SERVANTS OF GOD AND SLAVES OF THE DEVIL?: WITCHCRAFT, TYRANNY, AND SKEPTICISM ON THE EARLY MODERN STAGE

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kma'ki, the
Ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
We are all treaty people.

DEDICATION PAGE

This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Thomas Kubik, the calm in my tempests.

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ABSTRACT

When King James I ascended the English throne in 1603, his book *Daemonologie*, a treatise on witchcraft originally published in 1597, was reprinted in London, and James's fascination for witchcraft was soon widely known. In 1606, *Macbeth* was performed, and that play that included witchcraft was soon to be followed by several other witchcraft plays. Some scholars have interpreted this Jacobean trend as a compliment to the king's interests (Paul, Kearnan). However, although these plays draw on James's demonological interests, they do not use the topic of witchcraft to flatter his authority. Rather, they use witch characters to expose corruption in royal courts and community leaders alike, representing tyranny and not witchcraft as the true threat to a nation.

In early modern literature, the king and the witch are often represented as opposites. According to *Newes from Scotland*, "the King is the child & servant of God, and [the witches] but servants to the devil" (D3r). This binary often works to flatter the monarch; Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, for example, uses witches as a foil to royalty. However, I argue that the plays I discuss turn the blame on rulers and power structures, breaking down the established binary between the witch and the godly ruler, or the witch and the godly community. Dismantling the binary from both ends, these plays build on contemporary skepticism about witchcraft and witch trials to represent rulers as tyrants and communities as corrupt. Removing the opposition between witch and legitimate ruler, they portray the authorities as inept and ineffective (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*), illegitimate and tyrannical (*Macbeth*), morally bankrupt (*The Witch*), paranoid and vacillating (*The Tempest*), or corrupt (*The Witch of Edmonton*). By featuring only witches and corrupt leaders, without a just ruler to represent a clear binary opposite, these plays then contrast corrupt leadership with witchcraft to demonstrate that tyranny is the greater of the two evils. Using witchcraft to expose the corruption of both royal and community leadership, these plays critique power structures rather than legitimizing them.

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1 Corinthians 10:31 SDG

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: AUTHORITY AND THE WITCH IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

In 1590, King James VI of Scotland, destined to be James I of England in thirteen years, was actively involved in questioning and sentencing the North Berwick witches who were accused of raising a storm to sink the king's ship as it sailed from Denmark to Scotland with his new bride. In 1597, seven years after the trial, James published *Daemonologie*, his own theological text on witchcraft. When James became king of England in 1603, *Daemonologie* was reprinted in London, along with a copy of *Newes from Scotland*, the pamphlet detailing the North Berwick trials—a case study to support James's theological text. The king's fascination for witchcraft was well known, and in 1606, *Macbeth*, a play that included three witch characters who draw inspiration from the North Berwick trials and stage several of James's expressed fears from *Daemonologie*, was performed. *Macbeth* was likely performed before a royal audience at "Hampton Court, on August 7, 1606, at the end of the visit of the royal brother-in-law, King Christian of Denmark" (Kernan 72). After *Macbeth*, witch characters began to feature in multiple plays and masques, including John Marston's *Sophonisba* (1606), Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens* (1609), Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611), Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* (1616), and William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* (1623), as well as a restaged and adapted *Macbeth* (1616).

Many scholars have interpreted this minor trend in early modern theatre as a tribute to the king's interests. For example, in 1950, Henry Paul argued that *Macbeth* "was a royal play specially written for performance before King James. [T]hat the entire play is a royal play for court performance as a compliment to the king…should now be

stated as a fact; and it is a fact of the utmost importance to the proper understanding of the play…" (1). Alvin Kernan, following Paul in 1995, went as far as to argue that *Macbeth*'s witches are "exactly like those James had described in *Daemonologie*" (86). However, while *Macbeth* and other Jacobean witchcraft plays may have tailored their theatrical witches to the demonological beliefs of the monarch to some extent, the cross-class elements that comprise many of the witch characters in this study, from the weird sisters and Middleton's Hecate to *The Tempest*'s Sycorax, demonstrate that these characters are not solely or even primarily aimed at the concerns of the new monarch. In 2001, historian James Sharpe, following Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas, identified two separate sets of fears about witchcraft in the court and the village, explaining, "most English monarchs…found themselves confronted with what might be termed treason-cum-sorcery plots, in which those planning the downfall of the monarch sought magical assistance[.] On a less exalted social level…accusations [were] against harmful witches…" (*Witchcraft in Early Modern England* 15). Villagers typically accused their neighbours of maleficium—killing or harming cattle, damaging crops, spoiling produce, or creating other similar tangible domestic or agricultural havoc. The king and other demonologists, on the other hand, were preoccupied primarily with the demonic pact and magic like necromancy or fortune-telling that went along with it. In 1982, Peter Stallybrass applied Macfarlane and Thomas's conceptual divide between these two concerns to *Macbeth*, noting that the play presents "an ambiguity in the presentation of the Witches. On the one hand, they have features typical of the English village 'witch'…But, on the other hand, they are mysterious…and they prophesy the future" (30). Stallybrass uses this observation to argue that the weird sisters' "ambiguity"

"establishes a double perspective on evil" (30), reflecting both Macbeth's degradation as he descends into evil and his grasping ambition as he attempts to seize power. In 1996 Diane Purkiss responded to Stallybrass, arguing that he "uncritically reflects the Jacobean dramatists' scepticism about 'popular' superstition as nothing but a set of stories with commercial value" (*History* 208). Purkiss complicates Stallybrass's concept of ambiguity, arguing that rather than creating a "double perspective on evil," the witches "can stand for nothing concrete, but must evoke the disorder to the play's notion of order by indeterminacy. Ironically, this failure of interpretation becomes an interpretation: indeterminacy, and hence chaos, *is* the witches' meaning" (211). Purkiss further argues that this ambiguity works to flatter James's discernment as a wise judge and dominant spectator (211).

Even though Purkiss acknowledges the variety of components that make up *Macbeth*'s witches, complicating Kernan's initial claim that the stage witches are "exactly" like those described in *Daemonologie,* she nevertheless brings the conversation full circle—back to flattery of the king. In Purkiss's argument, this flattery is due to the play's ambiguity and the power it gives to James as spectator and judge, while Paul and Kernan believe that the play flatters the king by repeating his theological talking points. Both views, however, ultimately return to early modern stage witches as a device for the praise of the monarch. Though Purkiss's study is nearly thirty years old, this basic concept of *Macbeth* and many of the other Jacobean witchcraft plays that it inspires as designed for the praise of the monarch has not disappeared. In 2013, Luca Baratta echoed Kernan's phrase from 1995, claiming, "Shakespeare's witches…are exactly like those described in the *Daemonologie*" (199). Even scholars like Purkiss and Ani Kojoyan, who

reference the ambiguity of the witches, ultimately claim that even this ambiguity could be a compliment to James because of his "gradual increasing skeptical view towards the subject" (Kojoyan 171). This dissertation argues the opposite—that the witch characters in early modern plays, rather than praising the monarch by appealing to his interests, his discernment as a judge, or his growing skepticism, instead use witches to critique both royal and local rulership. These plays subtly shift the responsibility for widespread corruption to rulers and power structures by breaking down an established binary between the witch and the godly ruler, or the witch and the godly community, first by representing rulers as tyrants and communities as corrupt, and second by building on contemporary skepticism about witchcraft and witch trials. By deconstructing this binary, these plays, rather than condemning isolated and ostracized individuals, instead expose the corrupt inner workings of community governance, royal courts, and even foundational theories of rulership.

In much early modern literature, the king and the witch are represented as opposites: the witch becomes an inversion of legitimate godly rule. For example, *Newes from Scotland* explains that, "the King is the child & seruant of God, and [the witches] but seruants to the deuil, hee is the Lords annointed, and they but vesselles of Gods wrath: he is a true Christian, and trusteth in God, they worse than Infidels, for they onely trust in the deuill, who daily serue them, till he haue brought them to vtter destruction" (D3r). *Newes* paints James and the witches as absolutely opposed extremes, and James's own theology makes this binary clear. For example, in *Daemonologie* he describes witches in the first sentence as "these detestable slaues of the devil" (xix). In *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, by contrast, he writes, "Kings are called gods by the prophetical

King David because they sit upon God his [*sic*] throne in the earth and have the count of their administration to give unto him… 'to be the minister of God for the weal of them that do well and, as the minister of God, to take vengeance upon them that do evil'" (54-55). Similarly, in a speech to parliament in 1610, James stated that, "The State of Monarchie…[is] the supremist thing upon earth. For Kings are not onely God's Lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himselfe they are called Gods" (qtd in Harris 13). Like *Newes from Scotland*, James positions witches as the direct opposite of the king: he is God's representative on earth while they are slaves of the devil.

Stuart Clark confirms that early modern witchcraft is often conceived of as inversion.[1] Speaking of court masques in which that inversion was especially evident, he writes, "The elaboration of an upside-down world was in fact complete, pointing up with the fullest possible effect a conception of kingship as the only power capable of setting it to rights" (*Thinking with Demons* 77). This binary worked to highlight the necessity of kingship—an institution in which God's representative on earth could combat the servants of the devil; thus "[w]riting about [witches] could be defended as the appreciation of the highest virtues by the simultaneous exploration of the filthiest vices" (80). These starkly opposed extremes helped the king construct his own right to rule as an agent of God on earth.

This concept of a binary between witches and godly rulers may also be one reason for the fact that a high percentage of accused witches were women. Much of the

[1] The Oxford English Dictionary dates the term "inversion" to the mid 1500s and defines it as "n. The action or fact of reversing or transposing in direction, order, relationship, or effect; an instance of reversal or transposition" (*OED* inversion, n.).

scholarship on Jacobean witchcraft plays since the early 2000s has focused on the female witch as anti-mother (Levin, Spoto), as the embodiment of male fears about female power (Karpinska, Levin, Dunn-Hensley), or as the persona by which disenfranchised women gained autonomy (Purkiss). My thesis will challenge these understandings of early modern dramatic representations of witchcraft as primarily representative of misogyny or resistance to misogyny and argue that the frequent fact of the witch's female gender fits into the binary opposition between witch and monarch that ultimately breaks down and works to critique political leadership.

In his explanation of how witchcraft operates through inversion, Clark addresses the question of why so many accused witches (though not all) were women. He writes,

> First, it was assumed… that women were by nature weaker than men in respect to fundamental intellectual and psychological qualities, and, hence, had what one author called a 'greater facility to fall'…At the same time, their 'inordinate affections and passions' made them resentful of authority and difficult to discipline, so that they were always a potential threat to God's order. (*Thinking with Demons* 112-113)

In Clark's first step, the opposition male and female characteristics is one of the reasons for the higher numbers of women accused of witchcraft. Clark continues to explain that it was a logical progression to move from women as intellectually and spiritually weaker than men to the idea that "women were the devil's preferred target" (113). Clark's reasoning is clearly supported by early modern demonological texts like Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger's *The Malleus Maleficarum*, in which they write, "[women] are more credulous [than men]; and since the chief aim of the devil is to corrupt faith, therefore he

rather attacks them" (43). In *Daemonologie,* James I also writes, "as [the female] 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 homlier with that sex sensine" (30). It is these oppositions between the characteristics of men and women that, according to many early modern writers, make women more likely than men to become witches.

Clark continues, "the third element in the argument was to explain any other specific features of the crime in terms of characteristically feminine failings and handicaps" (*Thinking with Demons* 113). Again, Kramar and Sprenger elaborate at length, accusing women in particular of having "slippery tongues" (44) and so educating other women to be witches, of being "feebler in mind and body" (44), of being "more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations" (44), of being "quicker to waver in her faith, and consequently quicker to abjure the faith, which is the root of witchcraft" (44), and finally of having "woeful rivalry" (45) with others. Clark acknowledges that "The association of witchcraft with women was, it seems, built on entirely unoriginal foundations…It incorporated tradition Aristotelian notions regarding the innate imperfections of women as 'deformed' males, and the even more deeply entrenched Christian hostility towards women as the originators of sin" (*Thinking with Demons* 114). However, he goes on to claim that these stereotypes were not used simply to demean women (115) and that "on the whole…the literature of witchcraft lacks any sustained concern for the gender issue" (116). While witchcraft may not have been used to demean women in general, the idea that many witches were women did fit into the general stereotypes shared across both categories—women were witches because they

were different from men in fundamental, binary ways. The opposition between men and women made women more likely than men to be witches, who, in turn, become the opposite of the godly ruler.

The opposition between women and men is expanded in the concept of female witches as the antithesis, and the political and spiritual enemy, of the monarch. This antithesis also carried over into political legislation. Marion Gibson points out that when Parliament passed *An Act against Conjuration, Witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked Spirits* in 1604, the act "changed the definition of witchcraft substantially… It...added provision against the keeping of evil spirits, as opposed to merely conjuring them and the use of dead bodies in magic. Maleficium was no longer the only concern" (*Witchcraft and Society* 5). This distinction in the 1604 act between diabolic (or demonic pact) witchcraft and malefic witchcraft (causing harm or injury to people, animals, or goods) reflected James's own beliefs in *Daemonologie*, where he writes, "There are principallie two sortes, where-vnto all the partes of that vnhappie arte are redacted; whereof the one is called *Magie* or *Necromancie*, the other *Sorcerie* or *Witch-craft*" (5). Whereas Elizabeth's law had dealt primarily with maleficium, or magical harm to neighbours (Gibson, *Witchcraft and Society*, 5), James's new law emphasized the more nefarious diabolic pact, in which a person was supposed to become the slave of the devil and the opposite of the good, Christian ruler. The 1604 law strictly forbade anyone to "consult covenant with entertaine employ feede or rewarde any evill and wicked Spirit to or for any intent or purpose" (6), acts that were directly tied to the demonic pact. In *Daemonologie*, James explains, "[witches] may performe such seruices of their false Master, as he employes them in, the deuill as Gods Ape, counterfeites in his seruantes this

seruice & forme of adoration, that God prescrived and made his seruantes practise" (25). He goes on to explain that witches, bound to their master, the devil, through the diabolic pact, routinely invert Christian ceremonies and sacraments in their service to the devil. The concept of the witch as a servant of the devil and an inversion of the ruler, the true servant of God, therefore, is clear in records of trials, in James's own demonology, and in the 1604 legislation; this binary was well-known.

The concept of opposition or inversion is also a central element in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, a work written for performance at court, designed specifically to flatter the Jacobean monarch and his queen. In his opening note to *Masque of Queens*, Jonson explains that the visual antithesis was deliberate, writing, "Her majesty…had commanded me to think on some dance or show that might precede hers, and have the place of a foil or false masque…I…therefore now devised that twelve women in the habit of hags, or witches, sustaining the persons of Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity etc., the *opposites* to Good Fame, should fill that part" (305, emphasis mine). Jonson's witches, named for the opposites to Good Fame, were meant to counter the entrance of the queens and make the ladies of the court seem even more beautiful and virtuous by contrast. In his introduction to *Masque of Queens*, David Lindley applies Clark's articulation of inversion to the masque, writing,

> It is…vital to recognize the symbolic space the witches are made to occupy in the masque. As Stuart Clark has argued, the meaning of witchcraft is 'located not positively in the actions of witches but negatively and contrastively in relation to the meanings of *other* actions…Witchcraft was construed dialectically in terms of what it was

not; what was significant about it was not its substance but the system of oppositions that it established and fulfilled.' ("Introduction," 285)

Jonson's masque praised the court by contrasting it with, ostensibly, its most extreme opposite. Witches could, by their overt corruption and connection to the devil, be used to constitute a monarch's right to rule—both by demonstrating the necessity of godly authority, and by making the monarch appear more righteous by contrasting him with the servants of the devil.

1.1 AUTHORITY AND INVERSION

Although Jacobean writers, including James himself, often conceived of witches as the servants of the devil and the king as the servant of God, this binary was troubled by the concept of tyranny. Who would be God's servant on earth to combat the forces of the devil if the king was himself wicked? This study brings together insights from scholarship on witchcraft (Clark) and on the early modern political concept of tyranny (Bushnell) to reveal previously under-examined connections between the two. In early modern England, both witchcraft and tyranny function as binary opposites of godly rulership. When plays remove the component of godly rulership, leaving only witches and tyrants, the startling lack of contrast between rulers and servants of the devil exposes the rulers as corrupt tyrants and servants of the devil themselves.

Although King James claims that kings were seated upon God's throne on earth, he acknowledges the reality of tyranny. However, he does so primarily to defend the king against rebellion, no matter how wicked the king might be. The Oxford English Dictionary, tracing the term "tyrant" to the 1290s, defines it as "A king or ruler who exercises his or her power in an oppressive, unjust, or cruel manner" (*OED* tyrant, n. 3).

James compares the king to the head of a body and explains that, while a corrupted body part might be cut away for the good of the rest of the body, the head—no matter how corrupted—can never be removed lest the whole body perish (*The True Law of Free Monarchies* 74-5). Similarly, he describes ruler and subject as father and child, imploring, "consider, I pray you, what duty his children owe to him and whether upon any pretext whatsoever it will not be thought monstrous and unnatural to his sons to rise up against him… Yea, suppose the father were furiously following his sons with a drawn sword, is it lawful for them to turn and strike again or make any resistance but by flight?" (74) Though James does not exactly defend tyranny, he, unsurprisingly, makes no allowances for resistance from the people, even when their lives are in danger from the monarch, still representing the monarch as God's representative on earth and the natural ruler, regardless of how tyrannical he may become. James is, of course, deeply invested in protecting the monarch—no matter how corrupt he may be—against uprising. Beyond this practicality, however, he must protect the binary that places the monarch—no matter his moral condition—as the servant of God to maintain the ruler's alignment with God and rebellion's alignment with the devil. For James, this structure must be natural and innate so that nothing can justify its destruction or undermine the king's inherent and God-given power.

However, while James's writings on rulership insist on the unchanging status of the monarch despite his behaviour, the widespread early modern view was that the tyrant was the inverse of the good ruler. Like Clark, Rebecca Bushnell explains, "The tyrant…draws to himself everything that does not fit quite properly into the Western tradition of rationality" (9). She elaborates, "…[the] strategy of erecting antitheses

between the king's and the tyrant's moral qualities…is common to all sixteenth-century writers on tyranny…a king might easily become a tyrant, when he 'declyneth from his dewty.' Once he does so...the moral opposition is absolute, because morally and politically the tyrant must be everything the king is *not*" (Bushnell 47-9).

Despite James's insistence that the people owe a duty to the ruler regardless of his behaviour since he is God's vice regent on earth, contemporary political theory constructed the tyrant as the antithesis of the just ruler—a dangerous concept to a king paranoid about rebellion. In fact, this concept did help plant the seeds of resistance that would eventually develop into the English Civil War and the beheading of Charles I in 1649. While James argued that no behaviour on the part of the king was justification for his subjects to rise against him, Howard Nenner points out that several influential scholars, including Thomas Bilson, the bishop of Winchester and George Buchanan, James's former tutor, argued that a breach of trust on the part of the monarch might be justification for resistance on the part of the people. For example, Nenner points out that, "Eighteen years before James ascended the English throne, Bilson had argued that it was not to be counted rebellion to resist a prince who had disregarded the people's 'ancient and accustomed liberty, regiment, and laws' and thereby moved the commonwealth toward tyranny" (862). Similarly, Buchanan argued that the people no longer owe loyalty to the king if kings will not "administer the law with fairness and justice" because the rulers will have broken the "mutual contract between king and the people" (qtd. in Nenner 863). Buchanan even stated that subjects "owed it rebellion to resist a king that governed by law; and to resist such an one they justly esteemed no rebellion, but a necessary defense' (869). Nenner traces the trajectory of these theories of resistance to

the beheading of Charles I in 1649 and the deposition of James II in 1689. He argues, "The necessary link between 1649 and 1689 was the assertion that a king who had betrayed his trust of government had by his own actions abrogated his right to the allegiance of his people. He did not have to be deposed; he had *unkinged* himself" (869, emphasis mine). The concept of the tyrant as the antithesis to the ruler could (and, in part, did) lead to genuine political resistance against monarchs.

Bushnell's explanation of the antithesis between legitimate ruler and tyrant is curiously similar to Clark's concept of witchcraft as inversion. These two sets of binaries present an unsettling concept—tyranny, like witchcraft, is directly opposed to just rulership. If both tyranny and witchcraft occupy the other side of the binary from righteous rule, not only do the two share similarities, but tyranny often becomes a more realistic possibility and a greater danger than witchcraft since tyranny could wreak havoc on an entire nation while witchcraft was often localized, domestic, or even fictionalized in court accusations. The similarities between the two become startlingly evident in a comparison of two different early modern texts that both represent this antithesis clearly, moving back and forth between a series of opposites. Clark cites Richard Bernard, an early modern English preacher who "tried to make witchcraft intelligible in tabular form by presenting his readers with matching lists of, first, 'What the Lord doth', and, then, 'What Satan doth', facing one another as antitheses across the open pages of his book. Each pair of items, positive and negative, was to be read in numerical sequence…" (*Thinking with Demons* 83). For example, the list begins with, "The Lord hath his set Assemblies for his servants to meet together / So the Divell hath his set meetings for his Magicians and Witches to come together," and ends with "The Lord hath promised

earthly blessings, to stirre up people to serve him / So Satan is large in his promises to such as will serve him" (qtd. in Clark 83). Though these binaries are syntactic parallels, Clark explains that this listing demonstrates "religious orthodoxies in parodic disguise" (83)—for example, a meeting of witches is the inverse of an assembly of the servants of God, even though both are examples of meetings. Just as Clark references this list of binaries, Bushnell cites a list of opposites from La Primaudaye's *French Academie*, this time dealing with legitimate rulers as opposed to tyrants: "And as a good king conformeth himself to the lawes of God and nature, so a tyrant treadeth them underfoot…the one taketh revenge of publike injuries, and pardoneth his owne, the other cruelly revengeth injuries done to himself, and forgiveth those that are offered to others: the one spareth the honor of chaste women, the other triumpheth in their shame…" (qtd. in Bushnell 48). These two different sources employ an identical strategy, marking two distinct sets of opposites: what the Lord doth and what Satan doth; the ruler is opposed to the witch just as the behaviour of a just ruler is opposed to the abuses of a tyrant. This is also the same rhetorical strategy that the writer of *Newes from Scotland* uses when he says, "the King is the child & seruant of God, and [the witches] but seruants to the deuil, hee is the Lords annointed, and they but vesselles of Gods wrath: he is a true Christian, and trusteth in God, they worse than Infidels, for they onely trust in the deuill…" (D3r). Similarly, just as witches' (usually) female gender factors into the opposition between the witch and the godly ruler in Jacobean England, the tyrant, as the opposite of the godly ruler, was often feminized. Bushnell explains, "In Greek literature, antitheatricalism…forges a link between tyranny and femininity, a link reinforced by the cultural association between femininity and the desire for pleasure. The marks of the

feminine in Greek culture—irrationality, appetite, and the power of mimesis—are also the tyrant's characteristics" (20). This association between tyranny and effeminacy extended into the early modern period; Bushnell claims that "Sixteenth-century political writers, whether defending or opposing kings, struggled with defining the difference between king and tyrant in terms of moral character. In this definition, the tyrant's portrait adapted and amplified the elements of the classical tyrant, including…effeminacy" (38). Early modern conceptions of both tyrants and witches as the binary opposite of the just ruler use effeminacy to reinforce that binary.

Early modern texts mark both tyrants and witches as the antithesis of the Christian ruler; however, these two sets of binaries become complicated when upright and legitimate rulers are scarce. For example, if witches are the subject of a tyrannical ruler, no just ruler exists to counteract either of these evils. In this case, the just ruler, the antithesis to both the corrupt ruler and the servants of the devil, is absent, leaving only a corrupt ruler and corrupt servants whose different evils offer an implicit contrast to one another.

My dissertation examines corrupt rulership and witchcraft in three plays in which the antithesis that lends legitimacy to the ruler has ceased to function. In these plays the witch, rather than praising the court or monarch through a contrast that elevates virtue as in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, instead works to expose the monarch as a tyrant. When plays present only a witch and a tyrant with no option for a righteous ruler, they demonstrate that tyranny is more dangerous than witchcraft. The opposition that these plays create between two evils demonstrates that the tyrannical king is the greater evil of the two because of his corruption of authority. Bushnell explains that "[t]he tyrant figures

a kind of improper authority that makes authority itself problematic, at the same time that the tyrant is destroyed to reestablish legitimate sovereignty. The very existence of tyrants, after all, was the main sticking point for those who enjoined complete obedience to princes" (5). The potential of any ruler to become a tyrant—the inverse of their position as God's regent on earth—threatened the entire concept of kingship as an inherent good and destabilized the binary between the servants of God and the servants of the devil. It was, after all, theologically impossible for a ruler to be without fault, and even the conceptual binary between an earthly king and a servant of the devil was imperfect since no earthly ruler could embody godly perfection.

Just as the witch could be the inverse of the just ruler, the witch also figured as the inverse of the moral society. Pamphlets and trial documents often revel in prurient details of witchcraft cases, but only to restore order by the end of the narrative, often leaving the reader with a moral lesson and separating the behaviour of the corrupt witch or witches from the broader Christian society. For example, Henry Goodcole's "The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch" ends with a moral lesson for the reader:

> Deare Christians...Stand on your guard and watch with sobrietie to resist him, the Divell your adversary, who waiteth on you continually, to subvert you, that so you, that doe destest her abhominable wordes, and wayes, may never taste of the cup nor wages of shame and destruction, of which she did in this life: from which and from whose power, Lord Jesus save, and defend thy little flocke. (315)

This conclusion warns against the dangers of becoming like Elizabeth Sawyer, but it also makes an important distinction between the accused witch, who had been deceived by the

devil, and average readers, who can position themselves against her folly. Krisda Chaemsaithong argues, "With the second-person form, the pamphleteers position the readers as interlocutors, including them as participants in the discourse...in conjunction with the modal 'must' indicating obligation, the pamphleteer personally and directly addresses the reader using the second-person pronoun, while using 'they' to represent those involved in witchcraft" (Chaemsaithong 173-4). By associating the readers with the pamphlet's own points of view, pamphleteers like Henry Goodcole linguistically created an ingroup and an outgroup: the accused witch or witches are opposed to the general society, composed of law-abiding subjects maintaining the moral status quo. Chaemsaithong continues, "These pamphlets necessarily persuaded the reader to choose a particular view that they endorsed as the 'right' one" (Chaemsaithong 169). Similarly, Clark explains, "Witches were sometimes said to want the actual overthrow of godly princes but...[i]nstead, there were acts of *maleficium* that brought disorder to the commonwealth or threatened it symbolically. Thus it was widely accepted that witches could destroy marital hierarchy by sowing dissension in families" (*Thinking with Demons* 88). Trial narratives create a binary between the witch and the community from which she must be ostracized, lest she disrupt the order that is necessary to the smooth running of the community.

However, while pamphlets set up society in opposition to the witch, witchcraft plays set in villages instead do the opposite, positioning the community as the force responsible for the creation of the witch. While these plays stage community leaders rather than monarchs, they follow the same pattern as the plays that deal with royalty by casting the primary blame on the corrupt community and its leadership rather than using

the witch as a foil for an orderly society. The witch exposes the community, rather than legitimizing it.

1.2 EARLY MODERN SKEPTICISM IN THE COURTROOM

All the plays in this study trouble the binary between witches and either the king or the community not only by presenting kings as tyrants and the community as corrupt, but also by portraying contemporary skepticism about witchcraft. A witch who is a thoroughly corrupt agent of the devil may work to make a just ruler seem especially upright by contrast, but a tyrant contrasted with a witch who may not even be a genuine witch makes the ruler seem like the only legitimate threat and the witch seem like an obvious scapegoat for the transgressions of the true oppressor. While a range of early modern attitudes toward witchcraft existed, contemporary records indicate widespread skepticism about individual cases. As with any other crime, a fixed belief in witchcraft as demonic contagion did not mean that the believer assumed that the accused was guilty at every trial or discarded the possibility of false accusation, fraud, and human error. A close examination of several English witchcraft acquittals reveals not dismissal of witchcraft in general, but a desire for more and better evidence in order to convict the accused. Although not many openly rejected the concept of witchcraft entirely, the element of doubt worked to break down the binary between king and witch.

Historians suggest that the rate of witchcraft convictions slowed in early modern Stuart England, a fact which might seem surprising in the context of James's ascension to the English throne. Brian Levack notes that, "In 1602, a record number of [witch] executions occurred in the county of Essex, and there were signs that the trend would continue" ("Possession" 1616). The following year, James I became King of England, not

long after sentencing a large number of people for witchcraft in Scotland and writing a demonological treatise, and in 1604, Parliament passed the new witchcraft act, which "extended the scope of the crime…and established stricter penalties for those convicted" (1617). Levack reasons that, "With a demonologist like James on the throne and with a new statute… we would expect that a person tried for witchcraft in 1604 or shortly thereafter would incur the full wrath of state power. Everything would suggest that we would find the government using the system to root out witches and prosecute them to the full extent of the law" (1617). However, Levack goes on to explain that while we would *expect* to find the government actively prosecuting witches, "the government of James I surprisingly used its secular judicial power for very different purposes" (1618). James Sharpe agrees with Levack, noting that "the evidence of the Home Circuit demonstrates two main features in the pattern of prosecution. The first is that prosecution was at its peak in the South-East during the reign of Elizabeth. Despite the 1604 statute and James I's earlier interest in witchcraft, the tradition that his accession to the throne led to an upsurge in prosecutions is clearly groundless" (*Instruments of Darkness* 108-110).

While it was impossible for the influence of the king's studies in demonology to not be felt in the courtroom, the percentage of acquittals remained high during James's reign, rather than dropping. In spite of a context that would seem to foreshadow a sharp rise in witchcraft convictions, Malcolm Gaskill estimated in 2008 that, "Between 1608 and 1617 thirty-six suspected witches were arraigned on the Home Circuit, a figure comparable to the preceding decade; and yet in between the conviction rate (which had soared in the 1590s) fell from 41 per cent to 17 per cent" ("Witchcraft and Evidence" 42). While

numbers are always difficult to establish, Gaskill's research seems to indicate that skepticism about claims of witchcraft was likely more widespread than some scholars seem to believe, and that this skepticism had a significant impact on acquittal rates. Levack adds that, "An accused witch had a better chance of securing an acquittal in England than in any other country in western Europe, with the possible exception of the Netherlands and Finland. In the early seventeenth century, more than fifty percent of all English witchcraft trials ended in acquittals" ("Possession" 1624). This statistic suggests that subjects, judges, and James himself were not simply credulous and willing to jump to executions, and that James's book and new statute also did not lead to a sudden boom in witchcraft executions. Whatever the exact numbers, it is clear that after 1608 there was a marked drop in conviction rates, despite the king's apparent preoccupation with witchcraft and despite a new and slightly harsher witchcraft statute. These falling conviction rates may demonstrate the rise and influence of skeptical thought and individual conscience, especially in the courtroom.

Early modern trials demonstrate widespread skepticism about witchcraft, showing that while oppositions between witches and monarchs may have served well as court flattery, wider audiences may not have been as quick to assume this binary, especially if they held reservations about the validity of real cases of women accused of witchcraft. Levack argues that one of the key reasons that conviction rates for witchcraft began to drop all over Europe was that there was a "growing awareness by those persons who controlled the judicial machinery that many witches were being convicted and executed for crimes they had not committed… These critiques led…to the formulation and implementation of stricter procedural roles for the conduct of witchcraft trials,

including…the application of more demanding standards of evidence" ("Decline" 379). This general trend seems to have been the case in England as well as on the continent. Lorna Hutson emphasises the seventeenth century jury's "emergent evidential role" (76), explaining, "witnesses are…brought on to give testimony before a jury who no longer swears for or against the character of the defendant, but who now listens to competing narratives of the facts and decides, on the strength of their probability, as to the defendant's guilt or innocence" (45). Judicial processes that emphasized the role of individual conscience and discernment in weighing the evidence presented in court may have been at least partially responsible for high acquittal rates because of the pressure on ordinary juries. Hutson explains that seventeenth century English courts gradually placed more responsibility on juries to interpret evidence from witnesses:

> In 1607, James VI and I signed a proclamation which declared that the law of the realm placed such confidence in jurors 'as it doeth not absolutely tye them to the evidences and proofes produced, but that it leaveth both to the Juries consciences and understanding'. Here the transitional quality of the jury's role is clearly registered: it may, in its self-informing capacity, be responsible for 'supplie of Testimonie', but it may also evaluate 'the evidence and proofs produced'. (76)

Juries' "emergent evidential role" (76) seems to have been partly responsible for low conviction rates. Gaskill makes this connection directly, stating that "In an overwhelming number of cases…judges and juries were unconvinced…The concept of witchcraft was not on trial: suspected witches were. Nevertheless, outside the courtroom a range of intellectual positions was…plainly displayed" ("Witchcraft and Evidence" 40-1).

