

Staged Magic: Dramatizations of Early Modern Witchcraft

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Abstract

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The study of witchcraft has always been centered on a paradox. Early treatises established a deeply rooted belief in witchcraft, and witches confessed to impossible acts of *maleficium*, but witchcraft has never given women the ability to fly. By dismantling the rhetorical archetype of the witch and remaking her into a self-fashioning scholar, this project challenges the truth claims included at the beginning of witchcraft treatises and pamphlets. Rather than reading source material into and onto witchcraft plays as other scholars have done before me, I approach pamphlets, plays, and treatises as equal fictions, filling the gaps between them with a novel approach to theories of knowledge and questions about the nature of belief in the early modern period.

Staged Magic engages directly with treatises by Reginald Scot and King James I, pamphlets by various named and anonymous authors, as well as plays by Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare, William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford. My study of varied texts provides ample opportunity to engage with structuralism, feminist theory, and new historicism while employing epistemological frameworks to better understand what is at play in witchcraft trials and how they did or did not reflect the beliefs of readers and audiences. My first chapter, “Setting the Stage: *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, *Daemonology*, and the Nature of Belief,” examines texts that demonstrate true belief, like King James I’s *Daemonologie*, alongside skeptical texts like Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Together with a variety of pamphlets, “Setting the Stage” works toward an understanding of the early modern belief systems that produced both deep skepticism and true belief in witches and witchcraft simultaneously. My second chapter, “‘Who should bee the author of this mischief’: The Self-Fashioning Witch on Stage and Off,” re-reads *The Witch of Edmonton* as a dramatic representation of how a witch’s agency can be manipulated through accusation. Included in my study is an exploration of the role of belief and testimony in Henry Goodcole’s *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conviction and condemnation and Death*. My third chapter, “‘This brazen dish’: Immoral Feasting in *The Witch* and *Macbeth*,” builds on prior chapters with a study of Hecate as scholar in Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch*. Hecate’s craft is an exemplar of witchcraft as a legitimate epistemology, and I study her work in conjunction with Lady Macbeth’s witch-speak in *Macbeth*. “‘This brazen dish’” includes detailed examinations of the spells used in both plays and presents a clear understanding of how witchcraft operated as a system of knowledge that was passed down among women. To conclude, I offer a short reading of the testimonies included in Thomas Potts’s *The vvonderfull discoverie of witches in the countie of Lancaster*. *The vvonderfull discoverie* features many of the same crimes as *The Witch* and *The Witch of Edmonton* but relies on a series of testimonies alongside confessions to prove the witches’ collective and individual guilt. The power of these testimonies, alongside the work that Miranda Fricker does in *Epistemic Injustice*, help me to show how and why women were and were not believed when they claimed to have made a pact with Satan. *Staged Magic* presents witchcraft as a gendered epistemology that is deeply affected by the testimonial and hermeneutical injustices done to witches in pamphlets, plays, and treatises.

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For my parents:

You are the wind in my sails; thank you for making *everything* possible.

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Introduction

A Taxonomy of Witches

The story of witchcraft begins with Eve. Told by God that she could not eat from the tree “in the midst of the garden...lest ye die,” Eve was tempted by the Serpent to discover the truths that could be imparted by the tree’s fruit (Genesis 3:3).¹ The serpent promised Eve: “in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). The serpent’s temptation of Eve was not about fruit; it was about the temptation of *knowledge*. Eve was not a witch; she does not use *maleficium* to gain the knowledge that she seeks. She was, however, the first woman to be punished for a desire to know. Eve fell from grace not for Adam or for God but for her own desire to know something that others did not.

The Serpent in *Paradise Lost* is even more complimentary than his Biblical counterpart: “Queen of this universe...ye shall not die: / How should ye? By the fruit? It gives you life / To knowledge. By the threat’ner? Look on me, / Me who have touched and tasted, yet both live, / And life more perfect have attained than fate” (IX.684-689).² Satan tempts Eve with “life” and “knowledge,” giving her the opportunity reach for something that is “more perfect” than the life she leads in the Garden. The Serpent urges her not to trust God, who only wants to “keep [her] low and ignorant,” preventing Eve from having “eyes that seem so clear...shall perfectly be then / Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods, / Knowing both good and evil as they know” (IX.706-709). The Serpent convinces Eve that knowledge is being kept from her, and that she has every right to know just as much as God. The Serpent’s silver tongue persuades Eve to

¹ *The English Bible: King James Version*, ed. Herbert Marks (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012). All references to Bible are to this edition.

² John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen Fallon (New York: The Modern Library, 2007). All references to *Paradise Lost* are to this edition.

disobey God's order. She wants to understand what has been forbidden: "what forbids he but to know, / Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise" (IX.758-760). She can no longer be "denied / This intellectual food" (IX.767-768) that could "feed at once both body and mind" (IX.778-779). *Paradise Lost* depicts Eve as desirous of more than fruit. She challenges God's law because she wants to become like Him and "grow mature / In knowledge, as the gods who all things know" (IX.803-804).

With a similar desire to be "as the gods who all things know," the witch can be viewed as an early modern Eve in the plays, pamphlets, and treatises of the early modern period. She is depicted as desirous of knowledge, but her agentic potential is limited by the restrictions of the patriarchal system to which she is the object. Though the early modern witch is often described as having a pact with Satan, her own Serpent outside of the Garden, her relationship with demons, devils, and familiars is secondary to the desires expressed through her use of *maleficium*. The composition and publication of witchcraft pamphlets and treatises are central to understanding the place that the witch occupies in society and how religion, fear, and belief shape how witchcraft is understood and employed as a weapon.

Unlike other texts of the period, Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* is highly skeptical. Scot argues throughout the *Discoverie* that the witch's miracles are impossible; only God can make marvels. In order to convince the reader that the witch's claim to power is false, Scot gathers evidence, texts, and reports from ancient authors through his 16th-century contemporaries. By doing so, he creates a compendium of witchcraft knowledge, perhaps unwittingly organizing a text for 16th-century playwrights and 21st-century scholars to use as a guide to understand witchcraft belief. Though he doesn't believe in witchcraft as a legitimate practice, Scot recognizes that the figure of the witch is present and active in early modern

culture. Throughout *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Scot acknowledges that calling a woman a witch will ensure that she is condemned: “the name of a witch is so odious, and hir power so feared among the common people, that if the honestest bodie living chance to be arraigned thereupon, she shall hardlie escape condemnation.”³ Names carry meaning and designating a woman a “witch” had the power to reframe her past and shape her future.

In many cases, fear preceded the act of naming. Social tensions in early modern communities resulted in accusations of witchcraft that targeted old and indigent women because they were reliant on the community for practical support. These women are neat examples of the archetypal witch who lived on the outskirts of town, away from the heart of the community:

One sort of such as are said to bee witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, belare-eide, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles; poore, sullen, superstitious, and papists; or such as knowe no religion: in whose drousie minds the divell hath gotten a fine seat; so as, what mischeefe, mischance, calamitie, or slaughter is brought to passe, they are easily persuaded the same is done by themselves; imprinting in their minds an earnest and constant imagination hereof.⁴

Scot also references another common belief and source of witchcraft accusations: woman’s weaker nature. Due to their “drousie minds,” women were more likely than men to be tempted by the Devil. The belief that women were naturally weaker and more likely to be influenced by evil drove many accusations of witchcraft. In general, women who were threatening to the safe homogeneity of the community were more likely to face an accusation of witchcraft during their lifetimes. On the surface, naming the witch acted a means of spreading information and ensuring that the community knew whom to fear. With very real threats to survival present in early

³ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, ed. Montague Summers (Garden City: Dover Publications, 1972), 4.

⁴ Scot, 4.

modern communities, including failed crops, harsh weather, and disease, it appears to have been easier to blame witchcraft than accept the vagaries of community life.

Women who were infirm or lacked resources could be a threat to the economic health and long-term survival of a community. In *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, James Sharpe explains that villagers faced practical challenges that the presence of impoverished neighbors heightened in meaningful ways:

...throughout England the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constituted a period of marked, if in most areas gradual, socio-economic change. The key was demographic growth: over the period c. 1530-1630 the population of England doubled, from maybe 2,500,000 to 5,000,000 people. Food production barely kept up with this increase, while this demographic growth also created a flooded labour market which meant that the substantial proportion of the population which was wholly or partly dependent on wage labour found it more difficult to get work, and received less in terms of real wages for such employment as they were able to find.⁵

The economic challenges of the early modern period cannot be underestimated. Widespread poverty caused begging within villages, and a demonstrated need for resources increased interdependence among villagers because each community operated as its own social support system. The necessity for villagers to be interdependent and the threat of being turned away from a neighbor's door gave rise to the archetype of the witch who curses miserly neighbors for their uncharitable words or deeds.

The archetype of the witch who curses those who have been uncharitable was not always true. In the texts that reflect community beliefs about witchcraft, there is a subtle taxonomy in

⁵ James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (London: Pearson Education, 2001), 35.

the classification of the different types of witches. By calling some woman a “witch” and others a “cunning woman” or “sorceress,” texts and plays reference subtle differences in magical practice and social threat. Cunning women, for example, were keepers of knowledge, love charms, and gossips. In contrast, witches were viewed as truly evil and were more likely to have a direct relationship with the Devil. In early modern drama, the women who claim to be able to do magic or are suspected of having magical abilities operate under varied names and distinctions. Most often, characters that are seen doing magic of any type are referred to as “witches.” This is a blanket term, however, and often doesn’t reflect the nature of the magic that the character does in the play. There are many examples of plays that attempt to capture the subtle differences between witches and offer differences in naming conventions. Some refer to the magical practitioner as a “cunning woman,” “enchantress,” “sorceress,” or “prophetess.” In some cases, different editions or printings of plays even change these designations, creating more nuance in how women who do magic are viewed in early modern plays.

Differences in naming conventions for witchcraft can be used as a means for plays, pamphlets, or treatises to reference or establish a belief about how women fit into social structures. Calling a woman a “witch” rather than a “cunning woman” determines to what extent she could be tried for her crimes in proximity to the occult. Cunning women were not often tried under witchcraft statutes. In some cases, they were even recruited to work with witch-finders to search for the malevolent forces in the community. Witches, on the other hand, stood at a far greater risk of trial, torture, and execution because of their actions and what was believed about them within intimate neighborhoods and throughout societies. Examining the different classifications of witches in early modern theater reveals how witchcraft operated in a dramatic context and reflected the broader understanding of *maleficium* during the early modern period.



First used in reference to witchcraft circa 1350, “cunning” is defined as “Possessing magical knowledge or skill: in cunning man, cunning woman, a fortune-teller, conjurer, ‘wise man’, ‘wise woman’, wizard or witch.”⁶ In 1609, Ben Jonson used “cunning” to describe a “wise woman” or “fortune-teller.” In *Epicene*, the cunning woman is paired with a conjurer to show that the two magical practitioners are separate people with different talents: “And then her going in disguise to that conjurer and this cunning woman, where the first question is, how soon you shall die?” (2.3.119-121).⁷ The cunning woman is viewed as being skilled in manipulation and temptation; she is not explicitly described as a witch, nor does she engage in *maleficium*. In contrast, the conjuror must use ritual magic to provide answers and cannot rely on natural aptitude alone.

Unlike *Epicene*, the *Oxford English Dictionary* insists that “cunning” is related to witchcraft and that “cunning” and “witchcraft” are sometimes conflated. “Cunning,” however, is often associated with lesser magic like charms, fortune-telling, and herbalism. The most direct definition of “cunning” in both the noun and adjective form is “Possessing knowledge or learning, learned; versed in a subject.”⁸ Before its association with witchcraft, fortune-telling, or love charms, “cunning” was used to describe a woman had general knowledge or an in-depth understanding related to a specific skill set. Mother Bombie, from John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (1594), is a perfect example of a cunning woman. Unlike Dipsas, the witch in Lyly’s *Endymion* (1588), who moves through the landscape of the play freely and is deeply engaged in *maleficium*, Mother Bombie does not leave her doorway. Instead, she restricts access to her knowledge

⁶ “cunning (adj.),” *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/9658932804>.

⁷ Ben Jonson, *Epicene, or The Silent Woman*, in *English Renaissance Drama*, ed. David Bevington (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 775-860.

⁸ “cunning (adj.).”

through opening and closing the door to her home. Limiting the area in which she operates prevents others from having unbridled access to her and closely controls her engagement with them. She is kept separate enough that her activities will never raise concern with the courts. The limit that she puts on her engagement is both physical and practical; she engages only in rumor and secrets, not in magic and spells.

The *dramatis personae* at the beginning of the play identifies Mother Bombie as “an aged ‘cunning woman’, or soothsayer.”⁹ A “soothsayer” is someone who can see the future, or a prophet. Though it may appear to the other characters as if Mother Bombie can see the future, she makes no true prophecies. Instead, she manipulates what she knows about the other characters in order to reveal truths through a series of riddles. When she first appears, Mother Bombie is sitting on a stool in her doorway awaiting her first petitioner. Silena comes to Mother Bombie to ask whether or not she is a virgin. She assumes that Mother Bombie would understand her body in a way that she herself does not:

Mother Bombie. Who’s there?

Silena. One that would be a maid.

Mother Bombie. If thou be not, it is impossible thou shouldst be; and a shame
thou art not.

Silena. They say you are a witch.

Mother Bombie. They lie. I am a cunning woman.

Silena. Then tell me something.

Mother Bombie. Hold up thy hand. (2.3.94-101)

⁹ John Lyly, *Mother Bombie* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 57. All references to *Mother Bombie* are to this edition.

Mother Bombie is the keeper of knowledge in the community, but she has earned the reputation for being a witch: “They say you are a witch.” In response, Mother Bombie doesn’t argue or make claims about her ability, she only notes that “They lie.” In this instance, Mother Bombie’s “They” is the same as Silena’s: the community that shapes identity through naming and categorization. When Mother Bombie claims that she is “a cunning woman,” she refutes what the community believes of her and claims her identity through an act of self-fashioning. The cunning woman is not someone to be feared. Rather, Mother Bombie possesses the knowledge that Silena and others will need in order to unravel a series of love matches throughout the play.

Like the cunning woman, the prophetess is also at risk of being charged with witchcraft. In William Shakespeare’s *1 Henry VI* (1591), Joan de Pucelle claims the title of holy prophetess but is ultimately charged with witchcraft after she recruits the help of devils to make her final prophecy. When she is first introduced, Joan is described by the Bastard of Orléans as a “holy maid” who

...by a vision sent to her from heaven,
 Ordained is to raise this tedious siege
 And drive the English forth the bounds of France.
 The spirit of deep prophecy she hath,
 Exceeding the nine sibyls of old Rome;
 What’s past and what’s to come she can descry. (1.2.51-57)¹⁰

Joan’s prophecies are viewed as being granted by God. Orléans’s focus on her connection to God initially keeps Joan separate from any association with the witches who are in league with the Devil. Orléans includes the claim that Joan is descended from the “nine sibyls of old Rome”

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *1 Henry VI*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016). All references to *1 Henry VI* are to this edition.

who offered prophecies at holy sites. Including this reference legitimizes Joan's prophecies using a classical allusion. Because Joan can claim a connection to God and to the sibyls, questioning her abilities would be tantamount to doubting holy miracles.

Until her end, Joan claims that she is "Virtuous and holy, chosen from above / By inspiration of celestial grace / To work exceeding miracles on earth" (5.5.39-41). Because she has been sent from heaven and not hell, Joan's work is interpreted as miraculous rather than evil. She speaks of herself using "celestial" rhetoric; how she sees herself is compounded and proven by how others perceive her. When Joan is charged with witchcraft at the end of the play, it is because she departs from holy prophecy and attempts to conjure devils to give her "signs of future accidents" (5.3.4). Joan is charged with witchcraft for conjuring devils, but York refers to her as a "sorceress condemned to burn" rather than a conjureess (5.5.1). The change in Joan's position from the beginning to the end of the play captures the mutability of terms referencing witches and witchcraft during the early modern period. Joan makes holy prophecies and conjures devils using sorcery. She can be viewed as a prophetess, a conjureess, or a sorceress at different points in the play, but she is charged with the crime of witchcraft. The change in how Joan de Pucelle is labeled throughout *I Henry VI* challenges the definition of "witch" used in treatises and pamphlets.

When Joan de Pucelle conjures devils at the end of *I Henry VI*, she is engaging in an elite form of witchcraft that is based on skill and study. Conjuring was viewed as different than witchcraft due its reliance on specific materials and a lack of connection to natural desires. Whereas the witch answers to her lusts through instinct and sinister aid, the conjuror follows a series of steps in hopes of achieving a certain result. Though characters like Joan de Pucelle perform the act of conjuring, those magical practitioners that are explicitly called "conjurors" in

early modern plays were most often men. Due to the masculine associations that conjuring carries, it is closely related to other elite magics like astrology and necromancy, which were favored by royal courts and wealthy merchants.

Though witches and prophetesses are sometimes described as conjuring a devil or familiar as a part of their *maleficium*, they are not called “conjurers.” Reginald Scot captures this distinction in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, referring to witches using feminine pronouns and conjurers using masculine pronouns. He also describes the distinction between witches and conjurers as being one of both power and jurisdiction,

For whereas witches being poore and needie, go from doore to doore for releefe, have they never so manie todes or cats at home, or never so much hogs doong and charvill about them, or never so manie charmes in store: these conjurers (I saie) have gotten them offices in the church of *Rome*, wherby they have obtained authoritie & great estimation.¹¹

Conjurers, Scot argues, have “obtained authoritie & great estimation” in “the church of *Rome*.” For Scot, the threat of the Catholic faith involved the likelihood that priests will use their power of conjuration to develop an undue influence. Even Catholic conjurers are toothless, however, as Scot claims, “I for my part have read a number of their conjurations, but never could see anie divels of theirs, except it were in a plaie.”¹² Scot’s view of conjurers is both anti-Catholic and deeply skeptical. Though he appears to participate in the anti-Catholic rhetoric that compares papists to witches, he is clear in his assessment that he only sees conjurers be successful “in a plaie.”

Like the conjurer, the enchantress uses objects and ritual to create a new reality. Her status is complicated, and the roles of enchantress and sorceress are often conflated. One

¹¹ Scot, 262.

¹² Scot, 258.

example of how the sorceress and enchantress are mixed is the “aged sorceress” Dipsas in John Lyly’s *Endymion* (1588).¹³ In earlier editions of the play, specifically the Henry Holt edition of 1894, Dipsas is described as an “enchantress.”¹⁴ The difference in these descriptions captures the inconsistencies in witchcraft terminology. Characters like Dipsas can be categorized based on how others identify her or in reference to the nature of the magic she uses. Though she is referred to as having “cunning” and is also referred to as a “witch,” I argue that Dipsas is an enchantress. Her most significant act in the play, enchanting Endymion into an everlasting sleep, demonstrates the nature of her art even though it is in contrast to how she is identified.

When Tellus asks Dipsas to “listen in few words to my tale and answer in one word to the purpose” (1.4.12-13) so that she might “by herbs, stones, spells, incantation, enchantment, exorcisms, fire, metals, planets, or any practice to plant affection where it is not and to supplant it where it is” (1.4.15-18), the enchantress refuses. Dipsas claims that she cannot “rule hearts; for, were it in my power to place affection by appointment, I would make such evil appetites, such inordinate lusts, such cursed desires, as all the world should be filled both with superstitious heats and extreme love” (1.4.25-29). Her inability to give rise to “evil appetites” and “inordinate lusts,” which is perhaps her refusal to do so rather than true ineptitude, separates her from the witches and their *maleficium*. As I show in Chapter 3, witches like Hecate in Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* are perceived as particularly dangerous because of their appetites. The enchantress cannot give in to temptation, however; her magic must be held apart.

¹³ John Lyly, *Endymion*, in *English Renaissance Drama*, ed. David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katherine E. Maus, and Eric Rasmussen (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 80. All references to *Endymion* are to this edition.

¹⁴ The 1591 edition of the play, printed by I. Charwood for the Widow Broome, does not include a list of characters. It is difficult to know how Lyly would have identified Dipsas in the *dramatis personae*. Throughout the play, she is referred to as a “witch.”

Reginald Scot describes the potions brewed by witches with the intent of producing love as “mere poisons, bereaving some of the benefit of the braine, and so of the sense and understanding of the mind.”¹⁵ Though she does so without a potion, and without using a love spell, Dipsas is able to prevent Endymion from accessing the “sense and understanding of the mind” through sleep. She cannot make him love Tellus, but she can “breed slackness in love” through an enchantment (1.4.33). Dipsas directs Bagoa to

Fan with this hemlock over his face, and sing the enchantment for sleep, whilst I go in
and finish those ceremonies that are required in our art. Take heed ye touch not his face,
for the fan is so seasoned that whoso it toucheth with a leaf shall presently die, and over
whom the wind of it breatheth, he shall sleep forever. (2.3.43-48)

Like the objects that are essential to the conjuror’s art, Dipsas’s sorcery requires “ceremonies” and a “fan...so seasoned” with the material of magic that “whoso it toucheth with a leaf shall presently die.” Unlike the witch’s natural magic that is shaped by appetite, Dipsas describes her enchantment as an “art” that must be accompanied by objects and rituals (2.3.30). Though she does not use a love charm, Dipsas is able to do what Tellus asks: turn Endymion’s gaze away from the moon and back down to earth.

Scot’s caution against poisonous love potions is put into practice in Ralph Knevet’s *Rhodon and Iris* (1631) when Rhodon drinks a love potion that would kill him without the healing properties of Violetta’s lettuce.¹⁶ Written for the Norwich Society of Florists, *Rhodon and Iris* features a sorceress named Poneria who is banished for her many crimes, including providing Eglantine the love potion that threatens Rhodon’s life. Throughout the play, Poneria is

¹⁵ Scot, 69.

¹⁶ Ralph Knevet, *Rhodon and Iris* (London: Micael Spark at the blew Bible in Greene-Arbour, 1631). <https://login.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/rhodon-iris-pastorall-as-vvas-presented-at/docview/2248517149/se-2?accountid=14434>. All references to *Rhodon and Iris* are to this edition.

described as a “witch” and “sorceress.” The use of two categories to describe Poneria is similar to the doubling of Dipsas’s identity and skill in *Endymion*. Both women are described in varied ways while demonstrating specific skills that are more revealing than naming conventions would indicate.

Poneria’s central desire is to “eclipse the glory of these festivals” (2.1.11) through “cole blacke sinne that can lye hid” (2.1.5). She wants to “rend a well woven state in factious peeces; / To win the eares of mighty Potentates; / And hood-winke Kings, that they should neither see / To doe what’s just, nor hear the piteous cryes / Of those that are opprest” (2.1.15-19). Poneria attempts to achieve this through a series of spells that turn her impostor, Agnostus, into a Senator. With the use of a magical cap and beard created using a beesom, Agnostus acquires the ability to “be bold / To traduce thy betters, to censure the best, / To decide controversies without discretion, / To torment all companies with thy discourse, / And weary eares of yron with thy impertinences” (2.1.47-51). In *Endymion*, Dipsas deputizes the task of enchanting Endymion to Bagoa so that she can do the work to “finish those ceremonies that are required in our art” (2.3.44-45). While Dipsas works her magic off stage, Bagoa fans “with...hemlock over his face, and sing[s] the enchantment for sleep” (43-44). Similarly, Poneria provides enchanted objects to Agnostus for his use, but they are meant to achieve her ends. All he must do is wear the cap and the beard for Poneria’s sorcery to take hold. Using the enchanted disguise that Poneria provides, Agnostus gains an avenue into a political and social world to which he would not otherwise have access.

Throughout *Rhodon and Iris*, Poneria’s magic is described as malevolent sorcery. Though she participates in the materiality of a magical practice like Dipsas’s, her sorcery has greater influence and reach. Poneria’s desire to use sorcery to upend an entire government is at

odds with Scot's claim that the influence of a witch's magic stops at her neighbor's door. Poneria's influence marks her practice as different than the work of the enchantress. When Dipsas works her enchantments, she has one object: Endymion. She creates a spell that affects only him and achieves the ends that are in line with her desires. Poneria, in contrast, works magic that affects not only Agnostus, who wears her cap, but also all of the characters in the play that drink her poison, interact with ensorcelled characters, and find themselves engaged in a battle which she orchestrates from afar.

In Lambert Daneau's *A Dialogue of Witches* (1574), the sorceress and the witch are combined into one who does not "deuine, but only intoxicate[s] and priuily sea with poison, being thereto instructed by *Satanical* artes: yet if somtyme they chaunce to foretell things to come, they do it not by lottes, as they did in old tyme, but only by the Diuels reuealing."¹⁷ Daneau argues throughout his dialogue that sorcerers and diviners were the "first men of all that had any dealings or friendship with the Diuel."¹⁸ Daneau charges witches and sorcerers with the crime to taking divination too far. Though they were first to inherit their power through a relationship with Satan, witches no longer divine the future through art. Without art, the witch and the sorcerer have become the tools of the daemons and devils to which they have sold their souls. By Daneau's estimation, therefore, the sorcerer is just as evil as the witch. Both have a relationship with the Devil and a power that is more influential than that of lot-tellers and diviners. Unlike other witchcraft treatises of the period, Daneau's focuses closely on the effect of sorcery and the work that it does in the larger scope of dangerous evil.

¹⁷ Lambert Daneau, *A dialogue of witches, in foretime named lot-tellers, and now commonly called sorcerers* (R.W., 1575), *Sig. C.b. recto*. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2240901411/99844869?parentSessionId=2ZItEG8QJZDS TfqcKY8h9fcsq7W0RFZqKv0krN86thU%3D&accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

¹⁸ Daneau, *Sig. C.i. recto*.

Among the characters who are seen to practice witchcraft on stage during the early modern period, those who are simply called “witch” are perceived as being the most dangerous. The witch’s power, unlike the cunning woman’s, is not limited to rumor, nor can she claim to practice an elite form of magic like the enchantress or the conjuror. The witch engages in the darkest *maleficium*, harming those around her by answering to her lusts and appetites in a way that defies social order. She is a woman without rules who cannot be contained by the social structures that attempt to limit her power.

Ben Jonson’s *The Masque of Queens* (1609) reinforces occult archetypes through the depiction of a group of witches whose magic is displaced by the House of Fame and its virtuous queens. Central to the juxtaposition between the witches and the queens is the view that witchcraft is a subversion of the natural order. The masque makes this visible when each of the witches recites what she has collected to contribute to their spell. The Second Hag describes gathering “...wolves’ hairs, / The mad dogs’ foam, and the adders’ ears, / The spurning of a dead man’s eyes, / And all since the evening star did rise” (157-160). Through the description of what she collects, the Second Hag demonstrates that the witch’s tasks are determined by the natural cycle of the day, as she collects her ingredients “since the evening star did rise.” The objects that she gathers are difficult to come by and force her to go where good and chaste women would not venture. In order to collect “wolves’ hairs,” “mad dog’s foam,” “adders’ ears,” or the “spurning of a dead man’s eyes,” the Hag would have to put herself in physical and moral danger. All of these ingredients are disgusting and challenge accepted norms about what women should create together.

The Fifth and Sixth Hags kill children for the witch’s flying ointment. The Fifth Hag describes “suck[ing] the breath from a child” (171) who is asleep, and the Sixth Hag claims to

have “Killed an infant to have his fat” (174). Unlike Hecate’s coven in Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch*, the Hags in *The Masque of Queens* don’t detail how they boiled the baby in order to create a salve that would make them fly. Instead, the witches detail only the collection of the infant’s remains alongside the plants and psychotropic herbs that will be essential to their work: “plants among, / Hemlock, henbane, adder’s tongue, / Nightshade, moonwort, leopard’s bane” to combine with the objects, plants, and offal that the other witches collected (185-187). The Dame details her contribution after the assembled Hags have brought their offerings to her:

I have brought, to help our vows,
 Horned poppy, cypress boughs,
 The fig tree wild that grows on tombs,
 And juice that from the larch tree comes,
 The basilisk’s blood and the viper’s skin,
 And now our orgies let’s begin. (197-202)

The objects that the Dame brings with her come from the natural world, beginning with plants and trees. According to legend, the poppy that the Dame includes could make the wearer invisible at will: “Soak poppy seeds in wine for fifteen days. Then drink the wine each day for five days while fasting. According to tradition you will be able to make yourself invisible at will.”¹⁹ It is unclear whether or not it is the Dame’s intent that she and her Hags should develop the ability to become invisible or if the poppy is an ingredient for another spell. Not all of the items that she includes would have such a remarkable effect. The use of poppy is an example of the witch’s spell having what is now understood to be a real physical and psychological effect.

¹⁹ Scott Cunningham, *Cunningham’s Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2023), 211.

Poppy seeds are the source for opium and using them to make oneself invisible is likely nothing more than a response to drug intoxication.

The Dame's cry, "now our orgies let's begin," carries multiple meanings. The earliest uses of "orgies" in English date to the early 16th century and refer to "Secret rites or ceremonies practised in the worship of various gods of Greek and Roman mythology; esp. those practices connected with the festivals in honour of Dionysus or Bacchus."²⁰ In a more general sense, "orgy" can also refer to "Any rites, ceremonies, or secret observances, religious or otherwise."²¹ It is not until the 18th century that "orgy" takes on an explicitly sexual overtone, though sexual excess is implied in earlier references to Greek Bacchanalia. The Dame's reference to the witches' "orgies" intentionally engages with the multiple definitions of the word in order to heighten the audience's sense that they are viewing something forbidden by polite society. What follows is the depiction of a "secret rite" which stops short of "excessive drinking and indiscriminate sexual activity."²²

The threat of witchcraft was closely tied to excess. Witches were viewed as lustful and dangerous, and this is reflected in the masque's depiction of the witches' dance: "*a magical dance, full of preposterous change and gesticulation, but most applying to their property, who at their meetings do all things contrary to the custom of men, dancing back to back and hip to hip, their hands joined, and making their circles backward, to the left hand, with strange fantastic motions of their heads and bodies*" (340-345). Unable to depict the witches' orgy to the fullest extent, the masque instead depicts a fantastical dance full of "*preposterous change and gesticulation.*" The witches do everything "*contrary to the custom of men,*" including "*making*

²⁰ "orgy (n.)," *Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3877185378>.

²¹ "orgy (n.)."

²² "orgy (n.)."

their circles backward” and dancing “*back to back and hip to hip.*” Their dancing is heightened by “*a sound of loud music, as if many instruments had made one blast*” (348-349). Together, the aural cacophony and visual dissonance that represent the witches’ dance demonstrate the illegibility of witchcraft to polite society. Witchcraft has the capacity, the masque shows the audience, to turn everything upside down.

The subtle differences in the magic that cunning women, prophetesses, conjurors, enchantresses, sorceresses, and witches perform are often collapsed into general terms. The inevitable collapsing of terms can be seen in Reginald Scot’s affirmation that witches were quite common during the early modern period: “I have heard (to my greefe) some of the ministerie affirme, that they have had in their Parish at one instant, xvii. or xviii. witches: meaning such as could worke miracles supernaturallie.”²³ Scot calls these miracle workers “witches” rather than “cunning women” or “sorceresses,” but he also describes varied forms of witchcraft throughout his treatise that represent enchantments, prophecies, and conjurations. The common designation of “witch” creates space for the use of different occult skills by the individual, but it also causes a lack of specificity that can cause direct and indirect harm.

Calling all women who practice magic “witches” allows the witch-finder to exploit those individuals who employ varied types of magic that do not include *maleficium* alongside those who might be guilty of true evil. The exploitation of identity in relation to gender in the early modern period strengthens the majority group’s ability to blame and manipulate those who have less power. The exploitation of witches and cunning people did not align perfectly with a gender binary, and men were sometimes part of the disenfranchised groups who suffered at the hands of witch-finders. Nevertheless, the vast majority of those who were tried for witchcraft in England,

²³ Scot, 3.

Ireland, and Scotland during the early modern period were women. The gendered nature of witchcraft accusations is reflected in the complaints that often originated among groups of women and targeted other females in the community.

Witch-finders recruited cunning women to assist during witchcraft trials as a means of exploitation and blackmail. The help that the cunning woman offered witch-finders could keep her out of jail. There is deep and unsatisfying irony in the fact that cunning women were made to participate in the system that tried witches and sentenced them to death. Cunning folk and witch-finders operated in tandem throughout the early modern period. Robin Briggs explains: "...the careers of most witch-finders were relatively very short, whereas the cunning folk could operate for decades. As usual the boundaries between groups are very untidy, with the crucial distinction centers on the positive manner in which some individuals set out to mobilize suspicions, rather than simply responding to clients who approached them."²⁴ Briggs identifies an important difference between witch-finders and cunning women in this case: cunning women could be important figures in their community even if they were outsiders while witch-finders would have power but no welcome from the villages on which they descended. The cunning woman exists in a liminal space between need and fear. As long as the cunning woman was useful to the patriarchal system, she was welcome to continue to conduct business. In contrast, the witch could not be tolerated, and every means possible was used to restrain women's agency to ensure that dangerous witchcraft could be stopped.

The manner by which witches were accused, arrested, and tried relied on community testimony and the witch's confession. Testimonies and confessions are recorded in court records but had the farthest reach and greatest impact through pamphlets. The pamphlets that record a

²⁴ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbours: the Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 162.

witch's confession and describe her evil deeds often include a series of truth claims. The truth claims that the author makes at the beginning of a report or pamphlet establishes his record of the witch's confession as honest, true, and accurate. The witch's testimony is subject to a series of epistemic injustices, however, that are not captured in the text.

In *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing*, Miranda Fricker establishes a theoretical structure for how and why disenfranchised groups are limited in their access to knowledge through and because of established power structures. Fricker defines epistemic injustice as "a wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower."²⁵ She classifies epistemic injustice into two different types: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice occurs "when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word."²⁶ Hermeneutical injustice, however, "occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences."²⁷ Though she makes no direct references to witches as individuals with the capacity to know and interpret, they can be viewed as the objects of epistemic injustice when they are subjected to rumors, trials, and accusations.

Epistemic injustice is central to the establishment of witchcraft as a legitimate crime because the woman's "capacity as a knower" is disadvantaged within the patriarchal system that ruled judicial and royal courts. Though witchcraft was a destructive crime per the legal statutes of the period, it was also a crime of identity. Witches were often persecuted because of *who* they were rather than *what* they did within the social fabric of their communities. The laws of the period are not focused on issues of identity, however. Instead, they aim to codify what crimes

²⁵ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 1.

²⁶ Fricker, 1.

²⁷ Fricker, 1.

the witch can be tried for when she is blamed for sickening children and cattle. The law tends to devalue the witch's report of her own actions, giving more credence to testimonies from neighbors and long-standing rumors as opposed to reports and observations. The witch's confession and defense of her actions are both given a "deflated level of credibility," making her a victim of epistemic injustice. Because she is a woman and a witch, her word cannot be trusted.

I want to complicate Fricker's established theory of testimonial injustice in the case of witchcraft. At the same time that the witch's report of herself is given a "deflated level of credibility," the evidence given against her is given *increased* credibility. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, published at the conclusion of the Lancashire Witch Trials in August of 1612, includes the supposed confessions of witches, records of court proceedings, and the evidence that accusers gave against the women on trial. In "The Examination and euidence of Iames Robinson...against Anne Whittle, alias Chattox," Robinson claims that Whittle drew "drinke seuerall times" from a "Stand" that Robinson's wife prepared and "neuer after that time, for some eight or nine weekes, they could haue any drinke, but spoiled, as this Examinee thinketh was by the meanes of the said *Chattox*."²⁸ Robinson's claims also include evidence that Whittle and her daughter were "commonly reputed and reported to bee Witches."²⁹ Robinson's testimony against Whittle is believed by the men of the court and no further evidence is given against the witch because this report is "so apparant, as no indifferent man will question it, or rest vnsatisfied."³⁰

²⁸ Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Covntie of Lancaster. With the Arraignement and Triall of Nineteene notorious Witches, at the Assizes and general Gaole deliverie, holden at the Castle of Lancaster, upon Monday, the seventeenth of August last, 1612* (W. Stansby and Iohn Barnes, 1613), Sig. E verso – Sig. E2 recto. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240860427/99850200/9E6905BE3F06415CPQ/1?accountid=14434&source=Books>.

²⁹ Potts, Sig. E2 recto.

³⁰ Potts, Sig. E2 verso.

In the case of James Robinson's report detailing Anne Whittle's crimes, his word is given increased credibility against a woman who is charged with spoiling his drink for eight or nine weeks after she was present in his home. Whittle's recorded confession is also given increased credibility so that it may serve as irrefutable proof of her guilt. In the case of witch trials, therefore, the witch's position as an object within the system of epistemic injustice is in flux. When she claims that she is innocent, she is subject to a "deflated level of credibility." When she is coerced into a confession, on the other hand, her claims are given *increased* credibility. The court system that supported witch-hunters wants nothing more than to believe in the witch's supernatural power. Before she faced a judge, however, a community could attempt to determine a woman's guilt through trial by experiment.

The experiments that witches faced were passed down from the middle ages, where trial by ordeal was believed to be influenced by divine justice.³¹ Orna Alyagon Darr explains that the "experiments that were aimed at finding witches were not dictated from above by the royal judges who traveled from Westminster to the counties. They were initiated and conducted by the alleged victims' families at the pretrial stage. The findings were reported at the trial and the assize judges showed openness toward additional experimentation at the trial itself."³² The trial by experiment that a witch might face was not dependent entirely on the vigor of community belief or religious zeal. Darr further notes that "the swimming test...was not a spontaneous eruption of mob justice, but seems to have been a carefully planned and prearranged experiment, having orderly predetermined stages and orchestrated by gentlemen."³³ Ultimately, any trial by

³¹ Orna Alyagon Darr, "Experiments in the Courtroom: Social Dynamics and Spectacles of Proof in Early Modern English Witch Trials," *Law and Social Inquiry* vol. 39, no. 1 (2014), 155.

³² Darr, 162.

³³ Darr, 165.

experiment that the accused witch faced was intended to, “bolster the case and make it sufficient for indictment.”³⁴

Although witchcraft experiments attempted to legitimize the charges against a witch, many of the experiments themselves were illegal: “The swimming test and the scratching were illegal practices punishable by law and denounced by major religious authorities and many elite writers.”³⁵ Many justices went along with “popular demand,” however, and there could be “semiofficial cooperation” through the “passive attendance at illegal proceedings carried out by men of authority.”³⁶ The tension between popular social conduct and legal restrictions complicates the testimonial injustices present and active in the early modern witchcraft trial. Women should have been, and often were, tried by juries and traveling magistrates who adhered to the laws that acquitted some of the women who were tried for witchcraft. Darr’s evidence that witches were tried by experiment *before* a formal courtroom trial commenced indicates that there is increased credibility given to the results of the experiment alongside the accusations made against an individual. This shows that the results of witchcraft tests could be given as much if not more credibility than testimony within the trial sphere. Trial by experiment attempts to link confession and testimony with legal fact to produce an irrefutable charge against the witch. The perspective of the community is given increased credibility when the trial by experiment occurs prior to the arrival of a judge or magistrate. The witch’s report of herself is of limited service because it will count for naught if she floats, bleeds, or otherwise proves her guilt through bodily evidence that is perceived as being beyond question.³⁷

³⁴ Darr, 166.

³⁵ Darr, 167.

³⁶ Darr, 167.

³⁷ Although trial by experiment and other ordeals are described in witchcraft reports and pamphlets, they are not often featured in witchcraft plays. Similarly, dramatic representations of witchcraft are hesitant to depict the formal trial of a witch, finding the witch guilty and sentencing her offstage. Among the plays in my archive, the nearest depiction of a trial is Elizabeth Sawyer’s conversation with the Justice and Sir Arthur in Act IV of *The Witch of*

The witch's relative credibility is only one half of the epistemic injustice of which she is made the object. The second half of Fricker's argument is about hermeneutical injustice. To reiterate, hermeneutical injustice "occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences."³⁸ The "unfair disadvantage" that the witch faces is the construction of her identity by those in her community. Whereas the court system claims to try a woman for a specific crime, that of destroying life or property, it cannot be denied that the woman's identity is also on trial. Robinson states as a part of his evidence that Whittle was commonly known as a witch. In doing so, he reinforces the witch's community-constructed identity. When a woman's neighbors believe that she is a witch, she must be one.

