her real power. Mall quickly shows him what she is capable of by making a pail of milk fly, an act which leads to Robin's conviction that all milk in it is going to be cursed for seven years. She then continues by transforming his horse into a magically enhanced one, presumably capable of flying. This enables them to travel to London and back in just one night.

What the witches in the play are concerned with the most, however, is creating chaos in the Sealy household. This serves as revenge against Master Sealy, for he insulted one of the witches 'for bearing with a most unseemly disobedience in an untoward ill-bred son of hers' (ll. 2515–17). As a response, they cursed his entire household by reversing the social roles of every one of its members:

*Meg.* 'Ay, ay, ay!'

The father to the son doth cry;

The son rebukes the father old;

The daughter at the mother scold;

The wife the husband check and chide,

But that's no wonder, through the wide,

World 'tis common. (ll. 546–51)

Thus, the entire household is upside-down, with the old ruled by the young, and the masters ruled by their servants. As a consequence, the entire household falls into disorder, a disorder in which every major character in the play becomes involved.

When there is a wedding feast for the family's two 'servants', Lawrence and Parnell, taking place at the Sealy's, the witches get involved again. Their witchcraft causes much mischief and is present in many forms. First, the wedding cake turns to bran, and consequently, every food intended for the wedding turns into its former state as well, exemplified by the mutton becoming a set of horns and a pie turning into live birds. Moreover, all the meat in the kitchen flies out through the chimney and leaves behind only various repulsive animals. The witches, however, seemingly made a mistake, for they only bewitched the food intended for the wedding and the other food in the house was left unharmed. In addition to bewitching the food, the witches also bewitch the musicians' instruments, first making the musicians unable to play all the same tune, and then rendering their instruments make no sound. Lastly, their curse upon the Sealy's changes, for the children are now overly obedient to their parents, who show too great an affection towards each other.

What in Act 3 seemed like a destruction of the wedding feast turns up as a creation of a witches' feast in Act 4, since it is revealed that the food was not

destroyed but simply transferred to the witches' lodging in celebration of their triumph. It is at their feast, however, when the fortune starts to turn against them, as the boy whom they have bewitched breaks their spell and escapes. The witches intended to keep the boy enthralled by offering him their food and drink, which, as he reports, have no taste and relish. Additionally, Robin, who is held captive by Mistress Generous, manages to transform her into a horse by seizing her enchanted bridle. He then reveals her true nature to her husband, who makes her promise to give over her witchery.

The work of the witches is, however, still not done, for Mistress Generous continues her witchcraft ways. When she is visited by her nephew, Whetstone, who demands revenge against Master Arthur and his friends because they have abused him and called him bastard, she happily obliges, saying to Mall:

*Mistress Generous.* Marry, lass,  
To bring a new conceit to pass.  
Thy spirit I must borrow, more  
To fill the number three or four,  
Whom we will use to no great harm.  
Only assist me with thy charm.  
This night we'll celebrate to sport:  
'Tis all for mirth. We mean no hurt. (ll. 1993–2000)

The result of this charm is to summon spirits who will trick Whetstone's enemies into thinking they are bastards as well.

The final downfall of the witches commences when they decide to go to the mill, where they occasionally go haunt transformed into cats. There is, however, a new miller, a former soldier, who is not afraid and manages to cut off a paw of one

of the cats. This turns out to be the hand of Mistress Generous, with her wedding ring still on. Consequently, Mistress Generous is confronted by her husband, while the other witches are arrested by Daughy and the boy who escaped them, as they became witch-hunters for the moment. After the witches are lawfully arrested, they lose their power and everything comes back to normal. With the exception of Meg, they refuse to confess. The Epilogue states that the witches will be trialled, but not automatically found guilty, which is the way the law is supposed to work. This was caused by the fact that by the time the play was complete, the Lancashire trial was still not concluded.