Reluctant juries appear to be one example of a larger trend of widespread skepticism about individual witchcraft cases.

This "range of intellectual positions" (40-1) was due in part to "discontent with the Church's jurisdiction on the eve of the English reformation that offered the opportunity for a radical rethinking of the place of conscience in the common law" (Hutson 47). This emphasis on conscience necessarily led to the demand for a higher standard of evidence as jury members' consciences were easily troubled by the possibility of convicting someone wrongfully. It became safer to acquit someone on the grounds of insubstantial evidence than to risk being the cause of their unnecessary execution. This increased burden on the individual conscience and widespread desire for irrefutable evidence does not mean that England had widely rejected belief in witchcraft, but rather that there was a growing awareness of the possibility of fraud, false accusation, and wrongful conviction, and that convicting a person wrongfully and without sufficient proof would ultimately make the jury and not the convicted truly guilty.

In addition to (albeit fragmented and incomplete) statistics that suggest no dramatic rise in witchcraft prosecutions during the reign of James I (Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness* 108-110), there are several anecdotal court cases that demonstrate a general skepticism among the populace and an unwillingness to convict without sufficient evidence. For example, a biography of Elizabeth Cary, written by one of her daughters, records the story of ten-year-old Cary accompanying her father, a judge, to the trial of a woman accused of witchcraft. During the trial, young Cary observes that the accused woman is simply affirming everything her accusers say, but providing little detail of her own for her confession. Cary then whispers in her father's ear, requesting that he ask the

woman "whether she had bewitched to death Mr. John Symodes of such a place (her uncle that was one of the standers-by)" (187). The woman confesses that she did, at which point the entire courtroom understands that the poor woman has simply been affirming everything her accusers suggest, because "they had threatened her if she would not confess, and said, if she would, she should have mercy showed her" (187). Cary's early skepticism illustrates growing critical thought in a courtroom that was prioritizing evidence. In fact, the biography states that the accused woman was questioned when "the witnesses not being found convincing, [Cary's] father asked the woman what she said for herself" (186). The story later reinforces this point about unconvincing testimony, stating, "the witness brought against her being of little force and her own confession appearing now to be of less…she was easily believed innocent, and [ac]quitted" (187). Though the story is designed to illuminate the precocious skepticism of its subject, Elizabeth Cary, Christina Luckyj has pointed out that, "it is [Cary's] father who models the skeptical evidential process that left seventeenth-century English judges and juries unconvinced by the majority of charges of witchcraft" (*Liberty* 99). This case is a clear example of members of a courtroom actively seeking more conclusive evidence and expressing doubt about whether the accused are really guilty.

Cary's story represents an early localized case, but, as many scholars have noted, James himself showed a growing skepticism and awareness of the possibility of fraud after he became king of England. James Sharpe explains that, "[James's] attitudes were far removed from the propensity for rabid witch-hunting that has been attributed to him. The British Solomon, as James fancied himself, was as likely to display his expertise in matters of witchcraft by exposing fraudulent accusations as he was by rooting out nests of

malefic witches…" (*Anne Gunter* 178). For example, James and the jury demonstrated critical thinking about witchcraft cases as early as 1604: when Anne Gunter, a sufferer of strange, sudden fits and other unusual symptoms, claimed, with the guidance of her father, that her illness was the result of demonic possession driven by the witchcraft of three neighbours, Elizabeth Gregory, Mary Pepwell, and Agnes Pepwell (Levack, "Possession," 1618), a judge and jury acquitted the women in a local court hearing, and, in a Star Chamber hearing, Anne's behaviour was recognized as a charade. Levack comments that "this one [local] trial lasted at least eight hours, with the jury not withdrawing to 'confer of the issue and the proofs thereof made by the evidence' until after 10 p.m. Although Gunter marshaled some fifteen witnesses, and the presentation of the evidence involved some 'very long discourses,' the jury decided on a verdict of not guilty" ("Possession" 1623). This example demonstrates the importance of a high standard of evidence at the start of the seventeenth century, and juries' willingness to acquit an accused person due to a lack of evidence.

In 1616, an event known as the "Leicester boy trial" or the "Bosworth witch trial" became a surprising example of a case in which a court was willing to convict witches on scanty evidence, but the king was not. In July of 1616, nine people were convicted and hanged on charges of witchcraft after a twelve- or thirteen-year-old boy, John Smith, testified that the accused had bewitched him and demonstrated fits and symptoms of possession. However, when the king learned about the outcome of the trial, he personally questioned the main witness and "discover'd a Fallacy" (Francis Osborne, qtd. in Gaskill 43). The judges in the case were denounced and told to "be Circumspect in Condemning those, Committed by Ignorant Justices, for Diabolical Compacts' (qtd. in Gaskill,

"Witchcraft and Evidence," 43). Gaskill writes that "Thus warned, magistrates became more alert" (43). Philip C. Almond cites this case as one of the "[n]aturalistic explanations of possession and exposures of fraud [which]… significantly affected the history of witchcraft" (*Demonic Possession* 39) and quotes Michael MacDonald, who notes that trials in which the accused was acquitted or some members of the judicial process demonstrated skepticism "helped to increase the burden of proof and in doing so to refine the debate in terms that made it harder and harder to resolve the individual cases decisively in favour of the supernatural" (39). These and other cases in which members of the jury, judges, or the king himself expressed skepticism and demanded more and better evidence or a more thorough judicial process demonstrate a changing attitude to witchcraft cases that, while not dismissing supernatural crimes altogether, chose to lean toward caution. While James's *Daemonologie*, written before he became King of England, explicitly counters Reginald Scot's skeptical text *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, Gaskill points out that in practice, "James's personal examination of possession cases, and his exposure of frauds, brought him closer to Reginald Scot than he would have cared to admit" ("Witchcraft and Evidence" 42-43). For James, constructing a theological argument for the reality of witchcraft did not translate to convicting every person accused of witchcraft.

Rising standards of evidence in the early modern courtroom necessarily led to growing skepticism when these standards were not met, generating a sense of uncertainty around witchcraft cases. Hutson maps this growing sense of uncertainty onto early modern drama, explaining, "In the 1590s for the very first time, English dramatists began to make use… of the practice of raising and then *not answering* questions about how to

interpret evidence… dramatists were newly concerned with casting doubt on the reliability and probability of the signs and indications on which people base judgements about one another" (Hutson 12). The plays in this study illuminate this uncertainty; in some cases, guilt is established, but playwrights nevertheless generate sympathy for the accused (*The Witch of Edmonton*); in other cases, it is unclear whether witches are truly guilty of that which they are accused (*The Tempest*). These plays investigate a range of possibilities, but in every case they cast doubt on the judicial system or generate doubt by withholding evidence. These elements of uncertainty in every play break down the binary between witch and monarch by refusing to clearly state that witch characters are the servants of the devil.

1.3 EARLY MODERN SCHOLARLY SKEPTICS

The Oxford English Dictionary defines skepticism or scepticism as "denoting doubt about the validity of knowledge, apparent evidence, or generally accepted facts concerning the specified thing, or reservations about the thing in question" (*OED* scepticism | skepticism, n. 2.b.). It also defines a sceptic as "A person who doubts the validity of what is claimed to be knowledge in a particular sphere; a person who doubts a particular assertion…" (*OED* sceptic | skeptic, n. 1.). By this definition, witchcraft skeptics can include anyone from a person who denies that witchcraft exists at all to someone reluctant to convict a neighbour or to believe that every accepted fact about witchcraft is true. Witchcraft scholarship in England and on the continent existed on a spectrum from condemning any hint of witchcraft to denying the existence of witchcraft altogether. Daniela Koeppler outlines tensions surrounding skepticism in early modern Protestant thought. Starting in the early Reformation, she explains that, despite Luther's

own reformist origins as a skeptic of Roman Catholic doctrine, he nevertheless argued against skepticism in some areas of religion, specifically in the matter of assurance of salvation. Arguing against Erasmus's skepticism, Luther wrote, "The Holy Spirit is not a sceptic. He did not inscribe an uncertain illusion into our heart but rather a strong, great certainty" (qtd. in Koeppler 67). Similarly, despite his own critical thought about many doctrines of the Roman Catholic church, John Calvin was resistant to skepticism in his own Protestant community. Koeppler explains, "criticism was seen as a danger to the unity of the new Church. So long as it had not reached its breakthrough, deviation from the Reformation's teaching could not be tolerated" (69). Sebastian Castellio, a follower turned critic of Calvin, argued in his text "On the Art of Doubting" that doubt was both permissible and necessary for the Christian, and that to be certain without enough evidence was dangerous. He writes, "To consider that what is unsure is sure and not to doubt it is not only bold, but also very dangerous. No one will deny this. Now in religion, there are things that are unsure and even more things that are unclear. Not to doubt these is also bold and very dangerous" (qtd. in Koeppler 70). Castellio never left his Protestant faith, but argued that Christians ought to be hesitant about unclear doctrines; "Thus, doubt does not lead to criticizing the tradition as such, but rather to criticizing an exclusive way of interpreting which claims to be the only true way" (71). This tension between the demand for certainty in theological matters and the danger of hasty and unsupported conclusions carries over into early modern witchcraft skepticism. Several of the following scholars argue for the necessity of convicting the servants of the devil, while others suggest that it is better to risk allowing sin to go unpunished than to risk executing the innocent. While each of these scholars are grounded in scripture, their

differences of opinion on both interpretation of that scripture and on reasonable doubt divide them.

In *Daemonologie*, James references several other scholars and theologians on the subject of witchcraft, including Jean Bodin, Reginald Scot, and Johann Weyer. Johann Weyer's *De Praestigiis Daemonum et Incantationibus ac Venificiis*, or *On the Illusions of the Demons and on Spells and Poisons* (1563) was one of the first treatises to dismiss witchcraft as illusion and condemn the prosecution of witches; Weyer's argument is grounded in scripture, working to interpret and properly translate the few biblical passages that refer to witchcraft. Jean Bodin's *De La Démonomanie Des Sorciers* (1580) is, in part, a vitriolic response to Weyer; Bodin vehemently argues that witchcraft is real, Biblical, and dangerous. Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) follows Weyer's disbelief in witchcraft; however, while Weyer turns to scripture, Scot also appeals to reason and mockery of local superstition. King James I's *Daemonologie* follows the debate between Bodin on the one hand and Weyer and Scot on the other. In his Preface to the Reader, James explains that *Daemonologie* is specifically designed to respond to the

> damnable opinions of two principally in our age, whereof the one called SCOT an Englishman, is not ashamed in publike print to deny, that ther can be such a thing as Witch-craft: and so mainteines the old error of the Sadducees, in denying of spirits. The other called WIERVS [Weyer], a German Phisition, sets out a publick apologie for al these craftes-folkes, whereby, procuring for their impunitie, he plainely bewrayes himselfe to have bene one of that profession. (xix)

When James says that Weyer protests against witchcraft so much that "he plainely bewrayes himself to have bene one of that profession" (xix), he references Jean Bodin, who was so shocked that "an educated man could dissent from the clear theological and empirical truth of witchcraft that he accused Weyer of being a witch himself and called for his prosecution" (Kors and Peters 290). Bodin, like James, had written a response to Weyer's *De praestigiis daemonum* with the goal of debunking the text using scripture. In *Daemonologie*, James responds particularly to Reginald Scot, the English witchcraft skeptic, but he also participates in a larger scholarly dialogue that extends to the continent.

Reginald Scot and King James I, like Jean Bodin and Johann Weyer, present completely opposing views in their treatises on witchcraft; however, both sides defend their viewpoints with theological evidence. Skepticism, for these scholars, is not a rejection of the theological underpinnings of the opposition, but a different interpretation of the same evidence, similar to the way juries might interpret the same courtroom evidence differently from one another. These scholars do not come from completely different belief systems, and because their conclusions rely on their interpretations, the skeptics offer valid doubt that their opponents cannot dismiss by simply debunking their worldviews. Bertram explains, "Scot's Protestant ideology [was] an integral, rather than incidental, part of his skepticism towards witchcraft. As Scot himself put it, Christ 'is the substance and groundworke of truth it selfe'" (29). Scot states that his position "fully agree[s] with Gods glory, and with his holy word…Christ himself in his Gospel never mentioned the name of a witch. And that neither he, nor Moses ever spake any one word of the witches bargaine with the devil" (B1v). However, James rebuts Scot,

claiming that he "mainteines the olde error of the Sadducees, in denying of spirits" (xix). James may critique Scot's theology, but it is nevertheless theology. Both men appeal to scripture to support their positions, starting with the same foundation, even though they are fundamentally opposed, and so reasonable doubt about witchcraft always remains an option.

Since the Bible rarely mentions witchcraft, there is only one major story that all demonologists must interpret when they state their position on witchcraft: the story of the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28. This story takes place immediately before King Saul, the first king of Israel, dies in battle. While Saul initially seeks the Lord's counsel, he has been in rebellion against God for so long that God does not answer him, so the king commands his servants, "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and ask of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman at En Dor that hath a familiar spirit" (1 Samuel 28:7). Saul, in disguise, approaches the woman and asks her to bring him up the deceased prophet Samuel. The text in the 1599 Geneva Bible says that,

> when the woman saw Samuel, she cried with a loud voice, and the woman spake until Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? For thou art Saul. And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods ascending up out of the earth. Then he said unto her, What fashion is he of? And she answered, An old man cometh up lapped in a mantel: and Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he inclined his face to the ground, and bowed himself". (1 Samuel 28: 12-14)

Saul proceeds to have a conversation with the supposed ghost of Samuel, but the text is never clear about whether Saul can see the ghost himself or if the witch only reports it to him. Because the story of the witch of Endor is the only Biblical narrative that includes a witch as more than a passing reference, early modern views of witchcraft centred around two possible interpretations of this story. From a Protestant perspective, it was impossible to accept the ghost of Samuel at face value—to do so would be to discredit Protestant theology of heaven and hell and to give either the witch or the devil power over departed souls.

Both main views agree that the ghost itself must be a trick or a piece of theatre, but they disagree on the source of that deception. In the Geneva Bible, the editors add a footnote to the phrase "Saul knew that it was Samuel" (1 Samuel 28:14), interjecting, "To his imagination, albeit it was Satan, who to blind his eyes took upon him the form of Samuel, as he can do of an Angel of light" (14). This interpretation attributes the trickery to the devil's direct intervention, discarding the witch as ancillary—a mere slave of the devil. King James also takes this position, which is consistent with his view of the demonic pact, writing in *Daemonologie*, "that it was not the spirit of *Samuel*, I grant….And that the Diuel is permitted at som-times to put himself in the liknes of the Saintes, it is plaine in the Scripture, where it is said, that *Sathan can trans-forme himself into an Angell of Light*" (3). However, Reginald Scot, who dismisses all instances of the supernatural in witchcraft as material fraud, takes the view that the witch herself must have been performing convincing theatre: "the woman of Endors spirit was a counterfeit, and kept belike in her closet at Endor…And though Saul were bewitched and blinded in the matter; yet doubtlesse a wise man would have perchance espied her knavery"

(107). The fundamental difference between Scot and James is in whether or not they believe a supernatural element is involved in the deception at Endor; James believes that the devil—the father of lies—works through witches to deceive, while Scot believes that the only thing witches can conjure is a convincing material charade. Laura Levine explains,

> For Scot, the witch of Endor was a charlatan using stage tricks like ventriloquism to dupe Saul. For James, in contrast, what looked like Samuel raised by the witch was actually the devil in the shape of Samuel. Both explanations imply a 'theatrical' conception of witchcraft…in the sense that they involve the creation of illusions. But they do so in different ways. For Scot what is at issue is human 'juggling' or 'cousening,' the construction of an illusion that could (theoretically) be seen through even though Saul, hungry and gullible, failed to do so. For James what is operative is a demonic theatricality, the devil casting much more powerful illusions by assuming different shapes. Scot chose the natural explanation, James the supernatural. (2)

The distinction between natural and supernatural illusion is crucial in witchcraft plays, since the binary of rulers as deputies of God and witches as agents of the devil breaks down if the supposed witch only performs material illusion, or, indeed, if there is any doubt about the extent to her power or the reality of her pact with the devil.

Johann Weyer, the German skeptic whom James denounces at the beginning of *Daemonologie*, was, like Scot, a scholar who denied witchcraft entirely, and relied on the materialist interpretation of the Endor story. Charles Kors and Edward Peters write,

"Weyer (1515-88) was the first critic to deny the existence of witches altogether, arguing that it was not the witches who were recruited by the devil to harm mankind, but that the very belief that witches existed at all was a harmful diabolical invention" (280). In his *De praestigiis daemonum*, Weyer, before Scot, argues that witchcraft is mere illusion, using close reading of scripture to support his argument. He writes,

> When a question is raised or a discussion begun about the activities of witches, men soon offer the testimony of scriptural passages containing the term 'magician' or 'evil-doer,' or 'enchanter,' or poisoner,' or even 'juggler' (as some translate). They then affirm that these terms denote, without distinction of meaning, the women who are commonly called 'witches' or 'wise women.' I find, however, that these monstrous persons with their arts, their illusions, and their forbidden forms of divination are represented in differing ways by the Rabbis and the Hebrew interpreters, that our Latin translators use different names to describe them, and that the Greek translation does not agree precisely with the Hebrew or with the Latin translation. (282)

Since witchcraft is rarely mentioned in scripture, Weyer argues that most instances are actually referring to illusion or evil doing rather than magic. For example, he goes on to argue that "Ibn Ezra, a writer of great repute among the Hebrews, says that the word *Chasaph* refers properly to sleights, that is, to those illusions whereby things are presented to our eyes otherwise than they really are" (283). Weyer maintains that witchcraft is illusion, that that there is no Biblical proof for the diabolic pact or any other

early modern witchcraft belief. The concept of illusion was key to both Scot and Weyer's concept that witchcraft had no genuine supernatural power.

By the time King James condemned "WierVS [Weyer], a German Phisition," claiming that his knowledge of witchcraft must mean that he was "one of that profession" (xix), Weyer had already inspired Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Scot cites Weyer as he explains his own belief that witchcraft is illusion and that even instances of witchcraft in Biblical narratives must be only material trickery. Scot systematically breaks down "four kinds of impious coseners or witches" which Moses records, stating that they are either "coseners and jugglers, deceiving the Kings eyes with illusions and sleights, and making false things to appear as true," "she that destroyeth with poison," "[those who] use sundry kinds of divinations," and "magicians, or rather such, as would be reputed cunning" (82). According to Scot, what these four types of Biblical "witches" have in common is a claim to be able to work supernatural wonders without ever really achieving this; some, like the magicians who mumble secret words, truly believe they have power, while others only aim to deceive. Regardless of their beliefs and motives, all four are illusionists, according to Scot. He writes,

> These are all coseners and abusers of the people in their severall kind[s]. But because they are all termed of our translators by the name of witch in the Bible: thefore the lies of M. Mal and *Bodin,* and all our old tales are applied unto these names, and easily beleeved of the common people, who have never hitherto been instructed in the understanding these words. In which respect, I will (by Gods grace) shew you (co[nc]cerning the signification of them) the opinion of the most learned in o[ur] age;

> specially of *Iohannes Wierus*; who though he himselfe were similarly learned in the tongues, yet for his satisfication and full resolution in the same, he sent for the judgement of *Andr[e]us Massius,* the most [fa]mous *Hebrician* in the world, and had it in such sense and order, as I me[an] to set down unto you. (82)

Scot follows Weyer's reasoning that misinterpretation of scripture had caused error, and that witchcraft is merely illusion. He goes on to explain the witch of Endor as an illusionist in painstaking detail, writing, "it is not likely that God would answer Saul by dead S[a]muel, when he would not answer him by living Samuel: and most [un]likely of all, that God would answer him by a devil, that denied [to do it] by a prophet" (104). Scot spends several chapters explaining the ghost of Samuel as a physical illusion, stating in short, "in truth we may gather, that it was neither the devil in person, nor Samuel: but a circumstance is here described, according to the deceived opinion and imagination of Saul" (105). Surprisingly, though Bodin is so opposed to Weyer that he accuses Weyer of being in league with the devil himself, Scot, who relies heavily on Weyer for his own argument, references Bodin to support his own argument about the witch of Endor as illusionist: "[*Bodin* saith the ghost of Saul] could not be [the devil]; [for] that in the same communication between Saul and Samuel, the name of Jehovah is five times repeated, of which name the devill cannot able the hearing." (106). Scot goes on to explain that the witch of Endor must have simply counterfeited the entire encounter, probably by having knowledge of Saul beforehand and pretending she did not, by using ventriloquism to create the illusion of a ghost speaking, by lying to Saul about what she

actually saw, and, finally, by dressing in a disguise or convincing an accomplice to do so (106-111). Scot attributes witchcraft completely to illusion and trickery—nothing more.

1.4 THE IMPACT OF SKEPTICISM

Each of the plays in this study is indebted to contemporary skepticism about witchcraft, either through allusions to specific skeptical texts or by subtly staging the Endor debate, that is, the debate over whether witchcraft was a genuine supernatural practice or a form of theatrical illusion. However, these plays are more open-ended and ambiguous than scholarly texts, often alluding to scholarly works or the terms of the debate without ever clearly resolving the question. Benjamin Bertram writes, "the *Discoverie* provided a compendium of popular magical beliefs and practices for writers like William Shakespeare, who, ironically enough, appropriated Scot's text and perpetuated some of the very beliefs the reformer wanted to dispel" (37). However, by asserting that Shakespeare's allusions to Scot's book led to propagation of popular witchcraft beliefs, Bertram underestimates the impact of skepticism about witchcraft on playwrights and their audiences—a skepticism we can observe in several of the case studies previously discussed. Using Scot's characterization of witches in a play does not automatically and unthinkingly enforce stereotypes about witchcraft; rather, plays may call attention to the range of opinions on the topic and remain ambiguous. James Sharpe writes, "many... observers... [think] that there was a single view on witchcraft, and that the educated European of around 1600 was thoroughly inculcated with a theologically driven desire to hunt and burn witches. This was not the case" (*Anne Gunter* 78). Sharpe goes on to point out that the first major English book written about witchcraft was Reginald Scot's "unrelentingly sceptical" (78) *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Despite

James's own rebuttal of Scot, views on the topic likely varied widely, as we have seen from several case studies. At the very least, we know that many people were hesitant to condemn accused witches without abundant and compelling evidence.

Michel de Montaigne, an influential French essayist whose English translator, John Florio, made him famous in early modern England, is an example of an influential skeptic who doubts without claiming to know anything for certain. Montaigne discusses witchcraft several times in his essays, each time reserving doubt on the subject and refusing to accept or deny the possibility of supernatural power or a demonic pact. Montaigne's essay, "Of the force of Imagination" argues that imagination rather than reason is often the driving principle of people's beliefs. He uses an example from witchcraft to illustrate the power of imagination, rather than the power of the devil: Amasis, the king of Egypt, married a beautiful woman, and, because he suffered from impotence with her, accused her of witchcraft and threatened to kill her. However, after making vows to Venus, he found that he was cured and had blamed his new wife solely based on his own imaginings (42). In the same essay, Montaigne includes a second illustration from ancient witchcraft belief, again attributing the incident to the power of the imagination: "Likewise the imagination mooved and tossed by some vehemence, doth cast some da[rts], that may offend a strange object. Antiquitie hath held, that certaine women of *Scithia,* being provoked and vexed against some men, had the power to kill them, onely with their looke" (44). Montaigne's belief in the power of the imagination logically leads him to his essay "It is follie to referre Truth or Falsehood to our sufficiencie." If we are so easily fooled by our own minds, we cannot use our own judgement as a final determiner of reality. He reasons, "Why remember we not, what, and

how many contradictions we finde and feele even in our owne judgement? How many things served vs but yesterday as articles of faith, which to day we deeme but fables? Glory and curiositie are the scourges of our soules. The latter induceth vs to have an oare in every ship, and the former forbids vs to leave any thing vnresolved or vndecided." (89). By contrast, Montaigne routinely leaves many things doubtful and undecided. In the same essay, he uses witchcraft as an example of an undecided issue, explaining that while he has been dismissive of accusation in the past, he now understands that he should at least listen to ideas before dismissing them outright. He explains, "it is a sottish presumption to disdaine and condemn that for false, which vnto vs seemeth to beare no shew of likelihood or truth… So was I sometimes wont to doe, and if I heard any body speake… of enchantments, of witchcrafts, or any other thing reported, which I could not well conceive, or that was beyond my reach" (87). He goes on to say, " And now I perceive, that I was as much to be moaned my-selfe: Not that experience hath since made me to discerne any thing beyond my former opinions… but reason hath taught me, that so resolutely to condemne a thing for false, and impossible, is to assume vnto himselfe the advantage, to have the bounds and limits of Gods will…" (87). While Montaigne remains skeptical of witchcraft accusations, he nevertheless maintains an attitude of humility, believing that it is folly to make an assumption based only on what he believes to be likely.

In "Of the Lame or Cripple," as Montaigne considers "what free and gadding instrument humane reason is" (578), he exclaims, "I finde, that wee should say most times: *There is no such thing.* And I would often employ this answer; but I dare not: for they cry; It is a defeature produced by ignorance and weakenesse of spirite" (579). Rather

than holding to a judgement, Montaigne is content with an inability to know in a "world… in [which] a thousand questions [are] descanted and bandied too & fro; the *pro* and *contra* of which is meerly false…*Falsehood is so neere Neighbour to trueth, that a wiseman should not put himselfe vpon a slipperie downefal. Truth and falsehood have both alike countenances, their port, their taste and their proceedings semblable*" (519). Montaigne's skepticism is a state of doubt and uncertainty that he suspends as long as he believes himself to be ignorant on a topic so that he can avoid leaping to a judgement which is not warranted. In the same essay, Montaigne goes on to defend the position of sustained doubt and skepticism, using ancient trials and finally contemporary witchcraft trials to demonstrate situations in which such a doubt may be useful (581-3). Montaigne argues that in a trial, uncertainty or lack of evidence is reason enough to not convict a person—even if they may be guilty, the possibility of innocence amid a lack of information should make judges err on the side of caution.

By contrast, Jean Bodin argues that in many cases accused witches should be punished even when evidence is scarce. He reasons, "one who is convicted on acute presumptions is not innocent: for example the one who was discovered with his bloody sword near the murder victim with no one else around...How much more necessary it is then, to prescribe corporal punishments when the presumptions against witches are strong" (296). Montaigne argues the opposite, using uncertainty itself as a reason for deferring judgement indefinitely. Like Bodin, he writes about uncertainty in witch trials specifically, but unlike Bodin he states, "To kill men, a clear and shining light is required; and our life is too real and essential, to warrant these supernatural and fantastic

accidents" (524-5). Montaigne expresses only doubt about witchcraft, overtly refusing to come to a conclusion about whether these cases are true or even possible. He writes,

> How much more natural that our understanding should be carried from its place by the volubility of our disordered minds, than that one of us should be carried by a strange spirit upon a broom-staff, flesh and bones as we are, up the shaft of a chimney? Let us not seek illusion from without and unknown...I am of St. Augustine's opinion, that "'tis better to lean toward doubt than assurance, in things hard to prove and dangerous to believe. (525)

Montaigne even provides an example from his personal experience of questioning a woman accused of witchcraft. He recounts,

> I [some years ago] travelled through the country of a soveraigne Prince: who in favour of mee, and to abate my incredulity, did mee the grace… to make mee see… an olde beldam witch; a true and perfect sorceresse, both by her vglines and deformity; and such a one as long before was most famous in that profession. I sawe both proofes, witnesses, voluntary confessions, and some other insensible markes about this miserable olde woman; I enquired and talked with her a long time, with the greatest heed and attention I could; yet am I not [e]asily carried away by preoccupation. In the end, and in my conscience, I should rather have appointed them Helleborum, than Hemlocke… *The matter seemed liker to mindes captive then guiltie.* (582)

Montaigne consistently choses uncertainty over false accusation. He summarizes, "When all is done, it is an over-valuing of ones conjectures, by them to cause a man to be burned alive" (582) and "*To kill men; there is required a bright shining and cleare light*" (581). The consequences of being wrong are so severe that Montaigne would rather risk freeing a guilty person than murdering an innocent one.

Although King James I's *Daemonologie* follows Bodin's belief in diabolic witchcraft and harsh consequences for those who practice it, James himself appears to have taken on some of the skepticism of Montaigne later in his reign. James never appears to recant his belief in witchcraft; rather he begins to doubt the legitimacy of every witchcraft case, understanding that belief in spiritual illusion does not exclude the possibility of material illusion in some instances. James Sharpe explains that, "[James's] attitudes were far removed from the propensity for rabid witch-hunting that has been attributed to him. The British Solomon, as James fancied himself, was as likely to display his expertise in matters of witchcraft by exposing fraudulent accusations as he was by rooting out nests of malefic witches…" (*Anne Gunter* 178). Though James agrees with Bodin's theology of witchcraft, in practice he is not as quick to prosecute as Bodin would recommend, instead maintaining some of the skepticism of Montaigne and working to distinguish the guilty from the innocent.

The plays in this study suggest attitudes to witchcraft that range from the uncertainty typical of Montaigne (*The Tempest*) to the mockery and hyperbole characteristic of Scot (*The Witch*). Whether these plays openly exaggerate and mock witchcraft belief or maintain an inability to know for sure, they all undercut the absoluteness of the binary between God's deputy and the agents of the devil by

maintaining doubt about whether it is possible to prove that a person is in league with the devil. The witch in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is clearly a man in disguise, *The Witch of Edmonton* represents Sawyer's transformation into a witch as the result of social pressure, *Macbeth* stages the Endor question while positioning the title character as a tyrant like King Saul, *The Witch* turns its witch characters into parodic figures while drawing heavily on Scot, and *The Tempest* alludes to Montaigne's inability to know with certainty while constructing Sycorax's story through unreliable narrators. Each play participates in some way in the skeptical conversation about witchcraft.

My first chapter deals with Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton*, in which the Edmontonians goad Mother Sawyer into becoming a witch before she harbours any notion of becoming one, in contrast to Goodcole's account which portrays Sawyer as already wicked before the devil finds her. The play inverts Goodcole's narrative of the witch as a social contagion which must be removed and instead positions the town of Edmonton and its leadership as "curs," just like Dog, who drive Sawyer to become a witch. The witch becomes the victim of the corrupt community, rather than the community becoming the victim of the witch. Chaemsaithong writes, "In conjunction with the notion...that the devil...entices Christ's followers to withdraw and reject his teaching, the witches were represented [in pamphlets] as the devil's accomplices who caused harm through magical power, renounced Christian faith, and tempted innocent victims to turn against God" (169). *The Witch of Edmonton* inverts this narrative, instead positioning the witch as the victim of the society that persecutes her without cause. While the pamphlets allow the reader to feel a sense of separation and moral superiority, the plays instead contrast the community with the witch to expose its corruption.

My second chapter takes up Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in which Mistress Page and Mistress Ford dress Falstaff as a community woman whom Ford believes to be a witch. The play never establishes that the Wise Woman of Brentford is a witch—only that Ford believes that she is one. The real threat that the community faces is Falstaff, a man who disrupts the smooth running of the community, and the weak and ineffective leaders of Windsor, who allow him to continue to create discord. The merry wives force the men of Windsor to deal with Falstaff by using a costume to give shape to the threat he poses. Falstaff exhibits the characteristics of a male witch in the ways in which he disrupts the community, but because the town leadership remains oblivious to his schemes, disrupting Windsor themselves through their ineptitude, the merry wives use disguise to paradoxically portray his threat in a way that the men will immediately recognize and punish.

Macbeth, the subject of my third chapter, introduces the subject of witchcraft as a critique of royal rather than local authority. Most literary scholars have considered *Macbeth* as compliment to King James, because the play is set in James's ancestral Scotland; glorifies Banquo, one of James's supposed ancestors; dramatizes details from the North Berwick witch trials; and adapts the story to make it more favourable to the legitimate ruler, Duncan, who Holinshed represents as weak and ineffective (240). However, while the play might initially seem to curry James's favour, it is a prime example of a narrative that breaks down the binaries of witch and ruler, and tyrant and good king, leaving only witches and tyrants. The legitimate King Duncan is murdered at the beginning of the play, the young Malcolm is in exile and outside the plot until close to the end of the play, and the English King Edward never appears onstage. For the majority

of the narrative, Scotland is left to witches and tyrants. The play uses the weird sisters to create a parallel between Macbeth and the Biblical King Saul, who began his rule well, but ended his reign as a tyrant and displayed his corruption by seeking out the witch of Endor when God had forsaken him and rejected him as king. The play also refuses to answer the demonological question of whether the witch of Endor was charlatan or a slave of the devil, instead using the weird sisters to focus on Macbeth's rapidly deteriorating morality and failure as a ruler.