A woman like Whittle is *expected* to be a witch. As a result, both her community and she herself demonstrate the "gap in collective interpretive resources" to which Fricker refers. The witch is put at "an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of [her] social experiences." Throughout my project, I encounter many women whose confessions are recorded and distributed in treatises like *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*. There is no record of whether or not the confessions in these treatises were forced using torture or other coercive methods. Furthermore, there is no way to prove that recorded confessions are not ventriloquized fictions invented by scholars and witch-hunters. In the case of a text like Henry Goodcole's *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*, which I will discuss in detail in Chapter Two, for example, there is no clear evidence that Sawyer's recorded

Edmonton. When the men arrive, the community has already decided that Sawyer is a witch and must be hanged; her claims of innocence have been given decreased credibility. The Justice acts as the voice of reason in this case, giving increased credibility to Sawyer's protestations, until Sawyer is found formally guilty off stage at the end of the play. I discuss this scene in further detail in Chapter Two.

³⁸ Fricker, 1.

confession occurred. There is also no evidence that her confession *did not* occur, complicating matters further.

Robin Briggs describes the crime of witchcraft as “transparent” with “a hole at the centre, since witches did not actually do most of the things alleged against them.”³⁹ It is important to note that the hole at the center of witchcraft refers to the witch’s ability to raise storms, harm crops, or perform other miraculous feats. The legitimizing force of epistemic injustice acts on witchcraft as a crime of knowledge and identity, not on the wide-spread belief that witches had magical powers. In nearly all cases where a witch is charged for *maleficium*, the interrogator himself believed that the witch was not only guilty of her crimes, but also believed that she was entirely capable of committing miraculous acts to their fullest extent. This is made apparent through the series of truth claims that Henry Goodcole includes at the beginning of his treatise on Elizabeth Sawyer, the Witch of Edmonton. Goodcole affirms that he saw the witch, witnessed her crimes, and visited her in jail before her execution. Goodcole’s claims are emblematic of the nature of belief during the early modern period but unique in their approach. Unlike other authors, he does not rely on the reader’s established belief. He seeks to prove himself trustworthy *before* the reader encounters his narrative to ensure that both his words and the confession of the witch are accepted as fact. In the other pamphlets in my archive, the witch does not deny the accusations against her. The text leaves no space for her to challenge her male interlocutor. More importantly, the text would not achieve its purpose if the witch were to bewail her innocence. The goal of most pamphlets and treatises, Reginald Scot’s an exception among them, was to teach others to fear the witch. Her crimes must be laid out in detail, her sins counted, and the truth of her terrible deeds made irrefutable for the text to have its chosen effect.

³⁹ Briggs, 7.

The discussion of how witchcraft pamphlets functioned in their sociohistorical context is a central part of my argument about the nature of belief. Because there are no clear and definite records to indicate whether a witch believed herself capable of the crimes of which she is accused, I use Miranda Fricker's theoretical approach alongside cultural contexts to offer as clear a picture of witchcraft beliefs as possible. Approaching the hole at the center of witchcraft with the goal of first understanding how the pamphlet text operated in society will clarify the serious implications of witchcraft texts as dramatizations in their own right. Not all witches needed to appear on stage to be believed.

Reading pamphlet texts as dramatic representations of witchcraft reshapes them into a tool that can be used by unjust court systems. Because they were more accessible than longer, expensive treatises, pamphlets are key components in the epistemic injustice suffered by the women who were accused of witchcraft. Women named as witches were prevented from accessing the power or resources to make sense of their social experience, reinforcing the structural disadvantages that they suffered. The system that oppresses women and witches limits their ability to decide for themselves what they know to be true. As a result, they are made the objects of men's "discursive and imaginative habits" which "operate purely structurally" within a highly subjective patriarchal system.⁴⁰ Men, therefore, are the subjects in charge of creating a newly imagined reality. Naming the witch through rumor, record, and legal proceedings is the masculine imagination's most potent tool within the closed system of knowledge which dismisses women's epistemologies. Society's unfounded trust in men's authority and reason has the capacity to make a woman into a witch.



⁴⁰ Fricker, 11.

In my first chapter, “Setting the Stage: *The Discoverie of Witchcraft, Daemonology*, and the Nature of Belief,” I examine foundational witchcraft treatises from Reginald Scot and James I with the goal of understanding the nature of belief during the early modern period. In “The Reception of Reginald Scot's Discovery of Witchcraft: Witchcraft, Magic, and Radical Religion,” S.F. Davies argues that Scot’s treatise is unique because it is “the first extant treatise on witchcraft by an English author...but its real interest lies in the fact that Scot was uncompromisingly skeptical about the existence of witchcraft – in fact it was the most skeptical work on the subject printed in Europe during the early modern period.”⁴¹ Scot argues that the witch’s crimes are impossible and that the witch-hunter is more guilty than the witch because he believes her lies. Witches, he says, should not claim to perform the miracles that only God can accomplish. Though Scot is clear and consistent in his disbelief, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* is one of the primary resources used as source material for the plays of the period that present witches as a real threat. Authors like Thomas Middleton take Scot’s skepticism and reshape it to represent the witch’s unbridled desires. Reshaping Scot’s text has a significant impact not only on drama, but also on the witchcraft myths that have continued to this day.

In this chapter, I use Scot’s *Discoverie*, which continued to be amended and published through 1665, to establish a foundation on which to build an understanding of the environment of belief that produced the plays such as *The Witch*, *Macbeth*, and *The Witch of Edmonton*. Scot’s stance on the corporeality of witches, which included his belief that incorporeal spirits, or the Devil, could not cause harm because of a lack of physical body, has a sustained and direct influence on how and where belief appears in society. Scot’s tenets directly influence how witches are named, how they are created through the power of imagination, and how they

⁴¹ S.F. Davies, “The Reception of Reginald Scot’s Discovery of Witchcraft: Witchcraft, Magic, and Radical Religion,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* vol. 74, no. 3 (July 2013), 381.

manage excesses of knowledge and desire. By placing Scot's text in conversation with James I and the *Witchcraft Act of 1563*, I show that early modern dramatists shape what early moderns believed about witches and challenge the role that imagination has in creating a system of belief that persecuted women for impossible feats.

In my second chapter, titled "'Who should bee the author of this mischiefe': The Self-Fashioning Witch on Stage and Off," I place William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford's play *The Witch of Edmonton* in conversation with its source text, Henry Goodcole's *The wonderful discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer; Witch*. I examine the relationship between the source text, which claims to be a true report, and the play, which is an acknowledged fiction. In doing so, I show that the play reshapes the source text in subtle ways and gives Sawyer the power to create a different and more agential version of herself. Sawyer's agency in the play stands in opposition to Goodcole's report of Sawyer in *The wonderful discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer*. Beginning with several claims as to the truth of his report, Goodcole reports Sawyer's confession with what might be unfounded confidence. Throughout *The wonderful discovery*, there are textual clues which indicate that Goodcole may not have conducted the audience with Sawyer on which he claims to base his text.

Throughout both narratives, Sawyer fights against the forces that attempt to shape her reality and her own attempts to make herself into the kind of witch that others believe her to be. Sawyer fulfills many of the tropes of the archetypal witch during the period. She describes herself as bent and broken not by the natural progress of aging but by as the result of her neighbor's misuse. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the audience sees the abuse that the witch suffers enacted on stage and receives a direct report of the result. Sawyer is not a witch at the beginning of the play, but she is one at the end. The result of Sawyer's abuse is that she makes herself into

the witch that others presume her to be. The agency that is expressed through her self-fashioning is in tension with the lack of true agency that she has over her body or her freedom. The play offers Sawyer the agency that life did not. By examining these texts together, I build on what is established about belief in Chapter 1: fact and fiction are mutable during the period, but fiction can give the witch some of her power back.

My third chapter, titled “‘This brazen dish’: Immoral Feasting in *The Witch*,” examines the relationship between the witch’s appetites and her desire for power. I examine the spells that Hecate uses in *The Witch* alongside the witchcraft that appears in *Macbeth* to show how and where these plays intersect in surprising ways. Regarding the inclusion of text from *The Witch* in *Macbeth*, Mark Hutchings claims that “There is no doubt that *Macbeth* is the earlier play; although the date of *The Witch* is uncertain, it cannot be earlier than 1609, and is probably not later than 1616. So, the question that arises initially is when the additions were made – and whether they antedate or postdate *The Witch*.”⁴² The scholarship on these plays appears more certain as to the details of Shakespeare’s composition of *Macbeth* than it is about when Middleton wrote *The Witch*, since Middleton’s play did not enjoy a long stage run and existed only in manuscript form until 1778 when it was printed and distributed. The complicated relationship between these plays does not negate how important they are to one another both in the ways that they share text and in the ways that they reflect society’s understanding of witchcraft.

The witchcraft depicted in *The Witch* is more extreme than the witchcraft portrayed in *Macbeth* both in what is depicted on stage and in the use of source material. *The Witch* uses Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* for all of its spells, including the use of a boiled baby to make a

⁴² Mark Hutchings and A. A. Bromham, *Middleton and His Collaborators* (Devon: Northcote, 2008), 62.

flying ointment. Though *Macbeth* is dark in its tone and stage presence, it lacks the extreme witchcraft of its partner play. Unlike the witchcraft that is depicted in *The Witch* and *The Witch of Edmonton*, *Macbeth* features spells and incantations that serve the iambic pentameter and the plot of the play more than they do the portrayal of the witch's craft on stage. Even though the witchcraft in *Macbeth* serves a different purpose, it continues to engage with women's agency in important ways. Together, the plays included in this chapter reveal how extreme portrayals of witchcraft expose the radical desire among women for freedom, agency, and power. A meaningful engagement with the text of the spells included in these plays reinforce the idea that witchcraft could create agential spaces for women in addition to reinforcing the relationship between the play and the source text that it dramatizes.

To close, I address the role of evidence and confessions in Thomas Potts's *The wonderfull discoverie of witches in the countie of Lancaster* in a conclusion titled, "Witches Without a Play: the Pendle Witches and the Legacies of Witchcraft." There were two notable witchcraft trials in Lancashire. The first set of accusations and trials occurred in 1612 and involved the persecution of the witches of Pendle Hill, colloquially known as the Pendle Witches. The second set of trials occurred in 1633 and became the source material for Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome's *The Late Lancashire Witches*.

Potts's *The wonderful discoverie* is unique in my archive. It is the only witchcraft report among the documents that I use in this project that is not used as source material for a play. Texts like Scot's are used time and again, but though the material in Potts's treatise is rich and complicated, it is not reshaped for the stage. Among witchcraft treatises as a whole, this is relatively common. Reports and treatises were not often dramatized, so it is important to examine the relationship between text and fact outside of a dramatic context. My conclusion

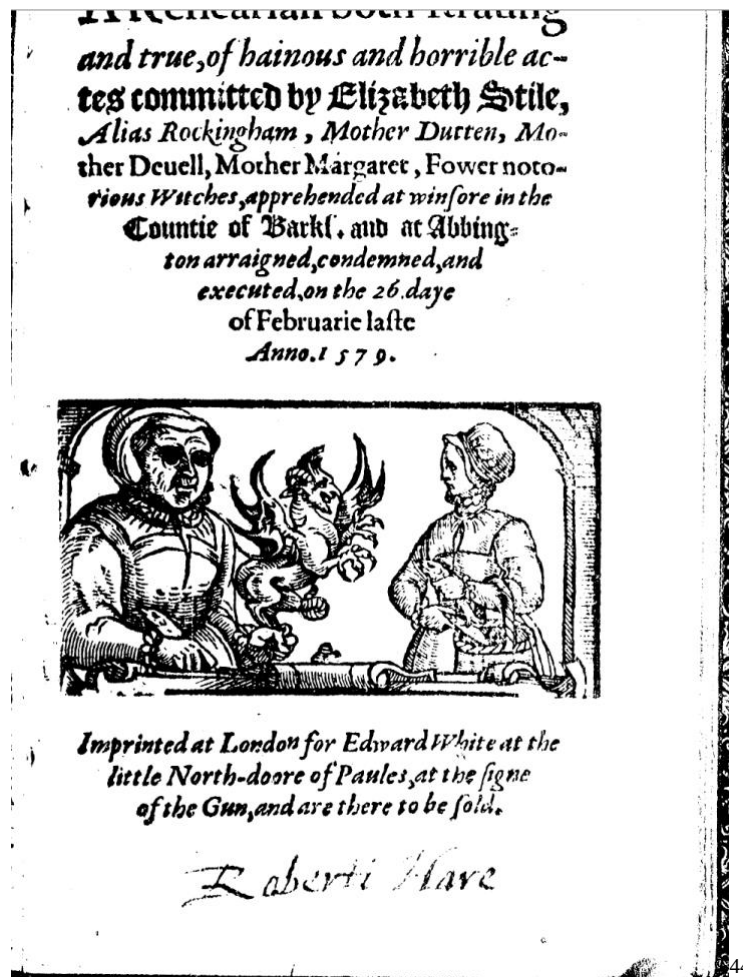
examines the role of confession and declaration in Potts's text, reframing what others say about witches versus what they reportedly say of themselves. Because the Pendle Witches are witches without a play, there is not a parallel opportunity to examine how the narrative would be manipulated for the stage. The text of the pamphlet is, however, fascinating on its own. It presents ample opportunity to examine the in-fighting and conflict between and among neighbors when they are asked to report on supernatural occurrences in court.



Together, these chapters contribute to closing the “gap in collective interpretive resources” that exists between witchcraft plays and their source material.⁴³ Early modern witchcraft pamphlets had the power to shape the public's imagination by bringing the legends of the witch's sabbath, flying ointments, and feline familiars to life. They reinforced belief while also reflecting established ideologies back onto society. Witchcraft drama directly engages with the social and ideological sources of witchcraft narratives as included in pamphlets and treatises. As a result, my archive of plays functions as a meaningful entry point to identifying and examining how witchcraft beliefs operated in early modern society. Dramatic representations of witchcraft in the form of a pamphlet or play were ultimately more accessible to the individuals and groups who saw their beliefs enacted on stage because of financial limitations and low literacy rates. Witchcraft texts are, therefore, meaningful cultural artifacts representing the marriage of belief, ideology, epistemology, and historical record.

⁴³ Fricker, 1.

Chapter 1

Setting the Stage: *The Discovery of Witchcraft, Daemonology, and the Nature of Belief*

The title page of *A rehearsall both straung and true, of heinous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile alias Rockingham, Mother Dutton, Mother Deuell, Mother Margaret, fower notorious witches, apprehended at Winsore in the countie of Barks and at Abbington arraigned, condemned, and executed, on the 26 daye of Februarie last Anno 1579*

⁴⁴ *A Rehearsall both Straung and True, of Hainous and Horrible Actes Committed by Elizabeth Stile Alias Rockingham, Mother Dutton, Mother Deuell, Mother Margaret, Fower Notorious Witches, Apprehended at Winsore in the Countie of Barks. and at Abbington Arraigned, Condemned, and Executed, on the 26 Daye of Februarie Laste Anno. 1579* (London: By J. Kingston for Edward White at the little north-doore of Paules, at the signe of the Gun, and are there to be sold, 1579), unpagued. <https://login.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/books/rehearsall-both-straug-true-hainous-horrible/docview/2240866404/se-2?accountid=14434>.

features and engraving of two women. The woman on the right is depicted with a basket over her arm and a fish in her hand. Her gown and cap are neat, while her face reveals dismay. The engraving does not provide fine detail, but the set of her eyes as she stares at the woman on the left shows uncertainty and fear. The woman on the left is larger than her counterpart. Her body expands beyond the frame, and her eyes are entirely black. Her face is turned to gaze beyond the woman next to her, toward the devil in her hand. The larger woman has no basket, no eyes, and no fish to serve for dinner. The devil that she grips with her left hand is depicted mid-flight with its claws extended toward the other woman. It is a winged creature with a peaked head, horns, outsized claws, and a tail which the woman on the left is using to keep it restrained. The creature's face is full of mirth, smiling at the smaller with sinister glee. This depiction of a witch and a devil on the title page of the text illustrates for the readers what they can expect to find inside: definitive proof of the existence and influence of the Devil.

The report included in this pamphlet is rich with the details of how those who died at the hands of these witches were bewitched: "Mother Dutten, by their counsaile and consent, did sticke an Hawthorne pricke, against the left sides of the breastes of the Images, directly there where thei thought the hartes of the persones to bee sette, whome the same pictures did represente, and thereupon within shorte space, the saied fower persones, beeying sodainely taken, died."⁴⁵ Included after several claims of truth-telling, details such as this one help to support the anonymous author's desire to have his words deemed truthful. Truth and belief, however, were in tension with the realities of reported fact during the early modern period. Because the differentiation between fact and fiction in literature had not yet been established in

⁴⁵ *A Rehearsall both Straung and True*, unpagged.

the middle part of the 16th century, an author's ability to claim that their assertions were true was limited by what was perceived as true by the reading public.

A rehearsal both straung and true is lodged firmly in the 16th century, but the development of fictional texts continued through the first years of the 18th century. The nature of belief, however, and the assertion of a text as factual played a large part in why witchcraft tracts and pamphlets were so widespread during the early modern period. Even though each author asserted that his claim was truthful, and that the confession contained in his report was sourced directly from the accused, there is no way to confirm that what the author reported is true or that he met the accused at all. The unnamed author must be taken at his word. In *Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds*, Darren Oldridge reminds us: "If culture plays a major role in our understanding of the world, perhaps we should be cautious about things that seem self-evidently true. After all, the existence of witches was obvious to educated people in the sixteenth century."⁴⁶ For Oldridge, the idea of truth is connected to what is familiar: "If some things are so normal that they go unseen, others stand out precisely because they are unfamiliar. But familiarity, of course, depends on context."⁴⁷ While the existence of witches was "obvious" to our sixteenth-century ancestors, they were also unfamiliar and dangerous. This sense of unfamiliarity caused witches to stand out to laymen and lawmakers alike. It is worthwhile to interrogate the nature of this obvious belief and the strangeness that surrounded witchcraft during the period between the publication of the first witchcraft treatises in English in the 1560s and the

⁴⁶ Darren Oldridge, *Strange Histories: The Trial of the Pig, the Walking Dead, and Other Matters of Fact from the Medieval and Renaissance Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 176.

⁴⁷ Oldridge, 175.

Interregnum, during which both the public and the playwrights were notably preoccupied with women's knowledge and the power of witches.

The author of *A rehearsal both straung and true* does not indicate under what conditions he was able to hear Elizabeth Stile's confession, nor under what authority he was able to record her confession. Other than his assertion that this is "The true examination and confession," there is no evidence that this conversation occurred. The author works hard to establish his credibility, including facts and details about the crimes committed in order to show that he knows as much as the accused. If he is writing based on court documents and borrowed stories from witchcraft treatises, he may know *more* than the witch herself. The manufactured story becomes his and not hers. Stile is said to have confessed all to Sir Henry Neuell, but Neuell is not the author of record for this text. The challenge of identifying the author reveals one of the key issues for this type of text: whose story is this?

On its surface, this is Stile's story, confessed to Neuell and interpolated through an unknown author. It is possible, however, that this is not Stile's story at all, and that this retelling contains none of the information that she may have confessed to Neuell or which may have been discovered in court. The anonymous author could very well be the craftsman behind this story, with details poached and pilfered from other texts or from court records. At a distance of centuries from the publication of this narrative, we cannot reconcile the discomfort of authorship when true facts may be fiction and no author is named.

A significant part of this author's truth telling is based on contextual knowledge. Many witches were accused using false information from neighbors and family members. The accused witch might not understand why she is being accused, what laws she is subject to, and what her punishment would be. The witch is unmoored in this experience because of her lack of

understanding, even when she is on trial for *knowing too much*. Men, on the other hand, particularly those who wrote pamphlets and treatises, were often well-read and well-versed in the laws and community norms of the period. In crafting a narrative, be it a false or true one, the author would inevitably have read some or all of the primary witch hunting documents which circulated in the second half of the 16th century. This gives him more information with which to establish his credibility and craft a narrative that fits the message or moral he wants to circulate. He is in the privileged position of being a well-informed reader and writer.

A good part of Stile's confession involves the actions of others. Her confession reveals that Father Rosimonde and his daughter, Mother Deuell, and Mother Margaret are all witches. The crimes to which Stile confesses, both on her own behalf and those crimes that she reveals were committed by the others, fit neatly to the assumptions that the reading public would have had about witches and witchcraft during the period. Stile "confesseth that she the same Elizabeth, vntil the tyme of her apprehension, kepte a Ratte, beeyng in very deede a wicked Spirite, naming it Philip, and that she fedde the same Ratte with bloode, issuing from her right handwrest, the markes whereof euidently remaine, and also that he gaue her right side to the Deuill, and so did the residue of the Witches before named."⁴⁸ The author appears to know not only that Stile has a familiar, but also what that familiar's name is and from where on the witch's body it feeds. If this confession is fiction, then it is clearly drawn from the stereotypes put forward in treatises of the period. If it is truthful, however, it is remarkably detailed and forthright in the accused's ability to share the details of her misdeeds.



⁴⁸ *A Rehearsall both Straung and True*, unpagged.

Modern readers may find it difficult to believe that there was once a woman named Elizabeth Stile who allowed a rat named Philip to drink the blood of her right wrist. The nature of belief, however, is malleable and affected by time. On one hand, monarchs like James I believed in the power of witches to do evil, asserting that they were in line with the Devil, and had turned their backs against God. Because of the danger that they posed to the kingdom and the king's rule, they needed to be discovered and executed. Others were more skeptical. Reginald Scot asserted that witchcraft was only sleight of hand which conjurors used to trick the eye and defraud potential customers. Scot believed strongly that those in line with the Devil were not the witches themselves, but the witch-hunters who, in maligning their neighbors and sentencing innocents to death, did the Devil's work by failing to see the good in others. The most enduring form of evil created by witch-hunters were the tracts, laws, and trial transcripts which they employed. In writing, printing, and disseminating this information with the goal of helping other witch-hunters defend their communities against the Devil, they perpetuated evil and violence against the primarily female population of those accused.

Treatises of the period, of which there are many examples beyond those of James I and Reginald Scot, contributed to an environment of belief narratives that were often fictional. Among extant pamphlets, every report was said to be true, confessed by the witch herself, and retold by the bailiff who saw her die. Among treatises, authors claimed that they presented true, well-researched, and incontrovertible evidence in support of or detracting from the existence of witches. Many of these treatises rely on one another and the Bible in order to present what they argue is accurate information. Because these treatises draw from one another so often, what we end up with is not a linear progression of true research, but rather a circular confabulation of false beliefs. With so many 'true' reports, what is the public to believe?

In *The Witch: a History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present*, Ronald Hutton takes up this question of belief and decides that the truth in the text is fiction:

That still leaves open the question whether there were any actual would-be satanic witches in early modern Europe. In other words, once the demons are out of the picture, except as fictional characters, were there people who assembled to worship them and committed the actions involved in that worship, as described in accounts of the sabbath? Here again, despite so much apparent testimony, all the professional research of the past half century seems to unite behind the conclusion that there were not, and that the witches' assemblies described in the records were illusory.⁴⁹

Hutton states, unequivocally, that there were no witches worshipping the Devil during the early modern period. His word choice here, however, is important. Hutton notes that the descriptions of these congregations were "illusory." The use of illusion in referencing the perception of witchcraft during the period is important in two ways: it is both an acknowledgement of the witches' own pretense in action and belief, and a challenge to the ways in which the witch-hunters of the period were subject to their own unsound gaze in regard to how it relates to the ways witches were read and interpreted by the public.

The ease of belief, particularly when belief is based on illusion, as Hutton points out, is central to Eric Pudney's argument in *Scepticism and Belief in English Witchcraft Drama, 1538-1681*: "It is important to recognize that such disbelief was, to some degree, always likely to be present. It was possible for early modern people to believe that women could feed the Devil with their own blood in exchange for the power to harm their neighbours on the basis of the prevalent

⁴⁹ Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: a History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 208.

understanding of the world. But it cannot have been *very* easy.”⁵⁰ Pudney does not take it for granted that the average early modern person would have easily believed in the power of the Devil to manipulate witches to his purpose. It is “possible,” he says, for someone to believe what the Anonymous Author claims in *A rehearsal both straung and true*, but it might not have been “easy” to believe in witches and familiars. Pudney does not continue the thread of this argument, but it is worth questioning what it would take for early modern people to believe Elizabeth Stile’s account. How many claims of truthfulness or support from facts and details would be needed to convince those reading this pamphlet that Stile is guilty without the shadow of a doubt?

The imaginative power of the witch-hunter, who was in nearly all cases a man of authority, comes to bear on more than just the witch’s status in the community. This imaginative power is also to blame for the myriad ways in which men misinterpreted the female body during the early modern period. In “This Heraldry in Lucrece’ Face,” Nancy Vickers refers to the problems caused by male authority as being subject to the male imagination: “The canonical legacy of description is a legacy shaped predominantly by the male imagination for the male imagination.”⁵¹ In her discussion of the male imagination, Vickers indirectly engages with Laura Mulvey’s theoretical framework from “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” Mulvey maintains that “Woman then stands in patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of

⁵⁰ Eric Pudney, *Scepticism and Belief in English Witchcraft Drama, 1538-1681* (Lund: Lund University Press, 2019), 311.

⁵¹ Nancy J. Vickers, “This Heraldry in Lucrece’ Face,” *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 171.

meaning, not maker of meaning.”⁵² Marrying Vickers’ use of the “male imagination” and Mulvey’s idea of the woman being the “bearer of meaning, not the maker of meaning” begins to reveal how the perspective of the witch-hunter and the texts that he engaged with were subject to the illusory power of male belief systems. Though the male imagination was ready and able to believe that women were capable of evil, the practices of witchcraft and Devil worship were, by all female accounts, absent from assemblies of women during the period. Women attempted to craft narratives of their own expertise and understanding, but because their voices were not heard to speak as loudly as those of their male counterparts, herbal practices and systems of knowledge have been subject to the male imagination and lost. Male fear of the female other produced the path by which the work of women, medical knowledge, and neighborhood disagreements became accusations of witchcraft.

The recorded beliefs about the female body during the early modern period are not based in observable fact. Instead, bodily functions were interpreted using Galenic medicine. It was not until well into the 17th century that scientists learned that the heart beats in order to circulate blood through the human body. Medical knowledge and the understanding of the body during the period was based on *belief* and *perception*, both of which are closely linked to imagination. Medical science, therefore, was predicated on what men believed was happening, regardless of what they directly observed. The treatment of women and the ways in which they were incorporated into and excluded from the daily life of a community were based on their perceived inborn weaknesses. These weaknesses made it easier to believe that they were capable of evil, with the worst among them being witches. Male imagination and belief impacted the ways in

⁵² Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 58.

which women were othered and excluded while scientific understanding, born of belief rather than observation, directly impacted the ways in which witches were persecuted and executed.

The female body is made to bear the weight of male beliefs, with little to no basis in fact. Men of the period attempted to diminish their role in creating and reinforcing this system of belief through the confessions of suspected witches. Male belief is dangerous for women because of the illusion that rumors of witchcraft are true reports of *maleficium*. When a woman confesses, the focus changes. The witch's confession makes the crime hers and not his; the woman may be dangerous, but now she can be contained by masculine law and power. In the above example, Elizabeth Stile confesses her transgressions and describes the crimes of others. The pamphlet itself claims to be a "true examination" and "confession." The ability of the male voice to examine the female body and mind in order to pass judgment is a further statement of reliability not of the accused witch's story but of the man's ability to interpret her and bring forth the truth.

The truth that these male examiners claimed to have discovered, however, was very rarely true. Women were falsely accused by their neighbors and forced to lie in order to survive. The male imagination and the belief in the infallibility of masculine forms of morality have a complicated relationship with the distrust that society had in women. There is no way to tell if the admissions that Elizabeth Stile made were truthful or if they were accurately reported. It is simpler to believe that Elizabeth Stile never confessed, or that the male imagination filled in where Stile's admissions end. This creates a narrative that does not fit the woman but serves her male interrogators. For all of the statements of truth at play in this text, there is no evidence that the author spoke to Stile. Without the need for direct reporting, this type of text can be composed from court records, other reports, or rumors.

Masculine perspectives contribute to the way in which we reinterpret these texts as fictional narratives rather than journalistic reports with integrity. Within the scope of these written records, women's bodies and their words are the product of male imaginations rather than autonomous narratives. The woman and the witch become the story that was told *about* her and *around* her rather than *by* her. It is my goal to uncover how the texts of the period reveal a belief system that is complicated by the blending of fact and fiction in pamphlets and treatises in addition to the power of the male imagination to compel the female body to bear meaning without also granting her permission to make meaning. Witches were women who sought to create knowledge, find meaning, and act on desire. Texts of the period, written by men, attempt to reclaim the narrative by rewriting history, silencing the women who challenged men.



James VI of Scotland, who would later become James I of England, published *Daemonologie* in 1597. The opening of this text finds author overcome by the evil that surrounds him. He is so overcome that he cannot help but write this treatise:

The fearefull aboundinge at this time in this countrie, of these detestable slaues of the Deuill, the Witches or enchaunters, hath moved me (beloued reader) to dispatch in post, this following treatise of mine, not in any wise (as protest) to serue for a shew of my learning & ingine, but onely (mooued of conscience) to preasse thereby, so farre as I can, to resolute the doubting harts of many; both that such assaultes of Sathan are most certainly practized, & that the instruments thereof, merits most severely to be punished...⁵³

⁵³ James I, King of England, *Daemonologie in Forme of a Dialogue, Diuided into Three Bookes* (Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Walde-graue printer to the Kings Majestie, 1597), *Sig. 2 recto – Sig. 2 verso*. <https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/books/daemonologie-forme-dialogue-diuided-into-three/docview/2240857109/se-2?accountid=14434>.

James's imagination is of a particularly dangerous sort among men. He is the sovereign ruler, chosen by God to be a father to his people. As such, his opinion is of greater importance than that of the average man, who is not the head of the country but only of his household. Eric Pudney remarks that "James is often described as having an 'interest' in witchcraft, which makes his engagement with the phenomenon sound very harmless and scholarly. It would be more accurate to say that the new king had a track record of putting witchcraft belief to political and polemical use."⁵⁴ Daniel Fischlin reinforces this idea in "'Counterfeiting God': James VI (I) and the Politics of *Daemonologie* (1597)": "James played and understood himself to be playing a central role, through both his political and literary interventions on the issue of witchcraft, in the construction of a myth of absolute power. Such a myth was necessary to his political survival, especially in the perilous and anxiety-producing political context prior to his ascension to the throne of England in 1603."⁵⁵ Because he was the monarch and deeply invested in the uses of witchcraft in the realm, James's focus on witchcraft represents a case of secure and complete belief during the period in which he wrote *Daemonologie*. He is not the scholar-king whose hobby it is to muse on the truth of witches and their relationship to the Devil, as Pudney points out. He is busy producing a myth of absolute power and his own God-given right to the throne by demonizing the evil that he claims is at work among his people. It is essential to his success in politics that he deny the authority of the Devil in order to support his own dominion in England and Scotland. He believed that the work of the Devil was all around him, exercised through the power of witches. Because the incorporeal Devil could not be his enemy, witches were. Theirs were the material lives and bodies that he could challenge in order to claim the

⁵⁴ Pudney, 130.

⁵⁵ Daniel Fischlin, "'Counterfeiting God': James VI (I) and the Politics of *Dæmonologie* (1597)," *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 26, no. 1 (1996): 21.

truth of his own beliefs, the power of his imagination, and his rights as king. His beliefs were uncomplicated. His goals in writing this treatise are both to reinforce his belief system and to refute the skepticism expressed by Reginald Scot, whom he names in his Preface.

James's goals in *Daemonologie* are stated clearly in the text's opening. He understands that he cannot rely wholly on blind belief systems and must prove the existence of witches to his reader:

My intention in this labour, is only to proue two things, as I haue already said: the one, that such diuelish artes haue bene and are. The other, what exact trial and seuere punishment they merite: & therefore reason I, what kind of things are possible to be performed in these arts, & by what natural causes they may be, not that I touch every particular thing of the Deuils power, for that were infinite: but onelie, to speak scholasitcklie...⁵⁶

Separating out the evil deeds of witches and comparing them to more benign actions help him to make clear the difference between witches and necromancers, and between those who act through the hand of God and those who act by the behest of the Devil. Furthermore, James's goal in determining "what exact trial and suere punishment" witchcraft crimes merit makes his treatise not only a philosophical examination of the issue, but a helpful manual with which law makers and witch-hunters can craft Acts to codify when and how those accused are to be tried and punished.

James establishes the binary function of his treatise early on as the form of the text, a dialogue, reinforces the text's purpose. A philosophical dialogue is traditionally meant to show the reader a number of perspectives on a given issue. These perspectives, while one may be held

⁵⁶ James I, *Sig. 3 recto*.

‘correct’ by the author, nevertheless allow the reader to engage with and question the meaning of the text in a way that a single explanation does not. Furthermore, James’s choice of speakers in Epistemon and Philomathes is intentional. Educated readers will, based on their knowledge of Greek, recognize Epistemon as having “the knowledge of an expert” and Philomathes as a “lover of learning.” Not only is the author reliable, but the figures through which he transmits this philosophical exploration are to be trusted as well.

Trustworthy Philomathes has doubts regarding witches. Part of his uncertainty has to do with the Biblical story of Saul and Samuel that he and Epistemon discuss in Chapter I of the First Book of *Demonologie*. There is some doubt within their dialogue as to what or whom the Witch of Endor is able to raise when Saul asks her if she can help him speak with the prophet Samuel.⁵⁷ The witch claims that she can raise Samuel, but both the scripture and Philomathes express doubts as to whether this apparition was Samuel or an apparition sent by the Devil:

Next what could be, or was raised? The spirit of *Samuel*? Prophane and against all Theologie: the Diuell in his likenes? as vnappellant, that either God would permit him to come in the shape of his Saintes (for then could neuer the Prophets in those daies haue bene sure, what Spirit spake to them in their visiones) or then that he could fore-tell what was to come there after; for Prophecie proceedeth onelie of GOD: and the Devill hath no knowledge of things to come.⁵⁸

James’s argument relies on the notion that God is the source of all things, including, in no small part, the work of the Devil and the witches. The Witch of Endor, however, fears that she will be trapped for her magic because it goes against God: “Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done,

⁵⁷ See 1 Samuel 28:3-25, “Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, *there is* a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.”

⁵⁸ James I, I.3.

how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?”⁵⁹ She does not doubt her abilities, but questions the wisdom of exposing her talents in a place where her peers have been cast out for doing the same. Philomathes doesn’t see this as an issue of human law, but rather one of heavenly rule: “I thinke it very strange, that God should permite anie man-kynde (since they beare his owne Image) to fall in so grosse and filthie a defection.”⁶⁰ In the context of Reginald Scot’s skepticism, Philip Almond asks, “Was it Samuel himself, or his soul or spirit, or some illusory likeness of him conjured up by God or the Devil?”⁶¹

To some, the Witch of Endor was no witch at all; she was merely a conduit, a “ventriloquist” who is able to channel Samuel when Saul is unable to find succor in God. Other interpretations argue that the Witch of Endor is a witch and that she does not channel Samuel, but rather raises the Devil in order to mislead and injure Saul. Still other interpretations doubt that the Witch of Endor is able to raise anything, instead misleading Saul and lying to him: “And she said, An old man cometh up; and he *is* covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it *was* Samuel...and bowed himself.”⁶² Any of these actions, whether performed by the Devil, Samuel, or smoke and mirrors, would be called witchcraft in early modern England, if not necromancy or charm work. The use of 1 Samuel in the first Chapter of *Daemonologie* sets the stage for a lineage of witches who have been misleading kings from the beginning. James benefits from the belief that the Witch of Endor raised the Devil in order to beguile Saul because it serves as the blueprint by which he can interrogate, imprison, and executed witches in Scotland.

⁵⁹ 1 Samuel 28:9.

⁶⁰ James I, I.6.

⁶¹ Philip C. Almond, *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot & The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 127.

⁶² 1 Samuel 28:14.

Epistemon argues that man's defection from God is a sin only in some cases. The Devil is "the enimie of mans Salvation, vses al the meanes he can to entrappe them so farre in his snares, as it may be vnable to them therafter (suppose they would) to rid themselues out of the same."⁶³ Because some men are of the elect among God's children, it is only defection if a holy man sins against the holy ghost. The sins of the forsaken are inconsequential to this line of thinking. Epistemon's logic, then, is that it is not a sin if those who are already damned align themselves with the Devil. This makes the Witch of Endor's sin against Saul worse in Epistemon's eyes. She has taken one of God's children, a holy man, and put him in the position of sinning against the holy ghost. The Witch of Endor's ability to encourage sin in others reinforces the view that women are dangerous, licentious, and apt to bring men to trouble as Eve did Adam. Epistemon uses this logic to further divide God's precepts against practicing magic into one of two categories: Magic or Necromancy and Sorcery or Witchcraft.

The First Book of *Demonologie* speaks in detail about necromancy, including who practiced it, what it was used for, and its Biblical context. In contrast, the Second Book addresses the practice of witchcraft exclusively. In order to differentiate between necromancy and witchcraft, James explains that the primary difference lies in the desire or motivating factor of the person practicing the craft, specifically the directionality of their work:

For where the *Magicians*, as allured by curiositie, in the most parte of their practises, seekes principallie the satisfying of the same, and to winne to themselues a popular honoure and estimation: These Witches on the other parte, being intised ether for the desire of reuenge, or of worldly riches, their whole practises are either to hurte men and their gudes, or what they possesse, for satisfying of their cruell mindes in the former, or

⁶³ James I, I.7.

else by the wracke in quhatsoever sorte, of anie whome God will permitte them to haue power off, to satisfie their greedie desire in the last poynt.⁶⁴

James argues that there is a fine line between a desire for fame and a desire for riches. The magician or necromancer is motivated by curiosity rather than a “desire of reuenge.” The necromancer’s curiosity is framed as academic in nature but is not always pure. Both the witch and the necromancer are dangerous to society and religious norms. In Book I, James argues that the sorcerers may merit more significant punishment, as their work comes “proceeds of...greater knowledge.”⁶⁵ Unlike the necromancer, the witch is motivated by a desire to hurt people in order to satisfy her cruel mind. Left unsaid within this dichotomy is an understood gender binary: necromancers are most often male and witches female. As I will show in subsequent chapters, the monarch’s use of the necromancer to tell fortunes and read astrological charts was normalized and sometimes celebrated during the early modern period.

In Chapter V of the Second Book, Philomathes takes on the question of gender: “What can be the cause that there are twentie women giuen to that craft, wherether is one man?”⁶⁶ Epistemon explains: “The reason is easie, for as that sexe is frailer then man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Deuill, as was ouer well proued to be true, by the Serpents deceiuing of Eua at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sexe sensine.”⁶⁷ Because of the difference in gender representation in these crafts, necromancy and astrology were marginally more acceptable than witchcraft and were often seen as legitimate scholarly pursuits. Kings and queens, the aristocracy, and the merchant class often used astrologers to inform their decisions, focusing particularly on birth charts that could provide

⁶⁴ James I, II.35.

⁶⁵ James I, I.26.

⁶⁶ James I, II.43.

⁶⁷ James I, II.44.

insight into the life of a newborn child. In *The Duchess of Malfi*, as we will see, the Duchess's husband composes the birth chart for his child.⁶⁸ This was common practice and acceptable on a grand scale, unless it was used against the queen. Astrologers in London were tried for attempting to predict the date of Queen Elizabeth's death, and in doing so divining the future of the kingdom, including its future monarch. Warring families were involved in these schemes, their desire for power being greater than their fear of the astrologer and the wrath of the queen.

When Philomathes asks why there is one man to every twenty women practicing witchcraft, he draws attention to the gross discrepancies in the trials of female witches. Philomathes's focus on the gender discrepancy between the sexes does not mean that there were no men practicing witchcraft, nor that there were no men who were outsiders in their community. While there may have been people of both sexes following the recipe books that offered herbal solutions for ailments and gathering in groups to share that knowledge, only women were tried and executed for these crimes. Some modern scholars go so far as to refer to the witch trials of the 16th and 17th centuries as gendercide. James's explanation of the difference between necromancy and witchcraft reflects commonly held beliefs during the period. Women were less hearty and more easily influenced, according to the Galenic belief that they were naturally porous. Their inherent porousness allowed them to conceive children, but also caused them to be susceptible to certain ailments and far more suggestible than males. James continues to rely on the Bible as both a textual source and a means to reason in his exploration of witchcraft. Because Eve fell, all women are doomed to fall after her. Because Eve was tempted by Satan, all

⁶⁸ See *The Duchess of Malfi* (2.2.81-85): "CARIOLA Sir, you are the happy father of a son; / Your wife commends him to you. ANTONIO Blessed comfort! / for heaven's sake tend her well; I'll presently / Go set a figure for's nativity."

women would be born with a unique relationship, a connection even, to the Devil and his charms, charms that they could practice in order to harm neighbors, husbands, and enemies.