The importance of their familiars is elaborated on as well, for they seem to be instrumental in all of their activities. They also need to be taken a good care of, especially in the matter of food, for later on in the play it is disclosed that Meg has grown lame because her familiar missed a feast. This implies that there is a physical bond between the witches and their familiars. Apart from that, the feeding of familiars through the witches' teats is present once again, which is expressed in a song meant to summon them:

*Maud.* Come Mawsy, come Puckling,  
And come, my sweet Suckling,  
My pretty Mamilion, my joy!  
Fall each to his duggy  
While kindly we hug ye  
As tender as nurse over boy.  
Then suck our bloods freely and with it be jolly,  
While merrily we sing hey trolly-lolly. (ll. 2721-28)

The familiars are shown to be almost always accompanying their mistresses, participating in their dances. They also serve them as spies, providing useful information and also as sexual partners, a fact which was provided by Meg in her confession. In this regard, the familiar pleased as well as a proper man, although his flesh was cold. This corresponds to real confessions describing the intercourse with the Devil, for the accused claimed that although the Devil was an extremely good lover, he felt cold and distant.

As for the Devil, he is mentioned only briefly during the interrogation of Mistress Generous by her husband. She confirms that she had made a pact with him in exchange for her soul.

An important theme related to witchcraft in this play is transformation. This is evident in many instances throughout the play, for the witches not only transform themselves into cats, hounds and hares, but also transform others, either as a punishment or as a convenient means of transport. Most notable example is Mistress Generous' enchanted bridle, which she uses to turn Robin into a horse and ride him to the witches' meeting. Unfortunately for her, Robin breaks free and uses the bridle against her. It is not explained why she is not using her magic instead of the bridle, because Goody Dickieson has turned one of the boys first into a hound and then into a horse without the help of any magical object.

Lastly, the witches' common means of transport are also mentioned at several instances. These include flying on broomsticks, riding a badger nab, which could mean either the head of a badger or a hat made out of its fur, a young porcupine, and a bear.

### 3.4.2. From Scepticism to Belief

The battle between rationalist scepticism and popular superstition is one of the main motifs of the play. The scepticism is embodied by Master Generous, who is a firm believer that witchcraft is a myth and will not change his opinion until he is proven otherwise. On the other side stands Master Daughy, who is entertaining the thought that witchcraft may be real, for strange things keep happening around him.

As the play progresses, it is evident that the truth, which was first on the side of the sceptics, moves towards the popular superstition, which is typically stigmatized as base, as it is proven to be the only correct way to interpret the events that had transpired. As the plot unfolds, a series of supernatural activities is revealed, which leads to the affirmation that witchcraft is indeed real.

This all, however, starts as an innocent debate about whether a hare which Arthur and his friends saw is actually a witch in disguise. This discussion is sparked by a proverb, according to which a hare is a sign of bad luck. The group is, however, unaware that they are speaking the truth. When the group meets Whetstone, a nephew of Mistress Generous, they express their dislike of him by calling him a witch. What follows is an insight into some of the popular witch beliefs, for Whetstone replies that he looks 'like no such ugly creature' (ll. 106–7). He continues by saying that there are reports of many witches living in the county and that witches are usually 'ugly old beldams' (l. 115). He also calls his mother a witch, for, although she was young, she was lusty and bewitched his father by her beauty. The idea that witches are lustful women is, thus, reiterated once again. Moreover, it is worth noting that the fact that the gentlemen entertained the idea that Whetstone might be a witch is rather curious, for the idea of man-witches was at the time of the play rare. On the other hand, one of the accused in the Lancashire trial was a man

named John Spencer, so the idea was still not completely abandoned.<sup>294</sup> Master Shakestone is, however, quite sceptical about the existence of witches, claiming that he ‘can hardly be induced to think there is any such kind of people’ (ll. 109–10).

Before the evidence proving the existence of witchcraft becomes undeniable, most of the gentlemen start out as sceptical about witchcraft. This group consists of Masters Generous, Arthur, Bantam and Shakestone. The only believers seem to be Daughy, neighbour of the Seely family, and Whetstone, Mistress Generous’ nephew.