In my fourth chapter, on Middleton's *The Witch*, I argue that this play overtly refers to the binary between witches and rulers, drawing on Jonson's *Masque of Queens* only to invert its inversion and represent the court as corrupt rather than virtuous. Middleton directly contrasts court and coven, opening the play with parallel banquet scenes, one in the court of Ravenna and one in the witches' cave. However, rather than opening with the witches' antimasque as *Masque of Queens* does, *The Witch* instead inverts the masque structure and begins in the court of Ravenna, a place that is fraught with so much debased behaviour and enmity that the coven seems peaceful and functional by comparison. Throughout the play, the court appears as more corrupt than the coven that is supposed to contrast it, and this point is emphasized by Middleton's references to Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*—a text that argues that witchcraft accusations are fraudulent and baseless. The result is that the witches seem like an absurd threat while corrupt rulership remains a real possibility.

Finally, in my last chapter on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, I argue that Prospero attempts to use the binary of witch vs. good ruler to his advantage, conceiving of his own right to rule against Sycorax's supposed corruption, and arguing that the island needs a

legitimate ruler to protect its subjects. However, though Prospero appeals to this binary, the fact that Sycorax never appears on stage and that her story is narrated through several speakers, some of whom have heard her story second hand, makes Prospero's claim seem shakier than he repeatedly tries to argue. The uncertainty around Sycorax makes this binary between Prospero and Sycorax difficult to establish with certainty. In addition, the representation of Sycorax may draw on Montaigne's essays, which express further uncertainty about whether or not witches are really guilty of the crime of which they are accused and argue that the safest course is never to sentence one if certainty is impossible to establish. In addition to the layers of doubt surrounding Sycorax's backstory and characterization, Prospero himself practices magic that would have been condemned as diabolic under Jacobean witchcraft laws. Once again, this play represents the corrupt ruler as the greatest danger to the state.

When the binary of the king vs. the witch—or the servants of God vs. the servants of the devil—breaks down to consist of an obvious tyrant who has no respect for God or his subjects vs. a witch who cannot be proven guilty, the witch can no longer serve the function of Jonson's antimasquers; witches no longer highlight the virtue of the ruler by contrast with him. Rather, this broken binary works to facilitate political and social critique, exposing tyrannical or dissolute rulership and dysfunctional societies while representing witches as victims, scapegoats, or powerless actors by comparison.

PART ONE: THE WITCH AND THE COMMUNITY

CHAPTER 2: "BY THEIR BAD USAGE MADE SO": THE MAKING OF THE WITCH IN *THE WITCH OF EDMONTON*

William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford's play *The Witch of Edmonton* is a dramatization of a contemporary court case, first recorded by pamphleteer Henry Goodcole in *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch* in 1621. Goodcole, a popular crime pamphleteer, visited Elizabeth Sawyer in Newgate prison daily to interview her prior to her execution (Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, 299). According to Goodcole's account and Sawyer's alleged responses to his questions, Sawyer became a witch when the devil, in the form of a black dog, found her cursing and swearing and claimed her for his own (304). She then apparently used her newfound power to "revenge herself on [her neighbours] in this manner, namely, witch to death their Nurse Children and Cattell" (305). Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's collaborative dramatization, first performed in the same year as Sawyer's trial, does not represent Sawyer as a malicious woman with a bad tongue that allows the devil access to her. Rather, the play populates the community of Edmonton with people whose own private lives are rife with secret sins and hypocrisy, and who persistently persecute an elderly and vulnerable Mother Sawyer, accusing her falsely of being a witch, until she finally becomes one out of desperation. *The Witch of Edmonton* is an important case study that illustrates how early modern witchcraft plays invert source material and the prevailing narratives about witches, turning a critical lens on the power structures and social forces that endanger a community. Though *The Witch of Edmonton* is chronologically the last play in this study, it establishes a clear pattern that provides a useful framework for examining the plays that

follow. While Goodcole's pamphlet seeks to condemn and ostracize the witch in order to separate her from the godly community, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's dramatization instead portrays the community as instrumental in creating the witch through their persecution of a poor old woman. The plays in the following chapters represent similar patterns of inversion, representing witches with elements of skepticism while shifting criticism to larger communities, authority structures, and even political theories.

In Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton*, Elizabeth Sawyer does not possess any of her own power. Rather, she is a danger to the community of Edmonton because she forms an alliance with Dog and asks him to harm her neighbours on her behalf. In his 1608 text, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft*, William Perkins frames the devil as the author of witchcraft and the source of the witch's power:

> considering that every art hath reference to some author by whom it was originally taught and delivered, I answer that [the rules of witchcraft] were devised first by Satan and by him revealed to wicked and ungodly persons of ancient times, as occasion served, who, receiving them from him, became afterward, in the just judgement of God, his instruments to report and convey them to others from hand to hand. (43)

According to Perkins, witchcraft originates directly from the devil. In the preface to his influential text *Daemonologie*, King James similarly reasons, "such assaults of Sathan are most certainly practized, & that the *instruments* thereof, merits most severely to be punished" (xix emphasis mine). Perkins thinks of witchcraft as passed down directly from the devil, and King James conceives of witches as direct instruments of the devil.

Charlotte-Rose Millar explains that Perkins' and King James's views represent widespread early modern English beliefs about the role of the devil in witchcraft:

> Early modern witchcraft was a diabolical crime. This new form of diabolical heresy which first took root during the 1430s was explained through the devil's very real presence in the world and his effect upon it. The devil, an omnipresent force of evil in early modern Europe, was fundamental to how witchcraft was explained by theologians and witchcraft theorists. Witches did not act alone; their malicious actions were only possible with the devil's assistance. (*Emotions* 29)

The witch in early modern England is dangerous not because she personally possesses supernatural power which she can use at will against her enemies, but because she, through the diabolical pact, becomes the Devil's entry point into the community in which she lives. *The Witch of Edmonton*, however, inverts this pattern to critique the corrupt community and its leaders by positioning the community as the devil's entry point to the witch.

In the introduction and conclusion to the source text for *The Witch of Edmonton*, the pamphlet, "The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch," Henry Goodcole warns his Christian readers about the dangers of behaviours that might invite the devil into a community. Goodcole addresses the Christian reader in his introduction (302-3) and conclusion (315); he also interrupts his own interview with Sawyer to direct occasional asides at his audience, conversing with them even as he converses with the prisoner. For example, when Goodcole first asks Sawyer how she "came to have acquaintance with the Divell" (308), and she replies that he "came unto me… when I was

cursing, swearing and blaspheming" (308), Goodcole turns to his Christian readers and writes, "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" (308). By including his readers in the interview, Goodcole positions himself as a member of a godly community that is collectively judging Sawyer for her involvement with the devil. Simultaneously, by warning his readers not to join Sawyer in her sin of cursing lest they too attract the devil's influence, Goodcole highlights the threat Sawyer's witchcraft poses to the community as a whole. He ends the pamphlet warning his readers, "Stand on your guard and watch with sobrietie to resist him, the Divell your adversary, who waiteth on you continually, to subvert you, that so you, that doe detest her abhominable words and wayes, may never taste of the cup nor wages of shame and destruction" (315). In Goodcole's account, then, Sawyer is a community member who must be removed from the community so that the devil cannot threaten it. Krisda Chaemsaithong explains that in pamphlets, "witches were represented as the devil's accomplices who… tempted innocent victims to turn against God" (169). Muriel Cunin explains, "The devil… is a pathogen entering the body of the community through the mouth of the witch, who becomes '[an] instrument of mischief' (5.3.21)" (48). Goodcole participates in a long tradition of positioning the godly community against the witch.

While *The Witch of Edmonton*'s Elizabeth Sawyer may serve as Dog's entry point into the community of Edmonton, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford portray the community of Edmonton as the devil's entry point to the witch as they relentlessly persecute Sawyer, goading her into finally becoming the witch they accuse her of being. The play inverts the typical witch narrative; rather than turning to the devil because of her own malicious

desire for power over her neighbours, Sawyer instead becomes a victim of her malicious neighbours, who hate her without a cause and treat her as a witch before she really is one. Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton* retools Henry Goodcole's account of Elizabeth Sawyer's trial to critique power structures in Jacobean rural society by giving Elizabeth Sawyer victim status contrary to the play's source material; accusing the community of creating the witch through repeated false accusation, cruelty, and lack of charity; and finally, associating the Edmontonians themselves with witchcraft and the devil. Far from being victims of the witch's power, the leaders and citizens of Edmonton behave so diabolically that they are instrumental in creating a witch.

2.1 SANITIZING SAWYER

While Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's Elizabeth Sawyer and Dog are based on Henry Goodcole's pamphlet, the play significantly sanitizes Goodcole's description of Elizabeth Sawyer, granting her victim status that in turn directs blame on the citizens of Edmonton. Elizabeth Sawyer and dog behave, in many ways, just like a stereotypical witch and familiar from contemporary pamphlet narratives. Sawyer expresses a desire for revenge, Dog finds her and offers her demonic assistance in exchange for her soul, Sawyer agrees, and the two work together for a time as Sawyer works vengeance on neighbours who have wronged her. However, the play sanitizes Sawyer's character and portrays her as a victim of community cruelty in several key ways.

First, while Goodcole expresses a keen and minute interest in the uncomfortably sexualized relationship between Mother Sawyer and her familiar, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford strip these elements from their drama almost completely, representing Sawyer's relationship with Dog as far less grotesque than what is represented in Goodcole's

narrative. In his interrogation of Elizabeth Sawyer, Goodcole asks a series of increasingly invasive questions about Sawyer's teat or devil's mark, including, "In what place of your body did the Divell sucke of your bloud, and whether did hee himself chuse the place, or did your selfe appoint him the place?", "Whether did you pull up your coats or no when the Divell came to sucke you?", and "How long would the time bee, that the Divill would continue sucking of you, and whether did you endure any paine, the time that hee was sucking of you?" (Goodcole 310). He also spends a significant amount of time on the process by which Sawyer's prosecutors recruited women to give Sawyer a thorough physical examination to look for this teat: "And they all three said, that they a little above the Fundiment of Elizabeth Sawyer, the prisoner, there indited before the Bench for a Witch, found a thing like a Teate the bignesse of the little finger, and the length of halfe a finger, which was branched at the top like a teate, and seemed as though one had suckt it, and the bottome thereof was blew, and the top of it was redde" (306-7). Goodcole's account fixates on lurid details like the location, appearance, and size of the teat, sexualizing Sawyer's relationship with her familiar in a way that the play never does.

While Goodcole's interest in the feeding habits of Sawyer's familiar may seem unnecessarily grotesque to the modern sensibility, the idea that this teat or devil's mark could be found near a witch's private parts was common knowledge and certainly not unique to Goodcole. In her recent study on the devil and witchcraft in early modern Europe, Millar explains,

> The belief that familiars sucked blood from witches (often from teats) as part of the diabolical pact was well established in popular print from as early as the sixteenth century. The positions of these teats varied, but as

> James Sharpe has argued, 'by the early seventeenth century, it was generally accepted that the…mark…would be on the witch's genitals or on her anus, thus adding a sexual dimension to the relationship between the female witch and her familiar.' …I argue that the devil's frequent sucking at witches' genitalia, as well as accounts of sexual intercourse between witches and devils, provide strong evidence for understanding English witchcraft as a sexualized activity. ("Familiar Spirits" 243)

Millar's study demonstrates that sexualizing the relationship between the witch and the familiar as Goodcole does was not unusual. Like Millar, Diane Purkiss writes, "Most 'teats' or 'witchmarks' were located on the genitals or near the anus" (134). However, despite how common and widespread the idea of the sexualized relationship between witch and familiar was, *The Witch of Edmonton* removes this detail.

This preoccupation with animal familiars feeding from teats appears to have developed gradually. In a pamphlet detailing the Chelmsford witchcraft trials in 1566, for example, a senior witch teaches a young apprentice to feed a cat named "Sathan" bread and milk and "geve of her bloudde to Sathan" only to seal the pact (17). The act of giving blood is described in a manner that is cryptic, matter of fact, and not embellished with sexual detail or portrayed as a habitual occurrence. The account of Elizabeth Stile's trial in 1579 records several methods of providing multiple familiar spirits with a partial blood diet, including feeding them "blood whiche she causeth to issue from her owne flancke," "Milke, mingled with her owne blood," "croummes of bread and her owne blood," and "bloode, issuying from her right handwrest, the markes whereof evidently remain" (36). Though the pamphlet clearly establishes blood from the witch's body as part of the

familiars' diets, the blood is often supplemented with ordinary foods, and the text never references a teat or suggests that the blood comes from near the witch's anus or genitals. Edward White's 1579 pamphlet on the trial of Elizabeth Francis includes familiars, but no reference to a pact, blood, a devil's mark, or a teat (43). In the 1582 pamphlet detailing the Essex trials, there is likewise no mention of a teat, though Ursula Kemp's son Thomas Rabbet testified that his mother had four familiar spirits, and he had seen her "give them beere to drinke and of a white Lofe or Cake to eate, and… the spirits will come to his mother, and sucke lood of her upon her armes, and other places of her body" (79). Again, though blood is a crucial method of feeding the familiar, the act is not sexual, and the text makes no reference to a teat or even a lasting mark.

However, by around the 1610s, sexualized descriptions of familiars drinking blood seem to be almost commonplace, and so Goodcole's account of Elizabeth Sawyer's story does not represent an isolated instance. Thomas Potts's 1612 account of several witch trials recounts a number of relationships with familiar spirits that border on the sexual, including Alizon Device and her black dog, who "did with his mouth…sucke at her breast, a little below her Paps, which place did remaine blew halfe a yeare next after" (243). The 1619 case of Margaret and Phillip Flower claims that the devil will "attend [witches] in some familiar shape of Rat, Cat, Toad, Bird, Cricket, & c: yea effectuate whatsoever they shall demaund or desire, and for their better assurance and corroboration of their credulity, they shall have palpable and forcible touches of sucking, pinching, kissing, closing, colling, and such like" (282). Marion Gibson argues, "This list suggests a sexual relationship between familiar and witch rather than the more usual suckling / feeding one" (*Early Modern Witches* 282), suggesting that at least in England, the idea of

a sexual relationship between witch and familiar was relatively new in the 1610s. In the same pamphlet, one of the accused, as she is being questioned, claims that "Joan Willimot had a spirit sucking on her, under the left flanke, in the likenesse of a little white Dogge… As for her selfe, this Examinate further saith, that shee gave her soule to the Divell to have these spirits at her command; for a confirmation whereof, she suffered them to suck her alwayes" (294). Another of the accused, "confesseth and saith, that shee hath a Spirit sucking on her in the forme of a white Rat, which keepeth her left breast, and hath so done for three or foure years" (296). Margaret Flower confessed "that she hath two familiar Spirits sucking on her, the one white, the other blacke spotted within the inward parts of her secrets" (296). The sexualized details of the demonic pact fit into a larger pattern of witches as sexually deviant or available. Stuart Clark explains the gendered aspect of witchcraft accusations by suggesting that early modern medical understandings of women's bodies naturally led to the logic that "The key to their wickedness lay, above all, in their carnal appetites, which were far greater than those of men" (*Thinking with Demons* 113). Goodcole's account, therefore, has good company, and yet *The Witch of Edmonton* does not include these disturbing details and only barely references them.

Despite the frequency of accounts that sexualized the relationship between witch and familiar, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford remove nearly every trace of a sexual relationship between Mother Sawyer and Dog, turning Sawyer into a more innocent and sympathetic character than in Goodcole's account. However, while Sawyer herself is scrubbed from sexual scandal, David Dean observes that some of the accusations that Rowley, Ford, and Dekker's Edmontonians level at Sawyer suggest that she has led them

to commit specifically sexual offenses, and these accusations appear to have no equivalent in Goodcole's account:

> one countryman [accuses Sawyer] of bewitching his wife to commit adultery with a Servant, a second countryman fears for his wife's virtue, and the third the well-being of cattle as well as wives, daughters, and maidservants in general. The sexual dimension to the accusations against Elizabeth is absent from Goodcole's account and seems drawn from the larger witchcraft literature…Yet the playwrights chose not to include the passages of confession which reveal Goodcole's prurient interest in the location of the teat, how the devil was given access to it, for how long, and whether it was painful to her or not. (159)

These accusations from Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's villagers, as well as their added subplots including Frank Thorney's bigamy (4.2.102-104), Sir Arthur impregnating his maidservant (1.1.195-208), and Cuddy Banks's unashamed desire for Kate Carter (2.2.225-245) demonstrate that Rowley, Dekker, and Ford were by no means removing sexual material in order to make their drama more socially acceptable. Rather, they remove sexual detail associated with Sawyer only.

Rowley, Dekker, and Ford also sanitize Mother Sawyer's relationship with Dog in the characters' physical representation on stage. While the familiar in Goodcole's pamphlet "suckt [Sawyer's] bloud a little above [her] fundament" (310), Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's familiar, according to the stage directions, sucks her arm to seal their pact with her blood (2.1.153). The only suggestion of sexual intimacy between Mother Sawyer and Dog is in 4.1 when she says,

Comfort me; thou shalt have the teat anon.

…I am dried up

With cursing and with madness, and have yet

No blood to moisten those sweet lips of thine.

Stand on thy hind-legs up. Kiss me, my Tommy,

And rub away some wrinkles on my brow

By making my old ribs to shrug for joy

Of thy fine tricks. What hast thou done? Let's tickle. (166-73)

Munro's textual note hesitantly suggests that "tickle" is "used variously for sexual activity in renaissance texts. It is unclear what is intended here, but the text calls for Dog, disturbingly like a human lover, to stand on his hind legs. The dramatists may, however, have intended more innocent intimacies" (Munro 102). Even if early performances interpreted this scene amorously, the relationship between Mother Sawyer and Dog is still a far cry from Goodcole's account. The play even alludes to Goodcole when Cuddy Banks, at the end of the play, says to Dog, "to creep under an old witch's coats and suck like a great puppy! Fie upon't! I have heard beastly things of you, Tom!" (5.1.186-8). Dog neither confirms nor denies the rumour, but responds, "Ha, ha! The worse thou heardst of me, the better 'tis." (5.1.189-90). Perhaps the playwrights are mocking Goodcole's excess or hinting that the rumours surrounding witchcraft are often far worse than the reality. I think it more likely, however, that the play is working to situate Elizabeth Sawyer outside the community and contrasting her behaviour with that of the promiscuous citizens of Edmonton; they are truly corrupt while she is only a lonely, ostracized woman seeking comfort from an animal.

In addition to downplaying the sexualized relationship between Mother Sawyer and Dog, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford grant Sawyer victim status by completely changing her identity from the wife and mother she is in Goodcole's pamphlet to an old woman without family or a support system in *The Witch of Edmonton*. Dean writes, "As [Dekker] well knew, Elizabeth Sawyer was not a spinster nor elderly; she was a married woman with children, aged forty-nine at the time of her execution… The playwrights clearly ignored this complication…" (157). Goodcole's account clearly indicates that Elizabeth Sawyer was a wife and mother. Goodcole records questioning her husband, who had testified that he saw a white ferret running through the thatch of the house (311). He also questions Sawyer about whether anyone else knew about her pact with the devil and demands, "Speake the truth, and tell the reason, why you did not reveale it to your husband, or to some other friend?" (311). Elizabeth Sawyer was married, and her husband, who was alive and well at the time of her trial, was questioned by the court. Goodcole's question not only positions Sawyer as a wife, but as a member of a larger community when he asks why she did not reveal it to "some other friend" (311). By contrast, Dekker's introduction to Elizabeth Sawyer paints her as alone and friendless as she laments, "And why on me? Why should the envious world / Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?" (2.1.1-2). While in the pamphlet account it takes vicious threats from Dog to keep Sawyer from revealing her secret to a friend, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's Sawyer is so ostracized from her community that she has no friends to tell. While Dog in the play text threatens to "tear [Sawyer's] body in a thousand pieces" (2.1.144) if she refuses to give him her soul, he never threatens her with similar consequences if she tells anyone about their pact. By contrast, Goodcole records Sawyer

explaining, “I did not tell any body thereof, that the Divel came unto me, neither I durst not; for the Divell charged me that I should not, and said, That if I did tell it to any body, at his next coming to me, he then would teare me in pieces” (311). Goodcole’s Sawyer is so well integrated in her community that the idea of her telling a friend is represented as a possibility so likely that the devil needs to threaten violence in order to prevent it. Dekker, by contrast, physically positions Sawyer on the margins of society; as Muriel Cunin observes, “throughout the play, Mother Sawyer is outdoors, in an open space. In the arraignment scene, the Justice of the Peace tells her to ‘get home and pray’ (4.1.162). The only mention of her real cottage occurs when the villagers set fire to it” (47). Positioning Sawyer outside the domestic space not only draws attention to her lack of husband and children, but emphasizes her position on the margins of her community and her desperate need for basic resources like fuel for a fire.

Though the real Elizabeth Sawyer was married woman with friends, a husband, and children in abundance, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford write these support systems out of the life of the fictional Mother Sawyer, increasingly positioning her as the victim and instead critiquing the community that persecutes her. However, the historical Sawyer, according to Goodcole’s account, was the mother of “at least eleven children… six of whom reached adulthood” (Munro 26). When Goodcole asks, “How came your eye to be put out?”, Sawyer responds, “With a sticke which one of my children had in 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” (312-13). The peculiar incident of losing an eye is the only mention of Sawyer’s children in Goodcole’s pamphlet, and though this is a brief episode, the playwrights make reference to it twice with the significant

difference that the children who had an accidental hand in the incident are removed from the narrative completely. For example, as Young Banks and several other villagers practice the Morris dance in 2.1, Mother Sawyer enters, and the second dancer exclaims, "bless us, Cuddy, and let her curse her tother eye out" (96), clearly calling attention to the fact that, as in Goodcole's pamphlet, Sawyer only has one eye. In 4.1, as Old Banks taunts Sawyer, "away, therefore, to th'justice for a warrant, and then, Gammer Gurton, have at your needle of witchcraft!" (278-9), she wittily responds, "And prick thine own eyes out. Go, peevish fools!" (280). It is possible that Sawyer is referring to image magic, the means by which she could attempt to blind her enemies by stabbing a facsimile with a needle. Whatever the case, Sawyer's wording of "thine own eyes" rather than simply "thy eyes" suggests an implication of "your eyes rather than mine." Even the concept of "pricking" eyes out, calls attention to Goodcole's record of how Sawyer lost her eye to a sharp stick that one of her children held. In short, while the playwrights clearly reference the fact of Sawyer's one missing eye, they remove her children from the narrative completely, even though the only time Goodcole's account references Sawyer's children is in connection with this episode.

Rowley, Dekker, and Ford also add to Sawyer's helplessness by representing her as an elderly woman, even though they would have known that the real Elizabeth Sawyer was only forty-nine at the time of her trial (Dean 157). Pat Thane explains, "with the best estimates we have and as reliable as we are likely to get, the proportion of the population aged over sixty was as high as 10 percent at the turn of the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries, remaining above 9 percent from 1656 to 1726…" (512). According to these statistics, the real Elizabeth Sawyer could hardly be considered an old woman. However,

the Mother Sawyer in Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's play represents herself as a "ruined cottage ready to fall with age" (2.1.118), an "old woman" (4.1.27), an "aged woman" (4.1.40), and a "poor old woman" (4.1.87, 5.3.24), and laments, "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" (4.1.133-7). Throughout the play, multiple other characters also refer to Sawyer as an old woman. Cuddy Banks calls her "Good Gammer Sawyer" (2.1.200) and a "motherly woman" (2.1.208), and Old Banks mockingly refers to her as "Gammer Gurton" (4.1.278), a well-known character from an early play. Even the name "Mother Sawyer" has elderly connotations; the Oxford English Dictionary notes that the title "Mother" was "used as a respectful (or mock-respectful) form of address to an elderly woman, *esp*. to one of little means or education." In summary, while Goodcole clearly records that Sawyer was a middle-aged, married mother who was well-integrated in her community, Dekker represents her as an unmarried, childless, friendless old woman, completely ostracised by her community—an oppressed victim rather than a malevolent witch.

Portraying Sawyer as a victim not only exaggerates her plight, but emphasizes the cruelty of her community and its leadership. Dean argues, "It seems clear then that Dekker, if indeed he wrote these scenes in the play as many suspect, chose deliberately to portray Elizabeth as a lonely, elderly woman to heighten the violence and injustice done to her, to emphasize the humanity of the intimate and physical relationship she temporarily enjoys with the Dog, and of course to demonstrate her isolation from the community" (158). Dekker's creative deviation from Goodcole's pamphlet not only emphasises Sawyer's isolation, but also shifts blame to the community for Sawyer's

defection to the devil rather than only targeting Sawyer herself. Goodcole's portrayal is of a well-adjusted, well-integrated community woman, who, despite her husband, children, and friends, seeks power, petty revenge, and even sexual intimacy with Dog. By contrast, Dekker's Mother Sawyer, without family, friends, or resources, is not only ostracized and shunned, but actively verbally and physically abused until she turns to Dog in desperation and forms a relationship with him that is reminiscent of a child, friend, or even domestic pet.

The Witch of Edmonton also shifts blame from Elizabeth Sawyer to the community of Edmonton by drastically simplifying Sawyer's relationship with her neighbours. Far from "Gather[ing] a few rotten sticks to warm [her]" (1.2.19-20), the real Elizabeth Sawyer "is described by Goodcole as a 'spinster'—that is, someone who makes their living from spinning—who also attempted to sell brooms to her neighbours (Munro 26). Sawyer was a businesswoman—not an old woman depending on gathering scraps to survive. Not only did she and her family have an ordinary means of making a living, thus not relying on their neighbours for charity, they were also to blame for causing friction with their neighbours. Unlike Mother Sawyer, who is the victim of unprompted verbal abuse from her neighbours, particularly Old Banks, the real Elizabeth Sawyer and several of her family members had actually been tried for petty crimes prior to her trial for witchcraft. Munro writes, "Elizabeth was herself tried on a charge of stealing sheets belonging to a neighbour, William Hussey, in September 1615, and only escaped the death penalty because the goods were judged to be worth less than one shilling. The alternative punishment would usually be a whipping—a fate that befell Elizabeth's son, William, in 1624, when he was convicted of stealing a sheep" (27). The historical

Elizabeth Sawyer then, at least, if these records can be trusted, had personally caused trouble with her neighbours and was not simply abused because she was "poor, deformed and ignorant, / And like a bow buckled and bent together" (2.1.3-4) as Rowley, Dekker, and Ford portray her.

In contrast to Goodcole's pamphlet, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's dramatization fits into the pattern of the charity-refused paradigm outlined by Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas, thus granting Sawyer significantly more victim status since she depends on her neighbours' good will for survival. Thomas explains the charity-refused paradigm, writing:

> the most common situation of all was that in which the victim (or, if he were an infant, the victim's parents) had been guilty of a breach of charity or neighbourliness, by turning away an old woman who had come to the door to beg or borrow some food or drink, or the loan of some household utensil… The overwhelmingly majority of fully documented witch cases fall into this simple pattern. The witch is sent away empty-handed, perhaps mumbling a malediction; and in due course something goes wrong with the household, for which she is immediately held responsible. (553-4)

MacFarlane similarly explains, "[O]ne [common] behaviour [of the suspected witch]…was begging, combined with grumbling or cursing when they were refused" (159). A person, typically, but not always, an elderly, impoverished woman would appeal to one of her neighbours, often but not always an economic superior, and request a small act of charity. She might ask for food, a small household item, money, or the chance to borrow basic tools. Her plea would be denied, and she would leave, muttering threats,

curses, or unintelligible words under her breath. Shortly after this incident, misfortune would befall the refusers of charity or someone in their family. For example, butter might spoil, livestock might become sick or mysteriously die, or someone in the household might suffer a strange illness or injury. The family would remember the conflict with the requester of charity and her parting threats, and make a connection between her animosity and their own bad luck, attribute their calamity to sorcery, and accuse the impoverished neighbour of being a witch (Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* 40). Though Macfarlane's observation was born out of his study of the Essex trials, the same narrative is repeated in witchcraft trials and pamphlets from all over England and Scotland. In Scotland, Isobel Young was accused in 1596 of hiring a witch to harm a woman who refused to let her redeem an acre of land (Martin 86). In England, a pamphlet detailing the 1566 witchcraft trials records, "[Joan Waterhouse] confessed that…lacking bread, she went to a girl, a neighbour's child, and desired her to give her a piece of bread and cheese. Which, when [she] denied and gave her not…she going home…call[ed] Satan, which came to her…in the likeness of a great dog, demanding what she would have. [S]he said she would have him to make such a girl afeared…" ("The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde" 77-78). In the Chlemsford trials of 1579, a woman was said to have come "to the house of one Richard Saunder…and being denied yeast which she required of his wife, she went her way murmuring, as offended with her answer. And after her departure, the young child in the cradle was taken vehemently sick, in a marvellously strange manner…" (96). In other cases, a woman was denied a piece of leather and a child fell ill (97), another was refused some pot herbs and her refuser suffered debilitating back pain, and a third begged alms and, when refused, was said to

have sent a ferret to bite her neighbours' child (188). There is abundant evidence of the charity-refused paradigm all over England and Scotland.

Several literary critics have noted that *The Witch of Edmonton* fits into the historic pattern of the charity refused paradigm; David Nicol states, "This depiction of the witch as scapegoat is remarkably congruent with the work of modern social historians, who have shown that real life witchcraft accusations often arose from the collective guilt of communities who had failed to give charity to their impoverished neighbours" (429). However, in the play, Sawyer's case is actually much more egregious than a loss of basic charity, while in "The wonderfull discoverie," Sawyer is not a victim of refused charity at all. Rather, according to Goodcole, Sawyer, "moved and seduced by the Divell, by the Diabolicall helpe, did out of her malicious heart, (because her neighbours where she dwelt, would not buy brooms of her) would therefore thus revenge her selfe on them in this manner, namely, witch to death their Nurse Children and Cattell" (304-5). Sawyer's neighbours suspect that she is seeking revenge on them, not for a refusal of the charity on which she depended for survival, but because they refuse to buy the brooms that she makes. Of course, their refusal of patronage would have had an impact for her and her family's well-being at a time when, "Minor losses of dairy products, crops and livestock, or the death of able-bodied family members could mean the difference between breaking even, sinking further into debt, or even falling into the ranks of the landless poor" (Martin 85) and when a woman could be threatened with beating or even execution for stealing a neighbour's sheets. However, there is still a vast difference between a refusal to purchase goods and a refusal to provide charity, particularly when the historical Elizabeth Sawyer

and her family had already made themselves odious to their community through their petty theft (if they were indeed guilty of the crimes of which they were convicted).

The Witch of Edmonton's Mother Sawyer, by contrast, is denied charity rather than business. Not only is she denied charity, she is denied a kind of charity to which she would traditionally be entitled and which she is willing to personally work for, despite her age. The first time Mother Sawyer appears in the play, she is gathering kindling on Old Banks's property:

> OLD BANKS: What makest thou upon my ground?
>
> SAWYER: Gather a few rotten sticks to warm me.
>
> OLD BANKS: Down with them which 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! [*Strikes her*] (2.1.19-27).

The traditional pattern of the charity refused paradigm is for an impoverished woman to directly request charity from community members and to curse them when they refuse to help her. However, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's rendition of this trope is far more rancorous than the usual stinginess of villagers who, perhaps due to their own financial difficulties, refuse to help their impoverished neighbours. Old Banks does not refuse to give Sawyer something of value that she requests from him. Rather, he actively stops her from working to gather sticks—something that is of no monetary value to him. He then

adds injury to insult by beating her. Cunin argues that Mother Sawyer's act of "Gather[ing] a few rotten sticks to warm [her]" (1.2.19-20), hints at

> the impact of the enclosure laws on poverty and their coincidence with witchcraft trials in England, a fact that has been stressed by many critics: 'The flourishing of absolute private property, enclosure, and the consolidation of large estates increasingly denied to lesser farmers the subsistence conditions on which their households had depended. The loss of common rights—not only grazing but also gathering fuel and gleaning harvest leavings—deprived women in particular of customary labour.' The play makes it clear that Mother Sawyer is driven to witchcraft by 'the external conditions of class, misogyny, and poverty.'" (44)

As Mother Sawyer is old, friendless and destitute, the community of Edmonton not only neglects to offer her charity, but actively prevents her from working for her own survival in one of the few ways left available to her. Never in this play does Sawyer approach her neighbours to request charity; rather, they approach her to stop her from gathering something that is of no value to them.