This chapter opened with the case of Elizabeth Stile and her fellow witches who were accused of consorting with the Devil and causing harm in their community. Stile's case is a helpful initial study regarding claims of truth and the nature of belief. It is important to return to several other examples, however, in order to measure them not against belief but against James I's criteria, which determined whether witches are believed and believable. His is a prime example of a belief-based text, which was particularly useful for political reasons. Tracts which challenged the idea that women were the primary aggressors are less common than those that follow James's outline of female witches and male astrologers. They are, however, a useful counterpoint to the binary that develops between what women are capable of and the behaviors which men have the responsibility to investigate and prevent.

In *The divels delusions or A faithful relation of John Palmer and Elizabeth Knott two notorious vvitches lately condemned at the sessions of Oyer and Terminer in St. Albans*, an anonymous author outlines the varied crimes of each of the named witches. The pamphlet, written in an epistolary format to "a friend," indicates that it was John Palmer, not Elizabeth Knott, who initiated their consorting with the Devil:

...when the Divel first made this mark he drew his bloud and caused him to write his mark upon the ground with his own hand therewith; his trading in this horrid and abominable practice of *Witchcraft* was (as hee confessed) betwixt the space of 50 and 60 years, the hurt which from time to time hee had done was very much and this I account

his prime pranck that he notoriously seduced *Elizabeth Knott* his kinswoman, to consort with him in his villany who hath assented to him.⁶⁹

This report upends much of the understanding that we have of witchcraft and the perspective on gender's role in witchcraft during the period. Women, not men, were supposed to be lascivious and weak enough to fall prey to the Devil. John Palmer's seduction of Elizabeth Knott shows that men could be the instigators of one's indoctrination into the craft. This author explains away his primary crime as temptation rather than the "horrid and abominable practice of *Witchcraft*."

Both Palmer and Knott are characterized as revengeful: "At another time to satisfie his revengfull humor hee killd a horse of Mr. *Cleavers* by sending his familiar: and this *Elizabeth Knott* bewicht a Cow of *John Lamans* by sending an evil spirit unto her, which was in the likeness of a *Catt*."⁷⁰ The anonymous author goes on to explain what motivated Knott's crimes: "The familiar which she entertained came to her about three weeks before the said Cow was bewitched at twelve of the Clock in the night, and the familiar promised her, that she should have her desire in anything she would desire, except money: and the reason why she bewitched the Cow of *William Laman* was, because she demanded money which was due to her, from the said *Lamans* wife, and it was denied her."⁷¹ In this retelling, Knott's work is motivated by revenge. She has been wronged by Laman's wife and in order to right that wrong she desires to cause pain in a similar way or to a similar extent to the pain that she has suffered. Palmer's action is more outright: he killed a horse rather than bewitching the animal. Both cases speak to the traditional

⁶⁹ *The Divels Delusions Or A Faithfull Relation of John Palmer and Elizabeth Knott Two Notorious Vvitches Lately Condemned at the Sessions of Oyer and Terminer in St. Albans. Together with the Confession of the Aforesaid John Palmer and Elizabeth Knott, Executed July 16. also their Accusations of Severall Vvitches in Hitchen, Norton, and Other Places in the County of Hartford* (London: Printed for Richard Williams stationer at St. Albans, 1649), 4. <https://login.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/books/divels-delusions-faithfull-relation-john-palmer/docview/2240919992/se-2?accountid=14434>.

⁷⁰ *The Divels Delusions*, 4.

⁷¹ *The Divels Delusions*, 5.

view of witches as wronged neighbors who are not only willing to exact revenge but seek it in order to even the score with neighbors by whom they feel slighted. What stands out in this case is the gender of the witches, since they don't fit the wronged woman or indigent widow stereotype.

The witch's desire for revenge is central to the conversation around witchcraft during the early modern period. Women were unable to respond to harms, both physical and emotional, in the ways that men were. Women were thought to send for their familiars, often in their sleep, in order to have this extension of their power enact evil rather than commit those deeds themselves. This type of female action is not *inaction*. It is indirect action, which is no less effective than the male witch's direct harm in the case of Palmer and Knott. Ronald Hutton provides a historical and global context to this belief structure in *The Witch: a History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present*: "In Dobu, for example, women were believed to work evil in their sleep, their spirits going forth to attack those of neighbours and so do them harm, while men worked it when awake, putting curses on the belongings of victims."⁷² Dobu is a world away from England, but Hutton's study is oriented not at the specific trajectory of English witches but toward a comprehensive study of witchcraft around the world. He focuses specifically on the ways in which witchcraft beliefs developed in different places at different times, in societies that did not have any contact with one another, but nevertheless developed similar beliefs and superstitions. Men's use of public magic and woman's requirement for secret magic speaks to the ways in which some magic was not only permitted but popularly utilized and other practices resulted in a death sentence. In this case both Palmer and Knott are put to death; their genders are secondary to their crimes.

⁷² Hutton, 19.

The author of *Witchcrafts, strange and wonderfull: discovering the damnable practices of seven witches, against the lives of certaine noble personages, and others of this kingdome, as shall appear in this lamentable history* is anonymous, much like our previous examples. This pamphlet, however, is more specific in several ways. This text reports to whom the confession was made and on what date, in an effort to continue to make claims as to the truth of the text and the histories included therein. Anne Baker's confession, for example, is "taken March 1. 1618 by the right Honorable *Francis* Earle of Rutland, Sir *George Manners* Knight two of his Majesties lustices of the Peace for the County of Lincolne, and *Samuel Flemming* Doctor of Divinity, one of his Majesties lustices of the Peace for the County of Leicester aforesaid."⁷³ Anne Baker's history is one of a village midwife. Throughout the text, she denies the acts that she is accused of, including the death of a newborn child:

Being examined concerning a childe of *Anne Stannidge*, which shee was suspected to have bewitched to death; saith, the said Anne Stannidge did deliver her childe into her hands, and that she did lay it upon her skirt, but did not harme unto it: And being charged by the mother of the child, that upon the burning of the haire and the pairing of the nailes of the said childe, the said *Anne Baker* came in and set her downe, and for one hours space could speak nothing, confesseth she came into the house of the said *Anne Stannidge* in great paine, but did not know of the burning of the haire and the nailes of said childe; but said shee was so sicke that shee did not know whither she went.⁷⁴

⁷³ *Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderfull: Discovering the Damnable Practices of Seven Witches, Against the Lives of Certaine Noble Personages, and Others of this Kingdome, as Shall Appeare in this Lamentable History; with an Approved Triall how to Finde Out either Witch Or any Apprentice to Witch-Craft* (London: by M.F. for Thomas Lambert at the Horshooe neere the Hospitall Gate in Smithfield, 1635), Sig. B2 verso. <https://login.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/books/witchcrafts-strange-wonderfull-discovering/docview/2240910621/se-2?accountid=14434>.

⁷⁴ *Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderfull*, Sig. B3 recto.

Anne Baker claims only to have delivered the child, and sick herself, cannot recall the details of the crime of which she is being accused. Anne Stannidge claims that the child's nails and hair were burned by Baker and that after their burning Stannidge could not speak. The use of nails and hair was common in witchcraft during the period, so much so that people were told to guard their personal effects – hair, nails, clothing – so that they could not be used in spells. There is no medical reason, however, for Baker to have burned these items. Is it possible that she did? Yes, but it is also possible that Stannidge knew of the popular lore of the witch burning hair and nails in a spell. Stannidge may very well have made claims to have seen something that did not happen.

It is unlikely that Baker committed any witchcraft against this mother and her child. The death rate for children during the period was high, and while the average family had eight children, only two of those children were likely to make it to adulthood.⁷⁵ Midwives of the period often tended to childhood illnesses, as Baker did: “The Examine confesseth that she came to *Ioane Gylles* house, her child being sicke, and that shee intreated this Examine to looke on her child, and tell her whether it was forespoken or no, and this Examine said it was forespoken; but when the said childe died she cannot tell.”⁷⁶ In this second case, Baker is not being asked to heal the child. Instead, she is asked to determine whether it is “forespoken” that the child will die. Baker is not characterized as a cunning woman in this text. She is asked to prophesize and act as midwife, however, both responsibilities of a village healer or cunning woman. A child's fate might be legible on their birth chart, but those village children that Baker would treat were likely not wealthy enough to have an astrologer chart their future on the day of

⁷⁵ See Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000).

⁷⁶ *Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderfull, Sig. B3 recto*.

their birth. It is possible, however, that Baker was able to determine if a child was too ill to survive based on her rudimentary medical knowledge. This is not a matter of cunning or telling the future, even if it is described this way. If there is no possible treatment to allay pain or treat infection, then it is foretold that the child should die, and a miracle if they should survive.

The cunning woman is perceived as less evil than the witch because her actions are often in fortune-telling and simple medicines, sometimes referred to as green magic or hedge magic, not *maleficium*. Why, then, is Anne Baker on trial? The final part of Baker's confession includes more traditional forms of witchcraft. Baker is guilty of burying the glove of a Lord and "as that glove did rot and wast, so did the liver of the said lord rot and wast."⁷⁷ She also "hath a spirit which hath the shape of a white dogge, which she calleth her good spirit."⁷⁸ Of all of the claims against Baker, these are the crimes that rise to "witchcraft." The belief in a familiar spirit and working magic using a personal object or wax figure were often enough to damn a woman for her crimes. The other evidence provided against Baker – the children that she treated and the deaths that she *may have* caused – is less conclusive than the presence of a white dog as her familiar. In the context of my argument, the inclusion of all of Baker's crimes is odd. By including these facts, the author reinforces Baker's position in the community in more detail than is usually provided in this type of text. The author goes to great lengths to show *all* of the ways in which Baker caused harm, and in doing so he also provides a richer picture of how witches and neighbors functioned in the average English village.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ *Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderfull*, Sig. B3 verso.

⁷⁸ *Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderfull*, Sig. B3 verso.

⁷⁹ See James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Pearson Education Limited, 2001) for an overview of population statistics and community dynamics which contributed to witchcraft accusations during the 16th and 17th centuries.

In *Scepticism and Belief in English Witchcraft Drama, 1538-1681*, Eric Pudney describes women like Anne Baker as inconvenient. To Pudney's thinking, Baker was one of the "Inconvenient people who could not easily be got rid of in any other way – in England, at least, these people were almost always women – could be disposed of using the laws against witchcraft. The suspension of disbelief required by the fictions of witchcraft could be achieved by people motivated by fear, grief, or hatred."⁸⁰ There are no clues in this text as to the reason why Baker was determined to be inconvenient to her community or what may have motivated the courts to accuse her of witchcraft. The author's motivation in writing this pamphlet, however, is clear. He uses the confessions of these witches, only one of which I've included here, to teach the reader a lesson: "What now remains (gentle Reader) but for thee to make use of so wonderfull a story, and a remarkeable an accident, out of which to draw a conclusion."⁸¹ Because the author's goal is to teach a lesson, and although he provides the usual claims of truthfulness, there is no telling whether the confessions that he includes are real. In this way, pamphlets of the period, particularly those addressed to the reading public and including a conclusion, are moral tales not unlike gruesome fairy tales.

The punishment for witchcraft during the period was execution after public shaming and an extended jail sentence. The second manner of punishment, that which preserved the life of the accused, is not mentioned outside of the law books. Only death, torture, and shame are included in witchcraft pamphlets and treatises of the period. While these treatises claim truthfulness, they are also sensationalized entertainment. The dramatization by largely anonymous authors of the crimes committed by named and unnamed women requires that they be tortured and put to death. It makes for a better story. A pamphlet that told of a woman who

⁸⁰ Pudney, 311.

⁸¹ *Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderfull. Sig. C3 recto.*

spent a year in jail, as we shall see in the witchcraft acts passed during the reigns of both Elizabeth and James, would likely not circulate very far or for very long. The manner of execution varied, however, based on location, crime, year, and use to the narrative. Some witches were burned at the stake and others were hanged. Many of those who were charged with witchcraft did not make it to their execution. In fact, they were never convicted of their crimes. Instead, they were killed through the use of witch tests, which were intended to help them to acknowledge their sins and confess to the crime of witchcraft. These methods of testing a witch defy modern logic. In many cases it is difficult to believe that the court and community thought that the accused witch would survive these trials.

Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderful concludes with a description of the ways in which a witch can be discovered. In order to expose a witch, the author indicates that “burning any relique or principall ornament belonging to the suspected Witch, which shall no sooner bee on fire, but the Witch will presently come running to behold it.”⁸² In some variations of this test, the witch will be harmed when her object is set aflame. In other cases, the person that she has bewitched will be released or their illness healed as soon as the object is burned, proving that the witch was behind the crime. The author also describes the practice of dunking, testing whether or not a witch would float:

...take the Witch or party suspected either to some Mildam, Pond, Lake or deepe River, and stripping her to her smocke, tie her armes acrossse, onely let her legs have free liberty; then fastening a rope about her middle which with the helpe of by standers may be ever ready to save her from drowning (in case she sinke) throw her into the water, and if shee swimme aloft and not sincke, then draw her foorth, and have some honest and discreet

⁸² *Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderfull*, Sig. C3+1 recto.

women neere, which may presently search her for the secret marke of Witches, as Teates, blood-moales, moist warts, and the like, which found, then the second time (binding her right thumbe to her left toe, and her left thumbe to her right toe) throw her into the water againe (with the assistance of the former rope to save her, if shee should chance to sincke) and if then shee swim againe and doe not sincke you may most assuredly resolve she is a Witch.⁸³

In this text, the author combines two tests for witchcraft – the search for the witch’s mark and dunking or swimming a witch. This author is also more humane than others in his outline of dunking, including several times the need for a rope “if shee should chance to sincke.” Other authors and accounts are less concerned about safety measures, as the witch’s death is proof that she is innocent. The woman who sinks is not a witch. Though she is dead, her soul will ascend to heaven, and those who killed her will have done God’s work. The woman who floats, however, is always a witch. In both cases, her life is endangered by this test, and though this author calls for a rope “to save her,” there is no further evidence that a rope was used to rescue a drowning woman in any instance of dunking or other water tests.

This author attempts to reinforce his humanity and the truth of his tract through the repetition of the need for life-saving safeguards: “fastening a rope about her middle which with the helpe of by standers may be ever ready to save her from drowning.” The idea of truth is important in these texts, as their veracity is directly associated with the willingness of readers to believe what they are being told. This is the first instance that we have encountered, however, in which the author’s reputation is at stake in how truthful his narrative appears. Rather than repeating only the truth of what he reports, he relies on readers’ perspective of *him*. If he is

⁸³ *Witchcrafts, Strange and Wonderfull*, Sig. C3+1 recto.

reliable enough to want to save the witch while swimming her, then he must be trusted to report the truth of these events. The test of the witch's mark, here explained as a secondary test after the woman is seen to float in the water, was the first test of a witch's pact with the Devil in other tracts. Some accounts detail this as the only test that the witch is subject to and was proof enough that the woman in question was, in fact, a witch.

Elderly women, those who were most often accused of witchcraft, were not known to have the snow-white skin of maids. Age is challenging for the body and no man or woman arrived at middle or old age free of warts, moles, scars, and other marks of experience. Because popular belief dictated that the Devil or a familiar would feed off of the witch, any of these marks could be read as the means by which the woman is able to offer her blood. These moles, warts, and skin tags are referred to as witches' teats, though they are not nipples in a biological or practical sense. The legibility of these marks on a woman's body creates a new reality in old age: the mere fact of living in a body approaching the final stages of life guarantees that a woman be labeled a witch.

Because a woman's body was misread through these marks, scientists, lawyers, and other officials during the period routinely found what they were looking for rather than discovering what was present. In every sense, the woman's body becomes the bearer of meaning and not the maker of meaning, as it is the male gaze which creates and imposes meaning on the female body: "In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that

they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*.”⁸⁴ In finding what they are looking for rather than what is present, male interrogators create a reversal in the discovery of witches. For male interrogators, the pleasure of discovery is a perverse pleasure in examination and exposure rather than ecstatic pleasure in understanding and knowledge. The woman’s body, in this case being charged with a crime, is passive because she is standing for judgment. The male gaze is able to determine, via his phantasy and imagination, what this woman is by looking at her and reading her surface. The gender dynamics at play here, and the power of the male gaze to read the female body, are important factors not only in deciding guilt, but also in understanding the realities of the witch’s crimes. Witches were on display in courtrooms and communities when they were tried and sometimes sentenced to public humiliation. The woman’s “to-be-looked-at-ness” is part of her function as a witch. Is a woman a witch if she has not been displayed, regarded, and *seen* as one?

In *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed*, the anonymous author describes the trial by experiment of the accused witch Mary Sutton in 1613 in great detail. After capturing Sutton and binding her to a horse, Master Enger, “desiring God to bee his assistance, with a cudgel which he has in his hand, he beate her till she was scarce able to stirre,” in order to release his men from the spell that she had put upon them.⁸⁵ After having been beaten, Sutton is “throwne in the first time shee sunke some two fotte into the water with a fall, but rose again, and floated upon the water like a planke.”⁸⁶ It is not clear in the text how much time passed between Sutton’s first injuries during the beating and her trial in the water. As was common

⁸⁴ Mulvey, 62.

⁸⁵ *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, for Notable Villanies by them Committed both by Land and Water with a Strange and most True Triall how to Know Whether a Woman be a Witch Or Not* (London: By William Stansby for Edward Marchant, and are to be sold at his shop ouer against the Crosse in Pauls Church-yard, 1613), Sig. C2 verso. <https://login.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/login?url=https://www-proquest-com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/books/vvitches-apprehended-examined-executed-notable/docview/2248497016/se-2?accountid=14434>.

⁸⁶ *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed*, Sig. C2 verso – Sig. C3 recto.

during the period, and as was often included in instruction manuals for those who were hunting witches, Sutton was fetched out of the water and examined for witch's marks. Master Enger had "women readie that se*****d her and found vnder her left thigh a kind of **at, which after the Bastard sonne confest her Spirits in seuerall shapes as Cats, Moales &c. vsed to sucke her."⁸⁷

The original manuscript has degraded and some words are smudged out. We can guess that these women attendants were charged with searching Sutton's body to discover any witches marks.

This may also have required them to cut her body hair so that her skin was exposed; doing so would not have added appreciably to the attendant's search. As with many aspects of witchcraft trials, searching the witch's body was intended to invade and humiliate. Under Sutton's left thigh they observed some kind of "teat" which was used to feed the Devil and her familiars.

Though these words are illegible in the text, there still remains the central idea of the witch's body needing to be revealed and examined. Revealing Sutton's body would first include undressing her, but this tract takes it a step farther and reveals her skin through shaving or cutting her body hair. This kind of exposure is couched in legal terms which make it appear as necessary to the process of examination, when at least part of the goal was to humiliate the woman into breaking down and confessing her sins, as false as they might be.

Sutton is forced to face the ordeal of the water again, and she is "bound crosse her thumbes and toes" before being tossed back into the water where "she sunke not at all, but sitting vpon the water, turned round about like a wheele, or as that which commonly we call a whirle poole."⁸⁸ The text also indicates here that Engers had men stationed alongside the mill pond where this is taking place with ropes tied to Sutton's bindings. They were not meant to be able to pull her out of the water. Instead, the text indicates that they used the ropes to toss "her vp and

⁸⁷ *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, Sig. C3 recto.*

⁸⁸ *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, Sig. C3 recto.*

downe to make her sinke, but could not.”⁸⁹ It is difficult to believe that Mary Sutton was able to sit on top of the water and make a whirlpool, as the text suggests, but this is the evidence that Enger needed to see and disseminate in order to prove that she was a witch.

When Sutton is pulled out of the water, “she as boldly as if she had béene innocent asked them if they could doe any more to her.”⁹⁰ Sutton has been beaten until she is unable to “stir,” dunked into the mill pond twice, and yet has the sense of self to ask for more trials and challenges. After Enger charges her with all of her misdeeds, including harming cattle and killing Enger’s son, she readily confesses. This quick confession reveals the text’s preoccupation with its own narrative goals rather than the torture and possible innocence of Mary Sutton. The time that the text spends early on in describing Sutton, her crimes, and her ordeal far outweigh the easy confession that Enger is able to elicit by listing Sutton’s crimes. Mary Sutton is executed for witchcraft with her mother, noted in the text as “Mother Sutton.” Both women are arraigned in court *after* their ordeals, and it is clear from the proceedings that these women were proven guilty before they were tried. Their trials, therefore, are not an attempt to discover innocence or to follow the rule of law. After trial by torture, a trial in the courtroom only legitimizes the witch-hunter’s aim and further cements the judgment passed by the community. The woman has always been guilty.

Accounts of witchcraft like *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed* and distributed as pamphlets are very different from longer treatises. They do more work to claim truthfulness and are less stable in their dates and crimes. Because these reports of court proceedings and pamphlets detailing salacious crimes deal less in theory and more in story, they use a different form and format than witchcraft treatises. Each pamphlet begins with a Letter to

⁸⁹ *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed*, Sig. C3 recto.

⁹⁰ *Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed*, Sig. C3 recto.

the Reader; some even use this epistolary format to begin a discussion of what the reader needs to know about witches. This is often framed as the author providing information to a friend which will help him understand the problem of witches. Eager readers feel as if they need to know this information in order to protect themselves and their families from witchcraft. The threat feels real, even if the only exposure they have had to witchcraft has been in published pamphlets. The format appeals to this type of reader directly and captures a different audience than the longer tracts and treatises because of their length and the cost of purchasing and binding those volumes. Casual readers were far more likely to engage with pamphlet material than a volume like *Daemonologie*.

The means of integrating witchcraft beliefs into the social fabric happened consistently across all levels of society, even among those who never saw a trial happen in their communities and never read one of the scholarly treatises that were available. The way this information is disseminated relied heavily on the imaginative power of the reader and the collective imagination of the group. Robin Briggs reinforces the need for reality in the role of imagination, both at the source and in the result: “Fantasies only work, in the sense of commanding belief and adherence, if they relate strongly to experience. So the fiction of witchcraft dramatized the most basic concerns of early modern people, those about reproduction and fertility, and the most fundamental relationships, those between mothers and children.”⁹¹ Deborah Willis writes specifically about the concern about mothers and witchcraft in *Malevolent Nurture*, noting the interplay between genders when it comes to the female witch and her master: “Gentry-level discourse worked to undo the village-level association of the witch with maternal *power*, to

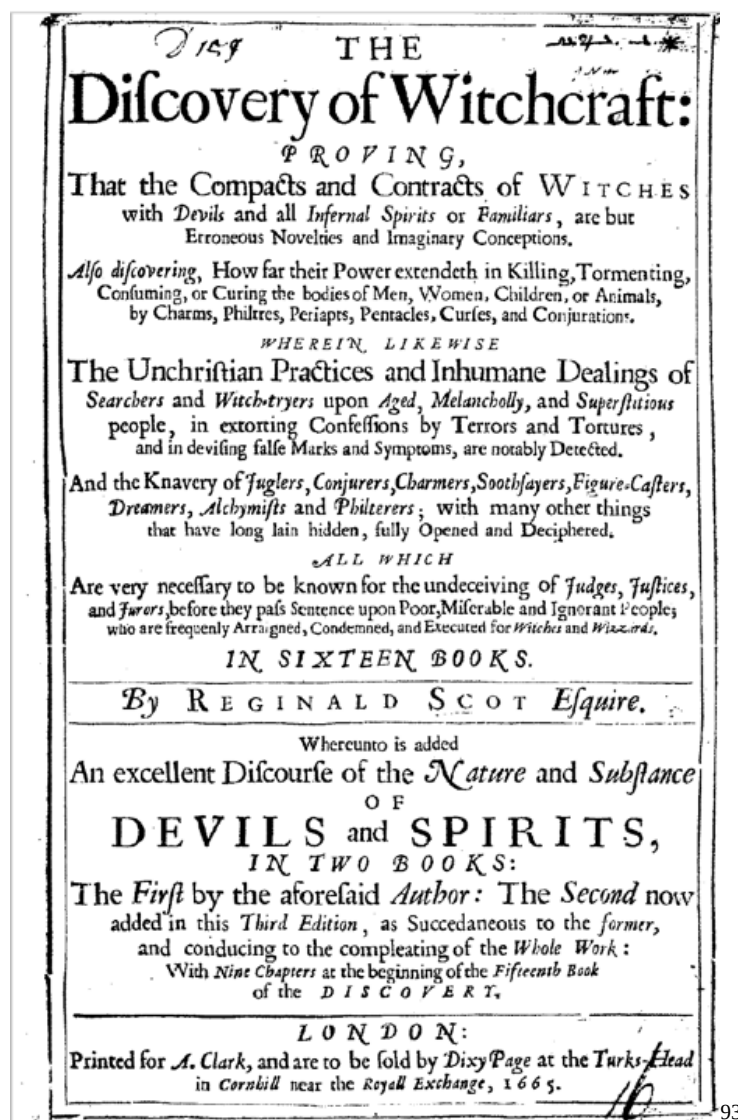
⁹¹ Robin Briggs, “‘By the Strength of Fancie’: Witchcraft and the Early Modern Imagination,” *Folklore* 115, no. 3 (2004): 270. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30035211>.

reassert her subordinate position by making her dependent on a male Devil.”⁹² While the average citizen would not have had first-hand experience with the Devil, they will have seen women living within and without proper gender roles in their communities. This lack of first-hand knowledge of the Devil is a key part of Reginald Scot’s argument, though Briggs and Willis do not engage directly with Scot. *The Discovery of Witchcraft* establishes the impossibility of witchcraft. Scot argues that the Devil is not a corporeal being and is thus unable to affect the lives of real people by making promises or taking blood. The “reality” of the Devil for those living during the early modern period would have been experienced both in Church and in their daily lives. The Devil, as we’ll see, is not a fork-tongued daemon to fear above all else, but the evil that can be found in men, fathers, witch-hunters, and at the heart of the church.



Similar to those texts which make claims of truth and accuracy from the beginning, Scot’s treatise affirms both his mission and his reliability at the outset. The complete title of Scot’s *Discovery* reads:

⁹² Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 15-16.



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The title page of *Discovery* includes five discrete sections. In the first, Scot establishes his primary motivation in writing this work: to prove that the contract between a witch and the Devil is imaginary. He includes “Devils,” “Infernal Spirits,” and “Familiars” here to ensure that all non-corporeal spirits are highlighted as key elements in the text. One of his key arguments in the text, as we see on the title page, is the notion that incorporeal spirits cannot make pacts with

⁹³ Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft Proving, that the Compacts and Contracts of Witches with Devils, and all Infernal Spirits Or Familiars, are but Erroneous Novelties and Imaginary Conceptions* (London: Printed for A. Clark, 1665), unpagged. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240962075/12043638/107EAC54152C48DDPQ/2?accountid=14434>.

humans. Since they do not exist, they cannot extract promises from witches or play a part in the witch's nefarious crimes.

It is possible to read the title of the second section of *Discovery* as representing Scot's belief in the witch's power to kill, torment, consume, or cure. Decoding these lines relies on a common understanding of the meaning of the word "far" in the first line. By calling forward "How far their Power extendeth," Scot indicates that there is a limit to the witch's power, and in the body of the text he argues that the limit to their power is total because that power does not exist. Witches are unable to cure or harm with their art. The third and fourth sections of the title extend Scot's argument past witches to those witch-hunters who would seek to harm the aged and indigent, who Scot believes are most often their victims. The tricksters in the fourth section – the jugglers, conjurers, charmers, soothsayers, figure-casters, dreamers, alchemists, and philterers – are even easier to expose than the other parties involved in the *Discovery*. Here is where Scot's text earns its reputation as the most comprehensive manual of stage magic printed during the period. In exposing the tricksters and hucksters who attempt to defraud the public, he ends up writing a manual for the lay person on how to do those tricks, effectively reversing the power dynamic between the conjuror and the client.

The final section of the title doesn't mention the public, but one does not need to be a magistrate in order to stand as judge to the witches and conjurors that Scot hopes to expose. The information that he includes in the *Discovery* is "necessary" so that those who might get caught up in witchcraft trials and accusations are able to see through the events in their communities and realize that what is being claimed to be true – flying, child-killing, pain, and death – is an attack on women and the indigent rather than *maleficium*.

In Scot's appeal "To the READERS," he trusts the innate wisdom of the reader, choosing to appeal to their logic and understanding rather than religious beliefs: "But *Robin Good-fellow* ceaseth now to be much feared, and Popery is sufficiently discovered. Nevertheless, Witches Charms, and Conjurors Cosenages are yet though effectual."⁹⁴ In unequivocally stating that conjurors are still effectual in communities where their services are sought, he captures a point of tension in contemporary belief systems. Robin Goodfellow, a nature sprite or fairy, was believed to be helpful to housewives. Also called Puck, this same sprite was just as likely to help to churn butter as he was to steal what he believed was owed to him. Scot points out that communities no longer fear Puck, nor do they believe in the rituals of Catholicism, but are still apt to pay Witches and Conjurors for their charms. Instead of seeing this as a development in thought over time and embracing the continued evolution of community belief systems, Scot approaches it as a point of unresolved tension. Why can we now believe in witches if we no longer believe in Robin Goodfellow or the Pope? Even the head of the Catholic Church has been outed as a charlatan in Scot's eyes.

Scot's goal in writing this treatise is to give readers the tools to use along with their good sense in debunking witchcraft: "But my request unto all you that read my Book shall be no more, but that it would please you to conferr my words with your own sense and experience, and also with the Word of God."⁹⁵ The chapters that follow Scot's appeal to his reader are organized loosely by those tricks that witches claim to be able to perform, including, but not limited to control over the celestial bodies, omnipotence, curing of diseases, and communion with the Devil. The form of the text is both that of a manual and an academic treatise. In organizing the chapters this way, Scot makes tricks and recipes easily accessible to the reader whose aim it is to

⁹⁴ Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1665), Sig b2 recto.

⁹⁵ Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1665), Sig. b2 recto.

replicate what Scot is debunking. Academic readers, particularly those who want to dismantle Scot's reasoning, can manipulate the form of the text to their own ends. These readers take each point and dismantle it, using true reports from pamphlets like the ones I have discussed here to strengthen the argument that witches were indeed able to do all that Scot has determined they cannot.

Scot believes that no honest person can give evidence against a witch: "...wicked servants, and run-awaies are to be admitted to bear witness against their dames in this matter of Witch-craft, because...none that be honest are able to detect them. Hereticks also and Witches shall be received to accuse, but not excuse a Witch."⁹⁶ His skepticism extends beyond the witches themselves, who he believes can do none of the things that they claim. Instead, he is skeptical of the entire system which names, tries, and executes witches, including witch-hunters, philosophers, and bailiffs who both write the laws that imprison witches and act on them. He indicates that no honest person is able to give evidence against a witch, and so only those who are dishonest can give evidence. By identifying witnesses as dishonest, Scot captures an important aspect of the system which punished women for crimes that they could never have committed.

Those who testify against accused witches are often neighbors, friends, or even family members who have something against the woman accused, irrespective of any action that she might have taken against individuals or the community as a whole. Servants with a grudge, run-away children or wards, heretics, and even other accused witches may have a small or large bit of revenge that they want to enact. James Sharpe offers a helpful overview of the community dynamics of the period in *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*:

⁹⁶ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Garden City: Dover Publications, 1972), 11.

... the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries constituted a period of marked, if in most areas gradual, socio-economic change. The key was demographic growth: over the period c. 1530-1630 the population of England doubled, from maybe 2,500,000 to 5,000,000 people. Food production barely kept up with this increase, while this demographic growth also created a flooded labour market which meant that the substantial proportion of the population which was wholly or partly dependent on wage labour found it more difficult to get work, and received less in terms of real wages for such employment as they were able to find.⁹⁷

A servant, perhaps facing dismissal without a reference, would look holy and honest instead of sneaky if she claimed to see her mistress with the Devil. Contextually, however, the same servant is in a difficult position. With others vying for the same work and happy to receive a lower wage, a domestic worker could easily be caught up in witchcraft fervor and lend her voice to those calling to punish a witch if it meant that she could keep her job or improve her reputation. Similarly, an accused witch might save her own life, free herself from jail, and help feed her family by accusing another woman of witchcraft. Scot's surface-level skepticism does not address the closed loops that existed among and between social classes. The witch must be damned from beneath her station and above: both by the members of the community that she may have offended and the patriarchal judicial system which annihilates her value as an individual.

When he outlines the ways a witch is examined by inquisitors, Scot points out that once she is accused, she is "not suffered to go home, or to other places, to seek sureties: for then...the people would be worse willing to accuse them; for fear lest at their return home, they work

⁹⁷ James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2001), 35.

revenge upon them.”⁹⁸ In this chapter, Scot outlines what the French philosopher Jean Bodin claims as the proper way to examine a witch. Bodin’s views on witchcraft relied on the central idea that there was a pact formed between the Devil and the witch. This is precisely why, in parroting the contents of Bodin’s *De la démonomania des sorciers* of 1580, Scot repeats the belief that “Witches must be examined as suddenly, and as unawares as is possible: the which will so amaze them that they will confess any thing, supposing the Devil hath forsaken them; whereas, if they should first be committed to prison, the Devil would tamper with them, and inform them what to do.”⁹⁹ The danger in examining a witch is not her ability to do evil, but a danger in losing her confession and thus losing the opportunity to execute her. A witch must always “be examined of all accusations, presumptions, and faults, at one instant; left Satan should afterwards dissuade her from confession.”¹⁰⁰ The witch’s pact with Satan is believed to be so strong that he can “dissuade her from confession, through promises of her indemnity” and give her the opportunity to fly away from the jail.¹⁰¹

The fear of losing a confession is so great for Bodin that “If they will confess nothing but upon the rack or torture; their apparel must be changed; and every hair on their body must be shaven off with a sharp razor.”¹⁰² The witch’s torture does not end on the rack, however, because a witch might use her charms to be taciturn and survive pain in the face of inquisition: “If they have charms for taciturnity, so as they feel not the common tortures, and therefore confess nothing; then some sharp instrument must be thrust betwixt every nail of their fingers and

⁹⁸ Scot, 11.

⁹⁹ Scot, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Scot, 12.

¹⁰¹ Scot, 12.

¹⁰² Scot, 12.

toes...For by means of that extreme pain, they will...confess any thing.”¹⁰³ For Bodin, the examination of the witch is both physical and psychological:

...at the time of the examination, there should be a semblance of great ado, to the terrifying of the Witch; and that a number of instruments, ginns, manacles, ropes, halters, fetters, &c. be prepared, through forth, and laid before the examine: and also that some be procured to make a most horrible and lamentable cry, in the place of torture, as though he or she were upon the rack, or in the tormentors hands: so as the examine may hear it whiles she is examined, before she her self be brought into the prison; and perhaps...she will by this means confess the matter.¹⁰⁴

The force of Bodin’s belief that this is the proper way to coerce a witch to repent and abandon Devil worship comes through clearly even as Scot reinterprets the text for the reader. Scot does very little work to reveal the evil at play in the witch-hunter’s effort if Bodin goes so far as to employ psychological torture in order to garner a confession.

In the context of Bodin’s beliefs, Scot reinforces the ways in which old and indigent women were often the victims of witchcraft claims: “If an old woman threaten or touch one being in health, who dieth shortly after; or else is infected with the Leprosie, Apoplexie, or any other strange disease: it is...a permanent fact...without further proof: if any body have mistrusted her, or said before that she was a Witch.”¹⁰⁵ It is not until Scot has listed Bodin’s theories regarding the discovery of a witch that he breaks away from what appears, at first glance, as a serious discussion of how witches can be caught and forced to confess. Scot is skeptical of Bodin’s belief that a woman is a witch if she can “come in, or depart out of the

¹⁰³ Scot, 12.

¹⁰⁴ Scot, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Scot, 13.

chamber or house, the doors being shut” because Bodin himself admits that he has never seen this happen.¹⁰⁶ Scot’s use of Bodin as a resource for the rules of witch hunting is effective in bringing the reader who believes in witchcraft into the fold. He quotes Bodin at first as if he is agreeing with him, but when he dismantles these rules and convictions, he makes his own approach to witchcraft clear.

Scot’s skepticism is compounded when, after having established his point of view on Bodin’s directives, he lists fifteen crimes that witches are accused of by inquisitors and responds to each accusation with his own reasoning. By establishing his argument this way, he moves from the trial to the crimes themselves. To the claim that witches “...boil Infants, after they have murdered them unbaptized, until their flesh be made potable,” Scot replies, “*Answ.* This is untrue, incredible, and impossible.”¹⁰⁷ To the penultimate claim that “They bewitch mens corn, and bring hunger and barrenness into the country; they ride and file in the air, bring storms, make tempests, &c.” Scot replies “*Answ.* Then will I worship them as Gods; for those be not the works of man, nor yet of a Witch: as I have elsewhere proved at large.”¹⁰⁸ There is no way to escape the inquisitors and prove one’s innocence:

...there is no way in the world for these poor women to escape the Inquisitors hands, and so consequently burning: but to gild their hands with money, whereby oftentimes they take pity upon them, and deliver them, as sufficiently purged: For they have authority to exchange the punishment of the body with the punishment of the purse...whereby they reap such profit, as a number of these silly women pay them yearly pensions, to the end they may not be punished again.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Scot, 13.

¹⁰⁷ Scot, 18.

¹⁰⁸ Scot, 19.

¹⁰⁹ Scot, 20.

At the core of Scot's text is skepticism, best interpreted as disbelief in the practice of witchcraft. What is clearer, however, is that Scot's skepticism, while central to his text, is not what makes it stand out within the archive of early modern witchcraft treatises and pamphlets. The most significant takeaway from Scot's *Discovery* which can be applied across texts of the period is a belief in guilt. Thus far, I have engaged with questions of truth. If the male imagination is central to the creation of texts about women's bodies, their sins, and their behavior, who has the power to tell the truth? There is, per Scot's revelation that women are "sufficiently purged" once they've "gilded" the inquisitor's hands, no guilt for the crime of witchcraft. Guilt cannot be, therefore, a state of truth for the witch.

By engaging with other treatises and developing a dialogue between his own reasoning and popular belief, Scot offers a refutation of those judgments passed on witches as well as accurate information and translations of other works. Scot uses these works to prove his point about witchcraft and those that claim to do God's work. In some cases his translations are the first exposure that readers might have to works in French or Latin. S.F. Davies registers that "because Scot's material was based on manuscript sources and Continental Latin works, Scot was inadvertently making such material far more widely available for an English audience."¹¹⁰ In presenting translations of several other works, Scot presents his own research honestly before moving through a logical progression of why and how magic and witchcraft cannot exist. Readers are forced to be attentive to Scot's core argument so that they are not incorrectly convinced that treatises like Bodin's are more accurate than *Discovery*.

The skepticism that Scot expresses in *Discovery* is limited in its reach. Evidence of the widespread belief in witches can be found in the laws and statutes of the period, particularly the

¹¹⁰ S. F. Davies, "The Reception of Reginald Scot's *Discovery* of Witchcraft: Witchcraft, Magic, and Radical Religion," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 3 (2013): 393.

Witchcraft Act of 1563. Because the previous statute against witchcraft was repealed by Edward VI in 1547, there were no legal controls to curb the use of witchcraft or conjurations among the public. When the witchcraft statutes were put back into place, “An Act against conjurations enchantments and witchcraft” outlined the legal ramifications for:

...any person or persons...use practice or exercise any invocations or conjurations of evil and wicked spirits, to or for any intent or purpose; or else of any person or persons...shall use practice or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm, or sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed, that then as well every such offender or offenders in witchcraft, enchantment, charm, or sorcery.¹¹¹

As this excerpt demonstrates, this Act does not outline specific actions or crimes. There is no mention of boiling babies; instead, the focus is on the destruction of property and any injury that might be done to the human body. The law requires evidence rather than rumor to prove that a crime has been committed. The law’s focus on the criminality of witchcraft requires that there be a clear and identifiable victim or victims in order to move the claim from gossip to fact. Those who are convicted of the crimes listed

shall for his or their first offence or offences, suffer without bail or mainprise, and once in every quarter of the said year, shall in some market town, upon the market day, or at such time as any fair shall be kept there, stand openly upon the pillory by the space of six hours and there shall openly confess his or her error and offence; and for the second offence, being as is aforesaid lawfully convicted or attained, shall suffer death as a felon, and shall lose the privilege of clergy and sanctuary.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 54-55.

¹¹² Rosen, 55.

The law's focus on number of offenses and type of offense does not capture the sensational narratives of the crimes committed by witches like Mary Sutton. The law relies on the judge's ability to determine the level of harm based on reported events. What it fails to do, however, is leave space for the supposed harms committed to be the result of chance, disease, or accident.