Daughy’s belief in witchcraft is rooted in his being present to the situation at the Seely household. Although initially unaware that the source of the household’s problems is witchcraft, when he is introduced to the situation, he feels there is something unnatural going on. Soon, he comes to the conclusion that witchcraft is at work, which is reflected in his line: ‘This is quite upside-down: the son controls the father, and the man overcrows his master’s coxcomb. Sure they are all bewitched!’ (ll. 402–4). He also elaborates on the witch-problem in the region: ‘Sure all the witches in the country have their hands in this home-spun medley; and there be no few ’tis thought’ (ll. 468–70). This is a reflection of the real situation, as witch-trials in Lancaster were well-known. From this point on, Daughy believes that witches are responsible for the whole situation and fears everything to be witchcraft. This is temporarily interrupted at the feast, for he is bewitched by Mall Spencer, which in this case means he fell in love with her, much to Master Arthur’s dismay, since he was promised money by Daughy. Fortunately for both of them, once Mall vanishes from the feast, Daughy returns back to normal, claiming that ‘here has been nothing but witchery all this day’ (ll. 1399–1400). Moreover, when witnessing the

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<sup>294</sup> Poole, *The Lancashire Witches*, 148.

unfortunate turn of events between Lawrence and Parnell, Daughy becomes immediately convinced that Lawrence's codpiece has been bewitched. After this incident, he decides to put an end to the witchcraft by temporarily acting as a witch-hunter, joined by his godson, the boy who escaped from the witches' clutches. The two of them then manage to capture the entirety of the witches' coven sans Mistress Generous, who was at that time already apprehended.

On the other end of the witch-belief spectrum stands Master Generous, who is repeatedly shown expressing his scepticism about the existence of witchcraft, most frequently in his interactions with his servant, Robin. After Robin brings him a bottle of wine from London and proof he was truly there, he responds by saying to himself: 'If I could believe there were such a thing as witchcraft, I should think this slave were bewitched now with an opinion' (ll. 1186–8). It is interesting that he seems more likely to accept the fact that witchcraft altered Robin's memory than to acknowledge its power to travel to London and back overnight. He, therefore, appears to be either narrow-minded, or quite ignorant of popular superstition regarding witchcraft. As a result, when Robin discovers that Mistress Generous is a witch, he is not too optimistic that Master Generous would believe him. His fear is proven true, for when he returns, claiming the horse is in fact his mistress, Generous is convinced that he is still under the effects of the wine. His scepticism, however, comes to an end after he sees the horse change into his wife. From this point on, he is ready to believe everything related to witchcraft.

The third group is formed by Arthur and his friends, who, although acknowledging witchcraft and its power, are not afraid of it, for they are convinced it cannot hurt them. Their belief is grounded in the fact that all that has been bewitched was the food and nobody came to any harm yet.

Lastly, an interesting twist on the witchcraft beliefs is presented by the miller's boy, who claims that before he escaped the witches, he had to combat the Devil. He describes himself in his story as a hero, for he held his ground for quarter of an hour before he was knocked unconscious. Although this is quite an unrealistic description of an encounter with the Devil, his description of his appearance is, on the other hand, relatively truthful, mentioning his sharp nails, cloven feet, and youthful appearance. The boy's exaggeration reflects the situation at the real trials, for the main witness was a young boy, who was in the end proven to be a liar.

In conclusion, the perception of witchcraft is shown to have changed during the course of the play, with even the most sceptical of people becoming persuaded by the events that witchcraft is real. Not only that, for the perception of witchcraft gradually changes, starting as a few vague ideas, but ultimately reflecting the popular beliefs.