2.2 CREATING THE WITCH

Rowley, Dekker, and Ford involve the community in Sawyer's transformation into a witch in a way that Goodcole never does. David Nicol writes,

> Despite the presence of a devil in the play, the playwrights place considerable emphasis on the coercive power of rural poverty and the scapegoating of marginal figures by small communities. One aspect of this depiction of social pressure is that the play attacks conventional beliefs

about the dangers of witches by dramatizing the creation of a 'witch' by a community that needs someone to blame for its misfortunes. (427)

Although historians widely recognize the charity-refused paradigm, and although 16th and 17th century pamphlets illustrate this pattern over and over, these contemporary accounts never indicate that the neighbours are responsible for the transformation into a witch—only that one of the ways to recognize a witch is by observing when she curses a neighbour she holds a grudge against. In other words, her identity as a witch is *revealed* when her neighbours are unkind to her, rather than *created* when her neighbours are unkind to her. While a witch may seek out the devil to exact revenge particularly because of her unkind neighbours, pamphlets rarely, if ever, record instances of those neighbours accusing her of being a witch before she actually is one. Rowley, Dekker, and Ford take the charity-refused paradigm one step further by portraying Mother Sawyer's neighbours as goading her into becoming a witch before she ever considers it herself and before the devil ever visits her.

The fact that the community is so instrumental in Sawyer's transformation introduces a subtle element of skepticism to the play. As Nicol writes, "In the plotline concerned with Mother Sawyer, doubt is continually introduced about the veracity of witchcraft beliefs. The dramatists show that the label 'witch' has been applied to Sawyer long before she decides to become one" (Nicol 427). The fact that the community labels Sawyer as a witch when she clearly is not one does not mean that the playwrights are necessarily denying the existence of witchcraft altogether, but it does show acknowledgement that witchcraft accusations may often be incorrect and demonstrate the potential for innocent people to be condemned prematurely. Mary Floyd-Wilson argues

that "Critics have recognized that *The Witch of Edmonton* sophisticatedly presents how a community helps generate its own witches by its scapegoating, uncharitable practices. Contrary to what some have argued, however, the playwrights' insight into this process does not imply skepticism about the practice of witchcraft or the influence of the devil" (143). While it is true that *The Witch of Edmonton* is deeply concerned with the influence of the devil and never denies a supernatural reality, the play does demonstrate skepticism about the *accuracy* of witchcraft accusations. As James Sharpe, Malcolm Gaskill, and Brian Levack have argued, acquittal rates for witchcraft were higher in England than anywhere else in Europe (Levack, "Possession," 1624), and this acquittal rate remained high during James I's reign (Gaskill, "Witchcraft and Evidence," 42), demonstrating widespread skepticism in the population. Levack posits that falling conviction rates in early 17th century England were in part the result of "a growing awareness…that many witches were being convicted and executed for crimes they had not committed" ("Decline" 379). Skepticism about witchcraft accusations, therefore, does not mean that English people were broadly denying the influence of the devil, but that they understood that not everyone accused of witchcraft was truly a witch. Rowley, Dekker, and Ford represent this kind of skepticism as they portray the community of Edmonton accusing Mother Sawyer of being a witch before Dog appears to make a pact with her. At this early stage in the play, their accusations are false. By recasting Sawyer as a vulnerable old woman, the playwrights also associate her character with the well-known skepticism of Reginald Scot, who portrayed elderly and isolated women as the primary victims of false accusation because of their susceptibility to community influence. He explains, "these old women being daunted with authority, circumvented with guile, constrained by force,

compelled by feare, induced by error, and deceived by ignorance, do fall into such rash credulity, and so are brought unto these absurd confessions" (43). While the playwrights do not quite adopt the extreme skepticism of Scot, instead staging Sawyer's pact with the devil, they do represent her as old, needy, lonely, and susceptible to the influence of her neighbours who relentlessly falsely accuse her until she agrees with their accusations.

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the community is primarily responsible for Sawyer's eventual pact with the devil because they name her and treat her as a witch before she ever wishes to become one. In *Thinking with Demons*, historian Stuart Clark argues that, rather than thinking about language as describing objective reality, we should be willing to consider "a different notion of language…in particular, that it should not be asked to follow reality but be allowed to constitute it. Here, the object of attention would become language itself, not the relationship between language and the extra-linguistic world" (*Thinking with Demons* 6). He clarifies, "What this amounts to is that human beings make truths (as well as errors) by making the sentences to express them, and the sign systems in which to say the sentences. They do not find them lying around in the external world waiting to be discovered and then accurately described in language" (7). In Elizabeth Sawyer's introductory scene in act 2 scene 1, Old Banks calls her both "witch" (17, 19) and "hag" (31), and Sawyer is at first baffled by these titles, asking him "Dost call me witch?" (18) and "Call me hag and witch! / What is the name? Where and by what art learned? / What spells, what charms or invocations? / May the thing called 'familiar' be purchased?" (35-38). These lines could be read as Sawyer genuinely wondering how she might become a witch, but one fact calls that interpretation into question. If she is genuinely asking how she might learn to become a witch and where she can find a

familiar, why is it that Dog does not appear to her at this opportune moment? Instead, Dog does not appear to her until she explicitly expresses a desire for revenge in 2.1.131-135. I think it more likely that at this moment Sawyer is genuinely wondering what Old Banks actually means when he calls her a witch—she is looking for a definition. As Clark argues, "witchcraft beliefs are an obvious example of signs that have no referents in the real world….Naturally, those who believed in witchcraft thought that their beliefs did correspond with reality. From within the vantage point of a language it is customary to suppose that signs describing works of reality do work in this way" (7). When Old Banks calls Sawyer a witch, he calls her something that she does not recognize as having referents in the real world.

Again, in 2.1.117-124, Sawyer expresses ignorance of and even doubts about the validity of witchcraft. Furious, she says,

> I have heard old Bedlams
> 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 became acquainted with them
> I am now ignorant. Would some power good or bad
> Instruct me which way I might be revenged… (2.1.117-124)

Sawyer is not only ignorant about how to become a witch, she also states that what little she has heard about witches comes from "old Bedlams," indicating that at this stage in the story Sawyer might even consider these tales ridiculous. The words of Old Banks and the other Edmontonians who persecute Mother Sawyer, then, at least in part cause her to

become a witch since she would likely never have come up with this concept on her own. Like a witch casting a spell, their words become reality. When Old Banks, Cuddy Banks, and the Morris dancers all repeatedly call her a witch, Sawyer finally says in exasperation, "'Tis all one / To be a witch as to be counted one" (2.1.133-4), and in the next moment Dog appears to make these words a reality. While Sawyer certainly has agency and a personal desire for revenge in the moment when Dog appears, and while Dog plays a significant role in her transformation, it is also true that at some level, the words of the Edmontonians create reality as Sawyer literally makes a pact with the devil and becomes a witch. Just before Dog appears to Sawyer for the first time, Sawyer declares, "That curmudgeon Banks / Is ground of all my scandal" (2.1.114-5). Munro's footnote reads, "**ground** the fundamental part; the underlying cause" (151) and "**my scandal** damage to my reputation, slanders against me; *scandal* can also refer to things that impair faith in god or obedience to divine law, or things that cause unbelief or moral lapses" (151). By this definition, Sawyer is accusing Banks of being the fundamental cause of her moral lapse and imminent fall away from faith. Even before Old Banks's entry in 2.1, Sawyer remarks to herself, "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— / Forespeaks 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" (2.1.8-15). From her earliest moment in the play, Sawyer suggests that the insults of her community have been so incessant that she herself almost believes that she is a witch.

The fact that the words of her community are the main factor Sawyer cites for her turn to the devil is remarkable given the source material of the play which blames Sawyer's bad tongue for her descent into witchcraft. According to Goodcole's record, when he asked Elizabeth 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?" (208), Sawyer responded, "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*" (308). Goodcole then supplements Sawyer's answer with a short monologue about how he hopes that others will avoid sins of the tongue since the tongue was designed to glorify God and Sawyer has paid dearly for her folly (308). When Goodcole asks her how many people and animals she has killed, Sawyer responds, "I have bene by the helpe of the Divell, the means of many Christians and beasts death, the cause that moved mee to do it, was malice and envy…" (309). Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's drama completely flips this narrative, down to the individual word choice. When Sawyer comes onstage for the first time, she says, "And why on me? Why should the *envious* world / Throw all their scandalous *malice* upon me?" (2.1.1-2, emphasis mine). The play flips the pamphlet's narrative from Elizabeth Sawyer turning to witchcraft and the devil purely out of malice and envy to the envious world throwing all of its malice on Sawyer, thus transforming her into a witch.

Goodcole's pamphlet unrelentingly blames Sawyer for inviting the devil through her unguarded tongue. Dean states, "Cursing, as Goodcole makes clear…was the very

reason why the devil came to Elizabeth in the first place" (151). Goodcole repeatedly emphasizes Sawyer's cursing, stating explicitly that "That tongue which by cursing, swearing, blaspheming, and omprecating, as afterward she confessed, was the occasioning cause, of the Divels accesse unto her, even at that time, and to claime her thereby as is owne, by it discovered her lying, swearing, and blaspheming" (304). Belabouring his point, Goodcole records Sawyer as saying, "The first time that the Divell came unto me was, when I was cursing, swearing and blaspheming; he then rushing in upon 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*" (308). He follows this confession with a didactic application of his own making:

> A wonderful warning to many whose tongues are too frequent in these abominable 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 therewith they at once both blesse and curse. (308).

Dean explains the legal and historical reasons for this emphasis on bad language in particular:

> Swearing was one of a cluster of bad behaviours…that had once been considered private sins, matters of individual conscience. By the 1620s, however, spurred on by new understandings of providence and magistracy associated with Calvinism, they were just as likely to be seen as social and

> political problems requiring regulation by authorities. Swearers, blasphemers, drunkards, adulterers, scolds, and the like were assumed to be reprobates whose actions deserved the attention of godly magistrates because they were transgressions against the community. (151-2)

Goodcole blames Sawyer's downfall on her bad tongue and marks her as a danger to the community, using her as a didactic example for others to avoid her pitfalls.

In contrast to Goodcole's unrelenting criticism of Sawyer's individual faults and uncontrollable tongue, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford portray the community of Edmonton as driving Sawyer to eventually make the demonic pact through their unprovoked cruelty, which is often perpetuated through their own abusive language. Although the decision is ultimately Sawyer's own, the play draws out the harsh treatment she must endure before she finally turns to cursing and revenge. In fact, when Sawyer makes her first appearance onstage, she is bemoaning curses leveled against her, rather than performing any cursing herself: "Must I…be made a common sink / For all the filth and rubbish of men's *tongues* / To fall and run into?" (2.1.6-8, emphasis mine). Here, Sawyer is not a bitter scold cursing the community. Instead, she is wondering why the community insists on cursing her. Floyd-Wilson argues that "most early modern spectators would suspect that [Sawyer] is not entirely innocent in her plight…to suffer as the 'common sink' of her community's ill-will would also point to her natural susceptibility to corruption" (142-3). She goes on to explain that "sink" could be used to describe "the sin of whoredom [which] is identified as a 'most fylthy lake, foule puddle, and styking synke, whereinto all kyndes of synnes and euils flow'" (143), and that Thomas Dekker himself wrote that "standing

water…does nothing but gather corruption" (qtd in Floyd-Wilson 143). However, as Munro notes, "common" signifies "belonging to the community, public" (143), suggesting that Sawyer is a community "sink" for others' "filth and rubbish…To fall and run into" (2.1.7-8), and therefore the sins that are heaped upon her are not truly her own. The connection that Floyd-Wilson points out between the word "sink" and the sin of whoredom is particularly interesting since the playwrights deliberately scrub Sawyer's character of the usual sexual corruption a witch would often be thought to display and instead show that these sins are rife in the community of Edmonton. Sawyer has become a scapegoat for the sins of the community, who turn her into a witch though their bad tongues.

Sawyer also claims that the community has slandered her: "Some call me 'witch', / And being ignorant of myself they go / About to teach me how to be one" (8-10). Again, Sawyer stresses her own ignorance and her inability to become a witch without the pressure of the community. Sawyer does mention her "bad tongue" (11) but insists that it is "by their bad usage made so" (11). Lest the audience suspect Sawyer is simply trying to make excuses for her bad tongue, the very next lines serve as a live case study to demonstrate her point. Old Banks enters and makes the first verbal blow: "Out! Out upon thee, witch!" (17). Sawyer does not immediately retaliate. She simply asks, "Dost call me witch?" (18). Of course, there is a certain level of interpretation here that could be left to the actress playing Sawyer; shouting the lines back at Old Banks would mean instant retaliation while an exhausted honest question would give Sawyer significantly more victim status. Whatever the case, however, the fact remains that her reply, by itself, is not a curse, insult, or even argument; it is a question. Old Banks, by contrast, continues to

insult her without provocation, answering, “I do, witch, I do, and worse I would, knew I a name more hateful. What makest thou upon my ground?” (19-20). Again, Sawyer does not respond to his verbal assault, instead merely answering his question: “Gather a few rotten sticks to warm me” (21). It is only when Old Banks demands that Sawyer drop her sticks and threatens her with violence (22-3) that Sawyer finally bursts out, “You won’t, churl, cut-throat, miser! There they be. Would they stuck ‘cross thy throat, thy bowels, thy maw, thy midriff—” (24-6). Even in this outburst, Sawyer does drop the sticks as instructed. While she verbally wishes harm on Old Banks, she at least calls him names that are accurate, such as “miser” in contrast to his slandering her with “witch.” In response to Sawyer finally fighting back after he has repeatedly verbally abused her, Old Banks reacts disproportionately once again and begins to physically assault her, striking her repeatedly (31). Perhaps Sawyer does have a “bad tongue” in this scene, but it is provably “by their bad usage made so” (11). Additionally, Sawyer’s “bad tongue” does not immediately summon the devil. It is not until much later in 2.1 that she reflects on what has transpired and begins to curse Banks, prompting Dog’s famous opening lines, “Ho! Have I found thee cursing? Now thou art mine own” (136-7).

2.3 EDMONTON AND THE DEVIL

Not only does Rowley, Dekker, and Ford’s play allow more space for Sawyer’s victimhood in the play than the pamphlet by portraying her as an old, poor, single social outcast, it portrays Dog, by contrast as comfortably integrated into Edmonton society, demonstrating that the community has no problem playing host to the devil. For example, when Dog tricks Cuddy Banks into falling into a pond, Cuddy initially threatens, “I’ll throw you in at Limehouse in some tanner’s pit or other” (3.1.116-7), but then quickly

forgets his anger and befriends Dog. He also invites him to join in the Morris dance, a community activity (3.1.155-6). The fact that the devil in both the play and the pamphlet manifests as a physical, material creature allows him to integrate in a visible way with the community. While Protestant ideas of witchcraft placed the devil in the role of power, the idea of a familiar was still an odd element in a Protestant understanding of witchcraft and magic. Millar explains, "For many Protestants, the idea of the devil as a small, tangible, domestic creature that did jobs for its mistress sat uncomfortably with a learned understanding of the devil's role in the world. Some attempted to explain away the familiar's appearance by referring to Satan's role as a trickster" (*Emotions* 52). Regardless of whether the concept of the familiar sat uncomfortably with a learned understanding of the devil, familiars allow for a popular understanding of a devil who could physically and visibly infiltrate the community, living among them as an accepted community member, rather than an invisible evil presence.

Even the term "familiar" is suggestive of someone who blends into a home or community. The Oxford English Dictionary records definitions from "a member of a person's household or family, esp. a servant of high rank" to "A close friend or associate; a person whom one knows well" to finally, "a spirit, often taking the form of an animal, which obeys and assists a witch or other person" (*OED* familiar, n. 1a, n. 2a, and n. 3a). Every one of these definitions was understood and operating in 1621, and it is not difficult to see the connections between them. Each of them has to do with close, domestic relationships. In 1621, the word would also have been understood as an adjective, meaning "Unceremonious, as among close friends; free, casual, informal," or "Of, belonging to, or relating to one's household or family…private, domestic"

("Familiar," n., adj,. & adv.). Each of these uses of the word has to do with domesticity, closeness, and the modern sense of something that is well known to someone. The layered meaning of this word demonstrates just how domestic and well-integrated into the community these creatures were thought to be.

Interestingly, though Goodcole is certainly interested in both Dog and two white ferrets that children reported Sawyer had been feeding (311), he exclusively uses the terms "Divell" and "spirit" rather than "familiar" when he questions Sawyer about these creatures. By contrast, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's Sawyer, after the community ostracises her to the point that Old Banks strikes her repeatedly without cause (1.2.31-32), cries out, "May the thing called 'familiar' be purchased?" (1.2.38) It is important that in the play, in which Sawyer has already been unjustly cut off from charity and community, Dog is not only a devil but a familiar—simultaneously Sawyer's last chance of a meaningful relationship of any kind and a creature that, unlike Sawyer, integrates seamlessly into the community of Edmonton. Mother Sawyer does not only communicate with Dog in order to enact revenge on those who have harmed her; she forms what she mistakenly thinks is a friendship with him, calling him "Tom" and turning to him not only for revenge but for emotional support. When Sir Arthur has finally accused Sawyer of being a witch, she turns to Dog and says, "My dear Tom-boy, welcome!... Comfort me; thou shalt have the teat anon" (4.1.167, 70). The way that Sawyer speaks to Dog suggests that he has become "familiar" to her—she calls him by a common name and looks to him for comfort. Millar summarizes scholars' commentary on common names for familiars, noting,

> the vast majority of familiar names were either diminutives such as Jack, John, Bunne, Tibb or standard et names such as Pusse, Gibb or Ball. They could also have descriptive names such as White, Blew or Calico…perhaps the main lesson from these names is that they all suggest the smallness of the familiar and the affectionate nature of the relationship between them and the accused witch who named them…familiars' names form a 'central part' of women's fantasies about their familiars. (*Emotions* 52-3)

Sawyer's use of the name "Tom-boy" suggests a close relationship with Dog that he himself did not initiate. In fact, in the scene when Dog first appears to Sawyer, he introduces himself as "He thou hast so often importuned to appear to thee—the devil" (2.1.141). The first time Dog acknowledges a different name is when he meets Cuddy Banks in 3.1. When Cuddy asks, "What might one call your name, dog?" (129-30), Dog replies, "My dame calls me Tom" (131), implying that this pet name is a title that Sawyer herself bestowed. This close relationship and diminutive title demonstrate how easily Dog is able to integrate into a larger community and cause harm from within while Sawyer is ostracized. He begins by presenting himself to the outcast Mother Sawyer, but is soon infiltrating every level of Edmonton society, from playing the fiddle while the Morris dancers perform (3.4.60) to easily influencing Frank Thorney to commit murder (3.3.14-65) (Sawyer does not request either of these actions).

The fact of Dog's physical, tangible presence as a community member in Edmonton becomes obvious in performance. On stage, Dog is not allowed to be a ghostly or spiritual presence—practicality necessitates that he is performed by an actor in

costume who visibly mingles with the other actors. Lucy Munro explains, "…[Worcester's Men] paid 10 shillings for 'Lame skenes' and 12 shillings for 'a canves sewt & skenes' for the first part of The Black Dog of Newgate… This play thus featured…a suit in which an actor could play a dog, suggesting that the dramatists…were able to draw on established traditions and, perhaps, ready-made costumes and props handed down from earlier plays" (Munro 8). This detail about probable costuming emphasizes the materiality of Dog onstage as an actor in a simple costume. Munro continues,

> *The Witch of Edmonton* seems also deliberately to resist presenting its devil in the flashy theatrical forms that he takes in *Doctor Faustus*, *The Virgin Martyr*, and *The Birth of Merlin*. If spectators hoped that Dog would appear in his 'true' demonic shape towards the end of the play, his appearance in Act 5—when he merely appears as a white dog, rather than a devil—may have come as an anti-climax. Unlike Harpax in *The Virgin Martyr*, he does not appear in a theatrically demonic form, and does not sink to hell via the playhouse's trapdoor and a blaze of squibs, being instead beaten from the stage in a far more homely fashion by Cuddy Banks. (17)

Not only does practical theatrical necessity dictate that Dog must be physically present onstage, the playwrights do not even seem to have used some of the few special effects available to them in 1621, such as a trapdoor to "hell" that could make Dog seem more supernatural. Rather, Dog blends into the community by appearing as ordinary as

possible. Roberta Barker describes Dog's uncanny blend of the ordinary and the supernatural in Dalhousie University's 2008 production, explaining,

> Our central aim was to communicate the notion of the Dog as a demonic figure of terrifying, earthly reality whose jocose animal disguise was penetrable by the theatre audience if not always by the play's dramatis personae. We chose to transform Kimberly Cody into the Dog…by masking her. The [mask] boasted disturbingly blank eyes and a toothy grin that appeared eager and friendly from some angles but revealed itself as leering and vicious from others. The Mask covered Cody's head, eyes, and nose but left her human mouth and chin fully visible. We hoped that this approach would encourage the audience to glimpse the quasi-human face of the devil under the dog. (175)

The horror of the devil in *The Witch of Edmonton* comes not from elaborate costuming or stage trap doors, but from his very ordinariness and the ease with which he mingles with a community that largely either accepts him without question or does not notice him at all.

Floyd-Wilson points out that while Dog's physical form as a domestic animal allows him to infiltrate Edmonton, he also has shape-shifting abilities that allow him to escalate that integration to the level of suggestion or contagion—something that is barely distinguishable from the self. She writes,

> While familiars prove to be the most visible manifestation of the devil in early modern culture, a majority of contemporary descriptions of diabolical experiences characterize the devil as a disembodied voice or as

> intrusive thoughts. As invisible forces, evil spirits were also deemed able to 'mingle themselves with' one's 'food, humours, spirits, with the ayre and breath that we drawn and breathe out.' As Dog explains his shape-shifting powers, he can 'stretch' himself and 'draw this bulk small as silver wire, / Enter at the least pore tobacco fume / Can make a breach for' (5.1.202-05)" (141).

Dog is able to mingle with the community not only in his physical form as a community member in an event like the Morris dance, but also as an unseen force that spreads corruption through suggestion; Floyd-Wilson suggests that "the spread of demonic influence functions as a contagion, for Dog is able to move through the community, 'touching' those he and Sawyer wish to affect with madness or harm" (141). However, while Dog expertly works to blend into the community, the citizens of Edmonton are far from his innocent victims; early modern notions of demonic influence held that "the devil tailors his temptation to the needs and desires of his subject" (143). In this sense, as the community of Edmonton responds to Dog's suggestions, they are all as much witches as Sawyer herself, as she points out when she is brought before a justice the first time (147). Sawyer eloquently claims that, "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…These by enchantments can whole lordships change…Are not these witches?" (4.1.104-7, 129, 136). The Justice responds, "Yes, yes, but the law / Cast not an eye on these" (137-8). While the law may not recognize these "men-witches" (4.1.152), Floyd-Wilson points out that these are the witches Dog is most interested in influencing. At the end of the play, Dog declares, "I am for greatness now, corrupted greatness. / There I'll

shug in and get a noble countenance, / Serve some Briarean footcloth-strider / That has an hundred hands to catch at bribes / But not a finger's nail of charity; / Such, like the dragon's tail, shall pull down hundreds / To drop and sink with him…Hence, silly fool, / I scorn to prey on such an atom soul" (5.1.200-210). While he remained Sawyer's familiar, Dog's "malevolence was limited to the domestic sphere in a small community. To serve a gallant man at court….will allow the devil to enlarge his kingdom much more quickly and efficiently" (Floyd-Wilson 148). A vulnerable, isolated, elderly woman might be susceptible to Dog's attacks, but she is far from his preferred victim, and, as the play repeatedly argues, has the capacity to cause relatively insignificant damage compared to the evil Dog can accomplish through a corrupt man in a position of power.

2.4 EDMONTON AS THE DEVIL

Not only does Dog easily blend in with the community of Edmonton, but the language of the play even associates the community of Edmonton with Dog, closely relating the two. For example, the word "cur" is used both to refer to Dog and the townspeople who treat Sawyer badly. Cuddy Banks often refers to Dog as a cur; upon meeting Dog, he says, "Fine gentle cur it is, and well brought up, I warrant him" (3.1.85-86) and "Now come behind, kind cur" (3.1.97). This term is not necessarily a negative one; one of the definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary is, "A dog: now always depreciative or contemptuous; a worthless, low-bred, or snappish dog. Formerly (and still sometimes dialectally) applied without depreciation, *esp.* to a watch-dog or shepherd's dog" (*OED* cur, n. 1a). The fact that he pairs the word with "gentle" and "kind" suggests that Cuddy is not using the term in a negative sense. However, when the term is applied to people, it becomes an insult, or "As a term of contempt: a surly, ill-bred, low, or

cowardly fellow" (*OED* cur, n. 1b). Sawyer is using this term when she calls the Edmontonians, "a pack of curs" (4.1.178). Sawyer even makes the connection between the Edmontonians and Dog before Dog ever appears onstage, calling Old Banks, "this miser, this black cur / That barks and bites and sucks the very blood / Of me and of my credit" (2.1.130-133). Here, before Sawyer ever meets Dog or becomes a witch, she identifies Banks as the devil figuratively sucking her blood in the gesture of a demonic pact and forcing her towards witchcraft by denying her the right to work for her basic survival. Nicol states, "the play in fact argues that social forces encourage demonic intervention; for example, Banks is a 'black cur' who sucks Sawyer's blood because his actions are driving her toward the waiting jaws of the Dog" (442). Not only do the Edmontonians mingle with Dog as a neighbour; they become Dog as they harass Sawyer into witchcraft. Later in the play, when the Justice asked Mother Sawyer if she is a witch, she responds, "I am none, but base curs so bark at me" (4.1.92). She then goes on to blame these curs, rather than the literal cur she has made a pact with, for being so cruel they could make a woman turn witch out of desperation: "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 turn witch" (93-95). She similarly calls the community "curs" as she nears her trial, turning to Dog for comfort and exclaiming, "I am torn in pieces by a pack of curs" (4.1.178). This exclamation about people but spoken to a Dog is doubly ironic in light of the play's source material. Used to refer to the community of Edmonton, this description echoes almost exactly the words of Dog in Goodcole's pamphlet at the moment when he intimidates Sawyer into making the demonic pact. Sawyer (reportedly) tells Goodcole, "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 bod which he asked of me" (Goodcole 309-10, emphasis mine). Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's Sawyer uses this same language of "tearing in pieces" to talk about what the community, rather than the devil, has done to her—the community is an even more aggressive pack of curs than Dog, forcing Sawyer into her role as a witch more violently than Dog himself does.

To emphasize just how much blame shifts to the community, Sawyer's diabolical pact in the play is much quicker and less threatening than in the source text. Though Dog does threaten, "Art mine or no? Speak, or I'll tear—" (2.1.163), he does not even finish his sentence before Sawyer interrupts, "All thine" (164). In the play, then, the language of "tearing in pieces," is used mostly with reference to the community. This language also directly aligns the devil with the Edmontonians. Nicol argues,

> There are numerous lines in the play that *conflate* social and demonic forces. Frank talks of 'the misery of beggary and want / Two devils that are occasions to enforce / A shameful end' (1.1.18-20), while Mother Sawyer calls Old Banks 'this black cur / That barks and bites, and sucks the very blood of me' (2.1.123-25), and the villagers that bait her 'dogs' (5.3.42). These social pressures are equated with the Dog because they have a similar coercive effect. (441)

Nicol's point that social pressures work as a kind of demonic force in the play is supported by the fact that Rowley, Dekker, and Ford include several references to the devil even before Dog ever arrives onstage. The first mention is Frank Thorney's line

about “The misery of beggary and want, / Two devils that are occasions to enforce / A shameful end” (1.1.18-20), but only a short while later, Sir Arthur Clarington accuses Frank of impregnating Winifred, lecturing, “If the nimble devil / That wantoned in your blood rebelled against / All rules of honest duty, you might, sir, / Have found out some more fitting place than here / To have built a stews in” (1.1.78-82). Later in the same scene, as Winnifred tells a vexed Sir Arthur that their clandestine relationship is now over, she implores him, “When I am gone, think on my just complaint. / I was your devil, O be you my saint!” (1.1.217-8). Again, when Old Thorney speaks to Frank about marrying Susan Carter, suspicious that his son has already married Winnifred, he says in anger, “Oh, thou art a villain! / A devil like a man” (1.2.172-3). All of these associations of Edmontonians with the devil occur before either Mother Sawyer or Dog appear onstage, establishing the idea of the devil as well-integrated in Edmontonian society with or without a witch. Similarly, before the devil ever arrives in the shape of a black dog, an angry Sawyer describes Old Banks as, “this black cur / That barks and bites and suck the very blood / Of me and of my credit” (2.1.131-2), picturing her tormentor not only as a black dog, but specifically as a familiar who sucks blood. Later in the play, Sawyer similarly conceives of her other tormentors as dogs, declaring, “None but base curs so bark at me” (4.1.92), “I am torn in pieces by a pack of curs” (4.1.168), and “These dogs will mad me” (5.2.61-2). The play repeatedly associates the community of Edmonton both with the devil in general and with dogs specifically.

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, then, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford retool Goodcole’s account of Elizabeth Sawyer and transform her from a middle-aged wife and mother who has become a community nuisance through petty theft and her sharp tongue and who

seeks out the devil to exact revenge for insignificant offenses against her into an elderly woman with no family or support network who is unreasonably ostracized by the community that owes her charity and even restricted from honest labour to which she would traditionally be entitled. Rather than willfully cursing until the devil appears to her, Sawyer is accused of being a witch before she actually is one and is both verbally and physically assaulted until she curses from frustration and desperation, causing the devil in the form of a dog to appear to her. This adaptation from Goodcole's pamphlet to the play places blame on the citizens of Edmonton for turning mother Sawyer into a witch rather than simply blaming Mother Sawyer's flawed moral character, and draws a parallel between the devil and the Edmontonians by referring to them both as curs. While Goodcole's narrative blames an able wife and mother with a means of survival for cursing and forming a pact with the devil out of malice, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford portray an old woman, unfairly treated and falsely labelled as a witch until out of desperation and resignation she becomes one. In Goodcole's pamphlet, the witch is a dangerous instrument through which the devil may enter the community; in *The Witch of Edmonton*, the cruel community is the instrument by which the devil enters the witch.

CHAPTER 3: "HEAVEN GUIDE HIM TO THY HUSBAND'S CUDGEL": FALSTAFF AND THE COMMUNITY WITCH IN *THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR*

Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is an important Elizabethan witchcraft play that, like *The Witch of Edmonton*, uses the figure of the witch to demonstrate that corrupt community leadership is the greatest threat to a community. Because of the play's genre and early date, combined with its representation of a man in the costume of a woman who also may not really be a witch at all, this play is seldom paired with the later trend of Jacobean witchcraft plays that began with *Macbeth* in 1606. However, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* presents an early example of a play that refuses to endorse the witch's role as a scapegoat, instead using this figure to hold the community leaders accountable for their own poor behaviour. While *The Witch of Edmonton* inverts its source text, transforming the witch into a victim of her community and the godly community into "a pack of curs" (4.1.178), *The Merry Wives of Windsor* takes a comedic approach, identifying the man who is the true source of community corruption by costuming him as a woman who Ford believes is a witch—the usual scapegoat—and, through this costume, holding both him and the men of Windsor accountable for their corruption and ineptitude. The play portrays Ford's anger and suspicion of the old woman of Brentford as misdirected, ignorant, and cruel; however, the merry wives are able to manipulate and redirect Ford's malice against the true threat to their community. By dressing Falstaff as a witch and later as a devil, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford use the shorthand of local superstition to expose the threat of social, domestic, and economic disorder that Falstaff poses and punish him outside the legal system without the risk of

either being blamed or being dismissed as unreasonable by the naïve men of their community.

Critical views of the scene in which Ford beats Falstaff in his disguise as a witch range from disgust at Ford abusing someone he believes to be an old woman (Cotton 321), to admiration for Falstaff's costumed escape (Grinnell 169), to praise of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford (who share a secret laugh at Falstaff's expense) (Uszkalo 28). These critics have observed both the disturbing misogyny inherent in watching Ford beat a person who looks like an old woman in front of an audience and the canny calculation of the merry wives, who use their resources to manipulate the patriarchal community in which they live. Richard Grinnell comments, "In an interesting twist on the relationship between theatre, witchcraft, and power, Falstaff uses theatrical costuming to escape detection, transforms himself into a witch, and uses the gender confusion inherent in that representation to make his escape…The transformation of self, and the power inherent in that transformation, is one of the unsettling features of [witchcraft]" (169). Grinnell skims over this complex scene, representing Falstaff as the one who "uses theatrical costuming to escape detection" and "make his escape" (169), excluding the facts that, firstly, the disguise was not Falstaff's clever idea but was orchestrated by the merry wives to get revenge on him and, secondly, that Falstaff can hardly be said to escape when he receives a sound thrashing at Ford's hands. As Falstaff dons the disguise offstage, Mistress Ford says, "I would my husband would meet him in this shape! He cannot abide the old woman of Brentford; he swears she's a witch, forbade her my house, and hath threatened to beat her" (4.2.73-6), to which Mistress Page vengefully replies, "Heaven guide him to thy husband's cudgel, and the devil guide his cudgel afterwards." (4.2.77-8). The beating

that follows as soon as Ford returns home is obviously severe, for Mistress Page objects, "Are you not ashamed? I think you have killed the poor woman" (4.2.164-5), and Falstaff later complains at length, "I would all the world might be cozened, for I have been cozened and beaten too. If it should come to the ear of the court how I have been transformed, and how my transformation hath been washed and cudgeled, they would melt me out of my fat, drop by drop, and liquor fishermen's boots with me" (4.6.77-82). Clearly the merry wives have deliberately dressed Falstaff in this particular disguise knowing what the consequences will be, and clearly Falstaff, though he is not caught as a man trying to make love to someone's wife, does not simply escape.