Among the varied narratives of both witchcraft accusations and trials that circulated during the period in pamphlets, plays, and treatises, little is said of the punishment for a first offense of witchcraft as laid out in 1563: imprisonment for one year, including quarterly public confessions. It is clear from the legal language used in this Act that the government's goal was to assess and restrict community engagement with the accused. Nothing is said in legal documents outside of popular narratives about tests of witchcraft, dunking, witch's marks, and salves used to fly under the night sky. Because the law of the land lacks this information, those in charge of witchcraft courts were forced to look to outside experts in order to learn how to identify a witch. Only once that identification was complete would the law step in and legitimize the claim that the woman in question was a witch and possibly guilty of a crime or crimes.

The Act of 1563 was not the only Act concerning witchcraft to be put into law during Elizabeth's reign. In 1580, Parliament passed "An Act against seditious words and rumors uttered against the Queen's most excellent Majesty."¹¹³ The Act reads:

if any person or persons, of what estate, condition or degree soever he or they be...and during the life of our said sovereign lady the Queen's Majesty that now is, either within her Highness's dominions or without, shall by setting or erecting of any figure or figures, or by casting of nativities, or by calculation, or by any prophesying, witchcraft, conjurations, or other like unlawful means whatsoever seek to know, and shall set forth

¹¹³ Rosen, 56.

by express words, deeds, or writings, how long her Majesty shall live or continue, or who shall reign as King or Queen of this realm of England after her Highness' decease...shall be judged as felons and shall suffer pains of death and [forfeit] as in case of felony is used, without any benefit of clergy or sanctuary.¹¹⁴

Not only does this Act reveal the monarchy's concern regarding the lack of an heir, but it also traffics in the idea of a queen who might be bewitched, besmirched, or ridiculed through the use of a poppet or wax figure. At the same time that Elizabeth's government is restricting the ability of sorcerers and witches to make predictions regarding their Queen, the Queen herself is consulting astrologists and alchemists in order to determine the future of her reign. The Queen's law and the Queen's behavior are at odds in this moment.

In a document dated 27 November 1624, Roger Morse narrates the admission to his circle of a "stranger called Mr. Morgan" who stated that "if Queen Elizabeth had lived but a little longer she would have been made the King of Spain a poor King or to the like effect...They say that she was a whore and a witch."¹¹⁵ These declarations are late in coming on two accounts. Mr. Morgan speaks 20 years after the death of the queen and includes Prince Henry of Wales, who died in 1612, in his diatribe. Mr. Morgan says of Henry that "they say before his body was cold on earth his soul was frying on a gridiron in hell."¹¹⁶ The purpose of these accusations, so long after the deaths of the accused, is unclear based on this document alone. British foreign policy was, however, focused on Spain during the first half of the century as England declared war on Spain in March of 1624 while continuing to negotiate a match between Prince Charles

¹¹⁴ Rosen, 56-57.

¹¹⁵ "Accusing Monarch of Witchcraft," *Early Modern Witch Trials*, The National Archives, accessed 15 December 2021. <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/early-modern-witch-trials/accusing-monarch-of-witchcraft/>.

¹¹⁶ "Accusing Monarch of Witchcraft."

and the Spanish Infanta Maria Anna. The belief that the Virgin Queen, who herself claimed to have the “heart and stomach of a king, and a king of England, too” might be able to rescue England from its predicament is natural.¹¹⁷ The myth of the Virgin Queen had not yet faded from the public’s memory. The claim that she was a witch, however, was a much more dangerous statement to make.

It was not uncommon for kings and queens to rely on their astrologers and advisors in making decisions. Astrologers were famous for making predictions upon the birth of royal children, and this behavior is translated to the staged plays of the period. In *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612), Antonio leaves the stage immediately after being informed that he has fathered a son: “I’ll presently / Go set a figure for’s nativity” (2.3.83-84).¹¹⁸ In his detailed study from 1945 of the horoscope in the play, Johnstone Parr notes that it was likely inserted by Webster and based on an historical account of the Malfi family, since the original tale from *The Palace of Pleasure* does not mention the child’s horoscope being cast.¹¹⁹ Webster does, however, show that he “knew enough of the technicalities of horoscopy to give his remarks on young Antonio’s nativity a considerable amount of ‘scientific’ verisimilitude.”¹²⁰ The appearance of horoscopy on stage demonstrates how widespread the cultural understanding of the practice was at the time, even though the common people would not have had access to natal horoscopy.¹²¹ The claim that the queen was a witch, therefore, is not entirely false, as she herself might be named as an accomplice of those necromancers that sought to know the future. Queen Elizabeth could cast

¹¹⁷ “Queen Elizabeth I’s speech to the troops at Tilbury,” *Royal Museums Greenwich*, accessed 19 December 2021. <https://www.rmg.co.uk/stories/topics/queen-elizabeth-speech-troops-tilbury>.

¹¹⁸ John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). All references to *The Duchess of Malfi* are to this edition.

¹¹⁹ Johnstone Parr, “The Horoscope in Webster’s the Duchess of Malfi,” *PMLA* 60, no. 3 (1945): 760–65.

¹²⁰ Parr, 765.

¹²¹ During the early modern period, horoscopy was used to refer to both the drawing up of the horoscope and the reading of its contents. Horoscopy and astrology were not interchangeable, as astrology denoted a wide range of practices.

her own fortunes by throwing bones,¹²² but those who attempted to tell her future and perhaps hope for her downfall would be punished for doing the same.

James I reinforced and amplified Elizabeth's acts against witchcraft in 1604 with "An Act against conjuration witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits." Whereas Elizabeth's previous acts were more focused on the nature of the harm that might be done to neighbors and friends, James focused on the witch's engagement with evil spirits:

That if any person or persons...shall use practice or exercise any invocation or. Conjuraton of any evil and wicked spirit, or shall consult, covenant with, entertain, employ feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose; or take up any dead man, woman, or child out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone, or any other part of any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment...shall suffer pains of death as a felon or felons, and shall lose the privilege and benefit of clergy and sanctuary.¹²³

The difference between the laws recorded during Elizabeth's reign and those of James's rule reveal each monarch's specific concerns regarding witches and witchcraft. Both indicate that some offences are to be met with death, and they stipulate that other offenders are to be punished with imprisonment and public confession. Charms and the objects of witchcraft are outlawed during both reigns, but the primary preoccupation is different.

¹²² The practice of throwing bones was intended to tell the future through intuition and could include casting objects other than bones. Each object was meant to represent different people, answers, or directions, and were tied closely to both the person reading the fortune and the person requesting that their fortune be read. Casting or throwing bones is famously inexact, as those who are reading the bones have quite a bit of room to craft an interpretation that they feel fits their client or their own hopes. Other practices include specific animal bones like sheep or pigs, or particular bones, like knucklebones.

¹²³ Rosen, 57-58.

James's stipulation that it is illegal to "consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit" proves that he believed that these spirits were real and could perform evil actions at the behest of their human counterparts.¹²⁴ As King of England, James was in the position of being a demonologist and theoretician as well as a monarch, with the power to change laws and hunt witches at will. The ways in which he departs from Scot's beliefs are stark both in his writing, as we have seen, and in the way that he approached the composition and passing of laws regarding witches and witchcraft. S.F. Davies reinforces the point that "The root of Scot's skepticism was a belief in the absolute incorporeality of spirits...this meant that any interaction between humans and Devils was impossible, and therefore so was witchcraft."¹²⁵ Davies borrows his reasoning from Scot's argument using clear and direct logic: if evil spirits cannot take a corporeal form, then communing with them and the practice of witchcraft is impossible. James's reasoning, however, hinges on the opposite: evil spirits are a danger to man and so not only is witchcraft real, it is a present threat to the health and peace of the realm.

Reginald Scot and James I present disparate approaches to witchcraft beliefs. Scot hopes to convince his readers that witchcraft is impossible and those conjurations that the public claims to have witnessed are largely sleight of hand, for which he offers directions so that any layman can perform these parlor tricks. James, however, hopes to convince his readers and his subjects that witchcraft is a real threat to their wellbeing, that the dead can be made to walk again, and that the Devil may tempt them while they go about their daily lives. Scot is in the position of being a reasonable voice among the masses whereas James has 'real' power: he is a monarch, even before he takes the throne of England, and so his personal beliefs can drive much more than popular opinion or discussion in learned circles.

¹²⁴ Rosen, 57.

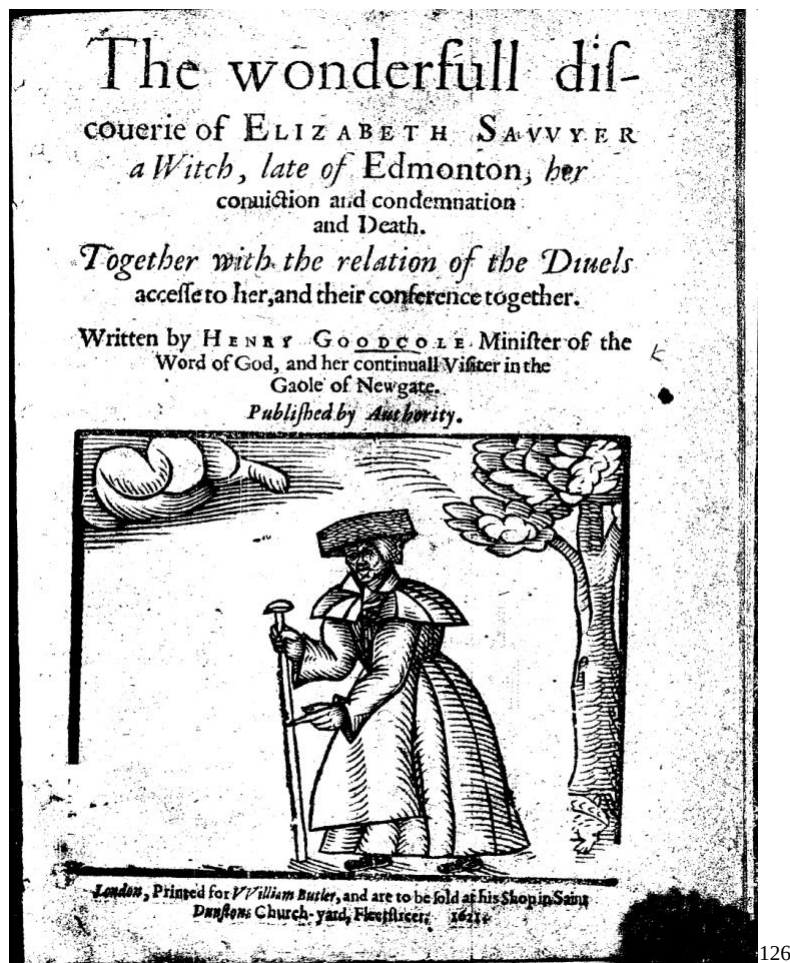
¹²⁵ Davies, 382-383.

As the central theoretical texts in my study, Scot's and James's works are in direct opposition while the dramatic texts that I engage with represent a clearer and more consistent representation of witchcraft belief. Both men have power, as all men had power during the period, but the power of James's imagination to craft and impact laws, to change the way in which barristers and husbands saw women and impact the direction of popular opinion is more direct than Scot's. Scot's beliefs make it into popular culture and that culture is transposed on stage, but his reasoning did little to sway popular opinion when cities and towns across Britain were reading "true" tales of witches with the power to kill cattle, maim neighbors, and destroy a year's worth of labor in popular pamphlets. The intersection between belief, theory, and reality is complicated for these men and these texts. Looking back to the 16th and 17th centuries, the nature of truth is difficult to untangle with a modern sensibility about what is real and what is fiction. In order to make sense of witchcraft, we must look to daily life and the common practices of men and women. Did their practices reveal a concern about witchcraft? Were they fearful or defiant when faced with the Devil?

What better place to look for these answers than the theater, as we know that the theater represents the real and the unreal. The reflection of real life on stage reveals more about the concerns of the populace than other written works because in order to appeal to the audience that was essential for the play's success, the playwright is required to reflect back to them who they are and what they fear. The play is a mirror for the audience, and while many canonical plays are chameleons, able to reflect the truth back to audiences across centuries, all plays contain enough nuances that are specific to the time period, current events, and the public's preoccupations that we can glean an idea about belief systems from their content and presentation.

Chapter 2

“Who should bee the author of this mischief”: The Self-Fashioning Witch on Stage and Off



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A modern understanding of witchcraft trials and pamphlets from the early modern period directly benefits from dramatizations like *The Witch of Edmonton*, written by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford in 1621. Henry Goodcole authored *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conviction and condemnation and Death. Together with the relation of the Divels accesse to her, and their conference together* earlier in

¹²⁶ Henry Goodcole, *The wonderful discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conviction and condemnation and Death. Together with the relation of the Divels accesse to her, and their conference together* (London: 1621), unpagged. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docviewtoc/2240882921/Record/9EB3AB4D5B184DBCPQ/1?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

the same year. The relationship between the play and the pamphlet is central to understanding how claims of witchcraft were shaped for public consumption. An important third party in this relationship is the witch's own self-fashioning. Elizabeth Sawyer is called a witch so often that she makes herself into one in order to take back the power that others have unfairly claimed over her body and soul.

Without plays like *The Witch of Edmonton*, there would be scant evidence of how early modern readers understood pamphlets like Goodcole's and what culture did with the information included in pamphlets. Though Goodcole lambasts the trial itself, he believes in Sawyer's guilt and undoubtedly embellishes his interview with Sawyer in order to shape her story into his desired narrative. Dekker, Ford, and Rowley, however, aim to craft a play which reflects the audience's experience and understanding of witchcraft rather than their own. Their approach is meaningfully different than Goodcole's. *The Witch of Edmonton* provides the character of Elizabeth Sawyer the opportunity to create herself. Her self-fashioning reclaims the agency that is stripped from her when the villagers decide that she is a witch. Goodcole's historical Sawyer, on the other hand, does not have the same power to create a self that is integral to her identity as an individual. She becomes his monster and not her own.

The Witch of Edmonton is one of the only witchcraft plays of the period to quote directly from the witchcraft pamphlet that claims to detail the confession of the title character. At the beginning of *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch, late of Edmonton*, Goodcole's stated purpose is to "defend the truth of the cause" and to root out evil.¹²⁷ To clarify what is true and what is not, Goodcole admits to being ashamed of what rumors and other pamphlets have claimed about Sawyer: "...I was ashamed to see and heare such ridiculous

¹²⁷ Goodcole, *Sig. A3 verso*.

fictions of her bewitching Corne on the ground, of a Ferret and an Owl dayly sporting before her, of the bewitched woman braying her selfe, of the Spirits attending in the Prison; all which I knew to be fitter for an Ale-bench than for a relation of proceeding in Court of Justice.”¹²⁸ In mentioning this “ridiculous fiction,” Goodcole creates a hierarchy of belief that establishes his narrative as the most trustworthy and the most truthful. The hierarchy of belief that Goodcole reinforces also places the observations and attitudes of the men involved in the case above the villagers and the accused herself. This complicates the nature of the confession that Goodcole claims to have recorded. Though the contents of *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch* should contain Sawyer’s honest confession, Goodcole’s hierarchy establishes his truth as more important than hers. He is the author of this confession, not Sawyer; as such, Goodcole’s words shape what early moderns believed about the Witch of Edmonton, not the woman herself.

The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch is Goodcole’s dramatization of Elizabeth Sawyer’s crimes. The existence of *The Witch of Edmonton*, therefore, creates a double drama. The play is the dramatization of a pamphlet, which itself is a dramatic representation of a series of crimes that could not have occurred. The relationship between drama and truth, therefore, exposes not what happened but rather what is believed to have happened. As a result, both *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch* reflect what the public believed about witches and the possibility of witchcraft. The court of public opinion was not concerned with the truth at the heart of the crime of witchcraft. Instead, the informal courts held in town squares and churchyards passed judgment based on rumor, behavior, belief, and social hierarchy. By engaging in narratives of belief related to magic and

¹²⁸ Goodcole, *Sig. A3 verso*.

witchcraft, early modern society reinforced a hierarchy of belief that challenged the nature of the truth and reinforced false narratives shaped by men's voices.

Goodcole shows disdain for the townspeople of Edmonton throughout *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*. When he reports on their first witch test, he calls it a “ridiculous custom” even as he reports it with zeal:

...an old ridiculous custom was used, which was to plucke the Thatch of her house, and to burne it, and it being so burned, the author of such mischief should presently then come: and it was observed and affirmed to the Court, that Elizabeth Sawyer would presently frequent the house of them that burnt the thatch which they pluckt of her house, and come without any sending for.¹²⁹

This custom is included in William Perkins' *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft; So Farre Forth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience* in 1608. He lists the burning of thatch as one of the proofs of witchcraft that is “less sufficient” for conviction, listing it along with the burning of the bewitched object itself:

...the burning of the thing bewitched, if it be not a man, as a hogge, or oxe, or such like creature, is imagined to be a forcible means to cause the Witch to discover herself.

Thirdly, the burning of thatch of the suspected parties house, which is through to be able to cure the partie bewitched, and to make the Witch to betray herself.¹³⁰

Evidence that this test was used widely can be found in 1579, when the anonymous author of *A detection of damnable driftes, practized by three witches arraigned at Chelmissforde in Essex at the laste assises there holden, which were whiche were executed in Aprill. 1579* narrates the

¹²⁹ Goodcole, *Sig. A3+1 recto*.

¹³⁰ M. William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft; So Farre Forth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience* (Cambridge: 1608), 206. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240883158/C194079FC8E14226PQ/1?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books&imgSeq=1>.

“Evidence given against Elleine Smith of Maldon.”¹³¹ After her son comes home to tell her that Ihon Estwood would not give him alms, Estwood was

...taken with very greate paine in his bodie, and the same night following, as he satte by the fire with one of his neighbours, to their thinking thei did see a Ratte runne up the Chimney, and presently it did fall doune again in the likenesse of a Tode, and taking it up with the tongges, thei thruste it into the fire, and so helde it in Forcesibly, it made the fire burne as blewe as Asure, and the fire was almost out, and at the burnying thereof the said Ellen Smithe was in greate paine and out of quiete, whereupon dissemblingly she came to the house of the fore saied Ihon Estwood, and asked how all that were there did, and he saied well I thanke God, and she said, I thought you had not been well, and therefore I came to see how you did, and so went her waie.¹³²

In Estwood's case, the appearance of Smithe is not the only strange occurrence. The text leads the reader to believe that there is both an occasion of transfiguration, the rat turning into a toad, and brilliantly colored fire before the supposed witch is called forward. Smithe's appearing as if “in greate pain” not only shows that the spell has been undone by the burning of the bewitched object, but that in doing so, the witch may have been harmed as well, as the toad was understood to be an extension of her body as well as the manifestation of her magic. How the anonymous author knew that she was in pain before appearing before those assembled is unclear. This text, like many others, intends to prove that witchcraft was a real danger. Narratives which indicate

¹³¹ *A Detection of Damnable Driftes, Practized by Three Vvitches Arraigned at Chelmifforde in Essex, at the Laste Assises there Holden, Whiche were Executed in Aprill. 1579 Set Forthe to Discover the Ambushementes of Sathan, Whereby He would Surprise Vs Lulled in Securitie, and Hardened with Contempte of Gods Vengeance Threatened for our Offences* (London: 1579) Sig. A.b. verso. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240936602/99854184/9B30CAB2527E4DFAPQ/1?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

¹³² *A Detection of Damnable Driftes*, unpagged.

that Smithe appeared “dissemblingly” and in “greate pain” supply facts that could not have been known by the author and are therefore likely false.

The villagers in *The Witch of Edmonton* believe that calling Elizabeth Sawyer forth with burning thatch would be proof enough of her guilt, but Goodcole remains unconvinced. Goodcole is more readily convinced of Sawyer’s guilt through her public and private body. He recreates her body on the page through detailed description, making it into a legible text of her wickedness:

Her face was most pale & ghоast-like without any bloud at all, and her countenance was still derected to the ground.

Her body was crooked and deformed, even bending together, which so happened but a little before her apprehension.

That tongue which by cursing, swearing, blaspheming, and imprecating, as afterward she confessed, was the occasioning cause, of the Divels access unto her, even at that time, and to claime her thereby as his own, by it discovered her lying, swearing, and blaspheming.¹³³

Sawyer’s guilt is reflected in her “crooked and deformed” body. The physical manifestation of her guilt is more reliable proof for Goodcole than the burning of the thatch from the roof of her house. The changes that Goodcole notes as part of her physical presence are said to have “happened but a little before her apprehension.” Timing is important to Goodcole. If Sawyer had always been stooped in her posture, his argument that she cannot stand tall because of her traffic with the Devil does not hold. Showing the reader that her body appeared thus before her

¹³³ Goodcole, unpagеd-Sig. B recto.

arrest helps to prove that her wickedness caused this change, as she would be at her worst directly before being arrested.

As both a physical and vocal trait, Sawyer's blaspheming tongue is alarming enough to cause suspicion of witchcraft, even without the changes in her physical body representing her descent into witchcraft. The report that the Devil found her "lying, swearing, and blaspheming," makes language, rather than Sawyer's nature, into the object or force which tempts the Devil. Unlike spells and rhymes in Latin, seen often in other plays and witchcraft treatises, swearing and blaspheming were accessible to the average woman during the period. As the mechanism by which the Devil gains access to Sawyer, blaspheming is both an action in response to the abuse that Sawyer faced and an act of self-fashioning. In her 2018 article, "Emotions in *The Witch of Edmonton*," Kathryn Prince presents Sawyer's blaspheming as a decision: "mistreated by everyone she encounters, [Sawyer] has reached her limit of endurance and attempts to summon the devil as she has heard witches can do."¹³⁴ Ideas about witchcraft, therefore, act on Sawyer in two ways: she is vilified as a witch, and she fashions herself into a witch based in response to both individual and collective belief.

The Witch of Edmonton engages directly with the idea of appearance and self-fashioning in response to what the audience believes when Elizabeth Sawyer first appears on stage. The audience acts as an extension of the townspeople in the play, and their judgment of Sawyer is just as meaningful as the judgment of Cuddy Banks and the other townspeople on stage. Sawyer's first speech in *The Witch of Edmonton* is extracted from Goodcole's text. Instead of being described by another as she is in the pamphlet, Sawyer describes herself in the play. As a result, she becomes her own "creatrice":

¹³⁴ Kathryn Prince, "Emotions in *The Witch of Edmonton*," *Early Theater* 21, no. 2 (2018): 184.

...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, urging
 That my bad tongue – by their bad usage made so –
 Forspeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn,
 Themselves, their servants, and their babes at nurse.
 This they enforce upon me, and in part
 Make me to credit it. (2.1.3-15)¹³⁵

Goodcole claims of Sawyer that “God did...make her tongue to be the meanes of her owne destruction,”¹³⁶ but the text of the play stresses that Sawyer did not become this way on her own; men's “bad usage” made her so. Her fall from grace is the fault of those around her and the impact that men's imaginative desires have on her reality appears to manifest through her appearance. Sawyer is “like a bow buckled and bent together” not because she bends but because she has been bent “By some more strong in mischiefs than [herself].” “Some more strong in mischiefs” references men and not the Devil. In Edmonton as in other villages during

¹³⁵ Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Lucy Munro (New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2021). All references to *The Witch of Edmonton* are to this edition.

¹³⁶ Goodcole, *Sig. B recto*.

the period, men and the generative power of the male imagination had the power to create what they thought they saw rather than what was present.

As witchcraft trials attest, the male imagination became one of the most active forces of patriarchal control. Nancy Vickers argues that the blazoning of a woman's body is a "product of men talking to men about women. The canonical legacy of description is a legacy shaped predominantly *by* the male imagination *for* the male imagination."¹³⁷ The male imagination is one of the reasons that patriarchal community structures can so easily see a woman like Elizabeth Sawyer and imagine evil. The male imagination makes the parts of a woman more substantial in their separateness. The modern reader may look at Elizabeth Sawyer and see only an older woman whose body has survived decades of labor, but the generative power of the male imagination sees a pale, bent woman and creates a witch.

Laura Mulvey argues that the male imagination makes women the "signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the...image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."¹³⁸ The concept of the woman's body as "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" reinforces the tension between the witch and the patriarchal systems that aim to contain her body and prove her wickedness. In concert, the text of the play and the text of the pamphlet address both Sawyer's blaspheming tongue and her physical presence. In doing so, they make the implicit argument that the witch's words are just as important a feature of her appearance as her bent and twisted body. Goodcole argues that it was Sawyer's tongue that brought the Devil to her, blaming the witch for her own downfall: "That tongue which by

¹³⁷ Nancy J. Vickers, "This Heraldry in Lucrece' Face," *Poetics Today* 6, no. 1/2 (1985): 171.

¹³⁸ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, ed. Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 58.

cursing, swearing, blaspheming, and imprecating, as afterward she confessed, was the occasioning cause, of the Divels access unto her, even at that time, and to claime her thereby as his own, by it discovered her lying, swearing, and blaspheming.”¹³⁹ In *The Witch of Edmonton*, however, Sawyer describes how the men around her have driven her to blasphemy: “...they go / About to teach me how to be one, urging / That my bad tongue – by their bad usage made so – / Forspeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn, / Themselves, their servants, and their babes at nurse” (2.1.9-13). In both the play and the pamphlet, Sawyer’s language makes her dangerous. In the play, however, there is a clearer sense of how her language is reactionary rather than proactive. Sawyer is made evil through her “bad tongue” but is the men’s “bad usage” that makes her into a witch.

In *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England*, Kirilka Stavreva argues that Sawyer is not merely blaspheming. Instead, she is engaged in a specific speech act that goes beyond “the violent speech acts of scolding and what I have termed witch-speak – malevolent speech that was typically impossible to reconstitute but was credited with effecting physical harm or death.”¹⁴⁰ Witch-speak is not only the product of witches or of those accused of being in league with the Devil. Stavreva’s concept of witch-speak extends beyond the bounds of gender and witchcraft accusation, including those who participate in speech that has the “affective power to induce fear and wonder, to make believe.”¹⁴¹ This includes the speech that is disparaged as dangerous female blather in pamphlets, including any act of “overspeaking, getting the upper hand in a verbal strife, exerting control over a performative context, and

¹³⁹ Goodcole, *Sig. B recto*.

¹⁴⁰ Kirilka Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 3.

¹⁴¹ Stavreva, 72.

asserting oneself over one's superior in the social or gender hierarchy."¹⁴² Stavreva's argument that women use overspeak to exert control "over a performative context" is appropriate in general terms. For the accused witch, however, I argue that the woman only attempts to "assert" herself or to get the "upper hand in a verbal strife." The witch, unlike the women engaged in conflict that Stavreva discusses, will always lose. Sawyer's use of witch-speak, therefore, is an attempt to control what Susan Amussen calls the "inversion of the social order."¹⁴³ Witchcraft itself is an "inversion of the social order," and Sawyer's speech acts reflect this as she attempts to reclaim agency over her body and her future. Though Sawyer attempts to expose the role that the community has in her becoming a witch, she is not successful. In order to expose the strife that the villagers have caused, Sawyer would need to dismantle the patriarchal structures which determine the shape of society as a whole.

Though Sawyer will inevitably be the losing party in her verbal conflict with Old Banks, her speech still has power to change how her actions and reactions are perceived by those around her. Stavreva argues that a woman's vocal response can be more than "witch-speak," it also has the capacity to act as "verbal violence": "Underlying both inadvertent and deliberate conflations of the fairly distinct types of feminine verbal violence was acute anxiety regarding its power to destabilize social hierarchies in general and, as I suggest, the category of gender in particular."¹⁴⁴ Women who fought back with words that threatened action claimed agency that should have belonged to men. Before she is perceived as a witch, Elizabeth Sawyer functions as a scold. The scold's speech had violent power but lacked the practical threat of the witch's *maleficium*. By

¹⁴² Stavreva, 72.

¹⁴³ Susan D. Amussen, "The Witch of Edmonton: Witchcraft, Inversion, and Social Criticism," *Early Theater* 21, no. 2 (2018): 167.

¹⁴⁴ Stavreva, xvii.

subverting gender norms, scolds opened themselves up to accusations of witchcraft through the appropriation of power that did not belong to them.

In her first on stage encounter with Old Banks, Sawyer attempts to get “the upper hand in a verbal strife,” setting the stage for the tone of her speech in the play. Sawyer sees her foe coming from afar, “Make me to credit it. / And here comes one / Of my chief adversaries,” and Old Banks arrives prepared for a fight, “Out! Out upon thee, witch!” (2.1.15-17). Sawyer has come to expect this behavior from the villagers. Old Banks’s threat increases both the passion of the exchange and forces Sawyer to engage in witch-speak:

OLD BANKS Down with them when I bid thee, quickly; I’ll make thy bones rattle in thy
skin else.

SAWYER You won’t, churl, cut-throat miser! There they be.

[*Drops the sticks.*] Would they stuck ‘cross thy
throat, thy bowels, thy maw, thy midriff –

OLD BANKS Sayst thou me so? Hag, out of my ground!

SAWYER Dost strike me slave? Curmudgeon, now thy bones aches, thy joints
cramps, and convulsions stretch and crack thy sinews!

OLD BANKS Cursing, thou hag? [*Strikes her repeatedly.*] Take that, and that!

(2.1.22-32)

Sawyer’s response to Old Banks’s provocation is not unwarranted. Old Banks threatens to “make thy bones rattle in thy skin,” and in response, she dares him to do so, “You won’t, churl, cut-throat miser!” She increases the stakes through her own cursing: “Would they stuck ‘cross thy throat, thy bowels.” Sawyer’s occupation in this scene cannot be construed as the Devil’s work. Collecting sticks is both a task required survival and the result of the abuse she suffers. If

she were embraced by her neighbors, she would not have the need to collect sticks for her fire. Her engagement with the community, arriving on stage as Old Banks, reflects what the village expected of a woman who had been labeled a witch, particularly in regard to the nature of her speech. Susan Amussen argues that the witch and her speech are both specific archetypes: “The typical witch had all the features of the scolding woman, so often consigned to the cucking-stool by exasperated local magistrates, but with a much more sinister character.”¹⁴⁵ By Amussen’s account, whether the woman was a witch or a scold, she was known to the magistrates and received treatment that was in line with her evil nature. Reginald Scot reinforces this point in *The Discoverie of Witches* when he explains: “If more ridiculous or abhominable crimes could have been invented, these poore women (whose cheefe fault is that they are scolds) should have been charged with them.”¹⁴⁶ In Scot’s 16th-century example and Amussen’s 21st-century example, the woman is assumed to be a witch based on her words and her person rather than her actions or any demonstrable relationship with the Devil. Once the community has decided that a woman is a witch, she is bound to prove them right.

Sawyer is right to fear being beaten because she has been labeled a witch, even if she is not yet afraid of being condemned. As Stavreva points out,

the community matched the witches’ fighting words with harmful physical acts; commoners brutally beat suspected witches, scratched and drew blood from their faces in order to alleviate the suffering of alleged victims, set fire to their thatch roofs to see whether they would be summoned home by demonic confederates, dunked them in water

¹⁴⁵ Amussen, 170.

¹⁴⁶ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Garden City: Dover Publications, 1972), 19.

with their thumbs tied to the toes of the opposite feet and condemned them if they floated up for a gasp of air, and flocked to grisly public hangings.¹⁴⁷

Robin Briggs tempers this point in *Witches and Neighbors: the Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft*: “In most places they ran greater risks of being beaten, insulted and called witch than of actual prosecution; it took a rather mysterious rise in emotional temperature of the community for latent hostility to come to a head and produce decisive action.”¹⁴⁸ It is clear from both Stavreva and Briggs’s commentary that a witch would be nearly assured to face several beatings at the hands of her neighbors. Sawyer’s response to Old Banks makes sense in this context: “Strike, do, and withered may that hand and arm, / Whose blows have lamed me, drop from the rotten drunk. / Abuse me! Beat me! Call me hag and witch!” (2.1.33-35). This is not the first time that Sawyer has faced the wrath of her neighbors; she already knows what names they will call her.

There is tension between Sawyer’s understanding of how the villagers’ opinions shape her and her invective directed at Old Banks. In the same scene she acknowledges, “Some call me ‘witch’, / And being ignorant of myself they go / About to teach me how to be one,” (2.1.8-10) and cries, “Abuse me! Beat me! Call me hag and witch!” (2.1.35). The first of these examples is a statement; Sawyer understands how the opinions of others shape her position in the community. The second contains a series of imperatives that threaten Old Banks. If he calls her a “hag and witch” as she asks, he risks her ire and the danger inherent therein. Each insult becomes threateningly real in its repetition. The qualities of *energeia* and *enargeia* clarify how the characters’ language creates their reality in this scene and throughout the play. Stavreva

¹⁴⁷ Stavreva, 73.

¹⁴⁸ Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbours: the Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 311.

relies on these rhetorical figures to understand the power of blaspheming speech during the period: “Classical authors, notably Quintilian, describe *enargeia* as the quality of speech that provokes imaginary seeing, making present to the mind’s eye the (imagined) past or future and in this way transforming listeners of narration into witnesses.”¹⁴⁹ *Energeia*, on the other hand, is a more general term describing the “energy or vigor of an expression.”¹⁵⁰ Unlike *enargeia*, *energeia* is not necessarily visual and can be used in more general terms.

Rhetorical figures like *energeia* and *enargeia* were well understood during the period in which *The Witch of Edmonton* was composed. George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie Contrived into Three Bookes: The First of Poets and Poesie, the Second of Proportion, the Third of Ornament* indicates that “ornament Poeticall is of two sortes according to the double virtue and efficacie of figures.”¹⁵¹ He goes on to define *energeia* and *enargeia* as

...one to satisfie & delight th’eare onely by a goodly outward shew set upon the matter with words and speaches smoothly and tunably running; another by certaine intendments or sense of such words & speaches inwardly working a stirre to the mynde: the firste qualitie the Greeks called *Enargia*, of this word argos, because it geveth a glorious lustre and light. This latter they called *Energia* of *ergon*, because it wrought with a strong and virtuous operation.¹⁵²

In this passage, Puttenham inverts the definitions, describing *energia* as the power of language to make things real as opposed to *enargia*. The two are not synonyms. In the entry for “Art,” *The Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* explains, “Quintilian’s elaboration of *ekphrasis*, the type of description

¹⁴⁹ Stavreva, xix.

¹⁵⁰ “energia,” in *Silva Rhetoricae* (Brigham Young University, 2016), <http://rhetoric.byu.edu/Figures/E/energia.htm>.

¹⁵¹ George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie Contrived into Three Bookes: The First of Poets and Poesie, the Second of Proportion, the Third of Ornament* (London: 1589), 119. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2248517279/99846086/BE69EAAEB1A54190PQ/1?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

¹⁵² Puttenham, 119.

(*descriptio*) that aims at graphic clarity (*evidentia*, *enargeia*) of the described object... involves a detailed analysis of the manner in which listening to or reading such descriptions, thanks to the tropes and figures present, produces a sense of seeing what is being described with one's inner eye."¹⁵³ Therefore, the key difference between *energeia* and *enargeia* lies in language's ability to turn the listener into a witness through the creation of a visual reality.

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the *enargeia* of Sawyer's speech has the ability to make what she says about herself and those around her into reality. When she describes herself as "poor, deformed and ignorant / And like a bow buckled and bent together," she becomes so (2.1.3-4). Sawyer's threats, however, engage both the descriptive power of *enargeia* and the linguistic passion of *energeia*. She is not merely angry with Old Banks; she *curses* him with aching bones, cramps, convulsions, and sticks that break the skin across his throat and midriff, impaling his bowels. Her curses are an act of violence that is limited to the power of invective, committing crimes with words that Sawyer cannot undertake with her body. Stavreva describes this as contributing to the witch's "frightful dialectic of fighting words and acts. They lashed out with curses and spells against the neglect, maltreatment, and brutality of social superiors, exercising what one anthropologist has called the 'negative power' to make trouble."¹⁵⁴ Sawyer feels restricted in her ability to "make trouble" through her own agency. All Sawyer has at her disposal are fighting words, and rhetorical violence only goes so far. She wants more: "What spells, what charms or invocations? / May the thing called 'familiar' be purchased?" (2.1.37-38). A witch who is disruptive is conspicuous, but an animal familiar can move through a community without being noticed.

¹⁵³ Bernhard F. Scholz, "Art," in *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), <https://www-oxfordreference-com.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125955.001.0001/acref-9780195125955-e-26>.

¹⁵⁴ Stavreva, 73.

Though they were both reported to have familiars, the laws of the period make no distinction between the cunning woman's white magic and the witch's black magic. All familiars were assumed to be evil, and they nearly always appeared in the form of an animal. As Emma Wilby explains, "demon familiars could appear in a variety of animal guises ranging from apes, stags, horses, lambs, ferrets, dogs, cats and mice to birds, bees, spiders, grasshoppers, snails and frogs. As several scholars have illustrated, long before the witch-craze and the furor about demon familiars, on both a popular and elite level the Devil was believed to assume animal forms."¹⁵⁵ A belief in the existence of familiars who do the bidding of the witch and the work of the Devil, if they aren't the Devil himself, was entrenched in early modern culture. The modern reader may be surprised by the appearance of Dog in Act 2, but the early modern audience would expect a helpmeet to arrive in response to Sawyer's invective.¹⁵⁶

Without a familiar and overhearing that Cuddy Banks and the Morris Dancers plan to put out her eye,¹⁵⁷ Sawyer laments her limited position in the village: "I am shunned / And hated like

¹⁵⁵ Emma Wilby, *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic* (Toronto: Sussex Academic Press, 2013), 63.

¹⁵⁶ There is space for a discussion about the comic impact of a man dressed up as a dog moving through a play that very seriously considers themes of witchcraft, bigamy, and murder. I don't plan on addressing the comic relationship between Sawyer and Dog, instead viewing Dog as what he claims to be in a witchcraft context, the devil familiar in the shape of an animal that can move between and among groups without detection.

¹⁵⁷ In *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*, Goodcole asks, "How came your eye to be put out?" and Sawyer responds, "With a sticke which one of my children had in the hand: that night my mother did dye it was done; for I was stooping by the bed side, and I by chance did hit my eye on the sharpe end of the sticke." Neither *The Witch of Edmonton* nor *The Wonderfull Discoverie* describes Sawyer initially as missing an eye. In the latter case, it only comes out during questioning, added as a detail among Goodcole's questions about the Devil's visits to Sawyer after her imprisonment. In the former, it isn't mentioned until the second Morris Dancer says, "Bless us, Cuddy, and let her curse her tother eye out" (2.1.102-103). In the margin notes, Goodcole explains that he asks this of her because, "her father and mothers eye, one of theirs was out." In context, the use of this detail is of interest as Sawyer's bodily deformity is used as evidence of her wickedness, leaving out this clear facial injury that can be read as further evidence of her evil. Goodcole's questioning can be interpreted as some belief, or a desire to believe, that Sawyer was not the first in her family to have a relationship with the Devil if one or both of her parents were also missing an eye. It is unclear from Goodcole's note if he meant both the father and mother were missing an eye or if there was only one missing eye between them. In either case, his intent is to show that Sawyer likely inherited her witchcraft from one or both of her parents.

a sickness, made a scorn / To all degrees and sexes” (2.1.115-117). Sawyer needs a solution to help her regain a sense of agency:

I have heard old beldams
 Talk of familiars in the shape of mice,
 Rats, ferrets, weasels and I wot not what,
 That have appeared and sucked, some say, their blood.
 But by what means they came acquainted with them
 I'm now ignorant. (2.1.117-122)

Even as Sawyer is othered by the Old Banks and the Morris Dancers, she identifies the “old beldams” as other still. These “old beldams” with “familiars in the shape of mice, / Rats, ferrets, weasels and I wot not what” demonstrates that an understanding of familiars and their role in helping the witch was widespread and well-known among early moderns. The shape of the witch’s familiar was not limited to a mouse, rat, ferret, or weasel: “Both fairy and demon familiars could appear in a variety of animal guises ranging from apes, stags, horses, lambs, ferrets, dogs, cats and mice to birds, bees, spiders, grasshoppers, snails and frogs.”¹⁵⁸ These animals were closely connected to both the witch’s body and her home. Emma Wilby explains, “Witches sometimes claimed that their demon familiars lived in a specific place in or near the house, and in this respect they resembled the domestic fairy, or brownie.”¹⁵⁹ This is one of the key differences between the cunning woman’s familiar and the witch’s familiar. The cunning woman’s familiar was far more impish in its action, preventing butter from churning and lighting small fires, compared to the witch’s familiar whose role was far more sinister.

¹⁵⁸ Wilby, 63.

¹⁵⁹ Wilby, 77.