### **3.4.3. Summary**

The witches in this play are shown as individuals capable of causing great harm and chaos. They are interested in both small-scale and large-scale bewitchments, but they seem to enjoy much more the latter form, for it requires more preparation and the process and outcome are significantly more satisfying. They are portrayed, in the first place, as the source of inversion and of the upset of social norms. Inversion was, as shown before, one of the essential attributes of witchcraft, for it was seen as an anti-religion and embodiment of everything which is bad and evil. This is portrayed in the play in two subplots: the chaos in the Sealy household and Mistress Generous' rebellion against her husband. In the first case, the witches place a curse on the family and its servants, turning the social roles of its members upside-down. The latter case displays Mistress Generous' disobedience by going on night-trips on the

back of Master Generous' favourite horse and trying to keep this information from him. After her secret identity is discovered, she pretends to repent but continues to practice witchcraft despite her husband's trust. She, therefore, remains being the dominant one in the relationship until the very moment she is apprehended and put into jail.

In spite of the fact that the witchcraft in the play is shown from the most credulous position possible, reflecting the popular superstition and witchcraft beliefs, it is evident that by the time the Lancashire trials of 1633–34 were taking place and the play was written, witchcraft was becoming a rather obsolete issue in England, for there were not many trials since the Pendle witches affair in 1612. As a consequence, the witchcraft portrayed in the play is not interested in the village witchcraft, centred on neighbourly disagreements, but rather on large conspiracies afflicting members of the gentry. The motif of a scorned witch, who bewitches her victim as a revenge is, however, still present, as well as the idea that witches are old, promiscuous women who own familiars.

The description of the witches' appearance is, unfortunately, not given. The reason for this might be the fact that the witches were based on real women accused of witchcraft and thus the authors did not deem it necessary to provide a description. The women in question were Margaret Johnson, Frances Dickieson, Mary Spencer and Jennet Hargraves. The inspiration for Maud's character is not clear, but the name itself was around 1600 associated with drinking and cursing, suggesting an ill-mannered woman, possibly a witch. The one thing implied in the play concerning the witches countenance is that Mall Spencer seems to be younger than her colleagues. Unlike the Weird Sisters, the Lancashire witches are portrayed as not always unified in their opinions and plans. During the feast, Mall decides to disrupt the spells done

by Goodie Dickieson and Meg by conjuring a musician of her own. Additionally, at the end of the play, the partially lame Meg decides to not comply with the other witches and confesses, describing her relationship with her familiar and their sexual intercourses, which is based on the confession of Margaret Johnson describing how the Devil, called Mamilian, appeared to her.<sup>295</sup> As a consequence, the witches in the play are portrayed as having a human side to them, which makes them to some extent more relatable.

Although the witches walk undiscovered among other characters, they are once again distinguished by their speech, which mostly consists of rhyming couplets. This is the case not only during their charms and songs, but in regular speech as well.

Another interesting aspect of the play is the witch-hunting, as performed by Daughty and his godson, for it is a reflection of the fear of witchcraft which was present in 1634 Lancashire. The boy whose accusations prompted the whole affair, Edmund Robinson, and his father serve as the models for the play's two witch-hunters. In spite of the fact that in the play they are presented as heroes, having caught the witches, the miller's son is also portrayed as a liar when he exaggerates his story about his encounter with the Devil. This might indicate that the society was already doubtful about his claims.

In conclusion, many of the features of witchcraft displayed in the play were inspired by the witch-craze related to the trials of 1633–34, which seemed to bring back to life after many years most of the popular witchcraft beliefs. Because the trials were a relatively large-scale affair, the chaos which the play's witches cause is great as well, although it means ignoring the most common activities of witches – bewitching cattle and damaging property.

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<sup>295</sup> Poole, *The Lancashire Witches*, 11.

## Conclusion

The aim of this master's thesis was to present and analyze magic, witchcraft, and all issues related to it, as it was perceived and understood in the early modern period, with an emphasis on the English region, and its portrayal in the English Renaissance drama. This period encompasses the rules of Elizabeth I, James I and Charles I.