While Grinnell argues that Falstaff uses the disguise of a witch in order to escape, Nancy Cotton points out that even if the merry wives are weaponizing Ford's prejudices in order to punish Falstaff, the optics of the end result are still deeply unsettling. She argues, "[Ford's] violence is striking because…the stage image shows a man beating a woman, the solitary example in Shakespeare" (321). Although the audience is aware that the woman Ford is beating is a predatory man in disguise, the fact remains that the visuals still portray a violent man unreasonably beating a harmless old woman and the men around him doing nothing to stop him; Cotton continues, "every character on stage accepts Ford's right to beat the old woman of Brainford solely because 'he cannot abide' her. The men he has brought with him do not interfere, and their lack of action rests on the unspoken premise that it is acceptable to beat, not just a witch, but a woman" (321). She pushes this disturbing image still further, arguing, "Because the real target of his rage is not Falstaff but his wife, the 'witch' becomes a surrogate for the woman he really wishes to beat" (321). She explains, "The names Ford calls the woman as he cudgels

her—'quean' and 'polecat' (IV.ii.172, 185)—are both slang terms for a whore, indicating that he projects on to her the infidelity he supposes in his wife…Moreover, he uses to her the same sarcasm he has just used to his wife and with the same motive, his anxiety to demonstrate that he is not deceived by the woman" (321-22). While Cotton rightly emphasises the violent misogyny inherent in the scene, her reading risks robbing Mistress Page and Mistress Ford of the credit they deserve for using both Falstaff and Ford's problematic behaviour against them and hitting two proverbial birds with one witch disguise. While the optics of the scene are certainly unsettling, the fact remains that the women are the only characters who come out of this scene as the winners. Falstaff is soundly beaten, and Ford is humiliated for his jealousy in front of his male peers. Kirsten Uszkalo responds, "Nancy Cotton…reads 'queane' and 'polecat' as projected insults meaning, primarily, 'whore.' Ford, however, is describing Mother Prat in the same term with which one would describe a witch, or a practising, if dubious, cunning woman…" (26). She continues,

> Rather than becoming a monument to the power of male sexuality, the cudgel is wielded by an enraged, but misguided patriarch, to beat a witch, who is actually a man in disguise, at the behest of two women, who appear horrified but who are actually sniggering. In the end Mistress Ford and Mistress Page are the only ones to derive pleasure from the pounding of the meritorious phallic object. (28)

While Uszkalo recognizes that the women orchestrate this scene, Anne Parten takes this notion even further, arguing that "Falstaff's punishment is disproportionate to his crime" (190), a bold statement given that by the time Ford beats him, he has poached,

vandalized, offended two honourable women, and tried to steal their husbands' money, and faced no real consequences for his actions.

Though many have seen Falstaff's disguise as part of the humiliation he undergoes, viewing the disguise and the punishment it delivers as not representative of the man underneath, and thus, humiliating, I argue that Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, rather than foisting an unfair false identity upon the man who has been harassing them, calculatingly reveal his true identity, inviting a punishment that he deserves but one that the authorities of Windsor are too oblivious or inept to mete out properly. In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, the merry wives use the shorthand of the witch costume to manipulate the corrupt authorities of Windsor into properly dealing with Falstaff's disruptive behaviour. While Falstaff is not represented as a genuine witch in the play text, his disruptive behaviour in the community is reminiscent of early modern accounts of male witches. However, since male witches were typically more difficult to convict than their female counterparts, the merry wives dress him in the costume of a neighbour woman whom Ford already believes is a witch. Though seemingly farcical, this costume works as a shorthand to demonstrate Falstaff's real witch-like offences in the community of Windsor. Similarly, Falstaff's horned costume as Herne the Hunter at the end of the play associates him with the devil and demonstrates that he is the true source of evil that is infiltrating the community. Falstaff's disguises ironically reveal his true identity as a community disruptor and force the men of Windsor to bring him to justice without implicating the merry wives or ruining their reputations.

3.1 FALSTAFF AND THE ATTRIBUTES OF THE MALE WITCH

The costume in which the merry wives dress Falstaff reveals rather than conceals the man beneath, because, though Falstaff is not literally a witch, his behaviour in the town of Windsor matches the social disruption of the male witch almost perfectly. E.J. Kent details the characteristics of the male witch as distinct from, while at the same time not simply opposite to, the female witch. He explains that "Those rare studies which do engage with gender and male witchcraft have suggested that [men accused of witchcraft] were 'feminized' men who 'represented a failure of masculinity' to such a degree that they embodied negative female traits and hence were labelled witches" (69). Kent argues that male witches were not simply feminized men, but rather that "ideas of early modern manhood shaped the accusations of witchcraft against men. In these cases…the beliefs that supported such accusations were fundamentally shaped by the masculinity of the witch" (73). Male witches were men who disrupted the smooth running of a community: "At the heart of the matter…lies the ambiguous economic behaviour of an individual upsetting those 'finely graded hierarchies' of the English village" (74). Falstaff may never perform actual witchcraft, but he certainly disrupts the hierarchy of the English village, and exhibits, if not witchcraft, witch-like behaviour. The opening scene of the play, even in the moments before Falstaff enters, illustrate this perfectly as Shallow complains to Slender and Sir Hugh of Falstaff's disruptive behaviour and the men discuss how to resolve the conflict. Shallow confronts Falstaff, stating succinctly, "Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge" (1.1.95-6). Kent argues that "disorderly behaviour" (80) could be considered evidence that a man was a witch, and Falstaff's behaviour is disorderly from even before the moment he appears onstage—the

play opens in the middle of the problem of the disorderly behaviour that he has already exhibited.

Kent also demonstrates that men accused of witchcraft had often caused disorder at the domestic level, just as Falstaff does in Windsor. Kent uses the case of Hugh Parsons to illustrate the unique community conflict a male witch was thought to cause, explaining, "Witchcraft accusations have an important relationship to householding and to parenting identities, and this seems…true of Hugh Parsons" (80). Falstaff causes disorder in the domestic sphere by attempting to seduce two married women and by aggravating Ford's jealousy, exacerbating marital discord in the Ford home. Kent continues,

> a second axis along which the social practice of patriarchy was assessed was a man's economic behaviour. Here, too, Hugh's neighbours told how Hugh's threats erupted powerfully from the male world of exchange relationships; disordering bargains and menacing male provision. Hugh's threatening speeches were powerful articulations of his lack of honest and manly restraint, his inability for plain-dealing, and his potential to disrupt the economic interdependencies of the small world of Springfield. (81)

Falstaff, similarly, disrupts the economics of the town of Windsor. As early as act 1, scene 1, Slender accuses Falstaff's crony Pistol of pickpocketing him, and though Pistol steadfastly denies it (1.1.139-141), Slender gives so accurate an account of what was stolen that Pistol's protestations are rendered feeble. Slender claims, "Ay, by these gloves, did he [steal my purse] or I would I might never come in mine own great chamber again else—of seven groats in mill-sixpences, and two Edward shovel-boards that cost me two

shilling and two pence apiece of Ed Miller, by these gloves" (1.1.127-130). The poor behaviour of Falstaff's retinue is reflective of his own behaviour as this charge follows Shallow's accusation of Falstaff's poaching and violence. Shortly after the dispute in front of the Page home, Falstaff decides to part ways with his crony Bardolph, declaring, "I am glad I am so acquit of this tinderbox. His thefts were too open. His filching was like an unskilful singer: he kept not time" (1.3.20-2), to which Nim responds, "The good humour is to steal at a minute's rest" (1.3.23). While Falstaff defends Pistol against the accusation of stealing Slender's purse, he decides to part ways with Bardoph because the latter's stealing skills are underdeveloped and obvious. Shortly after, as he examines his dire financial situation, he declares, "Well, sirs, I am almost out at heels…There is no remedy. I must cony-catch, I must shift" (1.3.26, 28-9), after which he openly discusses his plan to woo Mistress Page and Mistress Ford in order to get access to their husbands' money (1.3.37-64). Just like the male witch, Falstaff certainly manifests an "inability for plain-dealing, and…potential to disrupt the economic interdependencies" (Kent 80) of Windsor.

Most importantly, the male witch was a figure who had lost control of his emotions and lacked self-mastery. Kent explains, "as in their bodily life, early modern men, of all ranks, were expected to exercise mastery of their emotions to ensure that they achieved proper manly equilibrium…This impotence should not be theorized as feminization—it was a masculine state, a specifically masculine failure, understood in relation to masculine ideals and with reference to a masculine body" (84). He concludes, "We need to be sure that we are not forever feminizing abnormality and never masculinizing deviance" (87). Falstaff certainly lacks emotional control and self-mastery.

In act 1, scene 1 he has already committed violence and destruction offstage, and admits to Slender, "Slender, I broke your head" (1.1.105-6). Kent argues that "the feminization thesis is unconvincing because it characterizes male witches as 'weak-minded', 'passive' and 'powerless', traits which stand in direct contrast to the way accusers described them" (70). Falstaff is not weak-minded, passive, or powerless. From the moment he arrives onstage he is making puns and bawdy jokes and ridiculing others. Using the case of John Godfrey as an example, Kent argues, "That John Godfrey was angry, aggressive, rough, provocative, unpredictable, greedy, and hyper-contentious suggested a particular configuration of the masculine body. He seems to me to be a masculine counterpart to the leaky, boundless body of the female witch" (85). Falstaff possesses all the qualities that Kent sees in Godfrey.

Though Falstaff maps onto the characteristics of the English male witch, and though he and those around him associate him with hell and the devil, the merry wives need to disguise him because the support of community men would have been necessary to bring him to justice through the legal system. While the Windsor men recognize that Falstaff's behaviour is inappropriate, they seem completely unable to take action on any conflict or misdemeanour in their community. Peter Erickson points out that in Windsor, "The manner of dealing with conflict is avoidance" (98). In the play's opening scene, as Shallow attempts to get justice for Falstaff's vandalism, Evans tries to mediate the situation by suggesting a marriage between Slender and Anne Page, arguing, "It is petter that friends is the sword, and end it. And there is also another device in my prain, which, peradventure, prings goot discretions with it. There is Anne Page which is daughter to Master George Page, which is pretty virginity" (1.1.37-41). Erikson argues, "The nature

of the reconciliation Evans effects is subsequently shown to be permanent postponement of a resolution… Evans indicates that the conflict will be avoided by tabling it" (97). Rosemary Kegl explains,

> During the Renaissance, justices of the peace held allegiances to both state and local officials and, more generally, to both state and local notions of and methods for maintaining social order. They were members of the gentry who were appointed by the state to keep the peace in their local communities. Their immediate superiors were the judges of the assize courts, their immediate inferiors the town constables…*The Merry Wives of Windsor* depicts this elaborate legal machinery as ludicrously ineffective. In spite of his role as justice, Shallow refuses to keep the peace by settling his differences with Falstaff out of court" (Kegl 260-1).

Kegl points out that Justice Shallow is "not merely a justice but a quorum justice…Slender defines Shallow as a member of the local gentry who has been favoured by the state with an appointment to the "Coram"—or quorum. Because of their skillful and experienced application of the law, quorum justices were those justices of the peace whose presence was necessary to actually constitute a bench that carried legal authority" (262). However, Justice Shallow is completely ineffective as Quorum Justice. Kegl recalls that Shallow is unable to resolve community conflict when called upon. For example, he cannot find Falstaff in Ford's house when Ford asks for assistance, and he does nothing to help when the host cries for help after Evans and Doctor Caius steal his horses. He manages to deescalate an impending duel between Evans and Caius, but even then, the host is the one who really ends the conflict (262).

Not only does Justice Shallow allow discord in the community to continue and spread, he also becomes a part of that discord. When Shallow first appears on stage, he is the one engaged in petty squabbles while Sir Hugh Evans attempts to mediate. When Shallow angrily exclaims, "The Council shall hear it. It is a riot" (1.1.30), Evans replies "It is not meet the council hear a riot; there is no fear of Got in a riot. The council, look you, shall desire to hear the fear of Got, and not to hear a riot" (1.1.30-33). Rather than calming down at Evans's words, Shallow escalates his threat: "…if I were young again, the sword should end it" (1.1.35-6). Evans responds, "it is petter that friends is the sword and end it" (1.1.37) and then continues to sidetrack the conversation into discussion about a potential marriage between Slender and Anne Page (1.1.37-41). Despite Evans's insistence that friends should end the dispute, Shallow still confronts Falstaff (1.1.95-109) and proceeds to use "the council" (1.1.101) as a threat against him rather than a way to mediate and produce community unity. Worst of all, "Shallow allows Falstaff to become an uncontrollable threat to Windsor's peace. In so doing, the ungentlemanly justice also allows the knight to propel Ford into becoming one more sower of community discord" (Kegl 266-7). Kegl summarizes, "keeping the peace in Renaissance England was very much a matter of constructing and imposing the terms of that peace. By depicting Shallows's and Evans's failed attempts to keep the peace, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* perpetuates a generalized fear of local disorder" (Kegl 268-9). The authorities of Windsor are clearly inept at dealing with minor local discord even before Falstaff arrives to poach, pickpocket, squabble, and woo married women; the merry wives cannot trust Windsor's officials to both recognize and effectively deal with the threat that Falstaff poses.

In addition to the local authorities' ineptitude, the heads of the Ford and Page households are irrationally rage-filled or passive, respectively, leaving Mistress Ford and Page little hope that either of their husbands will appropriately deal with Falstaff's advances or social disruption. Ford leaps to the worst conclusions about his wife, rendering her unable to report Falstaff's predatory behaviour and receive help. Pamela Allen Brown notes, "The Windsor wives' decision to keep Falstaff's overtures hidden from their husbands would have been unusual in both common practice and the narratives of the jesting literature" (52). However, Ford's reaction to the possibility of Falstaff wooing his wife illustrates exactly why the wives must keep their plans a secret— if Ford knew the truth, Mistress Ford would likely face false accusations. As soon as Ford learns that Falstaff is attempting to woo his wife, decides, "I will seek out Falstaff" (2.1.126), preferring to confront the man himself rather than simply speak to his wife. While Ford is a jealous and angry husband who immediately jumps to unfair conclusions about his wife, Page seems to be the opposite. Mistress Quickly says of Mistress Page, "Never a wife in Windsor leads a better life than she does. Do what she will, say what she will, take all, pay all, go to bed when she list, rise when she list, all is as she will. And truly she deserves it, for if there be a kind woman in Windsor, she is one" (2.2.103-7), and Mistress Page herself says of her husband, "He's as far from jealousy as I am from giving him cause, and that, I hope, is an unmeasurable distance" (2.1.93-4). However, Page's response when he hears about Falstaff wooing his wife is not to dismiss the rumour because he trusts that his wife will be faithful, but because he does not believe that Falstaff would ever pursue her. When Nim tells him that "[Falstaff] loves your wife. There's the short and the long" (2.1.117-8), Page responds, "I will not believe such a

Cathayan, though the priest o' th' town commended him for a true man" (2.1.129-30). Had the merry wives told their husbands the full truth immediately, Ford would not have believed his wife's innocence, but Page would not have believed Falstaff's guilt. The merry wives decide to punish Falstaff not only because the men of Windsor will not, but because a direct accusation against Falstaff stands to implicate them as well.

3.2 FALSTAFF AS THE FEMALE WITCH

Dressing Falstaff as a suspected female witch is the only way the merry wives can get the men of Windsor to mete out justice through the understood and accepted social codes of their community without implicating themselves in the scandal that Falstaff works hard to create. Historian Robin Briggs explains that, "Witchcraft was peculiarly malleable, available to fit any kind of discord, because the link between ill-will and physical effects did not need to be demonstrated" (*Witches and Neighbours* 265). In order to make the men of Windsor deal with the threat of Falstaff, the merry wives must turn him into a shape that can fit any kind of discord and a person that Ford can accuse without any need to actually prove guilt. Ford's male companions make no effort to stop him violently beating the old woman of Brentford. By contrast, when he accuses his own wife, they try to reason with him. When Ford begins to search the buck basket, Page, Evans, and Shallow each reprimand him in turn. Page exclaims, "Why, this passes, Master Ford. You are not to go loose any longer; you must be pinioned" (4.2.108-9), Evans agrees, "Why, this is lunatics. This is mad as a mad dog" (110), and Shallow finishes, "Indeed, Master Ford, this is not well, indeed" (111). As Ford continues to search the buck basket, the men continue to scold his rash behaviour. Evans exclaims, "'Tis unreasonable! Will you take up your wife's clothes? Come, away" (123-4), Page

questions, “Why, man, why?” (126), Shallow remonstrates, “By my fidelity, this is not well, Master Ford. This wrongs you” (134-5), and Evans concludes, “Master Ford, you must pray, and not follow the imaginations of your own heart. This is jealousies” (136-7). However, while Page, Evans, and Shallow all protest Ford’s jealousy and mishandling the clothes in the buck basket, none of them intervene when he begins to beat Falstaff in costume as the old woman of Brentford. Though Mistress Page and Mistress Ford repeatedly beg Ford not to beat the old woman, the men are conspicuously silent as Ford physically abuses someone who seems to be an old woman until Mistress Page exclaims, “Are you not ashamed? I think you have killed the poor woman” (164-5). The only male commentary comes from Evans, who says, “By yea and no, I think the ‘oman is a witch indeed. I like not when a ‘oman has a great peard; I spy a great peard under his muffler” (169-71). Rather than restraining Ford’s violence, which is completely unjustified as he never provides evidence for his accusations, Evans merely speculates that the woman may in fact be a witch because he catches a glimpse of Falstaff’s beard behind the disguise. Jessica Dell explains, “Despite Mother Pratt’s longstanding connection with their community, the men are able to substitute another for her. Ford does not see her as a specific person, but rather as a concept of ‘rural witch’ that the Windsor men can apply to any woman they choose to persecute” (191). Like Old Banks and the other Edmontonians in *The Witch of Edmonton*, Ford turns the old woman of Brentford into a witch through his verbal and physical abuse, and is willing to beat her mercilessly as overcompensation for his perceived inability to keep order in his own home. The men’s remonstrances on behalf of Mistress Ford coupled with their silence in response to Ford beating a suspected witch emphasize Brigg’s point that “the link between ill-will and physical effects did not

need to be demonstrated" (265). Thus, the merry wives take the costuming of Ford's fictional witch and community scapegoat and use it to punish Falstaff, the genuine threat to the community. The merry wives prevent Ford's attempt to create and ostracize the witch by victimizing an elderly woman, instead forcing him to literally confront the threat that the community has been ignoring.[2]

Another reason that dressing Falstaff as Mother Pratt serves as a valuable shorthand for the merry wives is that, according to historian James Sharpe, accused witches were often longstanding members of a community who were suspected of witchcraft for years before they were finally brought to trial. Sharpe claims, "…in most cases taking a suspected witch to court was not something to be embarked upon lightly. Where supporting evidence is available, it is clear that the act of witchcraft recorded in a formal court document as providing the basis for prosecution was often only the tip of a much larger and more varied iceberg of deviant behaviour" (*Instruments of Darkness* 106). Falstaff, as a visitor to Windsor, would be an unlikely candidate for a court trial as he lacks the history within the community to establish this recognizable pattern of behaviour. For example, as previously mentioned, Ford and Page have opposite reactions to the news that Falstaff is trying to woo their wives. Part of the reason for this is their vastly different temperaments, alluded to throughout the play; Page loves and trusts his wife while Ford is jealous and easily provoked. However, Ford and Page not only react to Falstaff's behaviour differently because of their different relationships with their wives,

[2] In this scene, Ford is clearly attempting to find Falstaff and understands that he is a threat to the domestic space because of his advances on Mistress Ford. However, if Ford finds Falstaff and recognizes him, Mistress Ford knows that her husband will falsely accuse her as well. Falstaff's costuming works to reveal Falstaff's threat without endangering Mistress Ford.

but because they have different impressions of Falstaff: Ford believes Falstaff would try to woo his wife while Page immediate dismisses the report. In 1.1, although many of the men of the town are embroiled in disputes with Falstaff, he steadfastly denies their accusations (155), and a moment later, Page invites the entire gathered crowd, including Falstaff to dinner, urging them to "drink down all unkindness" (170). All of these varying opinions and treatments of Falstaff demonstrate that he has not been in Windsor long enough for the men of the town to develop a consensus about him. Mother Pratt, on the other hand, has a "longstanding connection with their community" (Dell 191). Falstaff's costume works as a visual shorthand that the men of Windsor instantly interpret in the way that the merry wives intend them to. Not only does Mother Pratt have a reputation in the community, Dell writes that "The town of Brentford was…known, according to Uszkalo, for witchcraft as only a few year earlier, in 1595, two women were executed there for practising black magic" (Dell 195). The name of Brentford, therefore, has an established reputation for witchcraft among playgoers in late Elizabethan England. The merry wives cleverly use known male prejudice against a local woman and the malleability of witchcraft accusation to manipulate local authorities to punish a disorderly man.

In a discussion of Falstaff as witch, it is impossible to ignore the gendered costume that the merry wives dress him in. There has been much commentary on Falstaff's crossdressing and the optics of a man beating a person who looks like a woman before a crowd of people who do nothing to stop him. An important detail to notice, however, is that while there are records of male witches being brought to trial, they were much more rare and more difficult to accuse than female witches. Charlotte-Rose Millar

reports, “Men make up almost fifteen per cent of witches mentioned in all sixty-six extant English witchcraft pamphlets published between 1563 and 1735. These sources provide descriptions of approximately thirty male witches, accounts of whom were often based on real cases in which men were accused, tried, and sometimes executed for witchcraft” (“Diabolical Men” 1). Millar continues, “In pamphlets both male and female witches were defined less by their gender and more through their interactions with other witches and with the devil. Both male and female witches were believed to enter into pacts with the devil in the form of a familiar spirit, to form an intimate, personal bond with this demonic creature, and to use malicious magic to harm their neighbours” (2). However, while both men and women could be accused of maleficium, Millar concedes, “it is true that English women were more likely to be accused of witchcraft than their male counterparts. However, once accused, male witches were described in print in remarkably similar terms” (9). Malcolm Gaskill agrees, “…witchcraft, ‘while sex-related, was not sex-specific’” (145). He writes of male witches:

> How could any man be prosecuted as a maleficent witch given the strong association between women and witches? the answer, it seems, is quite easily. First, contemporary definitions of the witch were varied and vague, especially over the question of gender. There was certainly no theological objection to the male witch and surprisingly little interest in why more women were witches than men; indeed, godly ministers actively discouraged the notion that witches were exclusively female in order to exploit witchcraft—popular magic and maleficium—as a universal symbol of sin. (“Devil” 159)

Gaskill cites two early modern theologians as making a case for the existence of male witches: the vicar of King's Lynn who argued that not all witches were "but men also on whose behalfe no exception can be laid" (qtd. in Gaskill 160) and William Perkins who argued that "Moses's use of the feminine gender was misleading and that, in truth, the Hebrew Patriarch 'exempteth not the male'" (161). Although early modern opinion did not exclude the possibility of witches being male, Gaskill admits that "In practice, the law against witchcraft, like the law in general, was more likely to favour the defence of male suspect, especially men of respectable social and economic status" (161). Erika Gasser also maintains that an accused male witch, John Samuel, "maintained some aspects of patriarchal authority that provided him a degree of latitude not available to his wife and daughter" (175). Although it would certainly not be unheard of for a man to be accused of witchcraft, Falstaff's recent introduction to the community of Windsor and lack of an established reputation coupled with his male gender would make it difficult for the merry wives to ever get revenge on his presumptuous behaviour through any legal channel.

Because significantly more women than men were accused and prosecuted for witchcraft in early modern Europe, it is an understandable mistake to assume that witchcraft accusations worked as active misogyny. Briggs remarks, "The demonologist would have been shocked to find their confident assertions turned against them by modern writers who use the persecution as prime evidence for man's inhumanity to women, often seeming to assume that the sex ratio was not Lancre's 90 per cent, or even Bodin's 98 per cent, but a stark 100 per cent" ("Women as Victims?" 438). He goes on to explain that many historians have oversimplified the gendering of witchcraft accusations, citing the example of the myth of the persecuted female healer. Because Kramer and

Sprenger in the *Malleus Maleficarum* specifically mention midwives as likely candidates for witchcrafts, some historians have speculated that witch trials were a result of "male hostility to a female paramedical specialism" (439), even though only two English witchcraft cases involved midwives and only fourteen out of 3000 cases in Scotland targeted midwives. These kinds of misconceptions about witchcraft trials, which frame accusations as male warfare against women, also run the risk of ignoring the fact that women were often actively involved in witch trials as accusers and witnesses. Briggs reports,

> A…pattern emerges when we look at the witnesses, for here there is a marked difference between the trials of men and women. In the former men gave testimony three time more often than women, 427 to 144. When women were on trial men still gave testimony more often, but only by 683 to 519, so that 43 per cent of witnesses were women, and in 30 per cent of cases they were in the majority. ("Women as Victims?" 443)

Briggs concludes, "What can be said already is that in a society whose formal structures at least were completely dominated by men, the numbers of women testifying are really rather large, while a subjective impression is that they were just as likely to produce damaging evidence as were the men" (443), though he adds that the readiness of women to accuse other women does not disprove the concept that a witch hunt was a woman hunt since women living in a patriarchal society may feel the need to make other women conform to societal standards in order to secure their own positions (443).

Regardless, women were often key accusers and witnesses in witchcraft trials, and to skim over this fact risks simplifying a complex tapestry of village life and neighbourly

relationships. Briggs comments, “The notion that the persecution was stage-managed by the elites, to which even so able a historian as Christina Larner could recently subscribe, seems wildly mistaken” (“Women as Victims?” 444). The idea, then, of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford taking out their neighbourly discontent on Falstaff by associating him with witchcraft is not so farcical an idea as it may seem to modern viewers. However, the fact that the merry wives change Falstaff’s identity and gender in order to punish him is certainly unusual. The merry wives are using one method of accusation that would actually have been available to them to get revenge on a man who they have no way of punishing through the regular legal system. Shape writes,

> …formal court prosecutions, for witchcraft as for other more mundane offences like theft, were often something only resorted to when other more informal means of settlement were exhausted. There existed, we must remember, a wide range of methods by which the threat of witchcraft could be combatted or its effects alleviated other than taking the suspected witch to court. These alternative strategies were probably made all the more attractive by the knowledge that formal prosecution could be a troublesome and costly business. (105)

Rather than taking Falstaff to court, the merry wives use other methods by which witchcraft can be combatted, neatly circumventing any legal process. When Mistress Ford and Mistress Page first receive their twin letters, Mistress Page angrily exclaims, “Why, I’ll exhibit a bill in the Parliament for the putting down of men. How shall I be revenged on him? For revenged I will be, as sure as his guts are made of puddings!”

(2.1.24-27). However, rather than exhibiting a bill in the Parliament, the merry wives cleverly circumvent the law in order to get their revenge.

Beyond Falstaff's beating as a witch in disguise, each of the humiliations that he undergoes at the hands of the merry wives reinforces his association with the figure of the witch since each is reminiscent of either popular ideas about witchcraft or common witchcraft punishments. For example, the entire episode of the buck basket is reminiscent of a trial by ordeal that a witch might undergo. Uszkalo comments, "[the merry wives] string [Falstaff] along through a series of humiliating misadventures associated with cunning, witchcraft, and fairy magic" (20). Among these, she lists: "they swim him in the Thames" (20). According to Heikki Pihlajamaki,

> "'Swimming a witch,' or 'ducking' as it was sometimes called, was a procedure in which the suspect's wrists were tied to her (less often his) ankles. She was then thrown into water with ropes attached. If the suspect sank, she was presumed innocent and was hauled up, for water as God's pure element would not accept the Devil's allies. Her failure to sink was considered an indication of guilt." (36)

Though Falstaff's ducking comes as a practical humiliation devised by the merry wives, he explains the fact that he did not sink at length, stating, "…you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking…I had been drowned, but that the shore was shelvy and shallow" (3.5.10-13). Though Falstaff here is thankful to have escaped drowning and provides a reasonable explanation for why he did not (the Thames does run shallow near Windsor), the fact remains that he did not sink and that his own monologue about the incident calls attention to this. This failure to sink, although rendered comical,

and although perfectly reasonable, functions as a reminder of Falstaff's guilt and attempts to disrupt the smooth functioning of domestic life in Windsor.

Though Falstaff's wetting in the Thames has some similarities to swimmings, water ordeals were not a common part of the English legal system in the late 1500s, a fact that emphasizes the merry wives' reliance on local custom outside a dysfunctional legal system. Pihlajamaki's work tracing the history of the water ordeal in England is helpful for an understanding of how Falstaff's comical ducking functions in the larger context of the Windsor town government. Pihlajamaki explains, "In England, the ordeals disappeared after the abolition of 1215 and as the jury system developed. No 'scientific' theory of evidence replayed ordeals at this point, nor were lawyers with academic training to master such a theory" (40). However, water ordeals did resurface in some parts of England during the early modern period. Pihlajamaki writes, "Cases of water ordeals appeared in England by the 1590s, and by the 1610s they were used quite frequently, but mostly unofficially. The English system never came to depend on swimming the suspects in any important sense, however. In the New England witch trials the water test was inflicted on some of the accused" (42). She qualifies further, "Ordeals, especially swimming a witch, were thought of in most countries as a phenomenon of popular culture with which learned jurists or theologians wanted to have nothing to do" (44). The merry wives, then, are using an ordeal that is associated with witchcraft, but which would have little weight in a genuine court of law.

I have already mentioned some of the tactics the merry wives use to try to coerce or trick the men of Windsor into dealing with the threat of Falstaff when they are unable or unwilling to see the threat that he represents. One possible explanation Pihlajamaki

presents for the use of ordeals in witch trials is that, "Witchcraft crimes were *crimina excepta*, particularly difficult to prove…it was probably more difficult to acquire sufficient evidence in witchcraft cases than it was in other types. Ordeals were, alas, needed to complement the otherwise insufficient *indicia ad torturam*" (48). While the merry wives give Falstaff a soaking in the Thames probably only in order to punish and humiliate him, Falstaff's clear mention of hell and explanation that he did not sink call attention to an occasionally-used ordeal used to help identify witches, particularly outside the bounds of the legal system and in cases in which guilt was difficult to prove to the authorities. This is the exact situation the merry wives find themselves in as they both attempt to deal with Falstaff outside the bounds of the law and demonstrate proof of his destructive behaviour to the men of Windsor.

Falstaff's association with witchcraft continues into his third and final humiliation as the merry wives manipulate local tradition to unofficially punish him before the entire Windsor community. At the end of the play, Falstaff wears another disguise that the merry wives invent for him, but this time they dress him as Herne the Hunter rather than as a local witch. Scholars generally agree that Shakespeare likely invented this figure, who is represented as a character from local folklore in the play (Purkiss, *Garden*, 141). Though Herne the Hunter is not himself a witch, the way that Mistress Page describes him is curiously similar to a popular malefic witch. She explains, "There is an old tale goes that Herne the Hunter, / Sometime a keeper here in Windsor Forest, / Doth all the winter time, at still midnight, / Walk round about an oak, with great ragg'd horns, / And there he blasts the tree, and takes the cattle, / And makes milch-kine yield blood, and shakes a chain / In a most hideous and dreadful manner" (4.4.25-31). Actions like blasting trees, taking

cattle, and causing cows to yield blood are often found in witchcraft pamphlets when purported witches are accused of maleficia. The merry wives' association of Falstaff with Herne the hunter, like their act of disguising him as the wise woman of Brentford, does not render him a literal witch who has made a pact with the devil, either in the play's plot or in the merry wives' scheming, but rather gives shape to the threat he poses to the community using stories and characters that the community understands as harmful. Rather than functioning as slander, these associations accurately reflect that Falstaff has already "beaten…men, killed…deer, and broke open [a] lodge" (1.1.95-6). Once again, Falstaff's disguise functions not to obscure his identity but to reveal his true nature and punish his disorderly behaviour.