Sawyer does not know what to do or how to become acquainted with a familiar. It is clear from her speech, however, that she does not need a charm for keeping the dust away; she desires revenge:

Would some power good or bad

Instruct me which way I might be revenged

Upon this churl, I'd go out of myself

And give this Fury leave to dwell within

This ruined cottage, ready to fall with age (2.1.122-126)

Sawyer exists outside of a line of matrilineal witches. Unlike mothers and daughters who were sometimes tried together, Sawyer needs someone or something to “Instruct me which way I might be revenged.” She likens her body to a “ruined cottage, ready to fall with age.” Her age and her anger give her license to follow evil wherever they may lead her. Sawyer is a woman with few choices left to her, and she is willing to lay her soul on the line to uncrook her back and take revenge. The witch was “usually in similar straits to the cunning woman. She was living in or near the breadline, and suffering some kind of hardship or tragedy” when she first calls up her familiar.¹⁶⁰ The poetry of Sawyer’s speech is at odds with her physical and financial status. At the same time that she is “poor, deformed, and ignorant, / And like a bow buckled and bent together,” she also delivers blank verse that is more sophisticated than other characters’ (2.1.3-4). As she inches closer and closer to calling to Dog with “Blasphemous speeches, oaths, detested oaths,” she out-speaks the others in the play.

Sawyer’s ability to out-speak those around her, even when she is not engaging in *energeia* speech, links her to the Witch of Endor in the Old Testament, who also has a familiar.

¹⁶⁰ Wilby, 70.

When Saul wants to speak to Samuel in 1 Samuel, he asks his servants: “Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and inquire of her,” and his servants reply, “Behold, *there is* a woman that hath a familiar spirit at En-dor” (1 Samuel 28:7).¹⁶¹ The witch’s familiar is evidence that she has the power Saul seeks. In 1 Samuel, Saul acknowledges that the familiar spirit is a key factor in what he seeks: “divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me *him* up, whom I shall name unto thee” (1 Samuel 28:8). The spirit is a tool that the Witch of Endor can use at her discretion. Still, she worries that Saul is setting her up for destruction: “Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off those that have familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die?” (1 Samuel 28:9). The Biblical law that prevents the Witch of Endor from doing her great work are not so different than the Witchcraft Acts that named the witch’s familiar as key evidence of her guilt in the 16th and 17th centuries.

In the 1604 “Act against conjuration witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits,” James I determined that no person “shall use, practice, or exercise any invocation or conjuration of any evil and wicket spirit: or shall consult, covenant with, entertaine, imploy, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit, to or for any intent or purpose.”¹⁶² In the face of this law, Sawyer tempts life and limb by knowingly seeking a familiar to help her exact revenge. The 1604 Act Against Conjuration outlines the punishment for those “so offending, and being thereof lawfully convicted” as “imprisonment by the space of one whole year, without bail or mainprise, and once in every quarter of the said year, shall in some market town, upon the market day, or at such time as any fair shall be kept there, stand openly upon the pillory by the space of six hours, and there

¹⁶¹ *The English Bible: King James Version*, ed. Herbert Marks (New York: W. W. Norton & Company), 2012. All references to Bible are to this edition.

¹⁶² Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 57.

shall openly confess his or her error and offence.”¹⁶³ A year of regular visits to the pillory and imprisonment is the punishment for a first offense, but on being “the second time lawfully and duly convicted and attained,” the witch “...shall suffer pains of death as a felon or felons, and shall lose the benefit and privilege of clergy and sanctuary.”¹⁶⁴ Although her neighbors are well established in their belief that she is a witch, Sawyer has done nothing prior to calling up a familiar that would put her afoul of any of the witchcraft statutes.

Sawyer will die for her crimes. There is no room for a first offense and a year’s punishment in the world of *The Witch of Edmonton* as there would be in early modern England. The theater leaves no room for the witch to get a second chance. Though her neighbors believe her to be a witch, Sawyer doesn’t know how to be one in a practical sense. She needs a teacher just as much as a helpmeet. She desperately desires the space to

Abjure all goodness, be at hate with prayer

And study curses, imprecations,

Blasphemous speeches, oaths, detested oaths,

Or anything that’s ill, so I might work

Revenge upon this miser, this black cur

That barks and bites and sucks the very blood

Of me and of my credit. ‘Tis all one

To be a witch as to be counted one.

Vengeance, shame, ruin light upon that canker! (2.1.127-135)

Because she does not know how to curse, Sawyer wants to “study curses, imprecations / Blasphemous speeches, oaths, detested oaths,” and she mistakenly names her yet-to-appear

¹⁶³ Rosen, 58.

¹⁶⁴ Rosen, 58.

familiar as her enemy, wanting “Revenge upon this miser, this black cur / That barks and bites and sucks the very blood / Of me and of my credit.” Dog is quite literally a “black cur,” but he has yet to show himself to be a miser. Old Banks is the miser, keeping Sawyer from collecting the sticks from his forest, but he is also the “black cur / That barks and bites.” She is not far off the character of the man when she compares him to an aggressive, mangy dog. Old Banks has beaten her, the human “bite,” and all those around her have demeaned and diminished her so that she has nothing left of her sense of self or of her “credit.” Folding her yet-to-be familiar and Old Banks into one creates the liminal and productive space from which Dog will emerge. This speech also reveals that Dog will be Sawyer’s downfall. Unlike the cunning woman’s helpful imps, the witch’s familiar can also be her enemy. Ultimately, Dog has too much power to act on his own desires. Sawyer’s credit is already diminished among her neighbors, and Dog will diminish it still further through independent actions that are blamed on his mistress. Dog’s desires and actions make the villagers’ behavior appear benign. The villagers suffer a witch, but Dog does not suffer a witch to live. When Sawyer wishes “Vengeance, shame, ruin light upon that canker” she speaks of Old Banks who beats her, the Morris Dancers who want to put her other eye out, and of Dog who will destroy her even as he makes her whole. Her curses are doubled over and over in this speech as she makes herself into the witch that the villagers know her to be. As Sawyer becomes a witch through her own agency and in response to the expectations of those around her, she plants the seeds of her own destruction.

Goodcole determines that Elizabeth Sawyer is guilty of her own ruination but does not acknowledge that her witchcraft is in response to the abuse she suffered: “Thus God did wonderfully overtake her in her owne wickednesse, to make her tongue to be the means of her

owne destruction, which had destroyed many before.”¹⁶⁵ Sawyer’s ability to “be the means of her owne destruction” is at odds with Goodcole’s report that she struggles to communicate during her trial: “at which hearing, she was not able to speake a sensible or ready word for her defense, but sends out in the hearing of the Judge, Jury, and all good people that stood by, many most fearfull imprecations for destruction against her self then to happen.”¹⁶⁶ Goodcole does not record the words that Sawyer speaks to the judge and jury. It is not until the “Confession” at the end of the text that he addresses the details of what Sawyer reported of herself and her crimes. Her inability to defend herself is suspicious to Goodcole. To the modern reader, however, Sawyer’s inability to offer a cogent response to baseless accusations in an environment where her life is at stake is entirely reasonable. She is being asked to defend herself against an impossible crime – a crime for which she will be found guilty.

Robin Briggs describes witchcraft as “a crime [that] was ‘transparent’, with a hole at the centre, since witches did not actually do most of the things alleged against them.”¹⁶⁷ Viewing the crime of witchcraft as transparent or hollow problematizes Goodcole’s claim that “Master Arthur Robinson, a worshipful Justice of Peace...laboriously and carefully examined her, and still his suspicion was strengthened against her, that doubtless shee was a witch.”¹⁶⁸ Even though the crime is a hollow one and there is no true evidence of Sawyer’s guilt, Robinson’s imagination makes the witch’s body into the bearer of his meaning. Sawyer becomes what the Justice and the judiciary system want to find. Briggs also explains the dynamic of the crime of witchcraft in the context of village politics. He explains that community ethics during the period carried the expectation that those with more food, more resources, and more warmth would share with those

¹⁶⁵ Goodcole, *Sig. B recto*.

¹⁶⁶ Goodcole, *Sig. B recto*.

¹⁶⁷ Briggs, 7.

¹⁶⁸ Goodcole, *Sig. B2 verso*.

who had less. When someone came to ask for bread, water, or assistance, turning them away was viewed as a moral failure:

The original dispute...occurred when the suspect asked for a small gift or service from a neighbour, who refused it. The person who failed to give, however, was well aware of the breach of neighbourly duty and convention involved, even when there were good immediate reasons for the refusal. Turning others away was implicitly an aggressive act, placing one's own needs first and making the refuser feel guilty; this aggression was then projected into the other person, who was expected to be angry and resentful after being refused. In effect, the victims' own anger and wish to attack would seem intolerable to them, with the projection operating as an unconscious defense mechanism.¹⁶⁹

Briggs offers an example of one appeal and one refusal in this case, but a woman was called a witch only after several confrontations of this type. Elsewhere, he suggests that witchcraft accusations were perpetuated by "individuals who their supposed victims knew all too well, whose reputations were built up over many years by an insidious process of rumour and gossip."¹⁷⁰ Though witchcraft is often portrayed in plays as occurring abruptly, Briggs proves that witchcraft accusations grew and became entrenched in village lore over many years. Witches were well known in their communities. Village norms and social structures are an essential component for understanding the dynamics at play when a woman is brought to trial for witchcraft.

Elizabeth Sawyer's position at the fringes of her community makes her a classic example of the would-be witch. Goodcole blames her blaspheming tongue for her eventual downfall, but

¹⁶⁹ Briggs, 118.

¹⁷⁰ Briggs, 2.

her fate was sealed long before she chose to curse the court rather than defend herself against an empty charge. This is blamed partly on her departure from God:

And in this manner, namely, that out of her false swearing the truth whereof, shee little thought should be found, but by her swearing and cursing blended, it thus farre made against her, that both Judge and Jurie, all of them grew more and more suspitious of her, and not without great cause: for none that had the feare of God, or any the least motion of Gods grace left in them, would, or durst, to perfume so impudently, with execrations and false oaths, to affront justice.¹⁷¹

Goodcole argues that “none that had the feare of God” in them could blaspheme as Sawyer does. This belief is consistent with other texts which frame blasphemy as counter to Godliness. *The sinne of blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, scholastically examined the reasons of the absolute irremissibility thereof displayed; an admonition to all revolting apostataes annexed*, published by John Meredith in 1622, opens with a quote from Mark 3:29: “He that Blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost, shall never have forgiveness, but is culpable of Eternall damnation.”¹⁷²

Throughout his treatise, Meredith relates stories of Biblical blasphemy, along with early modern temptations to turn against God “in this decrepit Age of the world where in wee live, who halting between two opinions, spare not to belch forth blasphemies against the Truth...that those who repute it a small matter, to depart from the Truth of the Gospell, to the Tents of Antechrist, may consider the danger, and retire, before they fall into that Sinne against the Holy Ghost, which is Irrecoverable.”¹⁷³ Meredith’s argument that the blasphemer has committed an irrevocable sin

¹⁷¹ Goodcole, *Sig. B – Sig. B verso*.

¹⁷² John Meredith, *The Sinne of Blasphemie Against the Holy Ghost, Scholastically Examined the Reasons of the Absolute Irremissibility Thereof Displayed; an Admonition to all Reuolting Apostataes Annexed* (London: 1622), unpagged. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240910673/99855868/BDDDB79BEFF2E432FPQ/1?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

¹⁷³ Meredith, *Sig. A3+1 recto*.

reinforces Goodcole's point of view. The sin of blasphemy was common enough during the period that all of those present at Sawyer's trial would have been aware of the danger in her words both to the speaker and to the listener. Sawyer's blasphemy makes it easy for Goodcole and the court to find her guilty. She has removed herself from God's grace. Sawyer has the power and agency to commit this irrevocable sin, so it takes no considerable work for the judge and jury to convince the court and themselves that Sawyer is guilty.

Sawyer damns herself with the blasphemy that makes her a witch. Her ability to blaspheme, however, is key to the agency that she demonstrates throughout the play and in the events reported in Goodcole's pamphlet. Sawyer's self-fashioning is threatening to the men around her. Her self-fashioning is reactive, however, complicating a reading of her agency in the face of adversity. A simpler reading of Sawyer would indicate that she blasphemes in response to threat, but this is not entirely true. Elizabeth Sawyer blasphemes with a purpose. Her witch-speak helps her to become a witch, a woman with the power to seek revenge. The success of her revenge proves that Sawyer is successful in her self-fashioning; she creates a new self that will be feared rather than fearful.

The language that Dog uses upon his first appearance is quoted from Goodcole's questioning of Sawyer in the final section of the pamphlet. Titled "A true Relation of the confession of Elizabeth Sawyer, *Spinster*" and included as a separate section in the pamphlet, Goodcole's record of Sawyer's confession is composed as a dialogue, "*In Dialogue manner are here expressed the persons that she murthered, and the cattell that she destroyed by the helpe of the Divell.*"¹⁷⁴ Sawyer's conviction prior to this confession colors their conversation. The position of the author and the nature of the record presented in the text makes it impossible to say

¹⁷⁴ Goodcole, *Sig. C recto*.

whether or not this conversation happened or if Sawyer said any of what Goodcole reports. At the opening of this section, Goodcole claims that Sawyer was “ignorant”: “In this manner was I inforced to speake unto her, because she might understand me, and give unto me answere, according to my demands, for she was a very ignorant woman.”¹⁷⁵ It is unclear what “ignorant” means in this context. It is possible that Goodcole intended to indicate that he was “inforced” to engage with Sawyer in a dialogue instead of directly recording her confession. The use of “ignorant” reflects the doublespeak that *The Witch of Edmonton* engages in so skillfully. It is possible that Sawyer is ignorant of the crime she has been accused of, that she lacks the learning to understand, or simply that she is illiterate. The stakes for this particular dialogue are higher than the language Goodcole uses would indicate.

Goodcole asks Sawyer, “By what meanes came you to have acquaintance with the Divell, and when was the first time that you saw him, and how did you know that it was the Divell?”¹⁷⁶ Sawyer’s response is clear and well organized for someone professed to be ignorant:

The first time that the Divell came unto me was, when I was cursing, swearing and blaspheming; he then rushed in upon me, and never before that time did I see him, or he me: and when he, namely the Divel, came to me, the first words that hee spake unto me were these: *Oh! have I now found you cursing, swearing, and blaspheming? now you are mine.*¹⁷⁷

Though Goodcole is an unreliable narrator of this docufiction, Sawyer is considered unable to report the truth of her own actions or what happens around her. Goodcole includes in his margin notes that “A Gentleman by the name of Mr. Maddox standing by, and hearing of her say the

¹⁷⁵ Goodcole, *Sig. C recto*.

¹⁷⁶ Goodcole, *Sig. C recto*.

¹⁷⁷ Goodcole, *Sig. C recto – Sig. C verso*.

word blaspheming, did aske of her, three or foure times, whether the Divell sayd have I found you blaspheming and shee confidently sayd, I.”¹⁷⁸ Goodcole’s note does not indicate that Maddox saw Sawyer’s familiar appear or that he suspected her of the murders of which she is accused. All Maddox reports is that he confirmed with Sawyer that the Devil said unto her, *Have I found you blaspheming?* For Goodcole, this is proof enough of Sawyer’s action and its consequence – the appearance of the Devil. The use of Maddox in the marginal note also reinforces that what Goodcole says is true. If two men will say that Sawyer is a witch, it turns belief into fact and overrides any claim that the witch herself might make about who or what she might be.

The second part of Sawyer’s answer complicates the reader’s view of the witch as inherently evil. Having admitted that she was caught blaspheming by the Devil, she adds a moral message as if she is aware that her words will be read widely:

A wonderfull warning to many whose tongues are too frequent in these abhominable sinnes; I pray God, that this her terrible example may deter them, to leave and distaste them, to put their tongues to a more holy language, then the accursed language of hell. The tongue of man is the glory of man, and it was ordained to glorifie God: but worse then brute beasts they are, who have a tongue, as well as men, that there with they at once both blesse and curse.¹⁷⁹

The moralizing in Sawyer’s response is included as if it were natural for the witch to respond with a desire for her sins to deter others. There is no change in typeset or organization that would indicate this moralizing has been added by Goodcole or another editor, but Sawyer’s supposed use of “this her terrible example” is revealing. Rather than claim “these abhominable

¹⁷⁸ Goodcole, *Sig. C verso*.

¹⁷⁹ Goodcole, *Sig. C verso*.

sinnes” as her own, Sawyer refers to “her terrible example” instead of “*my* terrible example.” This is a clear indication that Goodcole and not Sawyer is invested in reminding others to “put their tongues to a more holy language.” Goodcole would have the reader believe that an ignorant woman who was convicted of witchcraft three days earlier has the ability to make her blasphemy a lesson to all with the reminder that the “tongue of man is the glory of man.” The text implicitly asks the reader to suspend belief and take it as fact that Sawyer trafficked with the Devil and murdered her neighbors. When the text forces a voice that has heretofore only cursed and blasphemed to moralize, the reliability of this document and of Goodcole as its author further deteriorates.

As dramatized in *The Witch of Edmonton*, Sawyer is less fearful and more desirous of some guarantee that her revenge will be successful. If she is going to “make a deed of gift / Of soul and body” to Dog, she needs a guarantee that the work will be done (2.1.151-152). Dog’s encouragement of his mistress, however, is consistent. Though Sawyer does not yet believe that she will have her revenge, Dog knows that he can accomplish what Sawyer desires and more. In the pamphlet, Sawyer reports through Goodcole that “hee did bid me not to feare him at all, for hee would do me no hurt at all, but would do for mee whatsoever I should require.”¹⁸⁰ In the play, Dog tells Sawyer not only not to fear him, but that he loves her:

Come, do not fear: I love thee much too well
 To hurt or fright thee. If I seem terrible,
 It is to such as hate me. I have found
 Thy love unfeigned, have seen and pitied
 They open wrongs and come out of my love

¹⁸⁰ Goodcole, *Sig. C verso*.

To give thee just revenge against thy foes. (2.1.142-147)

To assure Sawyer that he is on her side, Dog uses language that is akin to religious devotion. Rather than take on the language of anger and revenge, of blasphemy, that Sawyer uses to call him forward, Dog speaks of loving her “much too well” with a love that is “unfeigned” because he has “seen and pitied” the “open wrongs” done against her. Dog arrives as a savior, framing his love of Sawyer as parallel to the love the Jesus offers the meek. By reframing Dog’s speech as a religious text, the play can be read as taking advantage of the patterns of language and devotion that the audience would have known. The result is, therefore, that Dog is easy to believe when he claims that he will “give...just revenge against thy foes.”

Sawyer’s belief in Dog and in his ability to carry out her revenge is at stake when he assures her that they are one and the same: “If I seem terrible, / It is to such as hate me.” Hatred of the Devil was so common during the period as to be ubiquitous. Though Dog uses positive religious language to ensure Sawyer that he is on her side, there is no guarantee that Sawyer’s fear will not overcome her desire for revenge. Dog needs Sawyer to believe in him in order for both of their goals to be met because Dog isn’t entirely a creature of Sawyer’s will. If she refuses him, he threatens her destruction: “if thou deniest, / I’ll tear thy body in a thousand pieces” (2.1.154-155). Traditionally, the relationship between the witch and her familiar is one of mutual ownership and duty. The witch is responsible for the familiar’s existence, keeping them fed and relatively safe, as many witches kept their familiars hidden away in their homes when they weren’t out doing their bidding: “Trial records contain references to demon familiars living in glass or leather bottles; crystals; baskets; boxes; earthenware pots lined with wool kept under the stairs or by the hearth; under borders of ‘green herbs’ in the garden and under the roots

or in the hollows of trees.”¹⁸¹ Dog relies on Sawyer less than a smaller animal might; a rat or a ferret is easily welcomed into the witch’s household. Although he is not sleeping next to her fire, Dog needs Sawyer just as much as she needs him.

Sawyer’s desire for revenge relies on Dog’s presence, but she will also owe him something in return: “To confirm ‘t, command me / Do any mischief unto man or beast / And I’ll effect it, on condition / That uncompelled thou make a deed of gift / Of soul and body to me” (2.1.148-152). This language mirrors Goodcole’s report of Sawyer’s first interaction with her devil familiar: “He asked of me, when hee came unto me, how I did, and what he should doe for mee, and demanded of mee my soule and body; threatning then to teare me in peeces, if that I did not grant unto him my soule and my body which he asked of me.”¹⁸² Sawyer needs a guarantee that the gift of her body and soul will not be for nothing. In the play, she asks, “I know not where to seek relief. But shall I, / After such covenants sealed, see full revenge / On all that wrong me?” (2.1.156-158). Dog assures her that the Devil is just as trustworthy as God: “The devil is no liar to such as he loves. / Didst ever know or hear the devil a liar / To such as he affects?” (2.1.159-161). The Devil’s love for Sawyer, like Jesus’s love for his disciples, is unconditional. Dog doesn’t love Sawyer for what she is; instead he loves her for what she may be, and he requires that she seal her pact with him using her blood, “Seal’t with thy blood. / (*Sucks from her arm. Thunder and lightning.*)” (2.1.164). The inclusion of “Thunder and lightning” in the stage direction illustrates how the pact made between Sawyer and Dog is greater than an agreement between a woman and a dog. The pact between a witch and her familiar represents the woman’s refusal of God and her baptism as reflected in the natural world.

¹⁸¹ Wilby, 77.

¹⁸² Goodcole, *Sig. C3 recto*.

In Goodcole's pamphlet, Sawyer's confession and the reports of her crimes do not include any direct record of her blasphemy. Both the pamphlet and the play indicate that Dog arrives after Sawyer has been blaspheming and cursing. She does not blaspheme in either text, however. In the pamphlet, nothing of what she says is listed, other than that she was "cursing, swearing, and blaspheming."¹⁸³ In the play, her cursing, swearing, and blaspheming is limited to her doublespeak about Old Banks and Dog. The closest that she comes to acting or speaking "in a way that shows contempt for God, sacred or holy things or people, or religion"¹⁸⁴ is to claim that she will "give this Fury leave to dwell within / This ruined cottage, ready to fall with age, / Abjure all goodness, be at hate with prayer" (2.1.127). Admitting that she will open herself up to Fury instead of God, that she will renounce everything good and hate prayer is blasphemy of a much gentler kind. Sawyer does not curse God outright, and she does not participate in any rituals that would sin against God. Rather than blaspheme, Sawyer shows a desire to blaspheme in both the play and the pamphlet.

There are several reasons why neither text records Sawyer's blasphemy. *The Witch of Edmonton* needed approval from the Master of the Revels, responsible for the censorship of staged dramas during the early modern period.¹⁸⁵ If Rowley, Dekker, and Ford had given Sawyer truly blasphemous speech to recite on stage, the play would not have passed the censor. The play would also have risked censure from the audience. The playwrights were in the business of theater, after all, and a play that goes too far for a God-fearing audience is not one that will make much money. Henry Goodcole, on the other hand, may have thought about censorship in

¹⁸³ Goodcole, *Sig. C verso*.

¹⁸⁴ "blaspheme (v.)," *Oxford English Dictionary*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023). <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4482168639>.

¹⁸⁵ This responsibility transferred to the Lord Chamberlain in 1624, only three years after *The Witch of Edmonton* was written and performed.

passing. First and foremost, Goodcole would have considered his personal relationship with God. As the “Minister of the Word of God,” Goodcole’s aim in distributing Sawyer’s confession was both sensational and religious. Goodcole aims to educate his reading audience as they engage with his report of the tragedy of Elizabeth Sawyer. This is the origin of Sawyer’s own moralizing; her amanuensis was a man of God. Goodcole’s ability to amend the text to serve his own purpose puts the veracity of the entire report into question. Kirilka Stavreva borrows from film studies and refers to pamphlets like Goodcole’s as “docufiction.” Her assessment that the document contains both truth and fiction helps the modern reader to understand the nature of this genre of text. With 400 years between Elizabeth Sawyer’s confession and this writing, I will never know what Sawyer said and what Henry Goodcole added on her behalf. With no evidence that he spoke to Sawyer or that she gave her confession to anyone after her conviction, all that remains is the docufiction that is attributed to Goodcole. A woman’s narrative that is interpolated by a man will never be true and accurate.

Sawyer’s self-fashioning is reflected in Dog’s appearance. He is both separate from her and comes from her. His presence and his words help to make her into the witch she wants to become: “The witch of Edmonton shall see his fall / If she at least put credit in my power / And in mine only, make orisons to me / And none but me” (185-188). Earlier labeling of Sawyer as a witch was intended to be derogatory, but Dog’s proclamation that “The witch of Edmonton shall see his fall” is intended instead to celebrate Sawyer’s power. Dog’s proclamation is a prophecy, but he does not tell Sawyer how Old Banks’ fall will come about. Instead, he provides directions for what she should do when she wants evil done, “I’ll tell thee: when thou wishest ill, / Corn, man or beast would spoil or kill, / Turn thy back against the sun / And mumble this short orison: / ‘If thou to death or shame pursue ‘em, / *Santibicetur nomen tuum*’” (2.1.189-194). When she

recites this prayer, however, Sawyer is not telling Dog what she wants done, only that there is evil to do. As a result, Dog retains the agency to do evil as he chooses. This marks a beginning in their relationship because Sawyer can now call Dog with intention and not through mistaken blasphemy.

The two-part prayer that Dog teaches Sawyer is modeled on the opening of the Lord's Prayer, "*Pater sanctificetur nomen tuum adveniat regnum tuum / panem nostrum cotidianum da nobis cotidie / et dimitte nobis peccata nostra siquidem et ipsi dimittimus omni debenti nobis et ne nos inducas in temptationem*" (Luke 11:2-4).¹⁸⁶ Sawyer uses the Latin text for the Lord's Prayer rather than the English version. This both obfuscates the meaning of the prayer for those audience members who could not translate the Latin and connects the prayer to the witch's spells. Unfamiliar language, even when it is Biblical language, engenders fear in the listener because it is inherently threatening. The threat of unfamiliar or highly complex language is similar to the power that the scold's tongue has to all those who hear her. Goodcole's questioning also assumes that Sawyer knows the Lord's Prayer and would be able to recite it on command. In Sawyer's "Confession," Goodcole asks, "Did the Divell at any time find you praying when he came unto you, and did not the Divell forbid you to pray to Jesus Christ, but to him alone? And did not he bid you pray to him the Divell, as he taught you?"¹⁸⁷ One of the witch-tests during the period required the examiner to ask the witch to pray. The woman who was not able to recite either her catechism or the Lord's Prayer was a witch.

Though she had already been convicted, Sawyer is able to recite at least part of these standard prayers. She also indicates that the devil caught her praying: "Yes, he found me once

¹⁸⁶ *Latin Vulgate*, Perseus Digital Library (Tufts University, 2022), <http://data.perseus.org/citations/urn:cts:greekLit:tlg0031.tlg003.perseus-lat1:1.1>. All references to the Bible in Latin are to this edition.

¹⁸⁷ Goodcole, *Sig. C3+1 verso*.

praying, and he asked of me to whom I prayed, and I answered him, to Jesus Christ, and he charged me then to pray no more to Jesus Christ, but to him the Devill, and he the Divell taught me this prayer, *Santibicetur nomen tuum*. Amen.”¹⁸⁸ The Devil teaches Sawyer the Latin of the Lord’s prayer with a very minor change. He exchanges *sanctibicetur* for *santificetur*, changing the tense of the prayer. Rather than praying that the Lord’s name “be sanctified” (*sanctificetur*), Sawyer prays that the Lord’s name “will be sanctified” (*santibicetur*). By changing the tense to the future continuous, Sawyer unwittingly indicates that the Lord’s name is not currently sanctified. As a result, she places herself outside of His holy influence by referencing His name in the future and not the present. Sawyer’s mistake in the tense of the Latin prayer reveals that she is innocent rather than further proving her guilt. She says nothing overtly blasphemous, and she has not subverted the meaning of the prayer in any significant way. Sawyer has only put God in the future rather than the present.

Knowing that this is the Latin of the Lord’s Prayer and not a prayer to the Devil, Goodcole presses her further: “Were you ever taught these Latine words before by any person else, or did you ever heare it before of anybody, or can you say any more of it?”¹⁸⁹ Goodcole’s stance that Sawyer is “ignorant,” which he claimed with such authority at the beginning of her confession, falls further and further by the wayside as she recites Latin and offers cogent explanations as to how and when she may have learned these Latin verses: “No, I was not taught it by any body else, but by the Divell alone, neighter doe I understand the meaning of the words, nor can speake any more Latine words.”¹⁹⁰ The use of Latin in this context heightens the ceremonial aspect of Sawyer’s engagement with her familiar. Unlearned in the magical arts,

¹⁸⁸ Goodcole, *Sig. C3+1 verso*.

¹⁸⁹ Goodcole, *Sig. C3+1 verso*.

¹⁹⁰ Goodcole, *Sig. C3+1 verso*.

without a grimoire to inherit and only sundry curses at her disposal, Sawyer learns how to engage in a directed form of witchcraft from Dog himself.

Sawyer takes the first 10-syllable line of the prayer, *Pater sanctificetur nomen tuum*, and uses nearly the same number of syllables to form another line “If thou to death or shame pursue ‘em.” Exchanging the first line of the prayer “Father, sanctified be thy name” with her desire for “death and shame” to find her enemies clarifies Dog’s aim in teaching this to her: it is what she should say when she wants him to bring revenge on one of the other villagers. The second part makes less sense in context, however. The direct English translation of *sanctificetur nomen tuum* is “sanctified be thy name.” Generally, however, English translations of the Bible use “hallowed” rather than “sanctified.” By using *sanctificetur nomen tuum* in a prayer to her devil familiar, Sawyer prays that Dog’s name rather than God’s is “hallowed” or made holy. This completes the bastardization of the prayer. The Devil in shape of Dog is in charge now, substituting his own name for that of the Holy Father.

Sawyer repeats the prayer as she becomes more comfortable with it. When Dog leaves the stage, Sawyer continues: “*Contaminetur nomen tuum*. I’m an expert scholar / Speak Latin or I know not well what language / As well as the best of ‘em” (2.1.199-201). As soon as Dog leaves, Sawyer loses her grip on the text of the prayer and her budding understanding. She confuses “*Contaminetur*” for “*Santibicetur*,” further manipulating the prayer. She has already changed the tense of the prayer from present to future continuous. Sawyer’s next change to the prayer further amends the meaning changing “thy name will be sanctified” to “contaminated be thy name.” She has not only changed the meaning from “sanctified” to “contaminated,” but she has also changed the tense again. God’s name shifts from the future continuous to the present; His name is contaminated. Sawyer’s mistake and the speed with which she makes it doubles the

irony in the claim that she is “an expert scholar.” The Latin of Dog’s curse continues to change throughout the scene. From its iteration of “*Contaminetur nomen tuum*” the curse changes to “*Et sanctabecetur nomen tuum*” and again to “*And sanctabacetur nomen tuum*”. “*Et*” and “*And*” mean the same thing, and the change from her first mistaken “*santibicetur*” to “*santabecetur*” alters the meaning from “sanctified” to “blessed.” The malleability of the prayer and its progression from prayer to curse and back to prayer demonstrates the instability in Sawyer’s position as a witch. She reverts to blessing God, even when she intends to curse. Sawyer is unable to repeat and use the prayer in a way that would be effective. Alongside the transformation that the text goes through during the scene, Sawyer’s inability to make use of the Latin text demonstrates that the prayer is not meant to be effective. Dog will do what he likes, and Sawyer’s attempts at prayer will only damn her in the eyes of God.



Elizabeth Sawyer must answer for her crimes and for the crimes of others in *The Witch of Edmonton*. These crimes include the hobbling of Old Banks’s horse: “My horse this morning runs most piteously of the glanders, whose nose yesternight was as clean as any man’s here now coming from the barber’s. And this, I’ll take my death upon’t, is long of this jadish witch, Mother Sawyer” (4.1.1-5). Because she is believed to be a witch, Sawyer is a natural scapegoat and will be blamed for all of the misfortunes that happen around her. The revenge that she wished Dog would help her achieve comes back to her tenfold.

The villagers cannot yet “Burn the witch, the witch, the witch, the witch,” so the men are forced to use the test that Goodcole lambasts in his pamphlet and burn the thatch of her roof instead (4.1.19-20). Hamluc explains that he has “A handful of thatch plucked off a hovel of hers; and they say when ‘tis burning, if she be a witch she’ll come running in” (4.1.22-24). Goodcole claims that tests like this one are useless in his account of Sawyer’s trial; yet, in the

play these beliefs are active on stage to reflect the audience's understanding of witchcraft tests and trials. The witch test that burns the thatch of her roof causes Sawyer to run on stage cursing, "Diseases, plagues, the curse of an old woman follow and fall upon you" (4.1.27-28). Her appearance is all that is needed to prove that she is guilty: "This thatch is as good as a jury to prove she is a witch" (4.1.32-33). When Sir Arthur Clarington and a Justice enter, Sawyer feigns innocence so convincingly that the Justice admonishes the men chasing her: "Fie, to abuse an aged woman!" (4.1.43). Visually, Sawyer is bent, bowed, and aged, but whereas some see her appearance as evidence of witchcraft, the Justice sees it as evidence of age and infirmity that should be respected.

Old Banks does not let the Justice remain mistaken for long: "A she-hell cat, a witch! To prove her one, we no sooner set fire on the thatch of her house, but in she came running as if the devil had sent her in a barrel of gunpowder, which trick as surely proves her a witch as the pox in a snuffling nose is a sign a man is a whoremaster" (4.1.44-49). The Justice is just as skeptical as Goodcole: "Come, come. Firing her thatch? Ridiculous! Take heed, sirs, what you do. Unless your proofs come better armed, instead of turning her into a witch you'll prove yourselves stark fools" (4.1.50-53). The Justice is dismissive of the test and warns the men that they risk "turning her into a witch" with their claims. The Justice speaks truth not only in the context of the play, but in the broader conversation about witchcraft happening during the period. Calling a woman a witch, be she one or no, means that men can *make* her into a witch with the generative power of their imaginations. Though the Justice appears to be the voice of reason, even he cannot resist the influence of those around him and their belief in Sawyer's supernatural abilities.

Sawyer's trial begins outside of the courtroom when Old Banks is given leave to share with the Justice the crimes that have been committed against him: "So, sir, ever since, having a

dun cow tied up in my backside, let me go thither or but cast mine ye at her, and if I should be hanged I cannot choose, though it be ten times in an hour, but run to the cow and, taking up her tail, kiss – saving your worship’s reverence – my cow behind, that the whole town of Edmonton has been ready to bepiss themselves with laughing me to scorn” (4.1.65-72). The ridicule that Old Banks faces when he is forced to “run to the cow and, taking up her tail, kiss” is the revenge that Sawyer sought. Even Sir Arthur finds Old Banks’s bewitchment funny, claiming that “if she be a witch, and the harms she does end in such sports, she may ‘scape burning’” (4.1.76-77). Sir Arthur’s response echoes the general sentiment that witchcraft that was most dangerous was *maleficium*. Judges and courts were to be on the lookout for murders and stillbirths, not a man who has a newfound love of his cow.

The Justice questions Sawyer, asking her “mild questions” to match the perceived nature of her crimes: “Let us to some mild questions; have you mild answers? Tell us honestly and with free confession – we’ll do our best to wean you from it – are you witch or no?” (4.1.86-89). It’s essential that he receive a “free confession” without coercion or threat. It is easier for him to prove Sawyer is a witch if she’ll admit her guilt. The key difference between Sawyer’s staged confession and the conversation that Goodcole records is that Sawyer has not yet been proven guilty in the play. When Goodcole interviews her to receive her confession, she has already been convicted and there is no longer a threat to her admitting that she is a witch. In the play, however, Sawyer maintains that she is innocent: “I am none. None but base curs so bark at me. I am none. Or would I were. If every poor old woman be trod on thus by slaves, reviled, kicked, beaten, as I am daily, she to be revenged had need to turn a witch” (4.1.92-95). Sawyer’s claim that a woman “had need to turn a witch” in order to face her oppressors clarifies the central question in the play. Sawyer is made a witch by those around her to the same extent that she

makes herself a witch through her own convictions. To her own thinking, it is natural that a woman so reviled would want to exact revenge on her oppressors.

Sawyer's crime is made more serious by the fact that she had to sell her soul to exact revenge on Old Banks: "And you to be revenged have sold your soul to th'devil" (4.1.96-97). Sawyer claims her innocence and refuses to capitulate, continuing to curse at the Justice who claims that she is "too saucy and too bitter" (4.1.99). Sawyer's "saucy" and "bitter" behavior reflects her inability to continue to participate in the patriarchal power structure that has harmed her. She likens her own crooked back to the deformed morality of the men who have put her on trial: "A man; perhaps no man. Men in gay clothes, whose backs are laden with titles and honours, are within far more crooked than I am and, if I be a witch, more witch-like" (4.1.104-107). Sawyer is introduced early in the play as one "poor, deformed and ignorant, / And like a bow buckled and bent together," and she reframes this description by making it about the Justice and Sir Arthur (2.1.3-4). Where she was "bow buckled and bent" by the ill use of her neighbors, the men in power are "laden with titles and honours...far more crooked than I am." Sawyer's comparison of her bent posture to the men around her exposes the nature of patriarchal power: men who have done little are lauded with titles that only increase their moral turpitude.

Sawyer is aware of the duality in the accusation levied against her. The men who charge her with *maleficium* surround themselves with women who may not be bent like Sawyer but are witches all the same:

A witch? Who is not?

Hold not that universal name in scorn, then.

What are your painted things in princes' courts,

Upon whose eyelids lust sits blowing fires

To burn men's souls in sensual hot desires,
 Upon whose naked paps a lecher's thought
 Acts sin in fouler shapes than can be wrought? (4.1.120-126)

Sawyer is not the ignorant woman Goodcole claims her to be. In this moment, she offers broad social criticism. Even though she is made to appear old and decrepit, she argues that her sins are not all that different from those of the women whom men lust after – those “painted things in princes' courts” who tempt men with lustful gazes as if their eyes were “blowing fires / To burn men's souls.” Sawyer's figure does not make men stare. She has no “naked paps” to tempt a “lecher's thought.” By Sawyer's measure, however, the beauty that women cultivate and use to tempt men is witchcraft and not very different from the sins of which she is accused. One does not need to be bent and broken to bewitch those around them; beauty can be witchcraft, too. Sawyer only infers that these women create themselves just as she has because her goal is not to demean them but to point out that the true sin happens in the mind of the lecher himself.

Unwittingly, Sawyer reinforces the rules and guidelines established regarding dress in the conduct manuals of the period. In *The English Gentlevvoman, Drawne Out to the Full Body Expressing, what Habilliments Doe Best Attire Her; what Ornaments Doe Best Adorne Her; what Complements Doe Best Accomplish Her*, Richard Brathwaite argues that clothing should be entirely practical. Apparel exists to keep out the cold. He relies on the tale of Adam and Eve to prove his point, explaining that had they never sinned, the first mother and father in the Bible would never have felt the cold: “No distemperature of cold or heat could before that time annoy him. Now his failing in performing what he ought, brings him to a feeling of that he neuer knew.”¹⁹¹ Brathwaite focuses less on the arguably more important aspects of the story and

¹⁹¹ Richard Brathwaite, *The English Gentlevvoman, Drawne Out to the Full Body Expressing, what Habilliments Doe Best Attire Her; what Ornaments Doe Best Adorne Her; what Complements Doe Best Accomplish Her* (London,

instead relates Genesis to the essential role of the tailor in society. “*Cloathing*,” he says, “keeps the body warme two ways: By keeping in the naturall heat of the body; and by keeping out the accidentall cold of the Ayre.”¹⁹² The full complement of women’s fashion astounds him:

How is it, that yee conuert that which was ordained for *necessity*, to feed the light-flaming fuell of licentious liberty? Was *Apparell* first intended for keeping in naturall heat, and keeping out accidentall cold? How comes it then that you weare these thinne Cobweb attires, which can neither preserue heat, nor repell cold? Of what an incurable cold would these Butterfly-habits possesse the wearer, were pride sensible of her selfe? Sure, these attires were not made to keepe cold out, but to bring cold in.¹⁹³

Brathwaite is so caught up in his own reasoning, arguing that clothing is essential to keep heat in and cold out, that he does not consider other reasons for dress. Brathwaite’s series of questions is accusatory, employing the tone of a parent scolding a child. Because women were viewed as dangerously sensual, any leeway extended to them in their dress could be dangerous and might even turn them toward witchcraft. Brathwaite’s goal in lambasting women’s sartorial habits is to further restrict what they can wear so that their choices are practical and virtuous rather than luxurious. He does not engage with or consider the woman’s point of view when she wears her “Cobweb attires,” nor does he consider how the men who gaze on these women discover sin between the folds of a woman’s skirt.

The gazes of lecherous men create sin when they look upon these women, and it is their sin that manifests the fashion and physical norms that require courtly women to look and act in a way that encourages sin. Women at court have sexual power but no political, financial, or moral

1631), *Sig. B verso*. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240907400/BB2576B0F05945A1PQ/1?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books&imgSeq=1>.