Magic and witchcraft are concepts which have been present in the human imagination for thousands of years. Although they are usually understood in relation to religion and science, their definition is not a simple task. Nevertheless, the topic of magic and witchcraft is one that is both appealing and controversial. On the one hand, it is an essential part of the fantasy literature, a genre that has been enjoying much popularity as of late. The appeal of this genre lies in the limitless potential of the worlds created, and in the escapism they provide. Thus, magic and witchcraft can serve as a way of confronting everyday problems in a new, interesting way, while attributing the evil in the world to the misuse of supernatural powers. As a result, magic and witchcraft frequently succeed in enthraling the audience through its vast potential. This is the case now, as it was in the early modern period. Even in the English Renaissance drama, the antagonists needed to be original, and witchcraft provided exactly the veil of mystery which made them both fascinating and frightening at the same time. The controversial aspect of witchcraft, on the other hand, is related to the new wave of the feminist movement, for witches were and are predominantly perceived as women, rather than men. They are endowed with many of the undesirable qualities, such as old age, ugliness, quarrelsome character, etc. As a result, witchcraft has become a delicate topic, serving as proof that the European society has always been misogynistic. This prompted many scholars to revisit old works of literature in order to try to discover alternative readings, which would

attribute to women much greater importance. The portrayal of witchcraft plays an essential role in this controversy, since it reflects both its social and the cultural aspect. Although witches typically represent everything that is dark about the past and about women, scholars such as Diane Purkiss made an effort to display their more positive sides, portraying them not as a threat to masculinity, but rather as a representation of female wishes, as a way to express their desires and manage their feelings. As a result, the stories and plays about witches play a vital part in an attempt to shed more light on the situation of women in the past.

In order to analyze the portrayal of magic and witchcraft in English Renaissance drama, it was necessary to gather as much information on the topic as possible. This is reflected in the first chapter, where a definition, as well as a comprehensive overview of these two phenomena, is provided. While magic is described as a rite used to achieve an outcome through changing or controlling reality, witchcraft is understood as an exercise of malevolent powers by occult means. The crucial aspects of witchcraft include the diabolical pact, *maleficium*, the popular and learned beliefs, and the issue of gender.

The treatment of witchcraft in England is the main concern of the second chapter, for the social and political changes during the Elizabethan and Jacobean period had a great impact on the perception of witchcraft. This was reflected not only in the Acts of Parliament, but also in the personal attitude of the English monarchs. As a consequence, the rule of James I is marked by an unprecedented witch-vogue, which can be perceived in the contemporary drama as well.

The witchcraft in the English Renaissance drama is illustrated by four plays, written between 1606–33: Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Middleton's *The Witch*, *The Witch of Edmonton* by Rowley, Dekker and Ford, and *The Late Lancashire Witches*

by Heywood and Brome. The goal is to find out how witches were portrayed in these plays, what were the sources of information the playwrights used, and if the final result corresponds with the overall picture of witchcraft as presented in the first two chapters.

To answer the question whether the witchcraft in the four plays corresponds with the contemporary witch-lore, this thesis shows that, for the most part, the playwrights incorporated witchcraft into their plays selectively, choosing those aspects which would make the plot more interesting and astonish the audience. As a result, with the exception of *Macbeth*, the witches are portrayed as caricatures. They are mischievous and twisted women who, despite their intentions to cause harm, are ultimately rendered powerless. On the other hand, although the main purpose of witchcraft was to cause a sensation, its portrayal is based on both the popular and elite beliefs. These two aspects are usually intertwined, for the authors are trying to appeal to both spheres of society. Nevertheless, this interaction between elite and popular beliefs was common at that time and it would be wrong to assume that the authors did not have any idea that this exchange of views was taking place. Next, the plays also reflect the social situation. While *Macbeth's* aim might have been to appease James I and his interest in witchcraft, the other three plays are a result of the public interest in witch-trials, which were taking place at the time the plays were written. The authors thus had an access to some of the most influential witchcraft pamphlets and records, some of which have not survived to this day, which they used as a source of information. As a result, although the plays use witchcraft selectively, its portrayal still reflects the people's beliefs and fears.