Scholars have long wondered about the curious combination of folklore and other imagery in the scene in the forest. Greenblatt et. al. observe, "…the tricking of Falstaff in the final scene draws on the royal and aristocratic heritage of the court masque. But this theatrical form, in which the courtiers become the actors, is here recast in a popular, festive mode" (1257). Colleen Marie Knowlton-Davis theorizes, "Charlton's Horn Fair…featured a procession that ended at the Church of St. Luke…during this pagan festival, 'the Men would be dressed as women…all would wear horns, blow horns, carry horns, and at the fair, would buy trinkets carved from iron" (28). Several scholars have also noted elements of charivari and skimmington in this scene (Kolkovich, Parten). However, the mixing of witchcraft and fairy magic in this scene is not only an eclectic coincidence brought on by a combination of folklore and witchcraft belief. The pairing of the two is not unique to *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. In fact, it also features in several contemporary witch trials. One of the few male witches of this time period is associated

with fairies. Marion Gibson writes, "John Walsh is the only male 'witch' in this time period to have an account devoted to his trial…Walsh's ritual—like catholic ritual—is represented in this Protestant church-court document as evil and superstitious, connected with the devil and with beliefs about fairies which Walsh's questioners probably regarded as evidence of (papist) ignorance" (*Early Modern Witches* 25). The trial document claims, "[Walsh] being demaunded how he knoweth when anye man is bewitched: He sayth that he knew it partlye by the Feries, and saith that ther be. iii. Kindes of Feries, white, green, & black. Which when he is disposed to use, hee speaketh with them upon hyls, where as there is great heapes of earth, as namely in Dorsetshiere" ("The Examination of John Walsh" 29). In this trial document, John Walsh reports fairies that are black, white, and green, exactly the words Mistress Quickly uses in 5.5. as she chants, "Fairies black, grey, green, and white" (34). The combination of fairy and witchcraft elements at the end of the play strengthen an association between Falstaff and witch-like behaviour by connecting him with a non-fictional male witch contemporary who similarly disrupted a community and was brought to justice.

Though the merry wives use the shorthand of witchcraft to illustrate the threat that Falstaff poses, the scene in the forest at the end of the play also demonstrates their acknowledgement that while Falstaff himself is a real danger, witchcraft and other folk beliefs are merely theatre—vehicles to expose the threat that Falstaff poses. The mixture of fairy and witch magic in scene calls to mind passages from Reginald Scot's popular skeptical work *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, first printed in 1584, only thirteen years before the play's probable first performance date (Greenblatt et al. 1463). Diane Purkiss writes, "…Shakespeare pieced together his…fairies from a number of sources, but none

was directly folkloric; indeed, it is questionable whether Shakespeare knew *anything* about fairies from oral sources at all, as opposed to from the writings of the burgeoning folklore industry, especially those of Reginald Scot" (*Garden* 158). In his skeptical work, Scot compares belief in witchcraft to belief in faeries to ridicule witchcraft accusations and trials. For example, he writes,

> …in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a tail in his breech, eies like a bason, fanges like a dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a niger, and a voice roring like a lion, whereby we start and are afraid when we heare one crie Bough: and they have so fraied us with bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens, kit conjurors, nymphes, changelines, inclubus, Robin good-fellow, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hell waine, the firedrake, the puckle, Tom thombe, hob gobblin, Tom tumbler, boneless, and such other bugs that we are afraid of our owne shadowes: in so much as some never feare the divell, but in a darke night…" (122)

Many of the mythical figures that Scot uses as comparison also appear in scene at Herne's oak in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. As the merry wives and their husbands plan their revenge in 4.4, Mistress Page says, "Nan Page my daughter, and my little son, / and three or four more of their growth, we'll dress / Like urchin's, oafs, and fairies, green and white, / With rounds of waxen tapers on their heads / And rattles in their hands…" (44-48). In 5.5, Mistress Quickly chants, "Fairies black, grey, green, and white, / You moonshine revellers, and shades of night, / You orphan heirs of fixed destiny, / Crier

hobgoblin, make the fairy oyes" (34-8), to which a character replies, "Elves, list your names…" (39). Thus, this scene lists hobgoblins, elves, and multiple fairies. The connection in this scene between a conventional devil figure and figures from folklore indicates both an acknowledgement that witchcraft is staged and a correct labelling of the real danger—Falstaff himself.

One of the most important elements used to accuse a witch was the pact with the devil. While the merry wives never accuse Falstaff of having made a pact with the devil, both the way that they talk about Falstaff and the details of their plans to humiliate him associate him with this crime. Charlotte-Rose Millar's work focuses particularly on the importance of the pact with the devil even in popular witchcraft belief. She claims, "Both male and female witches were believed to enter into pacts with the devil in the form of a familiar spirit, to form an intimate, personal bond with this demonic creature, and to use malicious magic to harm their neighbours. For readers of early modern witchcraft pamphlets, a witch, regardless of sex, was inextricably linked with diabolical power" ("Diabolical Men" 2). While Falstaff never literally sells his soul to the devil, the merry wives themselves refer to the devil owning him. After Ford mercilessly beats Falstaff, mistaking him for the wise woman of Brentford, Mistress Ford and Mistress Page congratulate each other on the success of their revenge after the men leave. Mistress Ford asks her companion, "What think you? May we, with the warrant of womanhood and the witness of a good conscience, pursue him with any further revenge?" (4.2.181-3), to which Mistress Page replies, "The spirit of wantonness is sure scared out of him. If the devil have him not in fee-simple, with fine and recovery, he will never, I think, in the way of waste attempt us again" (4.2.184-7). Greenblatt's note explains, "Legal terms: If the

devil doesn't absolutely own him, he won't try to despoil us again" (1518). However, Falstaff soon afterward *does* try to despoil them again, implying that if Falstaff is still persisting, perhaps the devil *does* "have him…in fee simple" (4.2.185). In 4.4, Evans repeats the idea that after all the revenge Falstaff has gone through, he surely will not make another attempt on the merry wives' chastity: "You say he has been thrown in the rivers, and has been grievously peaten as an old 'oman. Methinks there should be terrors in him that he should not come! Methinks his flesh is punished. He shall have no desires" (18-21). Falstaff himself echoes this sentiment to Mistress Quickly as he returns to the inn after his unceremonious beating. Like Mistress Page in 4.2, Falstaff even mentions the devil in his determination to have nothing more to do with the merry wives: "The devil take one party and his dam the other, and so they shall be both bestowed. I have suffered more for their sakes, more than the villainous inconstancy of man's disposition is able to bear" (4.5.88-91). However, immediately after Mistress Quickly delivers her message from the merry wives about a third rendezvous with Falstaff, he quickly reverses his earlier opinion, declaring, "…I'll hold. This is the third time; I hope good luck lies in odd numbers" (5.1.1-2). Falstaff's willingness to meet the merry wives yet again suggests, given Mistress Page's earlier statement, that the devil owns him.

The fact that Falstaff believes that he meets with fictional fairies at the end of the play also highlights his status as a community menace and his connection to witchcraft. Purkiss writes, "For the godly elite, fairies were simply, conclusively, devils: to admit to dealings with them was—in Scotland, and in England too after Elizabeth I's reform of the witchcraft statutes—to admit to witchcraft, to plead guilty. Scottish examiners often asked about demons—or fairies, using the terms interchangeably, so that anyone could

see what they thought" (*Garden* 127). However, Darren Oldridge responds, "For early modern English Protestants, the range of possibilities was fluid. It was conceivable that fairies were sometimes figments of the imagination and sometimes demons in disguise. Moreover, the Devil could be involved in both phenomena" (2). Oldridge uses the example of Thomas Churchyard's 1593 poem which details a dream in which the dreamer meets with fairies who later reveal themselves as demonic: "All hand in hand they traced, / a tricksy ancient round: / And soon as shadows were they gone, / and might no more be found. / And in their place came fearful bugs, / as black as any pitch: / With bellies big and swagging dugs, / More loathsome than a witch" (qtd. in Oldridge 1). Oldridge concludes, "The dreamer was left alone to contemplate his past misdeeds and gaze heavenwards in the hope of mercy" (1), words which are reminiscent of Falstaff's situation after the fictional fairies of Windsor stop tormenting him and he is made to consider his past behaviour, exclaiming, "And these are not fairies. I was three or four times in the thought they were not fairies, and yet *the guiltiness of my mind*, the sudden surprise of my powers, drove the grossness of the foppery into a received belief, in despite of the teeth of all rhyme and reason, that they were fairies" (5.5.115-9, emphasis mine). The fact that Falstaff is gullible enough to believe that the people of Windsor are fairies and to be terrified of them demonstrates that his guilty conscience is troubling him—"the guiltiness of [his] mind…drove the grossness of the foppery into a received belief" (116-8).

3.3 FALSTAFF AS THE DEVIL

Falstaff's disguise as Herne the Hunter also, notably, includes horns or antlers, which, though they clearly also make a visual joke about cuckoldry, gesture to a

connection with the devil. Knowlton-Davis claims, "When the conspirators decide that Falstaff must wear horns to his midnight rendezvous at Herne's Oak, they simultaneously associate him with the virility and potency of the Horned God and its opposite, the cuckolded husband, whose horns signify his lack of masculine prowess" (29). While both of these meanings may be accurate, after the play's frequent allusions to witchcraft and devils it is difficult to ignore the horns' clear potential for devilish imagery. Parten comments, "…the image of the horned Falstaff is designed to evoke no single set of connotations: he is, simultaneously, any or all of the following—devil, hunted deer, fertility spirit, scapegoat, satyr, Actaeon" (184). While each of these associations are meaningful, I want to focus on Falstaff's association with the devil in his final humiliation. Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* refers to devils with horns as an obvious example of oft-repeated folklore. Scot writes, "…in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a tail in his breech" (122). Later, as he records "An inventories of the names, shapes, powers, government, and effects of divels and spirits," he includes "Botis…if he out on humane shape, he sheweth great teeth, and twon hornes…" (315). He later says, "…some are so carnallie minded, that a spirit is no sooner spoken of, but immediatlie they thinke of a blacke man with cloven feet, a pair of hornes, a taile, clawes, and eies as broad as a bason, &c." (426). The imagery of the devil with horns was so well established as to be a cliché by the time Shakespeare imposed a pair on Falstaff. Once again, this association visibly reveals Falstaff's true nature rather than slandering him.

Since the beginning of the play, the language that Falstaff uses and that others use about him often includes allusions to witchcraft, hell, or the devil. For example, in 1.1,

Pistol taunts Slender with "How now, Mephistopheles?" (112), making an obvious reference to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, one of the most famous examples of a man making a deal with the devil. While a note in the Norton edition attributes this insult to Slender's slight build (Greenblatt et al. 1477), this reference also sets up a comic association with witchcraft from the beginning of the play. Later, as Falstaff and Pistol scheme to rob Ford, they talk about Ford's money and Falstaff's plan using a spiritual play on words. Falstaff says of Mistress Ford, "Now the report goes, she has all the rule of her husband's purse. He hath a legion of angels" (1.3.45-6). Pistol responds, "As many devils entertain, and to her, boy, say I" (47). While Falstaff uses "angels" as the colloquial term for coins, Pistol puns on the spiritual application of the word to essentially call Falstaff a devil for his swindling. Mistress Page and Mistress Ford also often associate Falstaff with the devil and hell. When Mistress Page reads Falstaff's bold letter for the first time, she exclaims in outrage, "What an unweighted behaviour hath this Flemish drunkard picked, with the devil's name, out of my conversation, that he dares in this manner assay me?" (2.1.19-21). Similarly, as Mistress Ford comes to tell Mistress Page about her own identical letter, she declares, "If I would but go to hell for an eternal moment or so, I could be knighted" (2.1.42-3). Falstaff himself more than once talks flippantly about hell. He says to Pistol, "I am damned in hell for swearing to gentlemen my friends you were good soldiers and tall fellows" (2.2.8-9). After being thrown in the Thames from the buck basket, Falstaff makes another glib reference to hell: "you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking. If the bottom were as deep as hell, I should down" (3.5.10-12). Falstaff frequently uses language associated with the devil and hell to describe himself and his circumstances, so his final disguise is consistent

with his behaviour and even his own self-representation throughout the play. Page makes an explicit connection between Falstaff and the devil as he talks to Shallow about the evening plans to humiliate the man in the forest: "No man means evil but the devil, and we shall know him by his horns" (5.2.10-11). Once again, the merry wives use a disguise to reveal Falstaff's true identity and to highlight the disorder that he has tried to create in the town of Windsor.

While dressing Falstaff as the devil gives shape to his devilish nature that he and many other characters hint at with metaphorical language throughout the play, the costume also adds double dramatic irony by setting Falstaff up as both the father of lies who is lied to and the hunter who becomes the hunted. Oldridge writes, "…fairy beliefs were framed in the context of false religion and illusion, both of which were associated with the father of lies" (2). "The father of lies" is a name for the devil that comes from John 8:44, in which Jesus says to the Pharisees, "Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it." King James also uses this title to refer to the devil in *Daemonologie*:

> For it is he onelie, the father of all lyes, who hauing first of all prescribed that forme of doing, feining himself to be commanded & restreined thereby, wil be loath to passe the bounds of these injunctions; aswell thereby to make them glory in the impiring ouer him…to make himself so to be trusted in these little thinges, that he may haue the better commoditie

> thereafter, to deceiue them in the end with a tricke once for all; I meane the euerlasting perdition of their soul & body. (12)

In the beginning of the play, as Falstaff plans to run an elaborate scam to swindle the Page and Ford families, he says, "There is no remedy. I must coney-catch, I must shift" (1.3.28-9). Falstaff openly plans to lie and swindle, and soon afterwards, (as previously mentioned), he and his cronies use a pun on "angels" (46, 48) to discuss playing the devil (47). However, while Falstaff believes that he is running an elaborate heist, he does not realize until the end of the play that each of his meetings with the merry wives is carefully orchestrated by them to fool him. Though Falstaff thought he was the father of lies, he is easily deceived. Oldridge argues, "The qualities that connected fairyland so clearly to Catholicism connected them both to the father of lies. Belief in fairies and belief in popery resulted from "spiritual blindness"—the propensity of fallen men and women to be seduced by false ideas about the supernatural" (3). Falstaff's reaction to the revelation that the fairies are in fact Windsor children in costume highlights his blindness and gullibility: "And these are not fairies" (5.5.115). Not only has Falstaff spectacularly failed as the father of lies, he has been duped to believe in something many dismissed as foolishness.

This inversion of the father of lies deceived is underscored by yet another layer of meaning that Falstaff's horns represent—a hunted stag. Falstaff himself invokes this meaning when the merry wives meet him in the forest and he compares himself to a stag in mating season: "For me, I am here a Windsor stag, and the fattest, I think, i'th' forest. Send me a cool rut-time, Jove, or who can blame me to piss my tallow?—Who comes here? My doe?" (5.5.11-13). Mistress Ford responds, "Sir John! Art thou there, my deer?

My male deer?" (5.5.14-15). However, while Falstaff begins the play as the hunter, metaphorically pursuing Mistresses Page and Ford, and even literally poaching and killing deer (1.1.95) and eating venison at the tables of Windsor (1.1.168-70), he ends, like Actaeon, the hunter who was killed by his own hounds when Diana transformed him into a deer, as the hunted. Pistol references this story early in the play as he urges Ford, "Or go thou like Sir Actaeon, / He, with Ringwood at thy heels" (2.1.107-8), foreshadowing the ending of the play—Falstaff the hunter becoming the hunted. The incident of the buck basket also foreshadows the hunting of Falstaff by punning on the word "buck" as Ford explodes into a rage thinking of Falstaff making him a cuckold: "Buck? I would I could wash myself of the buck! Buck, buck, ay, buck! I warrant you, buck! And of the season too, it shall appear" (3.3.133-5). Falstaff himself foreshadows his end as he speaks to the merry wives in the forest shortly before the fictional fairies of Windsor come to torment him. Unwilling to choose only one of the merry wives, he uses the gruesome metaphor of butchering a deer carcass to explain that Mistress Page and Mistress Ford may share him: "Divide me like a bribed buck, each a haunch. I will keep my sides to myself, my shoulder for the fellow of this walk, and my horns I bequeath your husbands. Am I a woodman, ha? Speak I like Herne the Hunter?" (5.5.21-24). The irony of his speech, of course, is that he does not yet know that the meeting in the woods is all a ruse to do exactly what his metaphor implies—to hunt and slaughter the deer. Mistress Ford once again turns to this metaphor after the ruse has been exposed, mocking Falstaff by telling him, "Sir John, we have had ill luck. We could never meet. I will never take you for my love again, but I will always count you my deer" (5.5.110-112). Walter Cohen comments, "The pattern is that of the duper duped. In the end, the renunciation of

plotting and hostility by a compromised group of characters produces a moral leveling" (1469). The costume reveals both to the town of Windsor and to Falstaff himself his true nature.

The ending of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* inverts Falstaff's pretenses, exposing the reality beneath. Elizabeth Zeman Kolkovich writes, "the final scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* resembles the popular shaming rituals of charivari and skimmington, in which a community united to mock and punish a domestic offender whose behaviour had threatened the social order" (330). The community of Windsor certainly comes together with the primary goal of shaming Falstaff in this scene. In 4.4, Ford, Page, Mistress Ford, Mistress Page, and Evans all come together to plan Falstaff's humiliation and include multiple other community members in their scheme. Mistress Page proposes, "Nan Page, my daughter, and my little son, / And three or four more of their growth, we'll dress / Like urchins, ouphes, and fairies, green and white" (44-6). Evans then offers to "teach the children their behaviours" (63), and to dress like an evil spirit himself (64), Ford offers to "buy them vizards" (65), and Page to purchase Anne's costume (68). In 4.5, Mistress Quickly visits Falstaff to convince him to come to Herne's Oak dressed as Herne the hunter. By 5.4, Evans is dressed as a satyr, and Page and a troop of children as fairies. Clearly, Falstaff's final humiliation, like skimmington or charivari, is one that requires the cooperation of the entire community. Kolkovich confirms, "…when Page…refers to Falstaff's impending humiliation as 'publike sport'…he employs language often used to describe charivari" (331). Parten explains that "The central fact of the true skimmington…is that it is a specifically public ceremony, expressive of community solidarity" (198). While charivari was not normally conducted with reference to fairies or

mythical creatures, this association only strengthens the idea of a community coming together to protect its members. Purkiss writes, "For some men and women, involvement with the fairies meant being part of a great battle between good and evil, light and dark. For some, to ride with the fairy host [meant]…a chance to take part in raging conflicts for the soul of a community" (*Garden* 142). The Pages, the Fords, and the other citizens of Windsor use both skimmington and reference to fairies to restore order in their community.

While the town of Windsor comes together to shame Falstaff, their charivari, rather than inverting the social order, demonstrates the fact that Falstaff has never succeeded in inverting it. Parten explains,

> The skimmington, a specialized form of the charivari, existed to demonstrate a community's concerted hostility towards a man who had permitted a local inversion of the normal sexual hierarchy; versions of it were used since at least medieval times to mock and punish the ineffective male whose failure to uphold masculine dignity had jeopardized the concept of men's authority over women, and who had, by extension, imperilled the larger social order. (185)

However, the final scene of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* includes some important differences from Parten's definition. Importantly, Falstaff never actually succeeds in inverting the social order, though he certainly tries. Rather than exposing a disorderly household, like a traditional skimmington, and using the shame inherent in that exposure to restore order, the merry wives use the conventions of a skimmington to reveal the fact that Falstaff has never actually succeeded in his disorderly behaviour since the merry

wives have resisted his advances and duped him into his own punishment. Stuart Clark argues, “Renaissance descriptions of the nature of Satan, the character of hell and, above all, the ritual activities of witches shared a vocabulary of misrule, that they were in effect part of a language conventionally employed to establish and condemn the properties of a disorderly world” (“Inversion” 100). In Falstaff’s final shaming, the merry wives establish and condemn the properties of a disorderly world, condemning Falstaff’s behaviour, without ever implicating themselves in that disorder.

Though scholas have interpreted Falstaff’s beating while in disguise as a witch as anything from part of his cunning escape to a horrifying visual of abusive misogyny, few have recognized the behaviour of a male witch that Falstaff demonstrates long before the female witch costume calls attention to it—or the unique way that the merry wives seek justice against him outside of the legal system by using an established lexicon of local beliefs and superstitions. Falstaff’s disguises are not disguises at all, but rather a mechanism by which the merry wives expose the danger he poses and bring him to justice. Falstaff’s threat to the community is uniquely masculine—his aggression, disruption of the Windsor economy, and infiltration of the domestic space match the attributes of the male witch, and the merry wives’ act of dressing him as the old woman of Brentford demonstrates that the material havoc that he creates in Windsor is far more serious than whatever Ford imagines of the old woman of Brentford. Like Actaeon, he becomes Windsor’s “deer” (5.5.112); the hunter becomes the hunted.

PART TWO: THE WITCH AND THE RULER

CHAPTER 4: "SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES": THE DEVIL AND THE RULER IN SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH*

Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is certainly the most widely known Jacobean witchcraft play, and likely one of the first in a trend of such plays. Though the oldest surviving copy of *Macbeth* is the 1623 First Folio, most scholars date its first performance to 1606, since it "has always seemed the most topical of Shakespeare's great tragedies, cannily alert at once to King James's personal obsessions and to contemporary events" (Greenblatt, "Introduction," 1005). According to Alvin Kernan, the play was likely first performed at Whitehall Palace in August of 1606, possibly for the visit of James's Danish brother-in-law, King Christian (71-2). Stephen Greenblatt points out that shortly after James ascended to the English throne, the Chamberlain's Men became the King's Men and would likely have wanted to show their gratitude for the king's patronage through works designed to interest and flatter him ("Introduction," 1005). The play includes references to the 1605 gunpowder plot and the controversial topic of equivocation in the trials that followed. It also dramatizes and adapts material from the North Berwick witchcraft trials which James had been personally involved in. Because of all these specific references to contemporary events, most scholars have been confident not only in the 1606 dating, but in the assumption that *Macbeth*, written for an acting company with new royal patronage and filled with references to recent political events and monarchical interests, was meant to appeal to and praise the king (1005-6). Though many have complicated this straightforward reading, noting that the play is often critical or untrusting of monarchy in general, many still interpret the play and its three weird sisters (who often mirror James's

own experience at the North Berwick trials) as primarily monarchist praise, if not propaganda.

Ever since Henry Paul's 1950 book *The Royal Play of Macbeth*, many scholars have interpreted Shakespeare's *Macbeth* as a thinly veiled attempt to appeal to the concerns of the new English monarch, James I. Paul argues, "[t]hat the entire play is a royal play for court performance as a compliment to the king…should now be stated as a fact; and it is a fact of the utmost importance to the proper understanding of the play" (1). However, some have challenged this exclusively royalist interpretation; William Carroll notes that "[o]ther readers…such as David Norbrook and Peter Stallybrass, have argued that this 'King James version' of the play misreads both the historical and the theatrical evidence; they find the play to be far more ambivalent about, and even subversive of, James's ideological interests" (Carroll 2). Regardless, many recent scholars have continued to approach the play with the assumption that it was tailor-made for James I, in particular interpreting the Weird Sisters through this lens due to James's own interest in the subject of witchcraft, which was well known from his book, *Daemonologie*, and his participation in the North Berwick witch trials in 1590-92, which accused around seventy people. Luca Baratta writes, "[Shakespeare] would further contribute to his patron's ideology of divine right, by deepening the subject of magic, which the king had been cultivating for many years…It is not mere coincidence, then, that Shakespeare's witches…are exactly like those described in the *Daemonologie*" (199). Ani Kojoyan complicates this view, but still orients the play around James's personal beliefs, stating that, "Shakespeare does not follow any single specific witch-lore tradition while creating

the witch's figure, [and this] could be considered an implicit appeal to King James's gradual increasing skeptical view towards the subject" (171).

It is reasonable to suggest that *Macbeth*'s witchcraft may have been of interest to the same king who spent many years invested in this topic. However, the play's witches do not function simply as royal flattery; rather, the play's preoccupation with witchcraft works to critique corrupt royal power. The play breaks down the binary between witch and ruler, first by introducing skepticism through the staging of a fundamental demonological debate about the witch of Endor, and secondly by placing Macbeth in the role of the devil, demonstrating that he is the primary source of evil in the play and the cause of his own downfall. While the witches have limited power which may not even be genuine, Macbeth is increasingly associated with the Biblical King Saul and the devil himself as he progresses on this downward trajectory, demonstrating that tyranny is Scotland's greatest threat.

4.1 INTERPRETING THE WITCHES

The weird sisters have long been, and remain, one of the most difficult features to interpret in *Macbeth*. Stephen Greenblatt has neatly summed up this dilemma stating, "it is in fact extremely difficult to specify what, if anything [the witches] do or even what, if anything, they are" ("Shakespeare Bewitched" 31). There are four main schools of thought about the weird sisters and their role in *Macbeth*. The first is simply that, as Henry Paul argues, the witches are part of a larger collection of details that are calculated to flatter James I. There are several compelling pieces of evidence supporting Paul's claim that have made many scholars up to the present day take his argument for granted. For example, the play transforms James's alleged ancestor, Banquo, from Macbeth's co-

conspirator in Holinshed's *Chronicles* to a war hero and opponent of Macbeth's rise to power. In contrast to Holinshed's account, *Macbeth* also portrays Duncan as a legitimate king and just ruler and overlooks Macbeth's equal right to the throne (Kernan 78), portraying Malcolm and Donalbain as of age and Duncan's rightful successors rather than underage and therefore, by law, later in the line of succession than Macbeth (Clark and Mason, Introduction, 85). *Macbeth* casts regicide in as negative a light as possible—a wise decision given the play's proximity to the 1605 gunpowder plot. Most obviously, *Macbeth* dramatizes Scottish history soon after the coronation of a Scottish king. All these details have led some scholars to believe that the play is monarchist flattery. As Baratta writes, "James I must have been enormously pleased with *Macbeth.* It was the Stuart play" (200). Joanna Levin more complexly argues that

> …within a Jamesian reading of *Macbeth*, the witches…appear as part of the 'demonic opposition to godly rule' that the rightful monarch must suppress in order to reveal his legitimacy. The suppression of the witches in *Macbeth* occurs largely through their consolidation in the figure of Lady Macbeth…and the hystericized woman emerges as the exemplar of disorderly femininity most in need of proper patriarchal governance. (Levin 45)

Levin posits that the witches demonstrate disorder, which can then be contained by the return of monarchical and patriarchal order (45). Similarly, Irene Spoto writes that "The witch occupies the wicked opposite of the ideal mother / housewife, therefore operating as a figure of the 'anti-housewife,' usurping household authority'" (66). In these readings, the witches represent inversion and chaos in the absence of legitimate government.

A second interpretation of the witches in *Macbeth* is Greenblatt's influential idea that they exist in the imagination. He writes,

> at [Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*'s] centre is an attempt to locate those beliefs not *in* but *as* the imagination. That is, Scot's principal concern is with the boundary between the imaginary and the real, and where [Heinrich] Kramer and [Jacob] Sprenger [the authors of the influential *Malleus Maleficarum*] had viewed that boundary as porous, Scot views it as properly closed. ("Shakespeare Bewitched" 23)

He attributes this logic to *Macbeth*, arguing that Banquo's comment upon meeting the weird sisters "refers not to the witches' equivocal appearance but to a deeper doubt, a doubt not about their gender but about their existence…their very 'outwardness,' their existence outside the mind and its fantasies, is called into question" (32). He also analyses Lady Macbeth's "Come you spirits" speech, outlining similarities between her invocations and acts of witchcraft, but ultimately concluding, "the fact that the spirits she invokes are 'sightless' already moves this passage away from the earth-bubble corporeality of the weird sisters and toward the metaphorical use of 'spirits' in Lady Macbeth's words, a few moments earlier, 'Hie thee hither / That I may pour my spirits in thine ear' (1.5.24-25). The 'spirits' she speaks of here are manifestly figurative" (33).

While Greenblatt argues for a primarily metaphorical interpretation of the weird sisters, Inge Leimberg responds with the third major interpretation—that the weird sisters are anything but figurative: "The spirits Lady Macbeth intends to pour into her husband's ear are not 'manifestly figurative' but unmistakably literal and there is nothing of the 'as if' about her pouring them. She does so" (Leimberg 64). Whether the witches are the

result of Macbeth's deteriorating mind, rooted in reality, or a combination of the two has been the subject of much debate; as Montague summarizes, "A significant body of scholarship [including Greenblatt, Kranz, and McGuinness] has by now made it clear that *Macbeth* primarily deals with uncertainty as to whether the witches are supernatural or not" (251).

Fourthly, several scholars have read the weird sisters as neither metaphorical nor completely literal, nor even as a symbol of chaos that is contained by natural order, but rather as either a combination of several of these things (Montague 252) or as figures that evade interpretation altogether, perhaps because of King James's apparent growing skepticism about witchcraft accusations. For example, Ani Kojoyan argues, "the status of [Shakespeare's created figure of the play-witch], which was not fixed because of its dual and complicated character and because Shakespeare does not follow any single specific witch-lore tradition while creating the witch's figure, could be considered an implicit appeal to King James's gradual increasing skeptical view towards the subject" (171). This last interpretation, while more nuanced than earlier scholarship, still centres King James as the primary motivator behind these theatrical representations of witchcraft.

Far from simply reflecting the monarch's own views about witchcraft back to him as part of a package of a Stuart monarchist project (as the first school of thought suggests), *Macbeth* is deeply critical of corrupt rulership. I argue that, as the fourth school of thought suggests, *Macbeth* maintains some uncertainty about the reality of witchcraft's power. However, rather than locating that uncertainty in Macbeth's imagination, the play raises the Endor question, a case study fundamental to demonology, to stage the dilemma of whether witchcraft is demonically driven or simply fraud. While the play stages this

question, it also refuses to answer it, instead focusing on the central character in the Endor episode: King Saul. Macbeth follows the same corrupt trajectory as King Saul as both kings voluntarily fall from grace in order to obtain temporal power and both seek answers from witches shortly before their untimely ends. By avoiding answering the Endor question and maintaining ambiguity, the play places the ultimate blame for Scotland's corruption squarely on its ruler and his downward trajectory. As Macbeth becomes reprobate through his increasingly evil decisions, the play draws associations between him and the devil, who is notably absent from the play, demonstrating that corrupted rulers and not witches are the play's main source of evil.

4.2 ATTRIBUTION: *MACBETH* AND MIDDLETON

To analyse *Macbeth*'s witches, it is necessary to hazard a reasonable guess about how much of the witch material in the play comes from the likely first performance in 1606. The earliest surviving text of *Macbeth* comes from Shakespeare's first folio in 1623. Many scholars have noted that the short play text may indicate that the play may have been significantly edited since its first performance date (Miola 1015). Gary Taylor argues that much—in fact, most—of the witch material was added by Middleton in 1616. While most scholars agree that the witch songs and Hecate scenes (3.5 and the end of 4.1) are additions that likely were authored by Middleton in 1616 (Clark, qtd. in Jackson and Werstine and Mowat 120), Taylor attributes much more of *Macbeth*'s witchcraft content to Middleton's later revisions than most contemporaries are prepared to agree with. Because the political contexts of *Macbeth*'s likely first performance date of 1606 and the date of Middleton's revisions in 1616 are so drastically different, it is important to consider what material Middleton was adapting. Was *Macbeth* simply thinly veiled

monarchist flattery which Middleton later recrafted, or did *Macbeth*, in 1606, start a series of plays that would use the element of witchcraft to subtly critique royal rule and other power structures? While Taylor is a careful scholar and some of his suggestions are plausible, he exaggerates the extent of Middleton's adaptations. If Taylor's analysis of the Middleton adaptation of *Macbeth* is correct, his conclusion would torpedo an enormous body of work on early representations of witchcraft on the Jacobean stage, and so his ideas deserve some consideration. His influence can be felt as early as 2010 when Celia R. Daileader, citing Taylor, stated that, "the bewhiskered hags that are now standard Halloween fare were Middleton's re-imagining of the 'three women fairies or nymphs' who prophesize to Macbeth in the lost original" (12). If Taylor and Daileader are correct, then, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* is nearly witch-less, the weird sisters of 1606 are reduced to merely nymphs or fairies, and the witches that survive today are Middleton's additions for the purpose of popular entertainment or a completely different political message than would have been possible in 1606. Taylor's reading strips the weird sisters of all their political power, removing them from a time period close to the North Berwick trials, in which witches would have had significance, and instead transporting them to a later date in which they may have been added for comedic and entertainment value. Diane Purkiss argues that, whatever else the witches might be, they are

> a low-budget, frankly exploitative collage of randomly chosen bits of witch-lore, selected not for thematic significance but for its sensational value…The witch-scenes brazenly refuse any serious engagement with witchcraft in favour of a forthright rendering of witches as a stage spectacular…Learned interpretations of the play which eagerly make

> sense of the witches and related their activities cogently to the main action are untrue to the play's unbridled sensationalism. (*History* 207)

While Purkiss's evaluation might be true if the bulk of the witch content was added by Middleton as late as 1616 for the purpose of revitalising the play, her assessment that witches were added primarily for cheap entertainment value is unreasonably reductive if the majority of the witch scenes come from 1606, not long after James had ascended to the English throne and the accounts of the North Berwick trials had been reprinted in London. The question of interpreting the witches depends in part on who primarily wrote them and when.