¹⁹² Brathwaite, *Sig. B verso*.

¹⁹³ Brathwaite, *Sig. B2 – Sig. B2 verso*.

power. Whereas Sawyer claims power through Dog to exact her revenge, these women have the power to shape men's desires. They have, however, been shaped by that desire first. The male gaze creates a woman's identity even as she creates the identity that she knows is desired and is thus "bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning."¹⁹⁴ The visual aspect of Laura Mulvey's view of the woman as "bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning" in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" post-dates *The Witch of Edmonton* by more than 350 years. The application of the concept is sound, however, and the ways that witchcraft is made manifest by male imagination through gender norms and the creation of identity is borne out through both Sawyer's argument and the general consensus during the period that women's self-fashioning was a dangerous thing.

Women were keenly aware that their words, their actions, and their bodies could betray them by revealing their guilt. The notion that the body would reveal a woman's inner secrets was well established through texts about green sickness and humoral theory. The Devil was not blamed for variations in a woman's humors. He was, however, blamed for a woman's desire to look like something other than her natural self or to behave in a way that was unbecoming. In other words, the Devil had a hand in her self-fashioning. In *A Discourse Against the Painting and Tincturing of Men and Women*, Thomas Tuke observes that women are tempted to change their appearance by the Devil:

For certainly it is not to be beleaved, that any simple women without a great inducement and instigation of the divel, would ever leave their natural and gracefull countenances, to seeke others that are suppositions and counterfeits, and should goe up and downe whited

¹⁹⁴ Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" in *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism*, edited by Patricia Erens (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 58.

and sised over with paintings laied one upon another, in such sort: that a man might easily cut off a curd or cheese-cake from either of their cheekes.¹⁹⁵

Tuke argues that the Devil encourages women to use paints and tinctures to change their appearance until their faces become “counterfeits.” A woman’s ability to change how she presents her face to the world is the source of deep suspicion in Tuke’s discourse. On the surface, this text is preoccupied by the individual’s departure from God’s grace. Under the surface, however, it appears that Tuke is more concerned with individual agency than issues of Godliness. If early modern women were able to change their appearance, then they would be able to act in a way that superseded patriarchal control. The threat of the Devil’s temptation is not about a woman’s soul. It is about her agency in creating herself not in God’s image but in her own. If women are able to create themselves rather than being created by men and thus believe in their own self-concept rather than what they are told to believe, then the hierarchy of belief crumbles.

In *A Treatise Against Witchcraft*, Henry Holland claims that in order to convince and entrap those around them, followers of Satan “...must be carefully bent, to beautifie and adorne their possession with a godly, sober, and innocent life.”¹⁹⁶ Unlike Tuke, Holland is not directly invested in a woman’s ability to paint her face or the witch’s seduction; instead, he centers his argument on his concern for all those who follow Satan. For the sake of my argument, however, I will narrow Holland’s argument to the witches who follow Satan. Holland views the witch as

¹⁹⁵ Thomas Tuke, *A Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing of Women Wherein the Abominable Sinnes of Murther and Poysoning, Pride and Ambition, Adultery and Witchcraft are Set Foorth & Discouered. Whereunto is Added the Picture of a Picture, Or, the Character of a Painted Woman* (London: 1616), Sig. B3 recto – Sig. B3 verso. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240889953/99853763/F71E8AFF3090413CPQ/1?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

¹⁹⁶ Henry Holland, *A Treatise Against Witchcraft: Or A Dialogue, Wherein the Greatest Doubts Concerning that Sinne, are Briefly Answered* (Cambridge: Printed by John Legatt, printer to the Universitie of Cambridge, 1590), Sig. K3 recto. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240918644/99839892/94C7DBDE848F4AE6PQ/1?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

one that is purposeful in her disguise. Instead of adorning her face, as Tuke argues, Holland sees the witch as one who attempts to convince those around her that she is an angel, “though they bee Angels of darknesse, yet to worke some feate, they will now and then trasforme themselves into Angels of light: they are one thing, but deceive, they will seem another,”¹⁹⁷ Holland’s witch wants others to believe that she is “godly...and innocent.” Her deception is not about her visual mien but her moral appearance. She needs to appear as if she is God-fearing regardless of her physical presentation because soul must shine through.

The magic that beautiful women create is different from the revenge that Elizabeth Sawyer seeks. When the men of the informal Court of Edmonton remind Sawyer that these women “work not as you do,” Sawyer argues that this magic is “far worse”:

Have you not city-witches who can turn
 Their husbands’ wares, whole standing shops of wares,
 To sumptuous tables, gardens of stolen sin,
 In one year wasting what scarce twenty win?
 Are these not witches? (4.1.127-128, 132-136)

The ways that these women turn “their husbands’ wares” into “sumptuous tables, gardens of stolen sin” are not legitimate examples of witchcraft in the eye of the Justice. The examples that Sawyer offers reflect the household and practical work that women do, but the Justice argues against Sawyer’s reasoning, “Yes, yes, but the law / Casts not an eye on these” (4.1.137-138). Because the acts of these “city-witches” are not categorized as *maleficium*, they are outside of the laws that dictate who is tried for witchcraft. They are not above the law; they are outside of it

¹⁹⁷ Tuke, *Sig. E verso*.

because their witchcraft is not only sanctioned but applauded. The “city-witches” are praised and prized for their ability to waste “what scarce twenty win.”

Sawyer is not a “city-witch.” She is not establishing a garden of “stolen sin,” nor is she crafting a lustful image. Sawyer is attempting to survive the ridicule and abuse of those around her. She argues that she is blamed not because of what she has done, but who she is:

Why then on me
 Or any lean old beldam? Reverence once
 Had wont to wait on age. Now an old woman
 Ill-favoured grown with years, if she be poor,
 Must be called bawd or witch. Such so abused
 Are the coarse witches; t’other are the fine,
 Spun for the devil’s own wearing. (4.1.139-143)

The women who, like Sawyer, are “ill-favoured grown with years” are “poor” and “must be called bawd or witch” because there is no other way that they fit into the social map of the village. They are kept outside of the life of the village because they no longer fit into the patriarchal structures that determine women’s roles; they are not wife, daughter, or wealthy widow. In describing others’ conditions, Sawyer discovers a way to describe her own position in the village and in the open-air court wherein she is tried.

When her argument about the city-witches and beautiful women fails to convince the Justice of her relative innocence, Sawyer launches into a comparison of the scold and a lawyer. In her view, The power of their respective tongues is not dissimilar. They differ only in how their behavior is sanctioned:

She on whose tongue a whirlwind sits to blow

A man out of himself, from his soft pillow
 To lean his head on rocks and fighting waves,
 Is not that scold a witch? The man of law
 Whose honeyed hopes the credulous client draw,
 As bees by tinkling basins, to swarm to him
 From his own hive to work the wax in his?
 He is no witch, not he. (4.1.144-151)

Sawyer argues that the scold and the lawyer have the same power as the witch. The scold can “blow / A man out of himself” and the lawyer can draw a “credulous client” whose hopes are based on wax works and not facts. The scold and the lawyer are not witches, but the scold runs the risk of being charged with a crime whereas the lawyer does not. Women are scolds; men are not. As a result, women who act out and push the boundaries of their roles are forced to face the court for speaking out unlike lawyers who face the court time and time again and are celebrated for their falsehoods. As scolds and lawyers, women and men exhibit the same behavior, but they are punished or lauded for it depending on whether that behavior is sanctioned by society.

Beautiful women, scolds, wives, and lawyers are guilty of committing the same sins as the witch. They are not, however, in league with the Devil. Sawyer’s scolding and bewitchment are made sinister because she sold her soul to a devil to exact revenge. Although she presents several arguments in her own defense, Sawyer has not yet been formally charged. The men dismiss her with an admonishment, “Old woman, mend thy life, get home and pray” (4.1.166). Elizabeth Sawyer is beyond being saved by prayer alone.

Goodcole does not offer Sawyer salvation through prayer. She is already damned. To prove her guilt to his readers, the jury that still needs to be convinced that the witch must be hanged, he lists the crimes of which Sawyer is convicted:

...did witch unto death *Agnes Ratcleife*, a neighbour of hers, dwelling in the towne of *Edmonton* where shee did likewise dwell, and the cause that urged her thereunto was, because that *Elizabeth Ratcliefe* did strike a Sowe of hers in her fight, for licking up a little Soape where shee had laide it, and for that *Elizabeth Sawyer* would be revenged of her, and thus threatened *Agnes Ratcleife*, that it should be a deare blow unto her...for that evening *Agnes Ratcleife* fell very sicke, and was extraordinarily vexed, and in a most strange manner in her sickness was tormented.¹⁹⁸

Sawyer is charged with Ratcliffe's death because four days after the woman fell sick, her husband reported that she died tormented: "*Agnes Ratcleife* lay foaming at the mouth, and was extraordinarily distempered, which many of his neighbours seeing, as well as himself, bred suspicion in them that some mischief was done against her."¹⁹⁹ The argument between the two women is hardly cause for torment and death: Ratcliffe hit Sawyer's pig after the animal ate her soap. Soap was a precious commodity during the period, more so for poor families and villagers who would have had to make it themselves. Ratcliffe's anger and the disagreement between the two women intensifies when Sawyer claims that Ratcliffe's actions will "be a deare blow unto her." Sawyer's threat is all it takes for Ratcliffe's illness to be the result of her *maleficium*.

In Goodcole's pamphlet, Sawyer made "her tongue to be the meanes of her owne destruction, which had destroyed many before," but in *The Witch of Edmonton*, Anne Ratcliffe²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁸ Goodcole, *Sig. B verso – Sig. B2 recto*.

¹⁹⁹ Goodcole, *Sig. B2 recto*.

²⁰⁰ The play varies the name of this character from Agnes Ratcleife to Anne Ratcliffe. This is the same woman, however, as in both the play and the pamphlet it is her death that ultimately causes Sawyer to hang.

is not ill abed.²⁰¹ Ratcliffe is not among those that Sawyer asks Dog to harm, and she is not one of the villagers whom Dog torments on stage. Her inclusion in the play completes the history of the pamphlet. The drive to mirror the pamphlet and insert Anne Ratcliffe proves that the audience would likely have read the pamphlet or been familiar with the court case through broadsides and ballads. Ratcliffe's inclusion in the play demonstrates Dog's power over the townsfolk and Sawyer's desire to wreak havoc. Ratcliffe wanders on stage shouting nonsense until she sees Sawyer: "I prithee let me scratch thy face, for thy pen has flayed off a great many men's skins. You'll have brave doings in the vacation, for knaves and fools are at variance in every village. I'll sue Mother Sawyer, and her sow shall give in evidence against her" (4.1.200-205). The notion that Sawyer's sow would give evidence against her in court illustrates just how mad Ratcliffe has become. Ratcliffe even offers Sawyer a compliment: Sawyer has taken advantage of the vacation when the law courts are out of session, and she's taken advantage of the "knaves and fools" who are "at variance in every village." Sawyer's blasphemous speech is transposed into the witch's "pen" that "has flayed off a great many men's skins." If nothing else, Ratcliffe reinforces what Sawyer said to Sir Arthur and the Justice. The woman that Sawyer has bewitched is still on her side and on the side of all witches who speak their minds to men in power.

Ratcliffe dies offstage and Old Ratcliffe is left to report his wife's demise: "She's become nothing but the miserable trunk of a wretched woman. We were in her hands as reeds in a mighty tempest. Spit of our strengths, away she brake, and, nothing in her mouth being beard but 'The devil, the witch, and the witch, the devil!', she beat out her own brains, and so died" (4.1.225-230). Madwomen who are the masters of their own fate, or in this case bewitched by

²⁰¹ Goodcole, *Sig. B recto*.

another woman, are more scandalous than women who fall ill. The scandal around Ratcliffe's death helps to prove the witch's guilt. There is no way that Sawyer could be innocent once a woman has brained herself after having been bewitched.

Old Banks revels in the opportunity to formally charge the woman who has so tormented him: "Get a warrant first to examine her, then ship her to Newgate. Here's enough, if all her other villainies were pardoned, to burn her for a witch" (4.1.237-239). This is true to Goodcole's report: regardless of the other crimes Sawyer is charged with, it is the death of Agnes Ratcliffe and the death of her neighbor's children and cattle that make her guilty of witchcraft. Her engagement with Dog and the physical evidence are considered ancillary to the murders that she committed.

At the end of the play, Sawyer is alone and abandoned both by Dog and the villagers. The play is circular in its structure, and Sawyer is back where she started: alone on stage bemoaning how others treat her,

Still wronged by every slave, and not a dog
 Bark in his dame's defence? I am called 'witch'
 Yet am myself bewitched from doing harm.
 Have I given up myself to thy black lust
 Thus to be scorned? Not see me in three days?
 I'm lost without my Tomalin. (5.1.1-6)

Without Dog, Sawyer no longer has access to the power that made her revenge possible. She is called a witch but cannot do witchcraft; she is "bewitched from doing harm" because she lacks her devil companion. Dog's abandonment of Sawyer is the cruelest action in the play, causing more harm than the beatings that Sawyer has learned to expect. Sawyer demonstrated strength

and conviction in her arguments with Sir Arthur and the Justice, but now she is “on fire, even in the midst of ice, / Raking my blood up till my shrunk knees feel / They curled head leaning on them” (5.1.10-12). The relationship between the witch and her familiar has been tender in the face of the revenge that they sought together. Sawyer’s diminished state proves their bond has been strengthened by a shared mission.

When Dog finally appears after Sawyer’s appeal, he is different. His color has changed to white, and Sawyer no longer recognizes him: “Ha! No, ‘tis my black cur I am cursing / For not attending on me” (5.1.28-29). Dog’s change in color indicates that he no longer belongs to Sawyer. He has become something new, and his “whiteness puts thee in mind of thy winding sheet” indicating that the play is near its end and Sawyer is near her execution. She has not, however, been charged or imprisoned. Her downfall appears so assured that Dog tells her she is “so ripe to fall into hell that no more of my kennel will so much as bark at him that hangs thee” (5.1.60-62). Though Sawyer claims that she will “not confess one mouthful,” Dog has already seen her future (5.1.69). He knows that “ere the executioner catch thee full in’s claws, thou’lt confess all” (5.1.74-75). Dog stands at the crossroads with the witch who brought him to earth; he knows what she will do, and he knows what has been done.



Elizabeth Sawyer is on the way to her execution at the end of *The Witch of Edmonton*. She has been abandoned by Dog, who finds a new master in Cuddy Banks, and she is blamed for her crimes as well as the evil that has been done by others. As she is walked on stage, Old Carter exclaims: “The witch, that instrument of mischief!” (5.2.37). The presence of a witch proves to those assembled that there is a clear and logical reason for the various misfortunes they have faced. Sawyer no longer claims that the devil wasn’t involved. Instead, she asks, “...is every

devil mine?” (5.2.46). She may have done evil, but Elizabeth Sawyer should not have to answer for others’ crimes in addition to her own.

Like many witches, Sawyer is blamed for what happens around her. David Nichol argues, however, that Sawyer’s execution is not about her *maleficium* at all: “Sawyer is punished, not for being a witch, but for speaking her mind about the society that has oppressed her.”²⁰² Sawyer is already diminished when the audience meets her, and she is further reduced through the action of the play. There is only a moment when her revenge gives her actionable power: when she argues with Sir Arthur and the Justice. When asked to confess again as she leaves the stage, Sawyer refuses: “Yet again? / Have I scarce breath enough to say my prayers, / And would you force me to spend that in bawling?” (5.2.67-69). Her ending is anticlimactic: Dog has aligned himself with Cuddy Banks, Sawyer is sent to be executed, and Frank Thorney’s crimes are buried by the drama of a witchcraft accusation. The Sawyer of Goodcole’s narrative does not have the opportunity to refuse her confession. He forces it upon her: “In this manner was I inforced to speake unto her, because she might understand me, and give unto me answere.”²⁰³ Through her confession, Sawyer becomes the bearer of Goodcole’s meaning, not the maker of her own meaning. She cannot refuse him, and she cannot explain; she can only submit to the meaning that Goodcole has already decided she represents.

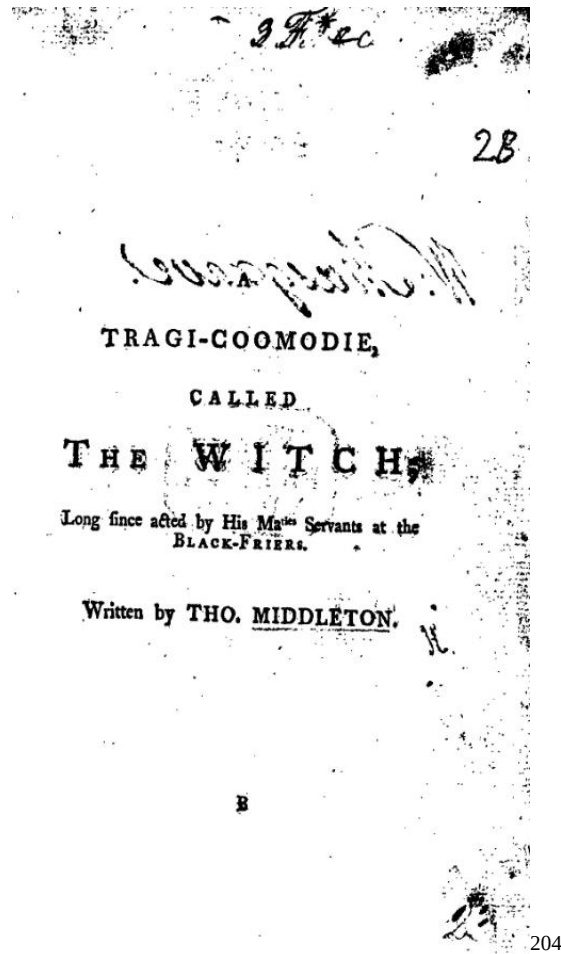
Goodcole is assured of Sawyer’s guilt, but the reader of the pamphlet is not as confident. Authors like Goodcole claim that they are telling the truth, and they do so in order to act as the trustworthy reporter doing a service for readers far and wide. Goodcole claims to be reporting the truth, to have the facts, and to have interviewed Elizabeth Sawyer, but for every claim he

²⁰² David Nichol, “Interrogating the Devil: Social and Demonic Pressure in *The Witch of Edmonton*,” *Comparative Drama* 38, no. 4 (2005): 429.

²⁰³ Goodcole, *Sig. C recto*.

makes that his report is truthful, there remains the possibility that he is embellishing the narrative, if not crafting the whole thing from his imagination. He makes every devil Sawyer's, directly participating in creating the hole at the center of the crime of witchcraft because alongside the crime that does not exist is a narrative of a confession that never happened. What Goodcole records is not Sawyer's story. Though the historical record includes only Goodcole's masculine narrative, *The Witch of Edmonton* reclaims Sawyer's agency through her repeated self-fashioning. Together, the pamphlet and the play show that not only was the witch made so by the villagers who abused her, she was shaped by her own set of beliefs that were beyond the reach of churches and courts.

Chapter 3

“This brazen dish”: Immoral Feasting in *The Witch* and *Macbeth*

Hecate's craft in *The Witch*, written by Thomas Middleton sometime between 1613 and 1616, includes the most extreme depictions of witchcraft in my archive, but her outrageous spells are not the stuff of dramatic imagination. The recipes and references to flight are sourced directly from Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Middleton borrows details from

²⁰⁴ Thomas Middleton, *A Tragi-Coomodie, Called The Witch; Long since acted by His Maties Servants at the Black-Friers*. (London: Printed by J. Nichols, 1778), unpagged. link.gale.com/apps/doc/CW0112657350/ECCO?u=mmlin_m_bostcoll&sid=bookmark-ECCO&xid=9e9b2b3e&pg=1. Existing only in manuscript form until 1778, *The Witch* has a complicated history. This image is the title page of the 1778 text and lacks the imagery of witchcraft that 16th-century texts employ; it lacks woodcuts featuring devils, witches riding hogs, and mythical beasts. The title page of this first printing is rather restrained, particularly when one considers the content of the play itself.

Scot without also including the attendant skepticism contained in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, transforming references to flight into the dramatic possibility of women launching themselves into the air. The play is also in conversation with Thomas Potts's *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, published at the conclusion of the Lancashire Witch Trials in August of 1612. Together, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* and *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches* show that extreme portrayals of witchcraft reflect what the witch herself believed she could accomplish and how that belief could turn into reality. Outside assumptions about the witch's power had an influence on popular beliefs, but her own faith in her abilities was even more important. Belief and conviction might convince the witch that she could fly.

Central to the witch's belief in her ability to fly is the extensive preparation required to propel her skyward. In *The Witch*, the witches' preparation mimics the domestic work of women in the home. Before the ingredients of the recipe are revealed, the activities of each of the witches in Hecate's coven closely parallel the work of any early modern woman. Their normative purpose makes them, to Deborah Willis's eyes, *more* dangerous: "If both solitary witches and covens were typically figured in terms of antithesis and inversion – as disruptors of traditional hierarchies of gender, family, community, and state – the witch-family was represented as dangerous because of its most normative features."²⁰⁵ Hecate's place as the head and heart of her coven is the inversion of "gender, family, community, and state" to which Willis refers. She rules as a matriarch who centers all coven activities on unbridled desire. The witches' deepest and most extravagant desire is to fly. To find literal and figurative freedom, the women must

...take this unbaptized brat

²⁰⁵ Deborah Willis, "The Witch-Family in Elizabethan and Jacobean Print Culture," *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 13, no. 1 (Winter 2013): 5.

Boil it well, preserve the fat;
 Our 'nointed flesh into the air
 In moonlight nights, o'er steeple tops,
 Mountains and pine trees, that like the pricks or stops
 Seem to our height – high towers and roofs of princes
 Like wrinkles in the earth. Whole provinces
 Appear to our sigh then even leek
 A russet mole upon some ladies cheek,
 When hundred leagues in air we feast and sing,
 Dance, kiss and coll, use everything.
 What young man can we wish to pleasure us
 But we enjoy him in an incubus? (18-31)²⁰⁶

The child needed to make the salve must be an “unbaptized brat” to avoid any protection that baptism would offer the child. Roland Littlewood contends that “the contract with God at baptism should have more force” than the pull of Satan’s evil.²⁰⁷ Thus, the use of an unbaptized child is essential to the spell’s success. Without the impediment of baptism, the witches can use the child’s fat to reframe the act of anointing. The women baptize themselves in a parallel ritual whose goal is not erasure of original sin. Instead of forging a connection to God, the witches free themselves from all ties. They are unencumbered by the gravity that keeps them earthbound and the social norms that dictate their behavior. Flying “into the air / In moonlight nights” places the witches beyond the reach of man’s influence and God’s judgment. When the prince’s roof is

²⁰⁶ Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*, ed. Elizabeth Schafer (New York: W. W. Norton, 1994). All references to *The Witch* are to this edition.

²⁰⁷ Roland Littlewood, “Strange, incredible and Impossible Things: The Early Anthropology of Reginald Scot,” *transcultural psychiatry* 46, no. 2 (June 2009): 351.

no more than one of the “wrinkles in the earth,” the witches are able to “feast and sing, / Dance, kiss and coll, use everything” without reproach. Their power gives them license to answer only to their appetites and desires, even when those desires are perverse or ravenous.

Once the witches take to the skies, their focus turns to other appetites: “What young man can we wish to pleasure us / But we enjoy him in an incubus?” The subversive power of their desire is many-layered. Hecate seeks a “young man” to “pleasure us,” representing an inversion of the sexual norms of the period. The use of “incubus” in the last line challenges what would otherwise be a relatively uncomplicated depiction of a woman claiming a man for her lover. Hecate is looking for a “young man,” not a daemon, but she wants to “enjoy him in an incubus.” An incubus is a male daemon who has intercourse with sleeping women. The incubus is traditionally the individual with power, as he takes advantage of the woman who is at her most vulnerable while she is sleeping. Nothing in Hecate’s speech indicates that she is in a vulnerable position, nor does she demonstrate a desire to be in a vulnerable position. Because Hecate is claiming agency again and again throughout this speech, it would make more sense for her to enjoy him as a *succubus*, the female daemon who has sex with sleeping men, rather than “in an incubus”; doing so would require fewer demonic transformations. Hecate would need only to become the daemon who fulfills her desires as opposed to recruiting an incubus to entrap the youth and have her desires met through the avatar of another entity. “Enjoy[ing] him in an incubus” requires Hecate to have either a long-standing relationship with an incubus or possess the magical ability to force a daemon to do her will. In either case Hecate retains significant power through her ability to have it herself or harness it in others.

Hecate also uses “wish” and “enjoy” without apology. In doing so, she exhibits a traditionally masculine pattern of behavior that subverts patriarchal norms. The dismantling of

patriarchal control is doubled though Hecate's choice of paramour. She chooses the son of a powerful man: the "Mayor of Whelpie's son / I knew him by his black cloak lined with yellow; / I think thou'st spoiled the youth; he's but seventeen; / I'll have him the next mounting..."

(I.ii.33-36). Hecate is not the boy's first encounter with witches: Stadlin "got'st" him last night (I.ii.33). The use of "got'st" in this context can be interpreted as "got," meaning to choose one among many, or "begot." In the sense of choosing, the witch has masculine authority to choose the person whom she desires. If "got" is interpreted as begetting, however, the witch references the feminine action of becoming pregnant. Stadlin having "got'st" the boy uses a feminine word for a woman's action against a male body, usurping patriarchal authority in the process. Stadlin has also "spoiled him" either because he's no longer a virgin or no longer innocent to the witch's evil. The boy may be spoiled to other women or spoiled in the eyes of God, but he is not spoiled for the witches. Hecate still desires her turn with him.

Hecate uses men's bodies to satisfy her desires. This practice extends to both the Mayor of Whelpie's son and the child who will be rendered for its fat. The key ingredient in her recipe, the unbaptized child, is prepared like a roast ready for cooking in a scene that reads like a sinister vision of domestic efficiency:

They're down his throat,

His mouth crammed full, his ears and nostrils stuffed.

I thrust in *eleoselinum* lately,

Ancontinum, *frondes populeus* and soot –

You may see that, he looks so black i'th' mouth –

Then *sium*, *acharum vulgare* too,

Pentaphyllon, the blood of a flitter-mouse,

Solanum somnificum et oleum. (38-45)

The action of filling the child's mouth "crammed full" with his "ears and nostrils stuffed" makes it so that he can no longer speak, hear, or smell. Closing the child's body off to the outside world through the use of magical herbs has two purposes: the child is separated from the world of the living, and he can no longer hear or speak the word of God.

Maleficium often includes actions that are modeled on religious rites in Christian scripture. One of the most important aspects of Christian baptism is the use of a holy anointing oil called chrism oil.²⁰⁸ Hecate and her witches craft an anointing oil that has a very different use and composition to chrism oil but is no less important or potent. Chrism oil is an ancient preparation from the Book of Exodus, wherein God instructs Moses on how to make an oil to anoint the people of Israel:

Take thou also unto thee principal spices, of pure myrrh five hundred shekels, and of sweet cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty shekels, and of sweet calamus two hundred and fifty shekels, And of cassia five hundred shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, and of oil olive an hin: And thou shalt make an oil of holy ointment, an ointment compound after the art of the apothecary; it shall be a holy anointing oil.

(Exodus 30:23-25)²⁰⁹

The recipe in Exodus uses myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, and cassia to make a "holy ointment" for use as a "holy anointing oil." The recipe for anointing oil that Hecate uses is quoted directly from Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. In Chapter Eight of Book X, Scot expounds

²⁰⁸ There are three holy oils used in Christian rites, all of which use currently use olive oil as a base. If olive oil is not available, other plant oils are sometimes used. Chrism oil is used for confirmations, baptisms, ordination, and the blessing of churches; the oil of the sick is used to anoint the sick; and the oil of catechumens is used to ward off evil or as a means to amplify previous religious rites. The oil of catechumens is also known as the oil of exorcism.

²⁰⁹ *The English Bible: King James Version*, ed. Herbert Marks (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2012). All references to Bible are to this edition.

upon “*Sundrie receipts and ointments, made and used for the transportation of witches, and other miraculous effects: an instance thereof reported and credited by some that are learned.*”²¹⁰

Scot reports that the recipe for a flying ointment should be prepared as follows:

[Take the] fat of young children, and seeth it with water in a brazen vessell, reserving the thickest of that which remaineth boiled in the bottome, which they laie up and keepe, until occasion serveth to use it. They put hereunto *Eleoselinum, Aconitum, Frondes populeas*, and Soot.²¹¹

The result, he remarks in the margin, will be the “Confections...for the miraculous transportation of witches.”²¹² Another of Scot’s recipes, however, uses different ingredients and offers more detail as to the immediate effect:

Sium, acarum vulgare, pentaphyllon, the blood of a flitter-mouse, *solanum somniferum*, & *oleum*. They stampe all these together, and then they rubbe all parts of their bodies exceedinglie, till they looke red, and be verie hot, so the pores may be opened, and their flesh soluble and loose...By this means (saith he) in a moone light night they seeme to be carried in the aire, to feasting, singing, dancing, kissing, culling, and other acts of venerie, with such youths as they love and desire most.²¹³

Scot claims that he is merely repeating the various methods and recipes that he has gathered from other scholars and texts, namely Jean Bodin, Johannes Baptista Neapolitanus, and the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*. He offers these two recipes as separate scripts with more or less detail but the same result: flying witches. *The Witch*, on the other hand, marries these recipes to create one spell that both overwhelms the audience and guarantees Hecate’s success in flight.

²¹⁰ Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Garden City: Dover Publications, 1972), 105.

²¹¹ Scot, 105.

²¹² Scot, 105.

²¹³ Scot, 105.

Hecate's spell begins with an "unbaptised brat," but leaves out how a witch might procure a child to use in her spell. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* written by Thomas Potts and published in 1613 includes both the confessions of accused witches and evidence provided against them by their victims. In "The Examination and Euidence of GRACE SOVVERBVTTS...vpon her Oath, Against IENNET BIERLEY, ELLEN BIERLEY, and IANE SOVTHVVORTH,"²¹⁴ Sowerbutts explains how the three accused witches stole a child from the Walshman family:

...and beeing come into the said house, this Examinee and the said *Ellen Bierley* stayed there, and the said *Iennet Bierley* went into the Chamber where the said *Walshman* and his wife lay, & from thence brought a little child, which this Examinee thinketh was in bed with it Father and Mother: and after the said *Iennet Bierley* had set her downe by the fire, with the said child, shee did thrust a naile into the nauell of the said child: and afterwards did take a pen and put it in at the said place, and did suck there a good space, and afterwards laid the child in bed againe: and then the said *Iennet* and the said *Ellen* returned to their owne houses, and this Examinee with them.²¹⁵

It is not clear from Sowerbutts's evidence why the women chose the Walshmans' child. She only says that "all the household was abed" and that Walshman's farm was nearby where she met the women.²¹⁶ Jennet Bierley, Ellen Bierley, and Jane Southworth go "into the Chamber where the said *Walshman* and his wife lay," and steal the child without waking its parents. They then take the "little child" to the fire and "thrust a naile into the nauell of the said child" without the child

²¹⁴ Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster. With the Arraignement and Triall of Nineteene notorious Witches, at the Assizes and general Gaole deliverie, holden at the Castle of Lancaster, upon Monday, the seventeenth of August last, 1612* (W. Stansby and Iohn Barnes, 1613), unpagged. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240860427/99850200/57E0BBA972D499FPQ/2?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

²¹⁵ Potts, *Sig. L verso* – *Sig. L2 recto*.

²¹⁶ Potts, *Sig. L verso*.

crying out. The witches' ability to do all this and still sneak out undetected confirms their sinister intent.

The witches had a purpose in bewitching the child, and Sowerbutts reports that “shee thinketh that the said child did thenceforth languish, and not long after dyed.”²¹⁷ Sowerbutts does not indicate if the child had a fever or if it was attended by any of the women during its illness. When the child dies, the women observe the burial:

And after the death of the said child; the next night after the buriall thereof, the said *Iennet Bierley & Ellen Bierley*, taking this Examine with them, went to Salmesburie Church, and there did take vp the said child, and the said *Iennet* did carrie it out of the Church-yard in her armes, and then did put it in her lap and carryed it home to her owne house, and hauing it there did boile some therof in a Pot, and some did broile on the coales, of both which the said *Iennet* and *Ellen* did eate,...And afterwards the said *Iennet & Ellen* did seethe the bones of the said child in a pot, & with the Fat that came out of the said bones, they said they would annoint themselues, that thereby they might sometimes change themselues into other shapes.²¹⁸

The witches disinter the child and “carrie it out of the Church-yard” to “boile” and “broile” it at home.²¹⁹ In Sowerbutts's description, the child appears to have been dismembered because “some thereof” was put into a pot and “some did broile on the coals.” The text does not, however, offer the details of that practice. Unlike Hecate's child, who is boiled whole and rendered for fat, the women eat the child and boil what is left for their spell. The result of their

²¹⁷ Potts, *Sig. L2 recto*.

²¹⁸ Potts, *Sig. L2 recto*.

²¹⁹ The use of this child represents an odd variation in the descriptions of boiling and eating the bodies of children in witchcraft texts. In this case, the child is very likely already baptized. He would not be buried on consecrated ground otherwise. In other examples, however, texts clearly state that the child boiled for their fat must be unbaptized to ensure that God's sacrament does not interfere with the spell. The question of baptism in witchcraft plays, reports, and treatises is worth further study.

cookery is “Fat that came out of the said bones” which they would use to “annoint themselves.” There are no references to herbs being used or incantations recited. For these witches, the rendered fat of a child is enough to “change themselues into other shapes.”

This recipe is at odds with Hecate’s flying ointment and the flying ointments recorded in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. The women use their preparation for transfiguration rather than flight, and the text does not clarify whether they changed themselves into shapes that could fly. Furthermore, the bones of a child would not render much fat. They might produce some collagen, which has a more jelly-like consistency as opposed to the greasy texture of fat, but it would be difficult to use as an ointment unless it were mixed with another ingredient. Without the use of solvents or binding agents, the witches’ recipe would not produce the desired result. Jennet Bierley, Ellen Bierley, and Jane Southworth were reported as being able to fly, but not as the result of their ointment. Sowerbutts reports that the women “were carried backe againe ouer Ribble, by the same blacke things that carried them thither” during the Witches Sabbat.²²⁰ Their flight is dependent on their “black things,” which were possibly devils or other familiars. They do not fly under their own power.

Grace Sowerbutts claims that she was bewitched and observed the witches come to her in the shape of dogs. She was also forced to watch the women bewitch a child and eat it so that they could use the rendered fat to shape-shift. All of these accusations lead up to the women’s arrival on winged monsters during the Witches Sabbat. Sowerbutts’s is only one of several interviews included in *The Wonderfyll Discoverie of Witches in the Covntie of Lancaster*. Her interview’s status as legal evidence is complicated by the court’s power to distort witchcraft narratives. Éva Pócs explains: “...the situation in the law court influenced the statements of the

²²⁰ Potts, *Sig. L3 verso*.

witnesses, and to an even greater extent those of the accused. The motivations of the accused, the accuser, and the witnesses, as well as the strategy of the defense (denial or admission), are all important influences on the proceedings.”²²¹ The environment of belief impacts what Sowerbutts reports. Grace Sowerbutts does not give evidence against Jennet Bierley, Ellen Bierley, and Jane Southworth in a vacuum. She unwittingly perpetuates “the prejudices and expectations of the elite’s demonology concerning the attributes of the witch” throughout her narrative.²²² She is subject to both internal and external narratives: the repetition of witchcraft lore that she learned over time as well as the expectations of her as a witness. Together, these influences act as catalysts for Sowerbutts’ imagination. The magnitude of the power of her imagination to convince her that what she sees is real cannot be understated. For all his skepticism about the magic that witches claim to do, Scot believes in the power of a woman’s imagination to create reality. In fact, he argues that the woman’s imagination is a key ingredient in the types of recipes that give them the ability to fly:

...for the force (saith he) of their imagination is so vehement, that almost all that part of the braine, wherein the memorie consisteth, is full of such conceipts. And whereas they are naturallie prone to believe anie thing; so doo they receive such impressions and steadfast imaginations into their minds, as even their spritis are altered thereby...And this helpeth them forward in their imaginations.²²³

The power of the woman’s imagination is a powerful and wide-ranging threat. As I have established in earlier chapters, the male imagination is a central component of witchcraft trials. Women on trial for impossible crimes must be subject to a fantastical force for the wider public

²²¹ Éva Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead: A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age*, trans. Szilvia Rédey and Michael Webb (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000), 21.

²²² Pócs, 21.

²²³ Scot, 105.

to believe that what they are charged with is true. The woman's imagination, however, has a very different kind of power. The female imagination convinces the witch that she can fly. She may not be able to convince others that what she believes is true, but she can convince herself and manifest a new reality.

Scot claims that the force of the witch's imagination, in conjunction with her memory and belief, has the power to launch her skyward. He uses "imagination" in two ways. In the first, imagination means the force of belief. The witch is so sure that her spell will work that the force of her belief and not the spell itself sends her flying. In the second sense, he uses imagination to mean the witch's work: the spells she uses and the study in which she engages. By combining conviction and learned spells, Scot inadvertently makes the case that the witch's craft is a valuable and convincing epistemology. Though she is still on trial, the witch is just as engaged in deep study as the cleric alone in his library. His imagination points him toward God and hers gives her the power to fly.

The witch pays a price when she uses her imagination to create a new reality, however. In what is one of the most scientifically sound passages in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Scot quotes Johannes Baptista Neapolitanus as he recounts what occurs after a woman spreads the flying ointment on her body:

...there fell into my hands a witch, who of hir owne accord did promise me to fetch me an errand out of hand from farre countries, and will all them whom I had brought to witnesse the matter, to depart out of the chamber. And when she had undressed hir selfe, and frothed hir bodie with cereine ointments (which action we beheld through a chinke or little hole of the doore) she fell downe thorough the force of those sporiferious or sleepee oitnments into a most sound and heavie sleepe: so as we did breake open the doore, and

did beate hir exceedinglylie; but the force of hir sleepe was such, as it tooke awaie from hir the sense of feeling...Now when hir strength and powers were wearie and decaid, shee awoke of hir owne accord, and began to speake manie vaine and doting words, affirming that she had passed over both sease and moutnaines; delivering to us manie untrue and flaste reports: we earnestlie denied them, she impudentlie affirmed them.²²⁴

In this account, Neapolitanus spies on a witch through a hole in the door as she prepares herself to fly. She claims to be able to do an errand for him, and when he brings other men to see it done, she sets them outside the door. She may be protecting her modesty, or she may be protecting the magic itself from male influence. As much as the witch claims to be able to fly, she never leaves the room. The ointment she uses puts her in a deep sleep. She is so far beyond the reach of the waking world that the men are able to re-enter the room and “beate her exceedinglylie.” When the woman finally wakes, she claims to have “passed over both sease and moutnaines.” Though the men observed her resting on the floor of the room for the entirety of her time away, she believes with great conviction that she flew through the air. The power of her imagination and of the sedatives and hallucinogens included in the ointment lead her to believe that what she experienced was real. She has no evidence to the contrary.

The witch’s imagination along with the herbs and hallucinogens included in recipes for the flying ointment prove to her that her experience of flight is real. Many of the herbs that Scot includes in the recipes he records in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* are harmless, but others would have had a significant effect on anyone who used the witch’s ointment. Scot’s reference to *eleoselinum* is to wild parsley, also known by folk names such as Devil’s Oatmeal, Persil,

²²⁴ Scot, 105.

Petroselinum.²²⁵ *Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs*, a modern magical herbal, explains that parsley can increase lust or be used for protection and purification.²²⁶ The next ingredient, *Ancontinum*, is monkshood or wolf's bane. Monkshood is "virulently poisonous" and often used in sachets or wrapped to avoid contact with the skin.²²⁷ Cunningham explains that the monkshood seed, when "wrapped in a lizard's skin and carried," "allows you to become invisible at will."²²⁸ Counter to Cunningham, medical texts explain that monkshood is a toxin which produces "seizures and dysrhythmias" causing vomiting, weakness, and paralysis.²²⁹ *Fronde populous* are poplar leaves, meant to "facilitate astral projection, and...are sometimes placed upon the body or made into an ointment."²³⁰ Though Cunningham claims that poplar is useful for flying ointments, there is no evidence that poplar is psychoactive.²³¹ Like poplar leaves, soot also lacks any psychoactive properties. In small quantities, as in a recipe for a flying ointment, soot would color the fat and act as a binding agent for the other ingredients.