Lastly, there is a need to state that this work did not exhaust the range of plays which could be analysed by far. I was interested in the development of stage-

witchcraft during the Jacobean period, for it was the time of the witch-vogue in drama. The plays of the Elizabethan era, however, have a great deal to offer as well, and are deserving of attention. Witchcraft in the work of Shakespeare could be a suitable topic as well, for it was already mentioned that it appears in every one of his plays, however minor its role may be. There are, however, several plays which could serve as a good starting point, namely *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Henry VI, Part I*.

## Resumé

Cílem této diplomové práce je představit a podrobit analýze fenomén magie a čarodějnictví a všech jejich aspektů, jak byly vnímány v raně novověkém období. Hlavní důraz je kladen na oblast dnešní Anglie za vlády Alžběty I., Jakuba I., a Karla I. Účelem práce je zjistit, jak byla magie a čarodějnictví vyobrazeno v soudobém dramatu a zda tento obraz odpovídá dobovým představám.

V první kapitole je podán podrobný popis principů, podle kterých magie funguje, jelikož na těchto principech je založeno vnímání jak čarodějnictví samotného, tak všech osob praktikujících magii: čarodějnic, mágů, kouzelníků, a podobně. Co se magie týče, jsou popsána pravidla, kterými se řídí, a nástroje, které jsou k jejímu praktikování potřeba. Dále je věnován prostor rozlišení mezi magií a čarodějnictvím, jelikož tyto dva termíny jsou často zaměňovány a není lehké stanovit mezi nimi hranici. Ve třetí části je podán vývoj čarodějnictví a důvodů, proč bylo postaveno mimo zákon. Jsou také vysvětleny jeho nejdůležitější rysy, které zahrnují smlouvu s ďáblem, často podepsán vlastní krví, a účast na Sabatech, shromážděních na kterých se plánovalo zlo a konaly se orgie s démony. Z těchto shromáždění pak nové čarodějnice odcházejí či odlétají obdařené novými schopnostmi, které používají za účelem škodit ostatním. Pozornost je věnována také rozdílům ve vnímání čarodějnictví mezi běžným lidem a vzdělanou elitou. Ačkoliv existují jisté rozdíly, jako například strach prostého lidu z kleteb a zdůrazňování významu paktu s Ďáblem elitou, nové výzkumy prokázaly, že myšlení těchto dvou skupin se neustále vzájemně ovlivňovalo, a z toho důvodu je obtížné stanovit jednoznačné rozdíly. V závěru první kapitoly je věnován prostor otázce pohlaví, jelikož ve většině raně novověkých zemí byly čarodějnice zobrazovány jako staré, ošklivé, a hádavé ženy. Navzdory tomuto faktu lze však nalézt mnoho případů, ve kterých byli odsouzení z větší části muži.

Jako příklad čarodějnic jsou vybrány Kirké a Hekaté, dvě mytické čarodějnice, které daly vzniknout značnému množství stereotypů spojených s čarodějnicemi.

Druhá kapitola se věnuje specifičnosti Anglického čarodějnictví. V minulosti spousta historiků, v čele s Keithem Thomasem a Alanem Macfarlanem, zastávala názor, že Anglické čarodějnictví se zásadně lišilo od toho pevninského. Tento fakt připisovaly odloučenosti Britských ostrovů a odlišnému společenskému vývoji. Ačkoliv v některých oblastech měli pravdu, novější výzkumy ukazují, že anglické čarodějnictví v zásadě následovalo stejné trendy jako to pevninské. Některé prvky čarodějnictví jsou však pro Anglii typické. Ty zahrnují relativní absenci zmínek o Sabatu, značnou oblibu v nadpřirozených domácích zvířatech, které byly zastoupeny hlavně psy a kočkami, ale také ropuchami či krysami, a výskyt čarodějnických znamení, necitlivých míst na těle čarodějek. Thomas a Macfarlane také přišli s myšlenou, že anglické čarodějnictví je založeno na principu odmítnutí dobročinnosti, jelikož ve velkém množství případů byli lidé prokleti ženami, kterým odmítli dát almužnu či prokázat nějakou jinou službu. Politická situace hrála také významnou roli ve vnímání čarodějnictví, jelikož výměna dynastie na trůnu způsobila zlom v jejím vnímání. Zatímco za vlády Alžběty bylo čarodějnictví stíháno s nejvyšší přísností, po nástupu Jakuba začala postupně převládat skepse v jeho existenci. Tento trend však není reflektován v soudobém dramatu, jelikož popularita čarodějnictví v něm nabrala naprosto opačný směr. V době, kdy bylo čarodějnictví pronásledováno nejvíce, se v dramatech téměř neobjevovalo, a v době politického nezájmu o toto téma byl lid čarodějnictvím uchvácen, což dalo vzniknout spoustě her. Kapitola se také věnuje osobě Reginalda Scota, prvního anglického démonologa. Tento muž napsal pojednání o čarodějnictví, nazvané *The Discoverie of witchcraft*, ve kterém