Taylor argues that much of the detail in *Macbeth*'s witch scenes was added later by Middleton; in fact, he is so sure of Middleton's involvement that he places an adaptation of *Macbeth* in Oxford's *The Collected Works of Thomas Middleton* and argues that the weird sisters prior to 1616 were staged as women fairies or nymphs (389 *A Companion*). However, this suggestion is highly unlikely for several reasons. First, Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (even if we excise the significant portion which Taylor attributes to Middleton) collapses the "[three] women in straunge & ferly apparell, resembling creatures of elder worlde" (Holinshed 243) that Macbeth and Banquo meet in *Holinshed's Chronicles* into the same figures as the "certain wysardes, in whose words he put great confidence" (249) and "a certeine witch, whom he had in great trust" (249) who Macbeth consults in 4.1 of the play. In Holinshed's *Chronicles*, these are not the same figures, and the weird sisters are never referred to as witches. In fact, Holinshed refers to them as "the three fayries or weird sisters" (249). The fact that Shakespeare makes the weird sisters and the later witch into the same characters when Holinshed does not, demonstrates that

Macbeth in 1606 casts the weird sisters as more witch-like than Holinshed does. The weird sisters cannot simply be fairies or nymphs if they become the same witch as in the later part of Holinshed's account.

Much of Taylor's interpretation of the weird sisters rests on his idea that Middleton and not Shakespeare is responsible for Banquo's reference to beards in 1.3. This is one of the first clues that something is strange about the three women. Taylor writes,

> …the gender of the three original witches was changed. Throughout Shakespeare's dialogue they are referred to as 'sisters', and therefore female. Likewise, in Forman's account the three figures Macbeth and Banquo meet in 1.3 are '3 women feiries or Nimphes'. But that gender designation contradicts the explicit reference to 'beards' in Banquo's first speech to the sisters (II.42-4)…since these characters presumably appeared in at least three scenes it is hard to explain how Forman could have taken them for women if they were bearded. (*A Companion* 389)

Taylor's analysis that a female "gender designation contradicts the explicit reference to 'beards' in Banquo's first speech" (389) is odd, considering that this confusion over gender is precisely the point of Banquo's line: "You *should be* women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so" (3.1.46-7). The fact that Taylor has noticed a contradiction proves nothing about whether Shakespeare or Middleton wrote these lines; Banquo's line demonstrates that this contradiction is purposeful.

Taylor attributes Banquo's line about beards to Middleton, even though he acknowledges most of the rest of the scene as Shakespearean, because "…switching the

gender of the witches allowed them to be recast, transferring the acting burden to the men, and thus freeing the company's boys to handle the interpolated material in 3.5 and 4.1" (389). However, it is unclear why Taylor believes that the weird sisters must have been played by boys before this time—they may always have been played by men. In fact, there is a precedent for this in other early modern plays. Brett D. Hirsch points to the same trend in several other plays:

> in Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Honest Man's Fortune*, Longaville describes women turning to witchcraft for revenge… 'Come to us, for disguises must wear beards, / And that's they say the token of a witch.' The same reasoning occurs in the first part of Thomas Dekker's *The Honest Whore*, where the servant does not admit a messenger with 'hairs at his mouth, for feare he should be a woman', on the basis that 'some women haue beardes' and that 'mary they are halfe witches'… (94)

Taylor, invested in attributing the bulk of the witch content in *Macbeth* to Middleton, has overlooked this established connection between bearded women and witchcraft, both in Shakespeare's earlier play and in the works of other contemporary playwrights, even though he acknowledges, "Middleton was [not] the only writer of the period to gender witches equivocally; there would have been nothing remarkable about the decision to give the witches beards. But they were not bearded in Shakespeare's source, or in the play Forman saw in 1611, and the language in which their beards are described in the adapted text is Middletonian" (389).

However, there is no reason why Shakespeare should not have written this line when he had already represented a bearded "witch" in earlier work.

Taylor's suggestion that the weird sisters were 'nymphs or fairies' depends significantly on Simon Forman's short description of a production of *Macbeth* which he attended at The Globe in 1610 or 1611. Forman never mentions beards and never even refers to the weird sisters as witches. He writes,

> ther was to be obserued firste howe Mackbeth and Bancko 2 noblemen of Scotland Ridinge thorowe a wod the [sic] stode befor them 3 women feiries or Nimiphes [sic] And saluted Mackbeth sayinge .l. 3 tyms vnto him. haille Mackbeth. king of Codon for thou shalt be a kinge but shalt beget No kinges &c. then said Bancko What all to Mackbeth And nothing to me ther said the nimphes haille to thee Banko thou shalt beget kinges. yet be no kinge. (MS Ashmole 208, folio 207 recto)

Forman also completely neglects to mention 4.1 at all, though he describes all the material surrounding it, including Banquo's ghost and the murder of Macduff's family. Scholars have speculated about why Forman's weird sisters are so different from those in the Folio. Taylor summarizes, "To explain this discrepancy, Shakespeare scholars have been forced to conjecture that Forman's account of the play has, here alone, been contaminated by Holinshed, Shakespeare's source, who calls these figures 'nymphs or fairies'. But why should Forman draw upon Holinshed here, and nowhere else?" (388). Rather than accepting that Forman may have been confusing the play he saw with its source text (a copy of which does not exist in Forman's remaining papers (388)), Taylor argues that "Shakespeare…often took over phrases and images from Holinshed, and Shakespeare is certainly more likely than Forman to have echoed 'nymphs' and 'fairies' from Holinshed" (389). Taylor may be right that Shakespeare was more *likely* than

Forman to echo Holinshed, but the truth is that, in the texts which survive, it is Forman and not Shakespeare who does so. This does not mean that it is not possible for a drastically different version of *Macbeth* to have been lost to the mists of time; however, *likelihood* is an insufficient argument.

Like it or not, Forman does echo Holinshed, and not only in his "feiries or Nimiphes" reference, which echoes Holinshed's line: "these women were eyther the weird sisters, that is (as ye would say, [the] Goddesses of destinie, or els some Nimphes or feiries" (244). In fact, references to Holinshed permeate Forman's opening lines. For example, he recounts Banquo saying, "What all to Mackbeth And nothing to me[?]" (7). Similarly, in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, Banquo says, "What manner of women…are you, that seeme so little fauourable vnto me, whereas to my fellow here, besides high offices, yee assigne also the kingdome, appointing foorth nothing for me at all?" (243). By contrast, Shakespeare's Banquo does not complain about receiving nothing, but instead says, "To me you speak not. / If you can look into the seeds of time / And say which grain will grow and which will not, / Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear / Your favours nor your hate" (1.3.58-62). Here, Banquo specifically does not beg, and in fact highlights Macbeth's eagerness through the contrast of his own caution. Forman's description of the weird sisters' lines as well as their appearance match Holinshed and not Shakespeare.

Lastly, Taylor points out that "Forman records one spectacular effect that does not appear in the extant text: in what corresponds to 1.3, he has Macbeth and Banquo 'riding.' Scragg considered it unlikely that Macbeth appears on horseback, but her argument underestimated the evidence for adaptation and abridgement of the original text" (388). Taylor goes on to say that horses had occasionally been used at the Globe,

but that they would have to have been removed for performance in a private playhouse like Blackfriars by the time Middleton adapted the play

Figure 1: Macbeth and Banquo approach the weird sisters on horseback. Holinshed, Raphael. *The Weird Sisters*. 1577, *Chronicles of England, Scotlande, and Irelande*, faithfully set forth by Raphaell Holinshed, p. 243.

(388). He takes this to be additional evidence indicating that Middleton must have significantly adapted this scene in 1616 after Forman saw the play circa 1610, presumably adding grown male actors with beards and subtracting live horses. However, far from being proof that Middleton significantly altered this scene, the horses are simply more evidence that Forman's description is influenced by Holinshed, whose account includes a woodcut of Macbeth and Banquo riding on horses (figure 1). Taylor also neglects to mention that Forman says that Macbeth and Banquo were "Ridinge thorowe a wod" (6) when Shakespeare clearly says that they were supposed to meet "Upon the heath" (1.1.7). A heath is "Open uncultivated ground; an extensive tract of waste land; a wilderness; now chiefly applied to a bare, more or less flat, tract of land" (*OED* heath, n. 1. a). Taylor attributes this line to Shakespeare (1170), and never attempts to claim that Middleton later changed Shakespeare's wood for a heath. However, while Shakespeare's witches meet Macbeth upon the heath, Holinshed's weird sisters meet Macbeth and Banquo as they "went sporting by the waie together…passing thorough the woods and fields" (268). Additionally, the accompanying woodcut (figure 1) includes a prominent tree in the centre of the image. All these details from Forman—the reference to 'nymphs or fairies',

the fact that the lines Forman recounts from Banquo closely resemble Holinshed, and the mention of horses and woods— point clearly to Holinshed and not a staged production as the source for Forman's opening lines. Forman's description of the version of *Macbeth* that he saw does not prove that the weird sisters were not truly witches before Middleton embellished them.

Of course, it is strange that Forman would refer to a source text in these opening lines rather than describing the play that he actually saw. However, many scholars have observed that Forman's notes, while useful in their rarity, are often troubled by missing pieces and inconsistencies (Hirsch 93). For example, "Forman's notes…generally stress the practical or moral lessons that can be drawn from the dramatic action he summarizes, rather than reflecting his literary sensibilities" (Shakespeare Documented), and several of his other play descriptions are missing key plot points as well. Mason points out that though scholars have speculated extensively on whether Forman's account represents a different version of *Macbeth* that was later altered by Middleton or someone else,

> [Forman's] descriptions of the two other Shakespeare plays he saw in 1611…are far from complete… His recollections were not always accurate: he says that the Sisters hailed Macbeth 'king of Codon' (rather than Thane of Cawdor) and that Duncan 'made Mackbeth forth with Prince of Northumberland' (instead of making Malcolm Prince of Cumberland), both of these being rather crucial slips as far as the narrative is concerned…Forman may give some clues to striking effects in a 1611 production of *Macbeth*, but his account does not constitute reliable

> evidence either of what was 'actually staged' (Scragg, 87) at the Globe in 1611, or of the existence of a pre-Folio version. (324-5)

We will never know the real reason why Forman appears to describe Holinshed rather than the action which appears in the 1623 Folio at the start of his description of *Macbeth*. Perhaps he was simply late for the play, missed the opening scenes, and later referred to the source text to fill in the gap. However, given that Forman also completely excises 4.1 and its accompanying prophecies, I think a second explanation is plausible. The Folger Shakespeare Library states that:

> [Forman] was drawn to the study of 'natural philosophy,' including astrology, medicine, and alchemy…By the 1590s he was successfully established in London as a healer… Forman also dabbled in necromancy. He was consulted by thousands of patients, primarily to cure physical ailments but also in the belief that his skills as an astrologer could help them find lost property or predict future events in their lives. He advised and cast horoscopes for numerous noble men and women who sought his help. Forman was badgered throughout his career by members of the College of Physicians, who resented that he successfully practiced in their profession without formal training. Forman's medical-astrological practice made him quite prosperous, if not wealthy (Shakespeare Documented)

Taylor has accepted Forman's account as merely the notes of an observer, allowing him specific interests or human forgetfulness, but not an agenda of his own. If Forman's primary source of wealth involved "dabbl[ing] in necromancy" and predicting the future, he may have wanted to avoid any contamination of his own trade with the witchcraft that

King James was known to hate, especially if he was already receiving pushback from the College of Physicians. For the sake of his unusual career and peace of mind, Forman may have wanted to excise the play's witchcraft scenes, which may have seemed uncomfortably close to his own work. The one prophecy scene which he retains he represents as not from witches, and the prophecies are not misleading or equivocal. Clearly, all of this is conjecture, but so is Taylor's suggestion that we must accept Forman's account as closer to the 1606 text than the 1623 Folio.

Beards are crucial to determine whether the weird sisters are witches or nymphs / fairies in 1.1 and 1.3. As Hirsch points out, "In light of the popular perceptions of witches as physically deformed, and the common assessment of bearded women as witches on stage, it is clear that many members of the Jacobean audience watching *Macbeth* would have interpreted the bearded Sisters…as witches" (95). However, Taylor is so invested in his argument that Simon Forman's account proves that the weird sisters did not have beards that he bases several other assumptions on this evidence alone, removing two other key witchcraft elements from these opening scenes to make the beginning of the play fit Forman's description of nymphs or fairies. For example, his first reattribution comes from the weird sisters' responses to their familiars in 1.1; familiars are fundamental to pact demonology, and their presence invalidates any interpretation of the sisters as something other than witches. Taylor must remove the familiars if he wants to insist that Forman's account is representative of an earlier version of the play. Though he acknowledges most of the scene as Shakespeare's, Taylor argues, "one line of the scene is probably Middleton's. There is no parallel in Shakespeare for 'greymalkin' or 'malkin'; 'Malkin' is a witch's familiar at *Witch* 1.2.219" ("Adaptation" 397). This

evidence is unsatisfactory, first because 'greymalkin' is an unlikely word to have a parallel in another Shakespeare play, given that the name is specific to a witch's familiar, and secondly because Middleton could just as easily lifted this word from *Macbeth* and added it to *The Witch* as added it to *Macbeth* as a revision later; in a scene that shows no other signs of adaptation, unlike 4.1, it seems more likely that the line belongs to Shakespeare. However, Taylor's motivation to strip Shakespeare's 1606 weird sisters of their associations with witchcraft in order to attribute them to Middleton in 1616, making him a *Macbeth* co-author, becomes clear when he says that the responses to the familiars "have the effect of changing the character of the three weird sisters, explicitly associating them with contemporary beliefs about witchcraft, and preparing for the kinds of material added in the Hecate scenes" ("Adaptation" 397).

This argument, however, is inconsistent with the similar responses to familiars in the beginning of 4.1 which Taylor does attribute to Shakespeare (1187). The songs and dances that most scholars agree Middleton added to *Macbeth* clearly stand out as additions because they are thematically and tonally different from the play content around them. It seems a stretch to say that a response to familiars that so closely mirrors the one in 4.1 would have been a later addition. Taylor, however, is invested in interpreting the weird sisters in act 1 as Forman's "feiries or Nimiphes," and so, to support this point, he must find a reason to remove any content that makes the weird sisters Jacobean witches. Taylor's reading neutralizes any political critique that Jacobean stage witches would have conveyed in 1606, so soon after the North Berwick trials, and reduces them to a plot device with barely more development than the source text. However, there is good reason to believe that the weird sisters were witches in 1606 and that Shakespeare was using

them to critically engage with contemporary political events as well as to develop a general critique of corrupt rulership.

In addition to removing witch content from 1.1, Taylor has doubts about how much of 4.1 Shakespeare wrote, although he admits that "despite Forman's silence…Shakespeare wrote a scene in which Macbeth revisited the three witches" ("Adaptation 390). However, Taylor attributes the bulk of the apparition section to Middleton, only reserving the words of the prophecies for the weird sisters in 1606 and attributing all the special effects to Middleton. He states, "The three apparitions also seem suspect. Like Hecate, the cat, the three spirits and the three additional witches, they are supernatural and appear nowhere else in the play…the three prophecies…could just as easily be delivered by the three weird sisters" (391). However, the fact that the apparitions are supernatural and appear nowhere else in the play does not mean that they must belong to Middleton; indeed, it would be extremely odd for the apparitions to appear more than once when they are limited to this particular occurrence and the weird sisters repeatedly tell Macbeth not to seek more knowledge. Additionally, the apparitions' speech does not match the witches' characteristic trochaic tetrameter, and so it seems unlikely that these speeches "could just as easily be delivered by the three weird sisters" (391). In fact, Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason argue that the apparitions' speech is structurally similar to Macbeth's and that their speech is "distinctive from that of the Sisters [since it] is in rhymed pentameters" (Introduction 48). Taylor's point that much of this scene must belong to Middleton rests largely on his attributing all of the first witch's lines from 60-70 to Hecate, who he considers a Middletonian character. He argues,

> since Hecate's speech at 4.1.143-50 is given the speech prefix 'I', it seems probable that she is also meant to speak the other speeches in the apparition sequence—as she does in Davenant's adaptation…In the rest of the play, the witches speak in a rotation which emphasizes their eery corporateness; in the apparition sequence, four speeches in a row are assigned to 'I', who also speaks the first speech after the sequence (4.1.124), when the characteristic rotation resumes. (*A Companion* 391).

This evidence seems like a stretch, particularly because the Folio (which includes Middleton's additions), makes no such attribution to Hecate in these lines, rather clearly labelling the speaker as the first witch. Why Taylor thinks that Davenant's adaptation in 1647 (which famously plays fast and loose with the play, "rewrite[ing] and simplify[ing] whatever is obscure in Shakespeare and omit[ing] whatever might make the forces of darkness appear heroic or attractive" (Williams 47)) is better evidence than the first Folio in 1623 is not clear.

In addition, the apparitions fit neatly into the play text while Middleton's additions do not. Each apparition thematically fits the prophecy that it delivers. The armed head, which tells Macduff to "Beware Macduff" (70), foreshadows Macbeth's own severed head at the hand of Macduff; the bloody child, which tells Macbeth that "none of woman born / Shall harm Macbeth" (79-80), foreshadows Macduff, the child born of cesarian section; and the "child crowned, with a tree in his hand" (84 s.d.), who tells Macbeth that he "shall never vanquished be until / Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him" (90-3), foreshadowing that Prince Malcolm's army will move the forest to Dunsinane by carrying branches. The apparitions are not a

hastily added special effect; they work to demonstrate their own prophecies. By contrast, Middleton's addition comes in awkwardly at the end of the scene. As Macbeth stands horrified at the show of kings (120-3), Middleton has the first witch interrupt his despair in a cheerful tone, asking, "But why / Stands Macbeth thus amazedly? / Come, sisters, cheer we up his sprites, / And show the best of our delights. / I'll charm the air to give a sound / While you perform your antic round" (124-9). In the rest of the scene leading up to this point, the witches have been reticent to show their art, while Macbeth demanded. The dance seems like an obvious addition because of the abrupt tonal shift and the fact that the witches move from reluctant to nearly pushy in the space of a few lines. The apparitions, on the other hand, merely reinforce the existing themes in the play. It also seems inconsistent to accept the show of kings for Shakespeare's (Taylor 392) and not the apparitions, when both are special effects offered by the witches. Once again, Taylor's reattributions work to neutralize Shakespeare's weird sisters and credit the bulk of the demonological material to Middleton.

It is likely that the first version of *Macbeth* included witches considering that it emerged shortly after the reprinting of influential texts about witchcraft and during a time of heightened anxiety about treason. *Macbeth* was likely first performed in 1606, only three years after James became king of England and *Daemonologie* was reprinted in London (due to renewed interest following James's coronation) along with a copy of *Newes from Scotland*, an account of the North Berwick trials that inspired it. According to Alan Kernan, "on December 26 [1606, The King's Men] went up to the palace as usual to open the Christmas season at Whitehall, putting on a play in the Banqueting House. Trials of the surviving Gunpowder Plotters were going forward, and it was a time for

high patriotism, for congratulating the king and the country on their narrow escape from disaster" (71-2). *Macbeth* fits well into a lineup of plays meant to celebrate James's survival from assassination, and if this is the case, it also is reasonable that the play would reference another treasonous attempt which James had survived: the supposed plot of the witches to sink his ship as he had made his way over from Denmark with his new bride in 1589. Kernan argues that *Macbeth* is a likely candidate for a performance of the King's Men at "Hampton Court, on August 7, 1606, at the end of the visit of the royal brother-in-law, King Christian of Denmark….the absence of swearing in the play indicates that it was either written or cleansed of profanity at some time after The Acte to Restrain Abuses of Players was passed by Parliament on May 27, 1606" (72). In addition, *King Lear*, which we can also date to 1606, also uses Holinshed's Chronicles as its source text (Clark and Mason, Introduction, 82), demonstrating that Shakespeare may have written both of these plays around the same time. If *Macbeth* was first performed before King James and King Christian in 1606, this historical context makes it likely that the weird sisters were witches rather than nymphs or fairies. Regardless of whether the play was staged for a specific royal occasion, the 1606 date alone makes the weird sisters likely to be witches. The idea that Shakespeare staged witches and not nymphs or fairies in 1606 is critical to *Macbeth*'s larger critique of kingship and to the play's engagement with King James's own theological dilemmas on the subject of witchcraft.

4.3 *MACBETH* AND THE ENDOR DEBATE

The apparitions, the show of kings, and Banquo's ghost are fundamental to understanding the play's portrayal of witchcraft, particularly in 1606, as they fit into the questions and anxieties generated by the North Berwick trials and expanded on in King

James's *Daemonologie*. One key text that all early modern demonologists had to grapple with was the story of the witch of Endor in 1 Samuel 28. In the story, King Saul, rejected by God and His prophets, seeks out the witch of Endor and asks her to "Bring me up Samuel" (vs. 11). She complies and reports seeing "gods ascending out of the earth…An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle" (vs. 13-14). The difficulty of the story lay in how to interpret the spirit of Samuel that the witch of Endor had called up. The idea that a witch had the power to literally raise the spirit of a deceased saint was alarming and theologically problematic. On the other hand, disagreeing with any of the words of the text called into question the inspired word of God. The 1599 Geneva Bible states that after the witch of Endor reports seeing "an old man…lapped in a mantel" coming up, "Saul knew that it was Samuel" (vs. 14). However, the editors amend this verse with a footnote, which states, "To his imagination, albeit it was Satan, who to blind his eyes took upon him the form of Samuel, as he can do of an Angel of light" (14). Similarly, when King James introduces Biblical evidence for witchcraft at the beginning of *Daemonologie*, he writes, "…that it was not the spirit of *Samuel*, I grant…And that the Diuel is permitted at som-times to out himself in the liknes of the Saintes, it is plaine in the Scripture, where it is said, that *Sathan can trans-forme himself into an Angell of Light*" (3). In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, on the other hand, Reginald Scot argues, "Well, I perceive the woman of Endors spirit was a counterfeit, and kept belike in hir closet at Endor… And though Saule were bewitched and blinded in the matter; yet doubtlesse a wise man wold have perchance espied her knaverie (144). Reginald Scot and King James deal with the problem of Samuel's ghost in opposite ways. Laura Levine explains,

> For Scot, the witch of Endor was a charlatan using stage tricks like ventriloquism to dupe Saul. For James, in contrast, what looked like Samuel raised by the witch was actually the devil in the shape of Samuel. Both explanations imply a 'theatrical' conception of witchcraft…in the sense that they involve the creation of illusions. But they do so in different ways. For Scot what is at issue is human 'juggling' or 'cousening,' the construction of an illusion that could (theoretically) be seen through even though Saul, hungry and gullible, failed to do so. For James what is operative is a demonic theatricality, the devil casting much more powerful illusions by assuming different shapes. Scot chose the natural explanation, James the supernatural. (2)

In *Macbeth*, Banquo's ghost and the other apparitions stage this debate between naturalism and supernaturalism.

Macbeth ponders the witch of Endor question—whether the supernatural is theatrical or demonic—when he sees Banquo's ghost in 3.4, and the play remains preoccupied with this question when the apparitions appear in 4.1. When Macbeth first reacts to Banquo's ghost during the banquet, Lady Macbeth scolds him and reasons, "This is the very painting of your fear" (3.4.71), representing Scot's side of the debate and writing off the ghost as Macbeth's troubled imagination—a naturalistic explanation. When Banquo's ghost appears a second time, Macbeth summarizes the stakes of the debate, exclaiming, "If charnel houses and our graves must send / Those that we bury back, our monuments / Shall be the maws of kites" (72-4). Macbeth cannot accept that the ghost is the literal body or soul of Banquo returned from the grave, or the

implications will be horrifying. Banquo's ghost must be either demonic or a projection of Macbeth's troubled mind, and it is impossible to say which. Finally, Macbeth, contrasting his wife's explanation, represents the supernatural side of the debate, declaring, "Approach thou like the rugged Russian bear, / The armed rhinoceros, or th' Hyrcan tiger! / Take any shape but that, and my firm nerves / Shall never tremble… / Hence, horrible shadow, / Unreal mockery, hence!" (102-109). Macbeth suggests that Banquo's ghost may have the ability to take a different form, making it a demonic trickster—an "unreal mockery" (109) or "Mimicry, imitation; a deceptive or counterfeit representation of something" (*OED* mockery, n. 3) rather than "The very painting of [his] fear" (71). However, while 3.4 introduces the dilemma of the natural vs. the supernatural, it never fully solves it. It is impossible to know whether Banquo's ghost is the manifestation of Macbeth's mental distress or a demonic trickster taking Banquo's form, just as it is impossible to know whether the witch of Endor tricked Saul with theatrics or whether a demonic spirit took the form of Samuel. The witch of Endor problem demonstrates how hard it is to know anything with certainty—James's own perennial problem in *Daemonologie* and the North Berwick trials.

When more apparitions appear in 4.1, they work to restage the question—are the apparitions natural or supernatural? Are they misleading theatrics or demonic performance? 4.1 stages the Endor question, drawing parallels between Macbeth's predicament and Saul's position in 1 Samuel 28. In both, the corrupt ruler of the land is about to go into battle and seeks to know what the outcome will be. Both corrupt kings seek a prophecy, and both the witch of Endor and the weird sisters call up a spirit. Both Saul and Macbeth ultimately die in the coming battle because of their own moral

corruption. The Geneva Bible even presents the witch of Endor in language similar to that used in *Macbeth* in relation to the weird sisters; Saul commands his servants, "Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and ask of her" (vs. 7). While this wording has changed in many modern (and more accurate) translations, the Bible of the time would have made the connection between this story and *Macbeth* all the clearer, as the opening three lines of 4.1 establish that the weird sisters do have familiar spirits.

In addition, the weird sisters and the witch of Endor both bring up apparitions. Taylor has commented on this stage direction, reasoning, "the word 'rises'…implies that the 'show of eight kings' ascends from the trapdoor…that the eight kings ascend, rather than simply enter, is implied by the first line of Macbeth's reaction to them: 'Thou art too like the spirit of Banquo: Down'…The last word 'Down', always understood as an imperative, indicates that Macbeth wants the figure to go back where he has come from, to go down instead of coming up" ("Adaptation" 392). Taylor then uses this observation to argue that rising from the trapdoor would be "anticlimactic" after the three apparitions had also risen, and so Middleton, upon adding apparitions, must have changed the stage direction for the show of kings and made them walk across the stage (392). The idea that a fourth show rising from the ground would be anticlimactic is surely a matter of taste. Regardless, Taylor's note is important because it demonstrates that the show of eight kings and Banquo may have risen in the same way that the witch of Endor describes Samuel's ghost rising. She says, "I saw gods ascending out of the earth…An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle" (vs. 13-14). Both specifically see the apparitions coming up out of the ground. This scene restages the central problem of the

witchcraft debate—the question of whether the spirits raised by witches are stage tricks or demons in disguise.

Although *Macbeth* repeatedly centres the main question of the witchcraft problem, presenting both the idea that the apparent supernatural may be located in stagecraft or the imagination and the possibility that the supernatural is orchestrated by the devil, the play never presents a conclusive answer to this problem. Instead, it points to Macbeth as the main instigator of witchcraft—regardless of its origins—and as ultimately responsible for his own actions, like King Saul, who deliberately sought out the witch of Endor and even coerced her into raising Samuel, against her protestations. While King James and Reginald Scot vehemently disagree about whether the ghost of Samuel has a natural or supernatural explanation, they agree on one thing: Saul would never have been fooled by either demons or theatrics had he not first willfully blinded himself. Scot explains, "both Saule and his servants ment such a one as could by hir spirit raise up Samuell, or any other that was dead and buried. Wherein you see they were deceived, though it were true, that she tooke upon hir so to doo… Surelie, as they were deceived and abused in part, so doubtlesse were they in the rest" (7.11). King James similarly explains, "God will not permit [the devil] so to deceiue his own: but only such, as first wilfully deceiues them-selues, by running vnto him, whom God then suffers to fall in their owne snares, and justlie permittes them to be illuded with great efficacy of deceit, because they would not beleeue the trueth" (3). *Macbeth*'s repeated staging of the unsolved witch of Endor debate, rather than advocating for one side or the other, instead focuses on both Saul and Macbeth's own self-deception and guilt. Though the witches and their special effects dominate the stage, the blame ultimately falls on Macbeth, who,

like Saul, starts his story as a war hero, makes dreadful choices out of a desire for power, seeks out witches to learn his future, and ultimately dies in the final battle. Saul does not fail as king because of his brush with witchcraft; even before he seeks out the witch of Endor, God has already forsaken him. In fact, in the moment in 1 Samuel 15 when Samuel tells Saul that God has rejected him as king, he compares Saul's behaviour to witchcraft; the Geneva Bible reads, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and transgression is wickedness and idolatry. Because thou hast cast away the word of the Lord, therefore he hath cast away thee from being king" (vs 23). Samuel makes it clear that Saul's action of rejecting God in order to rule according to his own desires is just as heinous as the sin of witchcraft, just as *Macbeth* clearly shows that Macbeth's wickedness is worse than the witchcraft he solicits; by the time he seeks out the weird sisters, he has already destroyed his own kingdom, and Macduff is in England seeking his downfall. As a note in the Geneva Bible states, "God hateth nothing more than the disobedience of his Commandment…" (23). The Endor debate works to highlight Macbeth's own culpability and self-deception; he, not the witches he solicits, is the main source of evil in the play.

Macbeth also hints at the Endor question in the dagger scene, when Macbeth asks, "Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but / A dagger of the mind, a false creation, / Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?" (2.1.36-9). Macbeth cannot tell whether the dagger is a vision or a physical reality, but regardless, he frames himself as fully responsible for his upcoming actions, declaring, "Thou marshall'st me the way that I was going" (42). Whether the dagger is a vision or a theatrical trick, it is not responsible for Macbeth's subsequent murder of Duncan—he was already moving towards this inevitability of his own volition. Macbeth goes on to talk

about the deceptive nature of dreams (50-1) and the fact that he cannot trust his own eyes (44-5), but once again he admits that these visions are due to his own premeditation, declaring, "it is the bloody business which informs / Thus to mine eyes" (48-9). The dagger scene is also paired with a reference to witchcraft as Macbeth says, "Witchcraft celebrates / Pale Hecate's offerings, and withered Murder, / Alarumed by his sentinel the wolf, / Whose howl's his watch, this with his stealthy pace, / With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design / moves like a ghost" (2.1.51-6). However, this reference to witchcraft is not a reference to demonic manipulation, but an association of Macbeth's wicked intentions with the demonic.

While *Macbeth* critiques corrupt rulership, it does so safely since Macbeth is himself a usurper. While the play includes regicide as a major plot point, Macbeth's tortured conscience at the beginning of the play makes it abundantly clear that king slaying is contrary to both God and nature. Macbeth himself frames Duncan as nearly angelic, declaring,

> …this Duncan
> Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
> So clear in his great office, that his virtues
> Will plead like angles, trumpet-tongued, against
> The deep damnation of his taking-off;
> And Pity, like a naked newborn babe
> Striding the blast, or heaven's cherubim horsed
> Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
> Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,

That tears shall drown the wind. (1.7.16-24)

Because Macbeth associates Duncan with the angels and himself with the devil, the play's critique of Macbeth's rule seems justified, protecting the playwright from overt political controversy.

However, the play's parallels between Macbeth and King Saul open room for critique of rulership since King Saul, the Biblical king who Macbeth mirrors, was a legitimate ruler appointed by God whose kingdom was taken away by God because of his own disobedience and corruption. In 1 Samuel 15, when Saul disobeys God's specific commands, the prophet Samuel tells him, "Because thou hast cast away the word of the Lord, therefore he hath cast away thee from being king…thou has cast away the word of the Lord, and the Lord hath cast away thee, that thou shalt not be King over Israel…The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to thy neighbor, that is better than thou" (vs. 23-28).

King Saul, like Macbeth, loses his kingdom to someone not of his line, and none of his own descendants become kings. However, while Macbeth is always an illegitimate king who appoints himself through treason, King Saul was a legitimate ruler who lost his kingdom because of his own disobedience to God. In *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, King James specifically states that Saul's fall was due to his own sin and could not be blamed on God. He writes, "…Saul was chosen by God for his virtue and meet qualities to govern his people, whereas his defection spring after-hand from the corruption of his own nature and not through any default in God" (59). King James also references Samuel's words about rebellion in *Daemonologie*, stating, "The diuerse nature of our sinnes procures at the Iustice of God, diuerse sortes of punishments answering

thereunto…God justlie by that sinne of rebellion, as Samuel calleth it, accuseth our life so wilfullie fighting against our profession" (37-8). Although Macbeth is an illegitimate ruler, his connections to King Saul allow for a critique of legitimate rulers who operate contrary to the law of God.