Sium are water parsnips, and it is unclear from Scot which species of water parsnip would have been included in this recipe. The water parsnip, or *sium suave*, is a flowering plant which can look similar to a type of poisonous hemlock called *cicuta maculate*, or spotted water hemlock.²³² *Sium suave* can be cooked and eaten, whereas *cicuta maculate* will cause convulsions and death. Far less dangerous than spotted water hemlock, *acharum vulgare* refers

²²⁵ Scott Cunningham, *Cunningham's Encyclopedia of Magical Herbs* (Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2023), 194.

²²⁶ Cunningham, 194.

²²⁷ Cunningham, 260.

²²⁸ Cunningham, 260.

²²⁹ Lewis S. Nelson M.D., Richard D. Shih M.D., and Michael J. Balick Ph.D., *Handbook of Poisonous and Injurious Plants* (New York: Springer, 2006), 32-33. DOI https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/10.1007/978-0-387-33817-0_3.

²³⁰ Cunningham, 210.

²³¹ Cunningham, 210.

²³² Edward W. Cetaruk, "Water Hemlock," in *Critical Care Toxicology*, ed. J. Brent, et. al. (New York: Springer, 2017). DOI https://doi-org.ezproxy.library.tufts.edu/10.1007/978-3-319-17900-1_85.

to common myrtle which is a “love herb...added to all love sachets and spells, especially those designed to keep love alive and exciting.”²³³ It is non-toxic and has small, white flowers that are similar to those of water parsnips. *Pentaphyllon* is plant with five leaves. There are no other details in the text that indicate which five-leaved plant would be included in the recipe. There are some five-leaved plants found in Asia that are related to ginseng root, but it is unlikely that Scot would have known that genus of plant during the early modern period.²³⁴

Like the soot used in this ointment, the blood of a flitter mouse also lacks any psychoactive properties. A “flitter mouse” is a bat. Using the blood of a bat in this spell adds a mystical or magical quality. Though bat’s blood does not meaningfully amplify the medicinal qualities of the ointment, it does add to its imaginative efficacy. The blood of a nocturnal, flying creature captures the imagination and makes the witch more likely to believe that she can fly. The last ingredient in this spell, and the most psychoactive, is *Solanum somnificum et oleum*, or deadly nightshade oil. Some nightshades are harmless, like tomatoes and eggplants. Other nightshades are highly toxic, causing the following symptoms: “dry, warm, and flushed skin...garbled speech...and delirium with hallucinations. The hallucinations may be quite troubling to the patient, and patients may develop severe dysphoria or agitated delirium.”²³⁵ It is also indicated that the individual’s “temperature may be slightly elevated...rarely above 102°F.”²³⁶ On examination of the clinical and magical uses of each ingredient, there are only

²³³ Cunningham, 182.

²³⁴ *Gynostemma pentaphyllum*, also called the “twisting blue plant,” is native to South and East Asia and has five leaves. Sometimes referred to as “poor man’s ginseng,” it can be used in teas and other medicinal preparations to increase longevity and health in old age.

²³⁵ Nelson et. al., 22.

²³⁶ Nelson et. al., 22.

two herbs in the spell would cause the state that Neapolitanus observed: nightshade oil, which was likely a distillation of *atropa belladonna*,²³⁷ and monkshood.

The flushed skin that poisonous nightshade causes would explain how witches were reported to have used the ointment. Observers indicate that they would “rubbe all parts of their bodies exceedinglie, till they look red, and be verie hot.”²³⁸ The use of nightshade explains the witch’s sleepiness and inability to wake. Nightshade depresses the central nervous system, and the witch would not be able to wake until the herb and its resultant compounds were cleared from her system. Neapolitanus claims that a specific type of woman is most susceptible to the use of these herbs and the results that they are purported to produce: “This...will not so come to passe with everie one, but onlie with old women that are melancholike, whose nature is extreame cold, and their evaporation small; and they both perceive and remember what they see in that case and taking of theirs.”²³⁹ The text hints that the witch might be under the influence of a poison that is producing the experience she claims to have. As quoted in Scot, Neapolitanus lays blame for the witch’s hallucination on the woman herself rather than the herbs that she uses. She is susceptible to these beliefs because she is “cold” and “melancholike,” and what she believes cannot possibly be real. From a man’s point of view, a woman’s imagination does not have the power to make her beliefs into reality. The witch knows better.

Men have always had the power to shape their beliefs into reality for themselves and others. The anointing oil that God instructs Moses to make relies on belief for its effectiveness. Though the ingredients in the holy anointing oil of the Bible and Hecate’s flying ointment are

²³⁷ While there are portions of the recipes in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* which are inexact in how they name herbs, *atropa belladonna* was not named until Carl Linnaeus developed his classification system in the 18th century. Prior to Linnaeus the proper name for the herb was “deadly nightshade.” Folk names include: banewort, devil’s berries, and devil’s herb.

²³⁸ Scot, 105.

²³⁹ Scot, 105.

very different, both are missing one key ingredient in the text of their recipe: the user. In the Bible, Moses's belief and the faith of Israelites are essential to the successful use of God's holy anointing oil. In the Gospel According to Saint Mark, the anointing oil is used to heal: "And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them" (Mark 6:13). In the Book of Psalms, the anointing oil ensures followers that they will be saved: "Now I know that the Lord saveth his anointed; he will hear him from his holy heaven with the saving strength of his right hand" (Psalms 20:6). Central to the holy oil's ability to *heal* and to *save* those who are anointed is the individual's belief in the power of the oil to do so. Without belief, the oil has no power. The witch's belief in the power of her ointment, therefore, is not so different from the Christian's belief in the power of Holy Chrism to heal.

Hecate's belief in her abilities extends beyond the types of magic that require recipes. The second and third spells in this scene require wax figures and images. In a continued mockery of domestic bliss, Hecate asks Stadlin, "Is the heart of wax / Stuck full of magic needles?" (I.ii.46-47). Like much of the magic in *The Witch*, Hecate's reference to a heart of wax is can be found in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Book XII, Chapter 16: "...*images made of wax, to be rid of a witch, to hang hir up, notable authorities against waxen images, a storie bewraieng the knaverie of waxen images.*"²⁴⁰ In this chapter, Scot narrates a "proved storie concerning the premises" of "a young maiden (dwelling at *Romnie* here in Kent)...[who] was visited with a sicknesse."²⁴¹ With no other means to ensure her survival, the parents of the maiden's husband sought the assistance of "a famous witch called mother *Baker*" who "asked whether they mistrusted not some bad neighbour."²⁴² Mother Baker blames the maiden's illness

²⁴⁰ Scot, 146.

²⁴¹ Scot, 147.

²⁴² Scot, 147.

on the “bad neighbour,” a woman who was “reputed to be a good creature” and who had “wrought the maidens destruction, by making a hart of wax, and pricking the same with pins and needels; affirming also that the same neighbor of hers had bestowed the same in some secret corner of the house.”²⁴³ Scot’s narrative claims to establish an understanding about waxen images and the witch’s ability to cause illness. It also explains how one woman can lay blame on another through lies and subterfuge, however:

This being beleaved, the house was searched by credible persons, but nothing could be found. The witch...continued hir assertion, and would needs go to the house where she hir selfe (as she affirmed) would certainlie find it. When she came thither, she used hir cunning (as it chanced) to hir owne confusion, or at least wise to hir detection: for heerin she did, as some of the wiser mistrusted that she woulde doo, laeieng downe privilie such an image (as she had before described) in a corner, which by others had beene most diligentlie searched & looked into.²⁴⁴

Through her attempts to accuse her neighbor of witchcraft, Mother Baker exposes herself instead. During witchcraft trials, women sometimes faced accusations from neighbors and family members. Women and midwives from the community were also used as tools of male witch-hunters to inspect the bodies of witches on trial. Whether they were providing evidence or accusing others, women often did so as a means of self-defense. With limited recourse against accusations of witchcraft, a woman’s only protection might be to blame someone else. This is particularly true if she was unable to hire a lawyer or appeal to friends to speak on her behalf. In this case, Mother Baker’s expertise exposes her own *maleficium*. Scot is sympathetic to Mother Baker’s situation in his account, finding the witch-hunters guilty and not the witch. He explains

²⁴³ Scot, 147.

²⁴⁴ Scot, 147.

that the old woman's wax figure could do no harm, and instead wishes "that all witchmongers might paie for their lewd repaire to inchantors, and consultation with witches, and such as have familiar spirits."²⁴⁵ Scot sets out in this section to explain how witches could believe in the power of homunculi made of wax and metal. Instead, he proves that accusations of witchcraft are often false. He also returns to his claim that witchcraft is not real; only God can produce miracles.

There are no falsehoods in Hecate's magic, however. Although the magic that she does in *The Witch* is quoted from Scot, she inherits none of his skepticism. Hecate layers charms on top of one another, the magic coming quick and fast: "And is the farmer's picture and his wife's / Laid down to th' fire yet?" (I.ii.48-49). Seeing charm after charm depicted on stage acts as proof that Hecate's magic is real. The force of repetition captures a bit of belief with each reiteration. Something that was once fancy becomes fact this way. The farmer's picture is part of the third charm that Hecate does in Act I. As the picture of the farmer and his wife is roasted, so they will roast in life. It is unclear at the outset what the relationship is between Hecate and the farmer. Based on the use of magic as a commodity elsewhere in the play, it is possible that she was asked to do this task by a paying customer who is not included in the play. The purpose of this spell in the larger arc of the play is not about the economics of witchcraft. It is also not about harming the farmer. The purpose of this spell is to further demonstrate and reinforce Hecate's appetite for vengeance. If the magical ointment that allows her to fly is about the desire for power and freedom, then this spell is about the desire for revenge against those who have wronged Hecate.

Hecate's desire for vengeance against the farmer and his wife is the result of the traditional instance of the witch being denied goods or charity. Roland Littlewood explains that

²⁴⁵ Scot, 147.

this is central to Scot's portrayal of a specific archetype: "[Scot] contributes much to our current popular image of the European witch – the ugly and poor old woman who, having been refused charity, vows revenge under her breath, and then is accused when the milk runs dry or a child dies; with threat or torture eventually extorting her confessions of the witch's Sabbath – the magical anointing followed by travel through the air to a moonlit gathering to kiss the Devil's bare posterior and vow fealty."²⁴⁶ Hecate has already used a dead child in a spell and flown through the sky. The next depiction that *The Witch* offers is of the woman who, "having been refused charity, vows revenge." The farmer and his wife pay dearly for their transgression:

Then their marrows are a-melting subtly,
And three months' sickness sucks up life in 'em.
They denied me often flour, barm and milk,
Goose grease and tar, when I ne'er hurt their charmings,
Their brew-locks, nor their batches, nor forespoke
Any of their breedings. Now I'll be meet with 'em. (I.ii.50-55)

Hecate threatens the very marrow of the farmer's bones – "their marrows are a-melting subtly" – and guarantees that "three months' sickness sucks up life in 'em." Three months of sickness is Hecate's way of torturing her victims from afar to keep herself from being accused of *maleficium* like Mother Baker. The farmer's crime and Hecate's desire for revenge reinforce traditional witchcraft archetypes. The witch is denied common household goods including flour, barm,²⁴⁷ milk, goose grease, and tar. Because the farmer will not let her purchase or borrow what she needs, Hecate is rightfully angry. It is unclear, however, whether or not the relationship between

²⁴⁶ Littlewood, 348-349.

²⁴⁷ Barm is the froth that forms on top of fermenting liquids such as beer. This ferment is used to leaven bread and repurposed to ferment other foods. Denying Hecate barm is similar to denying her yeast or other leavening, forcing her to look elsewhere or eat unleavened bread.

Hecate and the farmer is one of charity or economy. The witch who requests charity is central to Scot's argument that old women are often witches, but Hecate has no demonstrated need for charity. Some of Hecate's magic serves her own appetites, but she funds this work by selling other spells and charms. Throughout *The Witch*, supplicants come to her for magical solutions and pay both financially and morally for the privilege. Therefore, it is more likely that Hecate was in a position to pay the farmer for his wares and was denied the opportunity to purchase anything from him. The farmer's denial is reflected in the number of items she requested. Hecate is denied flour and moves down her list, testing the farmer and his wife in the process. When she asks for tar and is refused, she knows that the farmer will not offer her any of his goods.

The Weird Sisters face a similar challenge in *Macbeth*, reinforcing the archetype of the witch who curses those who will not give her charity. The Weird Sisters, like Hecate, are hungry for vengeance once their request has been denied. Their narrative is framed as a story that the First Witch tells her sisters when they gather on the heath:

A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap,
 And munched, and munched, and munched. "Give me," quoth I.
 "Aroint thee, witch!" the rump-fed runnion cries.
 Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o'the Tiger;
 But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
 And like a rat without a tail
 I'll do, I'll do, and I'll do. (I.iii.4-10)²⁴⁸

²⁴⁸ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. William C. Carroll (New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 1999). All references to *Macbeth* are to this edition.

In this case, the First Witch demands the chestnuts from the Sailor's Wife. The text does not indicate whether the witch is in the position to pay the Sailor's Wife for her chestnuts or that they were for sale. She merely voices her desire for chestnuts. In the witch's mind, her desire should be enough to command a response. When the woman refuses, the witch is justified in her revenge.

When the Sailor's Wife refuses the First Witch charity, her husband suffers the consequences. Torturing the woman's husband rather than the woman herself is both more evil and safer. The woman cannot accuse the witch of *maleficium* if it happens to someone thousands of miles away. The First Witch sets out to find the woman's husband, who is "master o'the Tiger,"

I' the shipman's card
 I'll drain him dry as hay.
 Sleep shall neither night nor day
 Hang upon his penthouse lid
 He shall live a man forbid.
 Weary sev'nights nine times nine
 Shall he dwindle peak and pine.
 Though his bark cannot be lost,
 Yet it shall be tempest-tossed. (I.iii.17-25)

The First Witch's threat to "drain him dry as hay" has a double meaning in conjunction with the claim that she'll "do." On the surface, the First Witch threatens to dehydrate the sailor. He will be thirsty even as he sails the Mediterranean Sea, but he will also be diminished in another way. The Witch's threat is also sexual. To "do" can mean to act, but it can also allude to specifically

sexual action. The First Witch subtly threatens to drain the sailor through repeated intercourse, “I’ll do, I’ll do, and I’ll do.” Through all of this, she will prevent him from dying. The sailor will wish for death, “Weary sev’n nights nine times nine / Shall he dwindle peak and pine,” but he will not be able to die. Even as his boat is “tempest-tossed” it “cannot be lost.” The Witch’s punishment is worse than torture because the sailor must survive without the hope of death.

To seal her revenge and prove that she is as powerful as she seems, the First Witch produces physical evidence: the sailor’s thumb, “Wrecked as homeward he did come” (I.iii.29). It takes a powerful witch to send her spirit to Aleppo to steal the thumb of a man whose wife denied her charity. *The Witch* and *Macbeth* offer examples of both the solitary witch seeking revenge for a lack of charity from her neighbors and the coven of witches amplifying their magic by working together. The dramatic representation of witchcraft in these plays offers a balanced representation of the solitary and group work that is reported in pamphlets. Witches acted alone as often as they acted in groups, primarily family groups. Deborah Willis explains that the witch was a solitary figure in about half of recorded cases: “The once-common idea that most people charged with witchcraft were either widows or single women has been shown to be mistaken; in some regions, more than half of the accused were married; others lived with children or with aging parents.”²⁴⁹ Willis’s suggestion that the idea of the single witch is “mistaken” might be qualified by reports about witches like Mother Baker and Elizabeth Sawyer. Records show that Mother Baker acted alone. Sawyer did as well, though she was married. The nuance that Willis does not capture is that the witch who lived with parents or children often suffered and acted alone. That does not mean that they *all* acted alone, however, as I have shown in my discussion of *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*.

²⁴⁹ Willis, 5.

Whether she is working alone or with her sisters, the witch's desire takes center stage. Unlike historical accounts, which accurately analyze the social challenges of the period that resulted in the need for increased charity, dramatic representation highlights the lack of charity as the inciting action for the witch's revenge.²⁵⁰ The witch's revenge is never simple, and she often uses it as an excuse to pursue unchecked appetites. In *The Witch*, Hecate's revenge turns into a demonstration of her power. She is vengeful but restrained, aiming to harm the farmer to the same extent that he has insulted her. Hecate could kill the farmer and his wife outright, but she does not. Instead, she ensures their downfall:

Seven of their young pigs I've bewitched already
 Of the last litter, nine ducklings, thirteen goslings – and a hog
 Fell lame last Sunday after evensong too –
 And mark how their sheep prosper or what sop
 Each milch-kind gives to th'pail. I'll send those snakes
 Shall milk'em all beforehand. The dewed-skirted dairy wenches
 Shall stroke dry dugs for this and go home cursing.
 I'll mar their syllabubs with frothy feastings
 Under cows' bellies with parish youths. (I.ii.56-63)

Hecate bewitches 7 pigs, 9 ducklings, 13 goslings, and 1 hog. Because this is likely a local farmer and not an aristocrat managing a large land holding, 30 animals is no small number and may be a significant portion of his livestock. Hecate also dries up the cows' milk, sending "those snakes" to milk the cows before the dairy maids arrive. Using snakes to milk the cows rather than killing the animals or drying up their milk in another way links Hecate's power to the Devil.

²⁵⁰ For an excellent assessment of the socioeconomic environment of the period and how that directly influenced witchcraft trials, see Robin Briggs's *Witches & Neighbours*, 2002.

Snakes are symbols of the Devil's power on earth. The snakes may be Hecate's familiars, or she could be exploiting the evil already inherent in the animal. The use of the snakes in this instance can also represent a meaningful relationship with the Devil or another demon. The play does not offer any further explanation, only that Hecate will "mar their syllabubs with frothy feastings / Under cows' bellies with parish youths." Her threat is literal and figurative. She will ruin their syllabubs, a drink made from curdled cream or milk, with her "frothy feastings." Even as she takes her revenge, Hecate is preoccupied by the pleasure in her power. Her feasting is shameless.

Though she recruits snakes and incubi, the power that Hecate wields appears to be earthbound rather than divine. She does not appear to make a compact with the Devil, nor does she indicate that she is in debt to him. Hecate's son Firestone, who is left out of the coven's rituals and takes umbrage at being outcast, reveals that his mother has indeed made a bargain with the Prince of Darkness. In response to Hecate's claim that she has foreseen her death, "Even just at twelve o'clock at night come three year," Firestone declares that her time is not up yet:

Your spirits are then more unconscionable than bakers; you'll have lived then, mother, six-score year to the hundred – and methinks after six-score years the devil might give you a cast – for he's a fruiterer too and has been from the beginning; the first apple that e'er was eaten came through is fingers. The costermonger's then, I hold to be the ancientest trade, though some will have the tailor pricked down before him. (I.ii.71-78)

Hecate has already lived 120 years and the Devil may give her a "cast," or the chance, to live for 130 years. Firestone's humor is not the easy and straightforward humor of most clowns. His joke is hard-won. His reference to the Devil as more liberal than the baker, who would never

round up to a baker's dozen, is not particularly comical. Firestone's humor is wry. He can't risk being funny because he's so hurt that he, the precious son, has been left out of the witches' fun.

Hecate admits that "We're all sworn / To sweat for such a spirit" (I.ii.127-128). Her acknowledgement that she is "sworn / To sweat for such a spirit" links both her power and the power of her coven to the Devil. It is surprising that she admits this at the same moment when her first customer appears on stage. Hecate claims agency over her appetites and revels in them when she and her coven are alone on stage. When Sebastian arrives, Hecate no longer revels in the magic that she does without aid and for her own pleasure. The work that she does for others comes from the witch's pact with the Devil. When she is alone, Hecate works magic whose success is dependent on the power of her imagination and belief. When she does magic for others, she must appeal to their imagination. As a result, she uses her partnership with the Devil and with the other witches to offer "all your sudden, ruinous storms / That shipwreck barks and tears up growing oaks, / Flies over houses and takes *Anno Domini* / Out of a rich man's chimney – a sweet place for't!" (I.ii.133-136). When she is selling magic, Hecate becomes the broker for her coven and their individual talents. Each of the witches has something to offer which reflects commonly held beliefs about witchcraft:

Or dost thou envy
 The fat prosperity of any neighbor?
 I'll call forth Hoppo and her incantation
 Can straight destroy the young of all his cattle,
 Blast vineyards, orchards, meadows or in one night
 Transport his dung, hay, corn, by ricks, whole stacks,
 Into thine own ground. (I.ii.140-146)

Hecate will ensure that Sebastian's revenge is successful for a price. Unlike the villagers who seek out cunning women in search of riddles and love charms, Sebastian comes to Hecate under duress. When he stands at her door, he is aware of the transgression that he is committing:

“Heaven knows with what unwillingness and hate / I enter this dammed place – but such extremes / Of wrongs in love fight ‘gainst religious knowledge, / That were I led by this disease to deaths / As numberless as creatures that must die, / I could not shun the way” (I.ii.107-112).

Sebastian is a desperate man and “such extremes / Of wrongs in love fight ‘gainst” the “religious knowledge” that should keep him away from Hecate's cave. Sebastian's arrival reveals that Hecate's position is more fraught than it first appears. She is a witch with unchecked power working within a system that finds her spells not only irreligious but dangerous.

Sebastian needs something that goes beyond a witch's common spells. He wants to make Antonio impotent on his wedding night, and Hecate gives him snake skins that will have the desired effect:

So sure into what house these are conveyed,
 Knit with these charmed and retentive knots,
 Neither the man begets nor woman breeds;
 No, nor performs the least desires of wedlock,
 Being them a mutual duty. (I.ii.155-159)

Hecate's spell is both practical and convenient. All Sebastian has to do is tie snakeskins into “charmed and retentive knots.” When the knotted snakeskins are “conveyed” to Antonio's house, “Niether the man begets nor woman breeds.” Though this spell appears simple and effective, Hecate also mentions a list of herbs that Sebastian could use instead: “*Chiroconita, adincantida / Archimadon, marmaritin, calicia, / Which I could sort to villainous barren ends*”

(I.ii.160-162). As with the recipe for Hecate's flying ointment, the text of the play refers to *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* for both a charm to prevent pregnancy and the list of herbs.

In Book XII, Chapter 6, titled "*Lawes provided for the punishment of such witches as worke miracles, whereof some are mentioned, and of certeine popish lawes published against them*," Scot discusses the laws "of other nations" that are sometimes at odds with English norms.²⁵¹ In his marginal note, he includes that these are the "Punishmet of impossibilities," reinforcing his argument in *Discoverie* that witchcraft cannot possibly be real because only God can work miracles.²⁵² He quotes the "words of pope *Innocent*" and "of pope *Julius*" on the witch's ability to prevent the creation of new life:

It is come to our eares, that manie lewd persons, of both kinds, as well male as female, using the companie of the divels *Incubus* and *Succubus*, with incantations, charmes, conjurations, &c: doo destroye, &c: the births of women with child, the yong of all cattell, the corne of the feeld, the grapes of the vines, and frute of the trees...yea men and women themselves are by their imprecations so afflicted with externall and inward paines and diseases, that men cannot beeget, nor wormalen bring forth anie children, nor yet accomplish the dutie of wedlock, denieng the faith which they in baptisme professed, to the destruction of their owne souls.²⁵³

The primary concern of Pope Innocent and Pope Julius is not only that a witch can prevent trees from bearing fruit, but that she can also cause men and women to become barren "with externall and inward paines and diseases." As a result of the witch's *maleficium*, these barren couples are unable to "accomplish the dutie of wedlock." Among the "other nations" that Scot refers to,

²⁵¹ Scot, 126.

²⁵² Scot, 126.

²⁵³ Scot, 126-127.

particularly the Catholic nations that fall under the purview of the Pope, the witch's ability to prevent man and wife from being married in the eyes of God is believed to be a grave sin.²⁵⁴ Scot uses a popish example of belief as a counterpoint to his protestation against the witch's ability to perform impossible miracles. *The Discoverie of Witches* establishes Catholicism as consisting of a series of retrograde beliefs that are alien and possibly ridiculous. The goal of *The Witch*, however, is not to make Hecate appear absurd. Her reference to the "villainous barren ends" that she can achieve is extreme in two key ways (I.ii.162). First, she promises to accomplish something that is both spiritually and physically harmful. Secondly, Hecate's spell requires Sebastian's unwavering belief. For Hecate to make Antonio impotent, Sebastian must believe without the shadow of a doubt that what she promises is possible. He cannot, like Scot, doubt that a witch can prevent a man and his wife from consummating their marriage. *The Witch* makes use of a foreign, Catholic belief system to make Hecate appear more powerful and strange. Other stage witches seek revenge for being cast out of their communities, speak in riddles, or offer romantic advice. They do not offer spells to make women barren and men impotent.²⁵⁵

Hecate flies, she deals in sex magic, and she claims desires that are extreme and transgressive. The only limits to her power are religious. She needs an unbaptized baby for her ointment because her ritual is not powerful enough to overwrite the ritual of baptism. For similar reasons, Hecate is also unable to break the bonds of a consecrated marriage:

²⁵⁴ Scot, 126.

²⁵⁵ *Macbeth* was written to flatter James I, but *The Witch* likely responded (at least in part) to the scandalous marriage of Lady Frances Howard to Robert Devereux, Earl of Essex. After three years of marriage, the couple had yet to consummate their union and Howard attempted to annul the union, stating that her husband was unable to perform in their marriage bed. Essex claimed that his ability to perform was not the cause of their marital strife, as he was able to bed other women. Because their marriage was a political one, court gossips were active in the proceedings, and it was rumored that Essex had been bewitched. Howard was imprisoned for witchcraft, but the annulment of her marriage to Essex was granted by order of James I in 1613. This spared Howard the torture and shame associated with the accusation of witchcraft and freed her to marry Robert Carr.

We cannot disjoin wedlock;
 'Tis of heaven's fastening. Well may we raise 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. (I.ii.170-175)

Hecate can sow discord, but she cannot put asunder those whom God has joined together.

Hecate's reference to "our master" is another direct reference to the Devil, reinforcing her relationship with him and the role that it has in her public magic. Hecate claims that the suffering of Job, "that patient miracle," was the Devil's work. Though Satan was able to tempt Job, Hecate argues that he would never have been successful. Satan's failure is more evidence that he cannot undo God's miracles. Hecate's reference to "that patient miracle" also reveals that *The Witch* is invested not only in the spells that Scot includes in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, but also in the primary argument of his text: the witch and her devil will never be as strong as God and his blessings.

Scot argues that because the witch is not as powerful as God, her magic is impossible. Though *The Witch* makes use of spells excerpted from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, the play does not inherit Scot's skepticism regarding the witch's abilities. Instead, the play uses Scot's argument that the witch cannot interfere with those blessed by God as a means to limit her power and make the witch more agreeable to the audience. The relationship between the play and Scot's treatise is not entirely straightforward, however. In order to convince the audience that the magic Hecate does in *The Witch* is authentic, the play quotes Scot out of context. The play shapes the spells into sublime examples of a witch's ability. In *The Witch*, Scot's skepticism

becomes the basis for the witch's belief in her own power. Because the plays are removed from their context and Scot's argument, the critique of witchcraft and witch-hunters is lost. One example of the play's distortion of *Discoverie* is the use of the Latin names for the herbs that Hecate could give Sebastian but does not: "I could give thee / *Chiroconita, adincantida* / *Archimadon, marmaritin, calicia*, / Which I could sort to villainous barren ends – / But this leads the same way" (I.ii.159-163). The play's reference is to *Discoverie* Book VI, Chapter 3 where Scot presents the following argument: "*That women have used poisoning in all ages more than men, and of the inconvenience of poisoning.*"²⁵⁶ Scot argues that women, due to their naturally corruptible nature, have always been poisoners:

As women in all ages have beene counted most apt to conceive witchcraft, and the divels special instruments therin, and the onelie or cheefe practisers therof: so also it appeareth, that they have been the first inventers, and the greatest practisers of poisoning, and more naturallie addicted and given thereunto than men...²⁵⁷

Scot bases this argument on the work of "*Augustine, Livie, Valerius, Diodorus*, and manie other [who] agree, that women were the first inventers and practisers of the art of poisoning."²⁵⁸ By presenting this argument alongside other male scholars, Scot multiplies women's villainies and reinforces the humoral ideal of the weak and naturally porous woman being subject to evil influence. Scot's engagement with philosophers who claim women were the first to practice the art of poisoning also serves as the source material for the herbs that Hecate mentions as an alternative to the snakeskin she provides to Sebastian. Scot explains that "the names of a great manie magicall herbs and stones" come from "*Pythagoras and Democritus*":

²⁵⁶ Scot, 67.

²⁵⁷ Scot, 67.

²⁵⁸ Scot, 67.

Marmaritin, whereby spirits might be raised: *Archimедon*, which would make one bewraie in his sleep, all the secrets in his heart: *Adincantida*, *Calicia*, *Mevais*, *Chirocineta*, &c: which had all their several vertues, or rather poisons. But all these now are worne out of knowledge: marie in their steed we have hogs turd and chervil, as the onelie thing whereby our witches worke miracles.²⁵⁹

When Hecate lists *chiroconita*, *adincantida*, *archimadon*, *marmaritin*, and *calicia*, she does not identify them as poisons. Instead, she says makes a vague reference to being able to use the “to villainous barren ends” (I.ii.162). Hecate’s claim is an empty threat. None of the herbs listed would cause barrenness in a man or woman. She cannot cause impotence or death, so this list of herbs must serve a non-magical function. Hecate is merely trying to impress Sebastian. She is selling him an idea of magic without using her energies and the force of her belief to do any witchcraft at all.

Without an in-depth understanding of Scot’s text and herbal remedies, the average early modern playgoer would have no idea that the curse Hecate offers would have no effect. The use of a series of Latin names for unfamiliar herbs serves a very important purpose. A central part of Hecate’s magic is the belief she has in her abilities. The audience must also believe in her, and the play does this through the use of seemingly inaccessible Latin naming systems to lend legitimacy to her spells. The use of Latin also heightens the drama of the play.²⁶⁰ Scot capitalizes on the drama of “this poisoning art called *Veneficium*” by further arguing that it represents an inversion of proper hierarchies:

²⁵⁹ Scot, 67.

²⁶⁰ This is similar to the use of Latin prayer in *The Witch of Edmonton*, though not entirely. The use of Latin in the prayer that Dog teaches to Elizabeth Sawyer is important because it exposes her lack of understanding. The audience would know more of the Latin liturgy than they would Latin plant names, however. In both cases, the action happening on stage is made just a bit more inaccessible through the use of languages other than vernacular English. Similar to how Scot’s recipes lend legitimacy to Hecate’s magic, the use of Latin on stage helps to create the magic of the theater.

...whereby murthers maie be committed, where no suspicion maie be gathered, nor anie resistance can be made; the strong cannot avoid the weake, the wise cannot prevent the foolish, the godlie cannot be preserved from the hands of the wicked; children maie hereby kill their parents, the servant the maiseter, the wife hir husband, so privilie, so inevitable, and so incurable, that of all other it hath beene throught the most odious kind of murther.²⁶¹

As a practice that is closely related to witchcraft, poisons are the only way that the “strong cannot avoid the weake.” Children can kill their parents, servants their masters, and wives their husbands through the use of poison. In each case, the weaker party uses poison as the only means by which the “godlie cannot be preserved from the hands of the wicked.” Scot aligns weakness with wickedness, employing logic to claim that those in positions of power, namely husbands, parents, and masters, are more “godlie” than those who are subservient. Just as powerful women subvert what early moderns viewed as the natural order in patriarchal systems, poisons give the person who wields them more power than is strictly natural.

The use of a series of harmless herbs in *The Witch* stands out for its strangeness. As I have established, Hecate and her coven subvert patriarchal norms through their response to and acceptance of unbridled desire. As a woman without a husband, Hecate is the weaker party in terms of structural power. She is not the weaker party when she brokers the sale of magic with Sebastian, however. Hecate’s role as saleswoman works against the argument that Scot attempts to make about power and the use of poison. Sebastian comes to Hecate to ask for a solution, pays her for her services, and she guarantees that he will be successful. She is in a position of power, and he is her inferior. Though Sebastian would ultimately be the one to use the proffered

²⁶¹ Scot, 67.

poison, it would be used in a different environment than the one in which it was created. Hecate is the most powerful person in her territory, but Sebastian would use the herbs in *his* environment where he is powerful. Unknowingly, Sebastian reduces his power by using Hecate's spells. There is a meaningful conversation about power structures at the heart of the mission to lend legitimacy to Hecate's great work. The challenge in understanding the maintenance and perversion of power structures operates as a subtext in *Scot*. The lack of nuance in understanding the power structures that apply to his topic complicates his claim that God will always reign supreme and that poisons are for the weak. Without close and careful reading, it is possible to lose sight of this thread in *The Witch*. The play buries some of its claims about power in the witch's recipes in an attempt to avoid a complicated conversation. A very subversive maneuver indeed.



The subversive power of women is central to many plays of the period, particularly those that feature witches. Hecate is one of the most subversive, and the magic that she does is extreme in its practice and results. The subtlety of her recipes is mirrored, however, in the less extreme magic that Lady Macbeth uses when she first appears on stage in *Macbeth*. Though she is not named as one of the witches in *Macbeth*, Lady Macbeth takes on the role of the fourth witch in the play through her use of an incantation that calls her husband home so that she can "chastise [him] with valor of my tongue" (I.v.23). Unlike the Weird Sisters, who attempt to shape the political future of Scotland through prophecy, Lady Macbeth's uses her incantation to bring about a singular result. When her husband returns home, she will poison him with all of the power and desire she possesses:

Yet do I fear thy nature;

It is too full o'the milk of human kindness

To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
 Art not without ambition, but without
 The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
 That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
 And yet wouldst wrongly win. (I.v.12-18)

The language that Lady Macbeth uses is not exclusively feminine or masculine, yet the effect that it has on the reader's perception of her husband is damning. He is not "without ambition," but he is "without / The illness should attend it." Macbeth's lack of conviction in a world where a man's illness, or ability to do ill in order to achieve power and status, is a damning failure. He has fulfilled nearly all of the requirements for the ideal patriarchal man, but his wife has doubts. One of his failures is the lack of an heir. Alexandra Shepard argues: "Men who failed as patriarchs or who failed to achieve patriarchal status did not necessarily fail as men, but often drew upon competing codes to prove their manhood."²⁶² These competing codes, described by Shepard as a form of "antipatriarchal manhood," included the "rejection of patriarchal imperatives."²⁶³ Because he has failed to achieve patriarchal manhood in one key way, Macbeth relies on kindness to propel him forward politically. King Duncan loves and respects him, and he shows bravery in battle. For Macbeth, these two attributes appear to be enough to assure him of his masculinity. Lady Macbeth refuses to settle for respect and bravery. Instead, she offers a scathing assessment of Macbeth's manhood that reflects the social narrative associated with his failure to achieve patriarchal ideals.

²⁶² Alexandra Shepard, "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen? Manhood in Britain, circa 1500-1700," *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005): 292.

²⁶³ Shepard, "From Anxious Patriarchs to Refined Gentlemen," 291.

Because her husband has failed as a man, Lady Macbeth makes up for his lack of strength and conviction with the power of her own belief. In place of celebrating her husband's prowess, what she offers a personal monologue and a witch's incantation. Like Hecate and her coven, Lady Macbeth names her desires, includes ingredients, and uses physical action connected with her words to manifest the desired result:

Thou'dst have, great Glamis,
 That which cries "Thus thou must do," if thou have it,
 And that which rather thou dost fear to do
 Than wishest should be undone. Hie thee hither,
 That I may pour my spirits in thine ear
 And chastise with valor of my tongue
 All that impedes thee from the golden round
 Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem
 To have thee crowned withal. (I.v.18-26)

Lady Macbeth calls her husband to her – "Hie thee hither" – so that she can infect him with her ambition. The "spirits" that she refers to could be liquid spirits, as in a charm or ointment, but they might also be familiar spirits or devils that she recruits to influence her husband. Like Hecate, Lady Macbeth has to balance her natural power with the abilities that are granted through her pact with the Devil. She can exercise her own influence or borrow magic from Hell. The Weird Sisters, who offer "fate and metaphysical aid," borrow their power from devils. Similar to the Fates, the Weird Sisters show Macbeth his future without telling him how it will come to pass. Lady Macbeth offers a different "metaphysical aid" through the use of poison. The use of "poison" in this context further complicates the established paradigm of the weak poisoning the

powerful. Lady Macbeth is more powerful than her husband, but she is restricted by her position as wife. Poison is not an admission of weakness in this context. Instead, it is the physical manifestation of language. Lady Macbeth's words are her magic.

Lady Macbeth's desire to "chastise" her husband with "the valor of [her] tongue" is not dissimilar to the power of Elizabeth Sawyer's words to fight against physical abuse. Both women use "witch-speak – malevolent speech that was typically impossible to reconstitute but was credited with effecting physical harm or death."²⁶⁴ Lady Macbeth's witch-speak is key to understanding her place as the fourth witch in *Macbeth*. Much of Lady's Macbeth's incantation has to do with subverting her femininity to claim power that is inaccessible because of her gender. Hecate does not have to do this as explicitly in *The Witch* as Lady Macbeth does in *Macbeth*. Because Hecate's only function in *The Witch* is magical, her power does not need to be explained or justified. In contrast, Lady Macbeth needs to provide context for her desires because the success of her ambition relies on her continued fulfillment of the role of a chaste wife in the patriarchal system.²⁶⁵

Because the evil Lady Macbeth desires is antithetical to her position, she must work at undoing the ties that bind her to traditional femininity. She calls on outside forces to bring forth a change that will eliminate the features and behaviors that make her a woman:

Make thick my blood;
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse,
That no compunctious visitings of nature

²⁶⁴ Kirilka Stavreva, *Words Like Daggers: Violent Female Speech in Early Modern England* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 3.

²⁶⁵ Macbeth was likely Lady Macbeth's second husband. She is reported to have given birth to a child in her first marriage. When she then says that she knows "How tender 'tis to love the babe the milks me," she really would have known, though her first marriage and child are not mentioned in the action of the play.

Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
 The effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts
 And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
 Whatever in your sightless substances
 You wait on nature's mischief! (I.v.39-46)

Lady Macbeth's desire to "Stop up th'access and passage to remorse" is the opposite of her husband's kindness. She wants to be guarded so that "no compunctious visitings of nature" distract her from what she must do. She wants no kindness or other perceived weaknesses to get in the way of her goal. She also wants to avoid any particularly female experiences that would limit her ability to make her husband king: pregnancy, menstruation, and childbirth would all prevent her from persuading her husband to fulfill his masculine duty. Her desire to stop natural physical processes establishes a connection to the lines that follow: "Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall." Lady Macbeth's magic causes those passages that are not "stopped up" to be meaningfully changed. Though she wants to be made angry by those "murdering ministers" who will come to her and perform this transformation, there is little evidence that she isn't already experiencing rage. Rather than claim rage and ambition as a man would, she asks for transformation as a means of securing permission from powers greater than herself. Lady Macbeth can move forward in a meaningful way only once her body matches the force of her desires.

Lady Macbeth's desires center on the subversion of gender norms and marriage expectations through supernatural means. Rather than allow her husband to have unlimited patriarchal power, she wants to seize his power and use it herself. Macbeth's weakness is a failure of manhood in his wife's eyes. In *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*,

Alexandra Shepard describes the traditional early modern marriage as one built around maintaining patriarchal power: “The primary duties of both spouses were directed towards maintaining the husband’s authority.”²⁶⁶ Lady Macbeth wants to dismantle this social norm by challenging her husband’s authority and attempting to take it for her own. Not only does she not trust that he will do what is necessary, she places her desire for power above the agency that her husband should have in their marriage. Because she is not married, Hecate works outside of this paradigm. The Duchess of Ravenna, however, does not.

The last of Hecate’s customers in *The Witch*, the Duchess of Ravenna’s erotic desires are matched with her desire for power and revenge. The combination of desires she exhibits positions her at an interesting intersection between the extremes of Hecate and Lady Macbeth. Like Lady Macbeth, the Duchess begins plotting her husband’s demise early on:

Did ever cruel, barbarous act match this?
 Twice hath his surfeits brought my father’s memory
 Thus spitefully and scornfully to mine eyes,
 And I’ll endure’t no more. ‘Tis in my heart since;
 I’ll be revenged as far as death can lead me. (I.i.136-140)

The “cruel, barbarous act” the Duchess refers to is her husband’s choice of drinking vessel. In the first scene of the play, the Duke proposes a toast and sends a goblet made from the skull of the Duchess’s father around the table for all to drink from: “Our duchess, I know, will pledge us, through the cup / Was once her father’s head – which as a trophy / We’ll keep till death in memory of that conquest” (I.i.115-117). The Duke is assured of his wife’s agreement not because he knows that it is acceptable to drink out of her father’s skull but because social

²⁶⁶ Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 75.

convention dictates that she be united with him in all things. She appears to consent on the surface, just as Lady Macbeth appears welcoming to Duncan when he first arrives, but the Duchess is nursing a secret hate. She will “be revenged as far as death can lead.”