vyjadřuje skepsi ohledně jeho existence. Zároveň však podává jeho podrobný popis, což posloužilo spoustě autorů jako zdroj informací.

Hlavní část této práce se věnuje analýze čtyř anglických dramát a má za cíl zjistit, zda bylo vyobrazení čarodějnictví a čarodějnic v těchto hrách založeno na soudobých představách, či zda bylo hlavním cílem autorů vytvořit zajímavé postavy, které mají hlavně ohromit. Zkoumaná dramata jsou následující: *Macbeth* od Williama Shakespeara, *The Witch* od Thomase Middletona, *The Witch of Edmonton*, jejímž autory jsou Rowley, Dekker a Ford, a *The Late Lancaster Witches* od pánů Heywooda a Bromea. Čarodějnice v *Macbethovi* jsou zobrazeny jako škodolibé ženy, které si libují v chaosu, který způsobují jen pro své potěšení. Thomas Middleton ve své hře čerpal z velké části z práce Scotta, díky čemuž je čarodějnictví zobrazeno se značnou dávkou odstupů, jelikož je zobrazeno hlavně pomocí seznamů kouzelných surovin a předmětů. Vzhledem k tomu, že tato hra je především komedie, je postava čarodějnice v konečném důsledku ukázána jako bezmocná. Hra *The Witch of Edmonton* byla inspirována skutečným procesem s ženou jménem Elizabeth Sawyer, která byla v roce 1621 popravena jako čarodějnice. Díky tomu je tato postava ve hře popsána jako ošklivá stařena, kterou její sousedé nesnáší kvůli její hádavé povaze. I když Elizabeth není v úvodu hře čarodějnicí, způsob, jakým se k ní její sousedé chovají ji přinutí k tomu uzavřít smlouvu s ďáblem, protože to je pro ni jediný způsob, jak se bránit. Poslední hra, *The Late Lancashire Witches*, byla zase založena na honech na čarodějnice konaných v oblasti kolem města Lancaster v letech 1633–34. Čarodějnice ve hře jsou proto obrazem žen stíhaných během tohoto procesu. Jejich zájmem je opět vytvářet chaos a nepořádek. Navzdory tomu je v závěru hry jejich moc zlomena a ženy jsou poslány do vězení, aby byly souzeny.

Výsledkem analýzy těchto dramát je zjištění, že autoři využívali soudobé představy o čarodějnictví selektivně. Jejich hlavním úmyslem bylo pravděpodobně přilákat pozornost publika vyobrazením čarodějnictví jako plného kouzel a tajemna. Navzdory tomu je však toto vyobrazení založeno na reálných základech, ať už na lidových představách, nebo na dobových textech. Vývoj vyobrazování čarodějnictví v dramatech také reflektuje společenský zájem o toto téma, jelikož lze vysledovat, že hry často vznikaly jako reakce na nějaký významný čarodějnický proces. Jelikož se aspekty jednotlivých procesů lišily, i zobrazení čarodějnictví v jednotlivých hrách je jiné, i když jeho základní prvky se objevují vždy.

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