Regardless of their desire for power and revenge, both Lady Macbeth and the Duchess require men to take action in ways that they cannot because of their gender. Lady Macbeth’s success hinges on her ability to convince Macbeth to kill Duncan. The Duchess, on the other hand, needs Almachildes to kill her husband. Her social and political positions are too tenuous for her to risk murdering him herself. In order to do this, she exploits Almachildes’s love for her maid, Amoretta. Using a classic bed trick, the Duchess threatens Almachildes to assure his cooperation:

Thou hast thy choice, and to that purpose, sir,
 I’ve given thee knowledge now of what thou hast
 And what thou must do to the worthy on’t.
 You must not think to come by such a fortune
 Without desert; that were unreasonable.
 He that’s not born to honour must not look
 To have it come with ease to him; he must win’t. (III.i.18-24)

The Duchess appeals to Almachildes’s manhood. He must be “worthy” of the “fortune” that will come to him if he completed this task for her. If wealth and honor are not inducement enough, she also threatens him with death:

But if through weakness
 Of a poor spirit thou deniest me this,
 Think but how thou shalt die – as I’ll work means for’t,

No murderer ever like thee. For I purpose
 To call this subtle, sinful snare of mine
 And act of force from thee. (III.i.26-31)

The Duchess fears that Almachildes has the same weakness of character that Lady Macbeth sees in her husband. In *The Witch*, the Duchess refers to it as being of “poor spirit,” which is similar to Lady Macbeth’s concern about her husband having too much of the “milk of human kindness.” The Duchess’s character assessment does not need to employ any Biblical references for her meaning to be clear. She, like Lady Macbeth, doubts that men can do the tasks she requires. Neither woman can bear weakness in others when she worked so hard to rid herself of frailty.

After Almachildes murders her husband, the Duchess decides that he needs to be the next to die. To do this, she recruits two helpers: the Lord Governor and Hecate. When her appeal to the Lord Governor isn’t immediately successful, the Duchess is driven to Hecate’s lair, where the witch offers her a solution. Although the Duchess desires something “sudden and subtle,” (V.ii.2) Hecate’s initial offer does not suit:

Then I have fitted you.
 Here lie the gifts of both sudden and subtle;
 His picture made in wax and gently molten,
 By a blue fire kindled with dead men’s eyes,
 Will waste him by degrees. (V.ii.2-6)

Hecate will cause Almachildes to “waste...by degrees,” but her magic will be subtle rather than sudden because it will take “Perhaps a moon’s progress” (V.ii.7). Like the other spells in *The Witch*, Hecate’s offer of a “picture made in wax and gently molten” refers directly to Scot’s

Discoverie. In the section titled *A charme teaching how to hurt whom you list with images of wax, &c.*, Scot provides one method of cursing someone by making “an image in his name, whom you would hurt or kill, of new virgine wax; under the right arme poke wehereof place a sawllowes hart, and the liver under the left; then hang about the necke thereof a new thred in a new needle pricked into the member which you would have hurt.”²⁶⁷ In the same paragraph, Scot offers no less than four alternate preparations to curse someone using an image. Some of these include specific words or psalms to rehearse over the waxen image, and others indicate only that there should be a “rehearsal of certeine words.”²⁶⁸ Scot’s description of these spells is remarkable for its lack of detail. Scot is otherwise specific in the organization and construction of his argument against witchcraft and in dismantling the spells that witch mongers claim as true *maleficium*. It is possible, therefore, that Scot knew few details about these spells in context and included only what he knew or could collect from reports. The lack of detail included about these spells is not a problem for *The Witch*. Even without detailed spells on which to base Hecate’s dialogue, she is able to offer the Duchess a believable solution.

The spell that the Duchess needs from Hecate cannot take a month. Almachildes must die as quickly as possible. Hecate offers the Duchess a spell, quoted directly from Scot, that will cause Almachildes’s death at “perfection’s time / And that’s not five hours hence” (V.ii.12-13). The Duchess makes a grievous mistake, though. When Hecate offers her another spell, the Duchess questions the witch’s abilities. In response, Hecate is put in the position to justify her power for the first time in the play. All the other characters who have come to her for solutions believed in her without question. The Duchess requires convincing:

Worse and worse! Doubts and incredulities!

²⁶⁷ Scot, 146.

²⁶⁸ Scot, 146.

They make me mad. Let scrupulous greatness know –

Cum volui, ripis ipsis mirantibus amnes

In fontes rediere suos, concussaue sisto,

Stantia concutio cantu freta, nubile pello

Nubilaque induco, ventos abigoque vocoque,

Viperias rumpo verbis et carmine fauces,

Et silvas moveo iubeoque tremiscere montes

Et mugire solum manesque exire spulchris!

Teque, luna, traho. Can you doubt me then daughter?

That can make mountains tremble, miles of woods walk,

Whole earth's foundation bellow and the spirits

Of entombed to burse out from their marbles,

Nay, draw yond moon to my involved designs? (V.ii.16-29)

Hecate offers the Duchess's "scrupulous greatness" a spell quoted from Scot, who quotes it from Ovid. The language of the spell and its purported result are intended to further prove Hecate's power. She can quote complicated Latin and "make mountains tremble." Again, Hecate's use of a Latin spell serves as a means to overwhelm her subject and prove that she is as talented as she claims.

The play does not offer any translation of Ovid's spell. Scot offers his translation of Ovid directly after quoting the Latin in Book XII, Chapter 7:

The rivers I can make retire,

Into the fountains whence they flo,

(Whereat the banks themselves admire)

I can make standing waters go,
 With charmes I drive both sea and clowd,
 I make it calme and blowe alowd.
 The vipers jawes, the rockie stone,
 With words and charmes I breake in twaine
 The force of earth congeald in one,
 I move and shake both woods and plaine;
 I made the soules of men arise,
 I pull the moone out of the skies.²⁶⁹

Through the use of Ovid's spell, *The Witch* gives Hecate the power to change the course of nature. This aligns perfectly with the other powers that she claims to have throughout the play. Her power is so great that she can make rivers "retire / Into the fountaines," "make standing waters go," and make the wind "blowe alowd." She can also "break in twaine" the "vipers jawes" and the "rockie stone." Hecate is so powerful that she can "make the soules of men arise," and "pull the moone out of the skies." This expression of Hecate's power is similar to Delphia's in *The Prophetess* when she claims to be able to "put that glorious light out, with such horreur, / As if the eternal Night had seiz'd the Sun" (II.i.76-77).²⁷⁰ In both cases, the witch's power allows her to control the natural world, reinforcing the witch's role in subverting established paradigms.

²⁶⁹ Scot, 128.

²⁷⁰ Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *The Prophetess*, ed. Fredson Bowers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). All references to *The Prophetess* are to this edition. Though *The Prophetess* first appeared in Beaumont and Fletcher's collected works, it is generally accepted that Francis Beaumont and Philip Massinger, not John Fletcher, were the authors of this play. See Cyrus Hoy, "Verbal Formulae in the Plays of Philip Massinger," *Studies in Philology* vol. 56, no. 4 (October 1959): 600-618.

Hecate finds the Duchess's doubt insulting because she believes that she can change the course of nature. In response to the Duchess's doubt, Hecate offers to do the magic required herself rather than send the woman away with a charm or wax tablet. As a result, the magic that Hecate offers the Duchess is appreciably different from the charms offered to her male customers. Hecate has, perhaps unwittingly, created a divide between the magic that she does for men and what she offers women. Men leave with the tools that they need to do their own work, but the Duchess leaves with something far more valuable:

Leave all to me and my five sisters, daughter.

It shall be convey'd in at howlet-time.

Take you no care; my spirits know their moments:

Raven or screech-owl never fly by th' door

But they call in--I thank 'em--and they lose not by't.

I give 'em barley soaked in infants' blood;

They shall have *semina cum sanguine*,

Their gorge cramm'd full, if they come once to our house.

We are no niggard. (V.ii.37-45)

The spell that Hecate uses to help the Duchess is tied to her own largesse. She will send her spirits “at howlet-time” and her success is assured because she always feeds the spirits that come to her, “Raven or screech-owl never fly by th' door / But they call in.” She gives “'em barley soaked in infants' blood... Their gorge cramm'd full.” Hecate's reference to *semina cum sanguine* doubles the English “barley soaked in infants' blood.” The Latin translates to “seeds with blood.” To prove her point, Hecate offers her feathered familiars blood and seeds twice over. The subtext of her speech also refers to the object of the Duchess's ire. “They” shall have

seeds with blood. Reading the end of this speech with Almachildes in mind changes the “gorge crammed full” from something abundant to an expression of murderous harm. The birds would love blood and seeds, but a man with his “gorge cramm’d full” of the noxious mixture would surely be near death.

Hecate is not the only witch in my archive who demonstrates the ability to control nature. The titular prophetess Delphia in *The Prophetess* written by John Fletcher and Philip Massinger and entered into the Stationer’s Register in 1622, is similar to Hecate in her use of extreme magics. Early in the play, Delphia prophesizes that the future emperor Diocles will marry her niece Drusilla upon his ascension. Delphia’s desire to ensure Drusilla’s ascent raises questions about the prophecies that Delphia claims to access. When Diocles conveniently forgets about Drusilla and attempts to marry Aurelia after he comes to power, Delphia reveals the true extent of her power:

It shall be done, as fits my skill and glory:
 To break thorow bolts, and locks, a Scholars prize
 For Theeves and Pick-locks: To passe thorow an Army
 Cover’d with Night, or some disguise, the practice
 Of poor and needy Spies: No, my *Drusilla*,
 From *Ceres* I will force her winged Dragons,
 And in the air hung over the Tribunal
 (The Musick of the Spheres attending on us)
 There, as his good Star, thou shalt shine upon him,
 If he prove true, and as his Angel guard him.
 But if he dare be false, I, in a moment

Will put that glorious light out, with such horror,
 As if the eternal Night had seiz'd the Sun,
 Or all things were return'd to the first Chaos,
 And then appear like Furies. (2.1.65-79)

Delphia brings up a storm to disturb Diocles and is powerful enough to suspend her spell and leave the lightening hanging over him, ready to “put that glorious light out, with such horror, / As if the eternal Night had seiz'd the Sun.” Throughout her speech, which represents only part of what Delphia accomplishes in *The Prophetess*, the repeated “I” statements reinforce that it is the witch and no one else who accomplishes these feats. There is no question that it will be Delphia who finds revenge on Diocles, “But if he dare be false, I, in a moment, / Will put that glorious light out.” Using “I” in the middle of the line creates a pause that stresses and reinforces Delphia’s agency. She does not manipulate the heavens entirely on her own, however. Delphia has a bit of divine help: “From *Ceres* I will force her winged Dragons.” Ceres, the ancient Roman goddess of agriculture, is not traditionally a warlike figure. She is, however, often depicted in a chariot drawn by dragons. She drives this chariot to earth when she is called upon to teach man how to sow his crops and produce a good harvest. Ceres also uses her chariot to search for her daughter Proserpina, who is lost to the underworld.²⁷¹ Delphia invokes Ceres as

²⁷¹ An 18th-century print made by Benjamin Cole depicts this scene and is titled “The Goddess Ceres in her Chariot drawn by Dragons, Teaching Mankind the Art of Husbandry”. In the far right of the image, the viewer can see that the dragons that pull Ceres’s chariot are depicted as winged snakes with forked tongues. In a 16th century illustration by Italian artist Andrea Meldolla Schiavone feature dragons with a lizard-like appearance, closer to the dragons that modern readers would be familiar with. This illustration shows Ceres’s wrath as she searches for Proserpina and is in contrast to Cole’s depiction. It is this more wrathful Ceres that Delphia draws on in her search for a helpful goddess to support her power. See: Benjamin Cole, “The Goddess Ceres in her Chariot drawn by Dragons, Teaching Mankind the Art of Husbandry,” etching, 1712-1783 (The British Museum), <https://www.bmimages.com/preview.asp?image=01613767755&itemw=4&itemf=0001&itemstep=1&itemx=17>. See, also: Andrea Meldolla Schiavone, “Ceres Driving a Chariot Pulled by Dragons,” pen and brush with brown wash, lead white, and black chalk on paper, late 1550s (Princeton University Art Museum), <https://artmuseum.princeton.edu/collections/objects/7560>.

a wrathful, motherly figure when she attempts to right the wrong that she believes has been done to Drusilla.

Delphia asserts ownership over the goddess's power when she claims to "put that glorious light out, with such horror," and "force" Ceres's "winged Dragons" to do her bidding. According to Reginald Scot, witches who claim they can cause storms and bring down the sun make themselves into Gods in an act of heresy:

They bewitch mens corne, and bring hunger and barrenness into the countrie; they ride and flie in the aire, bring stormes, make tempests, &c.

Ans. Then I will worship them as gods; for those be not the works of man nor yet of witch: as I have elsewhere proved at large.²⁷²

Delphia may have the power that prophecy and witchcraft confer, but she is human. Her claims of grandeur are dangerously overblown. By claiming power over Ceres and the ability to use the goddess's power as her own, Delphia risks making her abilities unbelievable. She may have gone too far in her claims. In order for her prophecies to take root, those around her need to believe that she is a prophetess and a witch. Her power relies on others' perceptions of her. Delphia's power is not the goddess's ability to control the heavens; it is the power of belief, both hers and those around her. Like Hecate, who believes that she can fly, if Delphia believes she can bring down the sun then she will.

The repeated use of "I" in Delphia's speeches reinforces one of the primary differences between the magic that she practices and the destructive *maleficium* of women like Hecate and Elizabeth Sawyer. Unlike other witches, Delphia attempts to balance her personal power with divine intervention. She does not ask Ceres for help directly, but she needs the goddess's

²⁷² Scot, 19.

dragons to make her magic work. There is evidence that Ceres may not provide this boon willingly, “From *Ceres* I will force her winged Dragons.” Delphia’s engagement with the goddess’s beasts is not gentle, and she does not make an offering to Ceres. She *forces* the dragons to hang over the Tribunal and maintain her threat.

Those who are gathered around her assume that Delphia’s storm is the result of goddess-like wrath: “The Signes are fatal: / *Juno* smiles not upon this Match, and shews too / She has her thunder” (2.3.131-132). Delphia does not appear to mind that her storm has been attributed to Juno as it reinforces her connection to the gods. Her singular focus is on Drusilla and Diocles, and she continues to use the power of other goddesses to her advantage: “Mount up, my birds; *Ascend*. / Some Rites I am to perform to *Hecate*, / To perfect my designs; which once perform’d / He shall be made obedient to thy Call, / Or in his ruine I will bury all” (2.3.144-148). Like the Weird Sisters in *Macbeth*, Delphia recruits Hecate to assist her in her work. Delphia’s appeal to both Ceres and Hecate to help her destroy Diocles’s court recasts the trinity to include herself. As the three-fold goddess of the crossroads, Hecate is often depicted with three faces that look in different directions. Her three faces represent her power over three of the elements (the heavens, the earth, and the sea) and provides the daily blessings of life. Hecate’s power over the elements is gifted directly from Zeus and “she presided over purifying and atoning rights” as well as being the “protectress of newborn babes.”²⁷³ By including herself in an unholy trinity including Hecate and Ceres, Delphia reshapes the three-fold goddess into a new, sinister form.

Delphia’s relationship to the goddesses and to her own magic mirrors Hecate’s relationship to her coven. In both cases, the connections between and among women are central to the success of their *maleficium*. The Duchess and Hecate do not work together, however. One

²⁷³ Henry George Liddell, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (New York: American Book Company, 1901), 429. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uiug.30112002427166&view=1up&seq=11&q1=E>.

woman wants to exploit the power of the other. Because the Duchess insulted her, Hecate ensures that the spell does not kill Almachildes. She returns to the kind of magic that she uses at the opening of the play, wielding spells that celebrate her power and light up her imagination rather than working to fulfill the desires of others. The result of this magic is left for the great reveal at the end of the play. Even then, it's unclear whether the play's resolution is due to chance or to Hecate. Hecate's final spell is extracted in *Macbeth*, where the text is inserted as "*Music and a song: "Black spirits," etc," (Macbeth IV.i).*²⁷⁴ Hecate sings:

HECATE	Black spirits and white, red spirits and grey, Mingle, mingle, mingle, you that mingle may. Titty, Tiffin, keep it stiff in. Firedrake, Puckey, make it lucky. Liard, Robin, you must bob in. Round, around, around, about, about, All ill come running in, all good keep out.
STADLIN	Here's the blood of a bat.
HECATE	Put in that, oh, put in that.
HOPPO	Here's libbard's bane.
HECATE	Put in a grain.
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. (V.ii.60-73)

²⁷⁴ The first folio uses this reference without including the text from *The Witch*, calling for "*Musicke and a Song. Black Spirits, &c.*" Stage copies of the text must have included the insert from Middleton to ensure that actors had the proper lines for the dance. See *Norton Facsimile of Shakespeare's First Folio* page 752.

Hecate opens Act 1, Scene ii in *The Witch* with, “Titty and Tiffin, / Suckin and Pidgen, / Liard and Robin, / White spirits, black spirits, / Grey spirits, red spirits” (I.ii.1-6). Employing a similar structure and word choice at the end of the play makes Hecate’s magic circular here. This is true to belief about witchcraft during the early modern period. Witches and those who feared them both worried about unfinished spells. The spell of the play is complete with this final dance. This spell is also unique because it is one of the only magical examples in *The Witch* that is not quoted from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Unlike the Latin spells and gruesome charms used elsewhere in the play, Hecate’s final spell is composed entirely of theatrical imagination. It contains no *maleficium*. Instead of helping Hecate to prove the strength of her power, the final spell celebrates the vague idea of the witch as an individual and a member of her coven. This spell is meant to leave the audience with the sense that Hecate is a witch rather than the specific information they would need to prove she is one. Though the poetry of the song is subdued, the ingredients in this spell are still gruesome. Each of the assembled witches offers ingredients to the charm along with their power to make it succeed. Stadlin offers “the blood of a bat,” “the juice of a toad,” and “the oil of adder.” Hoppo offers “a libbard’s bain.” Together, their ingredients will make “the younker madder.” The “younker” could be Almachildes, but it could also refer all the way back to the Mayor of Whelphie’s son. In either case, their magic makes young men mad:

ALL	Round, around, around, about, about, All ill come running in, all good keep out.
HECATE	So, so, enough: into the vessel with it. There, 't hath the true perfection: I am so light

At any mischief; there's no villainy

But is a tune, methinks. (V.ii.75-80)

The witches want “All ill” to “come running in,” strengthening their spell with their own vengeful desires. Hecate’s final contribution is a commentary on witchcraft itself: “I am so light / At any mischief; there’s no villainy.” What makes Hecate “light” cannot possibly be the product of “mischief” or “villainy.” Hecate sees her witch’s power as the source of her agency. Power allows her to claim space in a world which revolves around patriarchal systems that seek to limit or eliminate her control over her own body and convictions.

Throughout the play, Hecate demands reverence from those that come asking her for magical assistance. The seriousness of what she offers cannot be understated. When the play ends, however, her joy returns: “Come, my sweet sisters, let the air strike our tune / Whilst we show reverence to yond peeping moon” (V.ii.83-84). Hecate closes the play offering “reverence to yond peeping moon,” reminding the reader that the witch’s power comes from the very nature she claims to control. The witchcraft depicted in *The Witch* begins as grotesque and threatening *maleficium*, with boiled babies and hallucinogenic herbs. It ends quietly, with witches dancing under the moon.



The Witch challenges social norms in ways that *Macbeth* does not, but at the end of both plays patriarchal control wins the day. Throughout *The Witch*, the text draws on references to Scot that detail all of the ways witches can cause harm and take advantage of the people around them. The play challenges Scot’s central argument that witches cannot perform God’s miracles and exploits *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* for dramatic material to prove that Hecate is the powerful witch that she claims to be. There’s no question by the end of the play that Hecate can do the magic required to fly. *Macbeth*, on the other hand, lacks the detail that would make either

Lady Macbeth's or the Weird Sisters' witchcraft convincing. The Weird Sisters act as fates rather than witches. Though they dance around a cauldron and contribute a series of grotesque ingredients to their vessel, their magic is more about creating a suggestion of *maleficium* than it is about true witchcraft. The idea of witchcraft is reflected in the sections of *The Witch* that are inserted into *Macbeth*. The plays do not share Latin spells and boiled babies; instead, they share poetry about women's mischiefs.

Lady Macbeth comes closer to true *maleficium* than the Weird Sisters. By desiring the spirits to bring her husband home so that she can infect him with her evil, she claims power that is beyond what is accessible to her as a wife in a patriarchal system. Lady Macbeth's choice to forsake her social and class status for a witch's incantation is extremely transgressive. Unlike Lady Macbeth, the Weird Sisters and Hecate are already outsiders. Their use of prophecy or magic does not result in the loss of social status. Lady Macbeth pays dearly for desiring power that both outstrips her station and usurps her husband's authority. Once she employs the language of witchcraft, Lady Macbeth is damned.

The resolution at the end of *Macbeth* is uneasy. Lady Macbeth and her husband have died, Scotland is in shambles, and Malcom returns to claim his throne. The ending of *The Witch* is far neater. Lacking the conviction to kill the Duke, Almachildes reveals that the Duke's body has been hidden on stage all along. Similar to romances of the period, here the Duke rises again and reclaims his position. The Duke explains his resurrection as the result of true and everlasting love" "since in honour thou canst justly rise, / Vanish all wrongs, thy former practice dies" (V.iii.125-126). By coming back to life, he corrects the wrong that was so insulting to the Duchess at the beginning of the play that she wished him dead: "What grieved you then shall never more offend you - / Your father's skull with honour we'll inter, / And give the peace due to

the sepulchre” (V.iii.131-133). With the Duke’s pronouncement, the magic that Hecate did for Sebastian, Almachildes, and the Duchess comes to nothing.

At the end of *The Witch*, patriarchal rule reigns supreme for all but one of the characters. The Duchess may be reclaimed by her husband, but Hecate is still free to fulfill her own desires. The portrait of witchcraft in *The Witch* is appreciably different than other witchcraft plays of the period. Rather than respond directly to a pamphlet, as *The Witch of Edmonton* does, *The Witch* mines *The Discovery of Witchcraft* for the details of magic that make Hecate believable. Like *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, King James’s *Daemonology*, and Henry Holland’s *A Treatise Against Witchcraft*, *The Witch* is ultimately a study in the believability of witchcraft and the power of imagination. Hecate is not a curiosity or a comic foil; she is a composite of all of the myths and assumptions that early moderns had about witches and women. The power of her witchcraft is not about flying ointments and wax tablets. Hecate is powerful because she believes in the power of her own imagination. A man’s imagination may make a woman into a witch, but a woman’s imagination gives her the power to fly.

Conclusion

Witches Without a Play: the Pendle Witches and the Legacies of Witchcraft

Unlike other witchcraft trials of the period, the trials of the Pendle Witches in 1612 are not featured on stage. Thomas Potts's *The vvonderfull discouerie of witches in the countie of Lancaster VWith the arraignment and triall of nineteene notorious witches, at the assizes and general gaole deliuerie, holden at the castle of Lancaster; vpon Munday, the seuenteenth of August last, 1612* details the crimes of the Pendle Witches in great detail. Published after the trials concluded in 1613, Potts's treatise details the witch's crimes, confessions, and the evidence given against them by neighbors and those who claim to have been bewitched. Though the narratives provided in *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches* include gruesome details that are not dissimilar to the types of magic depicted in plays like *The Witch*, the only fictional text to use Potts's account was William Henry Ainsworth's 1849 novel, *The Lancashire Witches*.

The trial of the Pendle Witches in 1612 should not be confused with the witchcraft trials in Lancashire that occurred in 1633. *The Late Lancashire Witches* by Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, published in 1634, stages the later trial in a comedic play that captures much of what was reported in court documents. The earlier trials of 1612 include reports of witchcraft that are less fantastical than what is reported during later trials, however. The witchcraft that the Pendle Witches are accused of is grounded in real fears about the power of women to shape or end the lives of those around them. Like the magic that Hecate does in *The Witch*, the trials portrayed in *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches* include spell work that threatens established social norms in a way that poses a real threat. By the time Hewywood and Brome stage *The Late Lancashire Witches* nearly two decades later, witchcraft trials are just begining to decline. The threat of witchcraft was still present, but as society moved toward the execution of Charles I in

1649, the cultural tendency to blame witches for illness and death was less common. Witchcraft myth and belief were still active in society, with the witch hunts lead by Matthew Hopkins occurring in the late 1640s, but fewer and fewer individuals were likely to bring rumors about their neighbors to the attention of the magistrates. Orna Alyagon Darr understands this shift as being the result of a newfound emphasis on “factual proofs of witchcraft” rather than theological or folk belief.²⁷⁵ Even though belief and culture were changing toward the middle of the 17th century, it is strange that Pendle Witches are not included in the dramatic cannon.

There is a clear relationship between the spells depicted in *The Witch* and those shared as evidence in *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*, but Thomas Middleton’s play is not based on Potts’s treatise. *The Witch* uses Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* as its source material. The conversation between the three texts opens up the possibility that Potts’s treatise also used Scot’s text as its source material. Potts would have been aware of Scot’s treatise at the very least and may have permitted *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* to impact how he shapes the narratives in *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*. The relationship between these three texts deserves further study and a continued engagement with how earlier texts impact later depictions of witchcraft.

The magic depicted in *The Witch* is extreme, identifying and explaining in great detail how witches would boil unbaptized children to make their flying ointment. Hecate’s witchcraft is necessarily limited by the theatrical space, whereas the reports included in *The Wonderfull Discoverie* are not. Hecate’s mischief is put to rights at the end of the play, offering a solution to the witchcraft depicted therein. *The Witch* conveniently forgets to blame many of the characters’

²⁷⁵ Orna Alyagon Darr, “Experiments in the Courtroom: Social Dynamics and Spectacles of Proof in Early Modern English Witch Trials,” *Law and Social Inquiry* vol. 39, no. 1 (2014), 163.

transgressions on the witch who provided the spells that were meant to cause impotence and death; all is well, and the witch is contained once again.

The witchcraft depicted on stage in plays like *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Witch* reflects the cultural understanding of witchcraft during the period. The ability for drama to reflect and reinforce culture is tied to the mission of the theater. Peter Brook describes the theater as being “like a magnifying glass, and also like a reducing lens.”²⁷⁶ It simultaneously takes what is happening in culture and magnifies it, taking a closer look, while also reducing society to its constituent parts. Aspects of witchcraft trials and the women who are accused arrive on stage in ways that reflect real anxieties. When the anxieties are too real, however, the theater gets dangerously close to telling the truth of what is being depicted. As a result, the theater and not the truth of the original text becomes the limiting factor. Witchcraft reports that are too frightening or too threatening cannot be dramatized. This may be why *The Witch* has a limited dramatic history and why the threat of the Pendle Witches is not depicted on stage at all.

Following the prefatory material in *The Wonderfull Discoverie* in which Potts claims that what he reports is truth and the faults in the text are those of the printer and not his own, the author begins a series of chapters that include declarations, confessions, evidence, and court records. Combining narratives from different sources gives Potts more authority than he would have otherwise. Goodcole, for example, lacks any outside view or evidence against Elizabeth Sawyer that might have been reported by her victims. He makes a declaration about the truth of his report and shares her “confession,” but that is where his engagement stops. The lack of perspective available in Goodcole’s text makes him more difficult for the reader to believe.

²⁷⁶ Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 104.

There are so many voices contributing to Potts's narrative, however, that the power of his text is multiplied. His story is much more believable as a result.

Potts begins with "A particular Declaration of the most barberous and damnable Practices. Murthers, wicked and diuelish Conspiracies, practized *and executed by the most dangerous and malitious Witch Elizabeth Sowthernes alias Demdike*."²⁷⁷ Unfortunately, Sowthernes died in jail before she could be brought to trial for her crimes. Potts describes Sowthernes as "a very old woman, about the age of Foure-score yeares, and had been a Witch for fiftie yeares. Shee dwelt in the Forrest of *Pendle*, a vaste place, fitte for her profession: What shee committed in her time, no man knowes."²⁷⁸ Based on Potts's description of her and the vague references that he makes to her crimes, Sowthernes is on trial for *who* she is rather than *what* she has done. She is described as, "a generall agent for the Deuill in all these partes: no man escaped her, or her Furies, that euer gaue them any occasion of offence, or denyed them any thing they stood need of."²⁷⁹ When the village loses "Children, Friendes, Goodes, and Cattle," they call for "*Roger Nowell* Esquire...a very religious honest Gentleman, painefull in the seruice of his Countrey."²⁸⁰ Nowell and Sowthernes are presented as opposites. She is an "agent for the Deuill" and he is "a very religious honest Gentleman." Positioning Sowthernes this way at the beginning of the text ensures that the reader will understand her to be a witch.

When Sowthernes begins her confession, she says that she was "coming homeward from begging," when she met the "Deuill in the shape of a Boy, the one halfe of his Coate blacke, and

²⁷⁷ Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Coyntie of Lancaster. With the Arraignement and Triall of Nineteene notorious Witches, at the Assizes and general Gaole deliverie, holden at the Castle of Lancaster, upon Monday, the seventeenth of August last, 1612* (W. Stansby and Iohn Barnes, 1613), Sig. B recto. <https://www.proquest.com/eebo/docview/2240860427/99850200/57E0BBA972D499FPQ/2?accountid=14434&sourcetype=Books>.

²⁷⁸ Potts, Sig. B verso.

²⁷⁹ Potts, Sig. B2 recto.

²⁸⁰ Potts, Sig. B2 recto.

the other browne.”²⁸¹ The Devil continues to visit her without direction or desire before appearing as a brown dog to take her blood. When he comes to her to feed for the first time, Sowthernes falls “almost starke madd for the space of eight weeks.”²⁸² Thus far, Potts has blamed Sowthernes’ monstrous witchcraft on her age, her location, and a bout of madness. The first of the Pendle Witches is, therefore, on trial because of her identity and not her *maleficium*.

Mona Chollet describes the ageism present in witchcraft accusations as having a direct connection to the disgust that the woman’s body inspires: “While older women are indeed feared for their experience, it is also the case that the aging female body inspires genuine revulsion – and this helps lift the lid on the revulsion inspired by the female body at any age.”²⁸³ Older women, she argues, are “absolute objects” of the patriarchal system that values younger women when it values women at all.²⁸⁴ As an old woman who needs to beg to survive, Sowthernes is a woman of little value. It is easy for her neighbors to threaten her with torture and death because her loss will not affect them: “*Baldwyn* sayd to this Examinee...get out of my ground Whores and Witches, I will burne the one of you, and hang the other.”²⁸⁵ The Devil in the shape of a boy, whom Sowthernes calls *Tibb*, urges her to find her revenge on those who ridicule her through the creation of a clay tablet that is “the speediest way to take a mans life away by VVwitchcraft.”²⁸⁶ Though *Tibb* tells Sowthernes that this is a possible way to revenge herself upon *Balwyn*, there is no clue in the declaration as to the success of this spell. It is unclear if Sowthernes took *Tibb*’s suggestion or was successful in killing *Balwyn*. The final paragraph of Sowthernes’ supposed confession is more theoretical than it is confessional. Potts only indicates that the clay tablet will

²⁸¹ Potts, *Sig. B2 verso*.

²⁸² Potts, *Sig. B3 recto*.

²⁸³ Mona Chollet, *In Defense of Witches: The Legacy of the Witch Hunts and Why Women Are Still on Trial*, trans. Sophie R. Lewis (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2022), 174.

²⁸⁴ Chollet, 175.

²⁸⁵ Potts, *Sig. B3 recto*.

²⁸⁶ Potts, *Sig. B3 verso*.

be “therevpon by that meanes, the body shall die” without revealing whether or not Balwyn has died by Sowthernes’ hand.

Among the many confessions, examinations, and records of arraignment in *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, Sowthernes’ is the only declaration made without clear evidence of the witch’s crimes. The text claims that this is her “confession,” but the witch does not appear to confess anything other than seeing Tibb and allowing him to take her blood. The text uses the description of Sowthernes’ witchcraft as its opening salvo for two reasons. The first is that Sowthernes is the archetypal witch: she is old, indigent, and blamed for harm done to those who have turned her away without charity. The second reason relates to her position as an evil influence in her community. Because she dies before being arraigned for her crimes, it is easy to blame Sowthernes for all that happens after she is accused. The confession that directly follows the declaration of Sowthernes’ crimes is that of “Anne Whittle *alias* Chattox...taken 19. Day of May.”²⁸⁷ Whittle has “entered, through the wicked perswasions and counsel of *Elizabeth Southerns*, alias *Demdike*, and was seduced to condescent & agree to become subiect vnto that diuelish abhominable profession of Witchcraft.”²⁸⁸ Sowthernes does not have money or position, but she does have influence over other women. She effectively subverts the influence that the virtuous woman featured in conduct manuals should have over her friends, family, and neighbors. Unlike Juan Luis Vives’ virtuous woman, Sowthernes leads others toward evil. She is older and wiser; along with Tibb, she is able to recruit others to her devilish cause. Like Sowthernes, Whittle has committed an ambiguous crime. She dines with the Devil and accuses others of murder, making her guilty by association.

²⁸⁷ Potts, *Sig. B3+1 recto*.

²⁸⁸ Potts, *Sig. B3+1 recto*.

The Wonderfull Discoverie uses Sowthernes as a scapegoat for the crimes of others. Her position is similar to that of Elizabeth Sawyer when the Witch of Edmonton asks: "...is every devil mine?" (5.2.46).²⁸⁹ Whittle is recruited by Sowthernes, Alizon Deuice is her granddaughter, and each woman in turn blames Sowthernes for a crime or crimes. Whittle lists men that Sowthernes killed, and Deuice blames her grandmother for the death of a child: "a woman Child of the sayd Richard Baldwins was fallen sicke; and as this Examine did then heare, the sayd Child did languish afterwards by the space of a yeare, or thereaboutes, and dyed: And this Examine verily thinketh, that her said Graund-mother did bewitch the sayd Child to death."²⁹⁰ It was well-established during the period that if the mother was a witch, then the daughter would be, too. Deuice, therefore, inadvertently implicates herself along with her grandmother. If the grandmother was guilty of killing children, then all of the women in her family were likely guilty of *maleficium* as well. Witchcraft was seen as an inherited trait, but the threat of witches influencing their daughters was more about power than it was about spells.

Women were expected to teach their daughters how to behave properly. As demonstrated by the conduct manuals and social restrictions of the period, women were expected to carry themselves with chaste dignity, and it fell to mothers to teach their daughters what was and was not appropriate. While a young woman could conceivably learn the art of witchcraft from her mother or grandmother, the threat was not in the spells she would learn, but in the power and agency she would be taught to claim. Simone de Beauvoir describes a woman's power as part of the taboo that she inherits: "...woman is on earth surrounded with taboos like all sacred beings, she is herself taboo; because of the powers she holds, she is looked upon as a magician, a

²⁸⁹ Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Lucy Munro (New York: The Arden Shakespeare, 2021). All references to *The Witch of Edmonton* are to this edition.

²⁹⁰ Potts, *Sig. C verso*.

sorceress.”²⁹¹ De Beauvoir links the woman’s power with the label of “sorceress” because, as she later argues, the woman is separated from reality. The sorceress attempts to remain outside the realm of patriarchal control. Unlike men, who are restricted by the reality they have created, the woman is able to transcend reality: “Man lives in a consistent universe that is a reality conceivable in thought. Woman is at grips with a magical reality that defies thought, and she escapes from it through thoughts without real content. Instead of taking up her existence, she contemplates in the clouds the pure Idea of her destiny...”²⁹² By contemplating “in the clouds the pure Idea of her destiny,” the woman surpasses the man with her capacity for imaginative thinking even though she lacks a grounded rationality that is more trustworthy in a patriarchal context. The knowing woman with her own epistemology operates parallel to a man who is limited by the concrete reality of his thinking. She is limitless but distracted and absent from reality. Her fulfillment of womanhood shapes her into an archetype that resembles an oracle or mystic. The sorceress’s natural otherness separates her from the male astrologer’s need for ritual and artifact. De Beauvoir describes the separation between genders as bound by man’s reality in manifestly different realms.

The desire for a witch to confess is linked to the male need for the witch to make her crimes concrete. Doing so reframes the witch’s crime as something that can be contained, limited, and understood by a society built on patriarchal foundations. The witch’s confession is the method by which male examiners limit and ground women’s thinking. Miranda Fricker describes this as a key aspect of identity power: “...identity power is an integral part of the mechanism of testimonial exchange, because of the need for hearers to use social stereotypes as heuristics in their spontaneous assessments of their interlocutor’s credibility. This use of

²⁹¹ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, trans. H. M. Parshley (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 70.

²⁹² de Beauvoir, 618.

stereotypes may be entirely proper, or it may be misleading, depending on the stereotype.”²⁹³ In the case of witchcraft confessions, the stereotype employed to assess the “interlocutor’s credibility” is “misleading.” I would extend Fricker’s assessment and argue that the use of false stereotypes to reshape women into witches is not only misleading but possibly lethal. It is harmful in the very literal sense, since women were killed for crimes of witchcraft, but it is also dangerous in the sense that women’s knowledge is destroyed along with the witch’s body. The witch is stereotyped as evil, but the witch is also a *knower*. The stereotype of the witch and the use of the archetype of mothers and grandmothers who indoctrinate daughters and granddaughters fails to consider the exchange of knowledge that occurred within these relationships.

The witch’s confession is testimony to her reality. In the case of women like Elizabeth Sawyer, it is a reality through which she must shape a path forward. The power of her self-fashioning reclaims the truth that men create to remake the woman into the witch. Sawyer reframes herself as the subject rather than the object of a new reality. In contrast, Hecate does not need to refashion her reality. She is already in command of her surroundings and has ample practice in using her imagination to engender a new reality. Staged witches like Hecate and Sawyer do not suffer the same injustices forced upon the witches of pamphlets and treatises; their place on stage limits their exposure to the testimonial injustices of confession:

...testimonial injustice – especially when it is systematic – also wrongfully deprives the subject of a certain fundamental sort of respect, and the distinction between a source of information and an informant helps reveal this deprivation as also a form of objectification. The subject is wrongfully excluded from the community of trusted

²⁹³ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power & the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) 17.

informants, and this means that [s]he is unable to be a participant in the sharing of knowledge (except in so far as [s]he might be made use of as an object of knowledge through others using [her] as a source of information).²⁹⁴

The witch's confession is *always* reported by a man. His claims the truth of her evil, her physical deformity, and his own godliness. In doing so, he denies the woman "of a certain fundamental sort of respect." Because the witch is considered a "source of information" in only the vaguest sense, the male "informant" objectifies the witch through his reporting of her supposed confession. Denied her humanity, the witch is fully and only an object of the male author's reporting. She resists his power through her own self-fashioning, but her reach is limited by the concrete reality he has created. The male author erases the woman in all but name. She is his creation entirely.



The story of witchcraft does not begin or end with the trials and tests of the early modern period. To this day, women's narratives are subjected to testimonial and hermeneutical injustices which either devalue or destroy female epistemologies. Though society claims to have progressed in meaningful ways, no longer burning women at the stake for imagined crimes, the structures established during and through the witchcraft trials of the 16th and 17th centuries laid the foundation for an understanding of women's knowledge that continues to marginalize and undervalue systems of thought that are created outside of the patriarchal establishment. The study of early modern witchcraft trials can offer a new way to understand and dismantle the testimonial injustice that women experience in the 21st century.

²⁹⁴ Fricker, 132.

Simone de Beauvoir's claim that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman," neglects the constancy that is inherent in the act of becoming.²⁹⁵ As the objectified other, women must *become* what they are every day. In some cases, the act of becoming is expressed as reactionary self-fashioning. Like Elizabeth Sawyer, a woman might make herself into what is feared because doing so will grant her the subversive power to reshape reality. A woman can also become the embodiment of Hecate, entirely separate from patriarchal systems that limit the power of her imagination. In either case, the woman's act of becoming relies on the force of her belief. Writing in 2021, Manon Garcia identifies women's essential inferiority as a reflection of their socially constructed limitations: "...women are viewed as incapable of being free in the way that men are, or...such a freedom is seen as a potential danger, [so] that their submission is good."²⁹⁶ The witch's crime is her claim to the same freedom that men enjoy. When a woman makes herself in her own image rather than continuing to be subjugated by the patriarchal system which attempts to tame her, she becomes the witch.

²⁹⁵ de Beauvoir, 267.

²⁹⁶ Manon Garcia, *We Are Not Born Submissive* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2021), 3.

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