Not only does the play open a critique of legitimate rulership, it even alludes to God's warning when Israel requested a monarch in the first place, hinting at a critique of the entire institution of monarchy. In 1 Samuel 8, when the nation of Israel comes to Samuel with a request to set up a monarchy and appoint their first king, God tells Samuel to warn them about the kind of power a king will have over them and the ways in which he will be able to abuse that power. God tells Samuel to tell them,

> This shall be the manner of the king that shall reign over you: he will take your sons, and appoint them to his chariots, and to be his horsement, and some shall run before his chariot. Also he will make them his captains over thousands, and captains over fifties, and to ear his ground, and to reap his harvest, and to make instruments of war, and the things that serve for his chariots. He will also take your daughters and make then Apothecaries, and Cooks, and Bakers. And he will take your fields, and your vineyards, and your best Olive trees, and give them to his servants. And he will take the tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give it to his Eunuchs, and to his servants. And he will take your menservants, and your maidservants, and the chief of your young men, and your assess, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your sheep, and ye shall be his servants. And ye shall

cry out at that day, because of your king, whom ye have chosen you,

and the Lord will not hear you at that day. (vs. 11-18)

Macbeth alludes to this passage when Macduff travels to England to persuade Malcolm to come back to Scotland to claim his rightful crown. As MacDuff, like the nation of Israel, begs for a king, Malcolm echoes Samuel's words and tells him,

…there's no bottom, none,

In my voluptuousness: your wives, your daughters,

Your matrons, and your maids could not fill up

The cistern of my lust…

With this there grows

In my most ill-composed affection such

A stanchless avarice that, were I king,

I should cut off the nobles for their lands,

Desire his jewels and this other's house,

And my more-having would be as a sauce

To make me hunger more…(4.3.60-3, 76-83).

Malcolm echoes many of Samuel's warnings, threatening to take possessions, lands, and family members for his own purposes. Though Malcolm subsequently recants his words (123-4), the fact that he would speak falsely in the first place and even come up with this list of tyrannies shows that the future of Scotland rests precariously on his good behaviour; in fact, Malcolm inverts the behaviour of the tyrant by outwardly appearing to be a villain, but hiding a deeper virtue. However, the fact that Malcolm is performing as one kind of ruler while hiding his true nature demonstrates that his character is

changeable and unreliable. Because even a good and legitimate king has the power to enact this list of tyrannies—whether or not he chooses to use that power—demonstrates that the entire system, since its first institution in the nation of Israel, leaves the people vulnerable to the mercy of the sovereign's moral character.

4.4 THE PLACE OF THE DEVIL

Macbeth deliberately refuses a solution to the demonological problem it portrays, representing Macbeth himself as the driving force of evil in the play regardless of whether the play's witchcraft is theatrical or demonic. In fact, Baratta writes that "The devil does never concretely materialize in the play" (200). Stage devils had already been a part of theatrical tradition since Medieval morality and cycle plays, and Shakespeare also would have had a recent example of a stage devil in Marlowe's 1592 *Dr. Faustus*. *The Witch of Edmonton*'s Dog also demonstrates that devils were still being physically staged in 1621, and that this staging could work to break down the binary between the witch and the godly community through a physical reminder of the devil's integration in the community. The absence of a devil in *Macbeth*, then, is significant, especially if, as Baratta argues, "Shakespeare's witches…are exactly like those described in the *Daemonologie*" (199). James's theology of witchcraft depended on the devil completely—he and he alone was the source of the witch's power. James several times refers to witches as "the slaues to the devil" (1, 10), and even argues that Necromancers and magicians are enslaved as well, though they believe they are the devil's masters (10). For James, the demonic pact is what truly constitutes a witch (17-18). Shakespeare's witches, then, without a devil to direct them, are demonstrably not "exactly" like those in *Daemonologie*. Including a devil figure—or even a reference to the idea that the witches

derive their power from him alone—would resolve the Endor debate in James's favour, but the play remains deliberately ambiguous.

Other scholars have also noticed the significant absence of the devil in *Macbeth*. B.J. Sokol writes, "At the very start of the play the three witches are arranging their next *meeting*, a possible pointer to an un-English coven. But this hint is undermined because they are not summoned by Satan or a sub-devil…" ("Social History" 253). Dianne Purkiss even takes up a position opposed to Baratta, claiming, "Shakespeare's representation of witchcraft steers clear of endorsement of the notions of Continental pact witchcraft central to *Daemonologie*" (*History* 207). However, although the play never directly includes the devil, his physical absence is made even more striking by the clear signs of his presence everywhere, including hints of the continental pact with the devil that Purkiss so steadfastly denies. For example, Banquo implicitly references the pact when he exclaims, shortly after meeting the weird sisters and observing one of their prophecies come true, "What, can the devil speak true?" (1.3.108), drawing an immediate connection between the witches and their likely source of power.

The weird sisters also mention familiar spirits several times, which links them implicitly to a pact with the devil. As this study has mentioned previously in connection with *The Witch of Edmonton*, in England, familiar spirits were indisputable evidence that the pact had occurred. Many early modern English pamphlets detailing witch trials include the demonic pact, an agreement in which the witch would sell her soul to the devil in exchange for power. On the continent, the pact was usually accomplished through a sabbat, but in England, the unique tradition of the familiar developed instead. Although pamphlets change over time, the main narrative is that a disadvantaged person,

usually a woman, would promise her soul to the devil in exchange for power, usually to get revenge upon her enemies. As a sign of their pact, the spirit or devil, in the form of a familiar, would suck the woman's blood on some part of her body, creating a hidden teat to which they might return repeatedly to feed. This belief led to the idea that any strange mark on an accused woman's body could be evidence of the diabolic pact and condemn her—the devil's mark remained a lasting and visible sign of her lost soul and lust for power or autonomy. Charlotte-Rose Millar explains,

> The making of the pact is a cornerstone of witchcraft narratives. In pamphlets, the pact was nearly always made at the first meeting between witch and Devil and was viewed as a necessary prerequisite for becoming a witch. In many narratives the pact is explicit but in others it is implied by the Devil's presence, by teats on the witch's body and by the witch's reliance on the Devil's assistance. (*Emotions* 56-7)

Familiar spirits, then, also act as evidence that a pact with the devil has occurred. At the end of 1.1, the witches follow the orders of their familiars and exit the stage, making an oblique reference to the devil's involvement in their craft:

> FIRST WITCH. I come, Graymalkin.
>
> SECOND WITCH. Paddock calls
>
> THIRD WITCH. Anon. (1.1.9-11)

Greymalkin is likely the name of a cat, Paddock a toad, and the "Anon" of the third witch is probably a response to a third familiar (Mowat and Werstine 6). Though Gary Taylor suggests that these lines were added in Middleton's 1616 adaptation (1170, "Adaptation"

397), I argue that this suggestion is incompatible with his acceptance of the later references to familiars in 4.1 as Shakespearean (1187):

> FIRST WITCH. Thrice the brinded cat hath mewed.
>
> SECOND WITCH. Thrice, and once the hedge-pig whined.
>
> THIRD WITCH. Harpier cries "'Tis time, 'tis time!" (4.1.1-3)

Regardless, the weird sisters do, whether once or twice, make reference to familiars, an immediate link to the pact with the devil, especially for James I, who wrote, "The effect of [the witches'] contract consistes…in forms and effectes…in what shape or fashion [the devil] shall come vnto them, when they call vpon him. [T]o some of the baser sorte of them he oblishes him selfe to appeare at their calling vpon him…either in likenes of a dog, a Catte, an Ape, or such-like other beast…" (17-18). However, while these references to familiar spirits are a clear connection to the pact with the devil, demonstrating that the witches are not, "steer[ing] clear…of the notions of Continental pact witchcraft central to *Daemonologie*" (Purkiss, *History*, 207), these spirits still never appear on stage (the witches are always responding to their calls from offstage), and far less does the devil himself ever appear, leaving the witches a far cry from "those described in the *Daemonologie*" (Baratta 199). Instead, unlike *The Witch of Edmonton*'s strategy of physically staging Dog to demonstrate his absorption into a corrupt community, *Macbeth*, though similarly permeated with the devil, never stages a literal devil figure.

Rather than revolving around an outside force of evil, every example of witchcraft in the play revolves around Macbeth, locating the source of evil in his own increasingly evil decisions. Tee Montague explains the seeming ambiguity of the supernatural in

Macbeth with the influence of Calvinist thinking and its view of evil as primarily located in the human heart. He explains, "Calvin articulated a view of human nature as intrinsically debased. Inadvertently, however, Calvin's theologically motivated philosophical anthropology provided an explanation for evil that potentially dispensed with reference to the Devil, because it could account for suffering in naturalistic terms" (241). However, Montague also suggests that this naturalistic view of human responsibility became a dilemma for the church, which needed to account for the responsibility of fallen man without dispensing with the devil, who was clearly established in scripture and could not be dismissed as a force of evil altogether (241). Montague concludes that in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare "is representing an array of ideas out there in the real world that are in flux about the Devil, to which Macbeth appears as the living embodiment of ambivalence" (Montague 252). However, I believe that rather than embodying ambivalence, Macbeth and his decaying moral character become the main source of evil in the play; in the absence of a spiritual devil, Macbeth becomes a naturalistic source of evil due to the progressive development of his own corruption, mirroring King Saul's downward spiral and ultimate responsibility.

The strange tension between the simultaneous presence and absence of the devil features in Lady Macbeth's infamous "unsex me here" speech when she invokes spirits who never physically appear. Lady Macbeth's speech seems like a clear attempt, or at least reference to, making a pact with the devil. She says, "Come to my woman's breasts / And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers, wherever in your sightless substances / You wait on nature's mischief" (1.5.45-8). This language effectively calls on the spirits to come and suck on a witch's teat, sealing the pact with the devil. However,

while many have noted the language of the pact in Lady Macbeth's speech, they have also observed that invitation must be either metaphorical or ineffectual since the devil never actually arrives—no spirits respond. Dympna Callaghan states that "by seventeenth-century standards, not to mention those of the statue of 1604…Lady Macbeth is a witch" (Callaghan 359). However, she complicates this statement by arguing that the play writes Lady Macbeth off as a hysteric by the end of the play, a move in keeping with James's own growing skepticism of witchcraft cases and newfound tendency to medicalize subjects (369). Joanna Levin, building on Callaghan's analysis, similarly points out,

> Although Lady Macbeth never obtains the epithet of witch during the play, she would have been considered a witch according to the Witchcraft Statue of 1604. Like its Elizabethan predecessor, the Jacobean 'Acte against Conjuration, Witchcrafte and dealinge with evill and wicked Spirits' made the invocation of evil spirits a capital offense. Whether or not the evil spirits actually materialized, the conjuration of evil qualified as witchcraft. Thus… [Lady Macbeth's] words become a performative utterance: the very act of summoning demonic powers transforms her into the witch of the 1604 Statue. Yet, though her words would have been enough to convict her of witchcraft under the law, they would not have satisfied contemporary skeptics, or even a growing number of judges. (39)

Levin argues that Lady Macbeth enacts the transformation of the witch to the bewitched and finally to the hysteric, effectively embodying the skeptic's journey to rationalizing and medicalizing the demonic.

However, while these critics explain Lady Macbeth's simultaneous association with witchcraft and lack of any demonic response with the general growing skepticism of the early seventeenth century, I propose that the main devil of the play does in fact appear when Lady Macbeth calls. Lady Macbeth calls the spirits three times, beseeching, "Come, you spirits / that tend on mortal thoughts" (1.5.38-9), "Come to my woman's breasts /…you murd'ring ministers" (45-6), and "Come, thick night" (48). The moment she finishes her last invocation, Macbeth enters the stage. (1.5.52 s.d.). Her words have succeeded in conjuring the greatest source of evil in the play and bringing him onstage nearly immediately. At this early stage in the play, Macbeth has not yet descended to the ultimate depths of his depravity; nevertheless, the fact that he visually responds to Lady Macbeth's invocation (appearing on stage at the moment she calls for demonic aid to commit Duncan's murder) foreshadows that he will be the instrument through which her requests are answered. In fact, Macbeth does seem to enter the stage faster than he ought to. The scene opens with Lady Macbeth reading his letter (1.5.1-12), a few lines later a messenger arrives to inform his mistress that the king and Macbeth will be arriving by that evening (29-34), and only moments after that Macbeth arrives onstage following Lady Macbeth's request to "come." While this timing may be due in part to the practicality of condensing action, the speed of Macbeth's arrival when coupled with the placement directly after the conjuring speech also create a clear association of Macbeth with the devil or spirits who should appear at Lady Macbeth's invocation. Macbeth is not the physical embodiment of the devil; rather, the play avoids any representation of the devil onstage while also placing Macbeth in the usual position of the devil in order to

locate the primary source of evil firmly in the title character and his moral decline rather than in spiritual forces outside of his control.

Though the devil does not physically appear in the play, the word "devil" is mentioned several times—often with reference to Macbeth himself as he descends into depravity, pointing to the fact that he is his own source of evil and is responsible for his own moral corruption. For example, in the famous knocking at the gate scene, the drunk porter contrives an elaborate metaphor, conceiving of himself as the porter at the gates of hell: "If a man were porter of hell gate, he should have old turning the key…Who's there, i'th' name of Beelzebub? …who's there, in th'other devil's name?" (2.3.1-7). The porter's job is to open the door on behalf of Macbeth, his master. Each time he references opening the door in the devil / Beelzebub's name, he is making an association with Macbeth, the man in whose name he is really opening the door. It is also no accident that the first direct reference to Macbeth as the devil occurs immediately after Duncan's murder, a deed which metaphorically turns Macbeth's home into a kind of hell. Similarly, in act 3, scene 4, Macbeth nearly calls himself the devil when he sees Banquo's ghost after ordering his murder. When Lady Macbeth scolds her husband's fear of the apparition, asking, "Are you a man?" (59), Macbeth replies, "Ay, and a bold one that dare look on that / Which might appall the devil!" (60-61). Of course, Macbeth's phrasing is meant to emphasize the horror of seeing Banquo's ghost. However, the only person in the room who can see this ghost is Macbeth, and so the only devil who is appalled is himself. Toward the end of the play, as Macbeth's evils reach new depths, his opponents also begin to refer to him as the devil. As Macduff tries to convince Malcolm to return to Scotland, he says, "Not in the legions / Of horrid hell can come a devil more damned / In evils to top Macbeth"

(4.3.55-57). This is the first explicit reference to Macbeth as a devil—or worse than a devil. Similarly, as Young Siward fights Macbeth at the end of the play, he and Macbeth have the following exchange:

> YOUNG SIWARD. What is thy name?
>
> MACBETH. Thou'lt be afraid to hear it.
>
> YOUNG SIWARD. No, though thou call'st thyself a hotter name
>
> Than any is in hell.
>
> MACBETH. My name's Macbeth.
>
> YOUNG SIWARD. The devil himself could not pronounce a title
>
> More hateful to mine ear.
>
> MACBETH. No, nor more fearful. (5.7.4-9)

In this exchange, both Young Siward and Macbeth agree that Macbeth's name is more hateful and more fearful than any the devil could name. The irony here is that Macbeth is the devil who names himself, just as Dog in *The Witch of* Edmonton declares that he is "He thou hast so often importuned to appear to thee—the devil" (2.1.139-40). Shortly before this encounter with Young Siward, Macbeth indirectly refers to himself as the devil when he verbally abuses his servant, saying, "The devil damn thee black, thou cream-faced loon!" (5.3.11). Macbeth then proceeds to curse the servant, enacting the very damnation he wished the devil would bring, filling the role of the devil.

Nearly every reference to the devil in *Macbeth* is a reference to Macbeth himself, while a real stage devil is notably absent. In fact, it is even possible that Shakespeare knew of a connection between the devil and the Macbeth of earlier sources; Karen Bek-Pedersen claims that "[In] Andrew of Wyntoun's *Orygynale Cronykil of Scotland*, written *c.*1420…

Macbeth is portrayed not only as an illegitimate bastard, but in fact as the biological son of the devil himself and, moreover, as a man prone to believing in dreams, marvels, and prophecies" (Bek-Pedersen 59). This connection between Macbeth and the devil had already existed in some sources well before Shakespeare's dramatization, and whether Shakespeare knew of it or not, his play makes a similar association. However, in Shakespeare's play, Macbeth becomes a naturalistic source of evil through his human depravity and evil choices rather than through predisposition or victimhood.

Not only does the language of the play associate Macbeth with the devil, locating him as the primary source of evil, the action of the play also often places him in the position of the absent devil. I have already said that Macbeth appears in place of the missing devil when Lady Macbeth calls on demonic spirits. The summoning of Macbeth as a devil figure happens again in the play's longest witch scene, act 4 scene 1, if we accept that the Hecate sections in the scene are later interpolations by Middleton in for a 1616 adaptation of *Macbeth*, shortly after he wrote *The Witch*. Purkiss writes that "the version of *Macbeth* which survives is the product of later revision; attempts to bring the text back to the putative purity of its first staging can only be conjectural. What survives is a play reworked for the witch-fashion set by Jonson's masque" (Purkiss, *History*, 206). While Purkiss is right to say that it is impossible to capture *Macbeth* exactly as it was in 1606, a great deal of scholarship has still attempted this. I am interested in this question not from any purist desire to capture the "original" *Macbeth* (I will deal with the fascinating Middleton additions in a later chapter) but because analyzing the play without specific additions materially changes an interpretation of Macbeth's character, especially in 4.1. Even though the question of later additions is a thorny one, most scholars agree

with Taylor that at least all of the witch songs and appearances of Hecate are part of the later adaptation; Clark explains that "The scene has recently been subjected to computer-based tests using digital databases. Although experts in this field allow that 'no one type of testing can create absolute certainty' (Jackson, 'Reviewing', 154), it seems likely that Shakespeare was not its author" (331-2). Werstine and Mowat write of Hecate's appearance in 4.1, "These lines (and the stage direction preceding them) are thought by most scholars to be by another author. Since the song that the witches sing, 'Black Spirits,' is from Middleton's play *The Witch*, the lines may have been written by Middleton" (120). Taylor, despite crediting much more of the script to Middleton in 1616 than most scholars would be prepared to agree with, attributes the song, entrance of Hecate, and participation of three other witches to Middleton, but believes that the rest of the caldron ingredients and the call from the familiars are Shakespearean (1187-8). He writes, "Middleton has already been generally acknowledged as the author of 39-60 and 143-4.1.150.2…On the other hand, Shakespeare seems just as responsible for 1-38, 61-3, 81-3 (on the basis of the witch's trochaic metre, vocabulary, and style)…" (*A Companion* 390).

If we accept these sections as Shakespearean this means that, if we remove the known Middleton additions in order to move closer to the 1606 text, the witches summon Macbeth with their hell broth rather than summoning Hecate. As the text reads with the additions, the witches finish their collective charm by chanting, "Cool it with a baboon's blood; / Then the charm is firm and good" (37-8). As they finish, Hecate appears on cue, declaring, "Oh, well done. I commend your pains" (39). If we leave Hecate's entrance in the text, Macbeth's entrance following the dance seems like an interruption in the affairs

of the coven. However, with Hecate and the dance removed, Macbeth enters the stage as if summoned by the charm. The second witch declares that the charm is "firm and good" (38), and immediately afterward, as if the charm is beginning to work, she announces, "By the pricking of my thumbs, / Something wicked this way comes. / Open, locks, whoever knocks!" (44-46). Rather than barging in on a ritual that has nothing to do with him, Macbeth instead appears as if called for, once again filling the place of the main devil in the play.

The idea that the witches use their cauldron concoction to summon Macbeth is supported by the fact that just a moment later they use the same cauldron to summon other spirits. Though the charm was firm and good only a moment before, the first witch begins to add ingredients when Macbeth tells her to call her masters. If Macbeth's entrance was not in response to the first charm, the sisters apparently declared the charm finished for no reason and to no effect. This seems unlikely, as when the witches attempt to conjure the apparitions for Macbeth, they add ingredients and achieve immediate results (63-68, 68 s.d.). Macbeth appears to the witches as if conjured.

Not only does Macbeth appear to the witches' meeting when summoned; his language also demonstrates that he is presiding over their meeting, filling the usual role of the devil at a sabbat. Clark and Mason point out that "At times Macbeth's language seems to verge on rant: [for instance] in… his extravagant speech to the Sisters in 4.1, the scene where he has gone to seek them out. According to John Porter Houston, rant typically is characterized by invocation, imperatives and hyperbole' as well as the 'personification of great forces', all features that appear here" (Clark and Mason, Introduction 51). Macbeth's speech at the beginning of 4.1 is more than a desperate plea

for information; it is a conjuration. Macbeth even states this himself when he prefaces his speech with, "I conjure you by that which you profess" (4.1.49). Clark and Mason write, "Macbeth's speech is carefully structured to suggest control, but the intensity of the repetition also conveys his determination to assert it. He understands the seriousness of what he is about to ask. His speech is more than a command, it is a solemn conjuration, in which the repetitive clause structure mimics the mode of an incantation" (52). This repetition is clear at the beginning of four of Macbeth's lines: "Though you untie the winds… / Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down, / Though castles topple on their warders' heads, / Though palaces and pyramids do slope…" (4.1.51-56). Though Macbeth here commands the weird sisters directly, this is not the first time that he uses the language of conjuration. In 3.2, "…he invokes the powers of the night to carry out his commands as he does the Sisters" (Clark and Mason, Introduction, 53). He begins with a reference to witchcraft: "Ere the bat hath flown / His cloistered flight, ere to black Hecate's summons / The shard-born beetle with his drowsy hums / Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done / A deed of dreadful note" (3.2.39-43). He then uses the language of conjuration, commanding, "Come, seeling night, / Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day, / And with thy bloody and invisible hand / Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond / Which keeps me pale!" (45-9). Macbeth frequently takes on the language of conjuration, repeatedly commanding the forces of darkness to do his bidding, despite the fact that he is the one soliciting their help. Macbeth's slipping between the role of solicitor and commander demonstrates the extent of his corruption—he has moved from simply receiving prophecy to demanding the services of witches, in much the same way that Saul commands the witch of Endor to do his bidding.

Macbeth's tone towards the weird sisters is commanding and demanding even before he meets with them the second time. Macbeth's demands are the primary driver of the witchcraft in 4.1. First, he seeks out the weird sisters and demands answers, and secondly, he presses them throughout the scene whenever they are reluctant. In 4.1, Macbeth specifically seeks out the weird sisters. He declares his intent in 3.5 when he says to Lady Macbeth, "I will tomorrow— / And betimes I will—to the weird sisters. / More shall they speak, for now I am bent to know / By the worst means the worst" (135-7). This time, rather than the weird sisters meeting with Macbeth, he seeks them out, specifically for knowledge. Throughout 4.1, he commands them, conjures them, and demands information. The first thing Macbeth says when he enters the witches' scene is, "How now, you secret, black, and midnight hags? / What is't you do?" (47-8). When they answer, "A deed without a name" (48), Macbeth responds to these cryptic words by demanding, "I conjure you by that which you profess, / Howe'er you come to know it, answer me" (49-50). Macbeth directs the meeting, first demanding to know what the witches are doing, and persisting when they initially will not tell him. Even the apparitions appear when Macbeth specifically demands, "Call 'em; let me see 'em" (62). When the first apparition appears, Macbeth demands, "Tell me, thou unknown power—" (68) before the witches tell him, "He knows thy thought. / Hear his speech, but say thou naught" (68-9). Despite being warned not to speak to the apparition, Macbeth again demands more information when the apparition finishes the prophecy, demanding, "But one word more—" (73). Again, when the third apparition rises and Macbeth questions what it is (85-8), the witches have to remind him, "Listen, but speak not to't" (88). When the third apparition descends, Macbeth persists in asking more: "Yet my heart / Throbs to

know one thing: tell me, if your art / Can tell so much, shall Banquo's issue ever / Reign in this kingdom?" (99-103). A third time, the witches caution him, "Seek to know no more" (104), but Macbeth persists, "I will be satisfied. Deny me this, / And an eternal curse fall on you! Let me know" (105-6). By this point in his downward trajectory, Macbeth has become the authoritative voice directing the witches. Like King Saul, Macbeth has deteriorated to the point of not only soliciting a witch and participating in witchcraft, but directing it himself. While many scholars have interpreted the weird sisters as an obvious compliment to the king since they reflect many of his concerns about the dangers of witchcraft, the play positions Macbeth and his abusive rulership as Scotland's greatest danger; corrupt rulership and not witchcraft is to blame for the play's tragic trajectory.

4.5 *MACBETH* AND NORTH BERWICK

One of the ways in which *Macbeth* critiques corrupt rulership is through its allusions to the North Berwick trials, restaging elements of the trials to demonstrate the difficulty of procuring satisfactory evidence or making a judgement. While James's goal was to expose and convict witches, his own involvement in the North Berwick trials put him in danger of becoming involved in witchcraft himself as he questioned the accused and commanded them to perform to produce evidence. *Macbeth*'s weird sisters closely mirror the witches in the North Berwick trials, restaging James's dilemma from years earlier and making him confront the evidence a second time. Diane Purkiss argues that, rather than treating James as a paranoid monarch, *Macbeth* invites James to use his powers of deduction and analyze the weird sisters: "the witches of *Macbeth* are equivocal or unreadable texts which the characters must but cannot interpret successfully. Because

the play lacks any interpretive figure who can make sense of events, correct interpretation of the witches in *Macbeth* lies outside the play itself, privileging the spectators in general and one (royal) spectator in particular" (Purkiss 207). The witches do not present one coherent narrative about witchcraft. Rather, they are impossible to read, combining demonological, popular, and classical elements that range from clearly fictional to "true" crime. Christopher Clary writes, "the experience of encountering the witches precipitates a sense of wonder that provokes analysis and 'forbid[s]' interpretation. Banquo later equates the experience of interacting with the witches as akin to a madness…this experience of wonder is one that seems to arrest rational thought" (68). Banquo in fact mentions this inability to interpret the weird sisters several times, first in his comment about their gender (1.3.46-7), and again when he asks, "Were such things here as we do speak about? / Or have we eaten of the insane root / That takes the reason prisoner?" (84-6). Throughout the play, characters express the difficulty of understanding what or who the weird sisters are, experiencing the difficulties of trial judges, struggling to assign a category to the accused.

Though scholars have long recognized a connection between *Macbeth* and the North Berwick trials, in particular citing James's own personal interest in witchcraft as evidence that the play was designed to cater to his tastes, there remains little scholarship on the detail or extent of these influences. For example, in their 2015 Arden edition of *Macbeth*, Clark and Mason merely list *Newes from Scotland* as a possible minor source, stating, "A number of other works have been proposed as possible sources for the play" (Introduction, 94). In fairness, Clark and Mason amend this comment with a footnote, stating, "It is hard to imagine that Shakespeare would not have consulted this work, given

that it is an account of a plot by Scottish witches against the King, the publication of which James himself commissioned" (94). They also tag three specific instances in which they see these possible influences. However, the play contains many more allusions to the trials than the instances Clark and Mason point out. For example, *Newes from Scotland* explains,

> [Agnis Thompson] confessed that at the time when his Maiestie was in Denmarke, she being accompanied with the parties before specially-named, tooke a Cat and christened it, and afterward bound to each parte of that Cat, the cheefest partes of a dead man, and seuerall ioynts of his bodies, and that in the night following the saide Cat was conueied into the midest of the sea by all these witches sayling in their riddles or Ciues as is aftoresaid, and so left the saide Cat right before the Towne of Lieth in Scotland: this doone, there did arise such a tempest in the Sea, as a greater hath not been seene: which tempest was the cause of the perrishing of a Boate or vessell comming ouer from the towne of Brunt Iland to the towne of Lieth (B3r).

Just as the witches of North Berwick allegedly worked together to raise a storm to attack James's royal ship, the weird sisters in 1.3 plan to raise a storm together for the expressed purpose of harming a man. The first witch explains that since a local woman refused her charity (4-5), she is seeking revenge: "Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' th' 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" (6-9). Like the witches of North Berwick, who reportedly work together to produce a storm, the weird sisters are collaborative; the second witch offers, "I'll give

thee a wind" (10), and the third witch joins in, "And I another" (12). Additionally, the weird sisters raise a storm with the help of body parts taken from a dead man, similar to the North Berwick witches. Just as the North Berwick witches "bound to each parte of a Cat, the cheefest partes of a dead man, and seuerall ioynts of his bodie" (B3r), the first witch declares, "Here I have a pilot's thumb, / Wrecked as homeward he did come" (26-7). The play also echoes the "witches sayling in their riddles or Ciues" (B3r) in the line "in a sieve I'll thither sail" (1.3.7). This reference to a sieve is one of the three instances of an allusion to *Newes* that Clark and Mason identify (94, 137). Similarly, Macbeth's conjuration to persuade the witches to speak in 4.1 again references the storms that led to the North Berwick trials:

> Though you untie the winds and let them fight
> Against the churches, though the yeasty waves
> Confound and swallow navigation up,
> Though bladed corn be lodged and trees blown down,
> Though castles topple on their warders' heads,
> Though palaces and pyramids to slope
> Their heads to their foundations, though the treasure
> Of nature's germens tumble all together
> Even till destruction sicken, answer me
> To what I ask you." (50-60)

Like the supposedly witchcraft-generated storm of North Berwick, Macbeth's speech alludes to a storm—perhaps the same one that the witches were brewing in 1.3.

Macbeth includes a second obvious allusion to the North Berwick trials when the witches mention a venomous toad (4.1.6-8). During the trials, Agnis Tompson "confessed that she tooke a blacke Toade, and did hang the same vp by the heeles, three daies, and collected and gathered the venome as it dropped and fell from it in an Oister shell" (B3r) in the hopes of acquiring an article of clothing belonging to the king so that she would be able to magically poison him at a distance. Similarly, in 4.1, the witches mention a "toad that under cold stone / days and nights has thirty-one / sweltered venom sleeping got" (4.1.6-8). While some of the cauldron ingredients seem drawn from classical texts, popular belief, or even Shakespeare's imagination, a toad reserved specifically for poison seems like an allusion to Tompson's confession, and this is another of the three instances that Clark and Mason identify as a likely reference to *Newes* (94, 234). These clear parallels between the weird sisters and the witches of North Berwick continue throughout the witch scenes as *Macbeth* restages the peculiar details and uncertainties of the trials, making it impossible to say "what, if anything [the witches] do or even what, if anything, they are" (Greenblatt, "Shakespeare Bewitched," 31).

Purkiss argues that this uncertainty about what the weird sisters really are demonstrates that "Shakespeare may have been shadowing James's move away from detecting 'real' witches to detecting witches as the forgeries of fraudulent actors" (*History* 208-9). This shift is certainly possible; however, it is important to note that James's careful approach to the subject of witchcraft, his rigorous questioning, and his frequent acquittals or medicalization of cases does not mean that he eventually no longer believed in witchcraft. Rather, James believed both in the genuineness of witchcraft and demonic influence *and* in the idea that some might seek to counterfeit it or that medical

and spiritual cases had the potential to be confused for one another (Sharpe, *Anne Gunter*, 101). Rather than questioning the concept of witchcraft altogether, James saw himself as a wise judge, able to discern the difference between demonic activity and fraud. *Macbeth*'s witches are deliberately difficult to categorize as they stage the challenge of recognizing the difference between magic and theatrics.

If *Macbeth* is alluding to *Newes from Scotland*, the fact that the witches are difficult to read fits well with James's dilemma in the North Berwick trials as he becomes the central judge and seeks to expose the truth. *Newes from Scotland* traces James's quest to uncover the truth, from using leading questions, to using torture to procure confessions, to getting accused witches to perform aspects of their rituals before an audience. The entire pamphlet is preoccupied with uncovering the truth and repeatedly looks to the king as the source of the truth. The pamphlet opens with a note to the reader, stressing the importance of truth: "THE MANIFOLDE vntruthes which is spread abroade, concerning the detestable actions and apprehension of those Witches wherof this Historye following truely entreateth, hath caused me to publish the same in print" (A2r). This pamphlet seeks to set the record straight, and in order to do that, it turns to James specifically: "All which examinations (gentle Reader) I haue heere truelye published, as they were taken and vttered in the presence of the Kings Maiestie, praying thee to accept it for veritie, the same beeing so true as cannot be reproued" (A2v). A subtitle later in the pamphlet again emphasizes the priority of truth, as it begins with, "A true discourse" (A3r). The pamphlet goes so far as to associate the king's wisdom with the knowledge of God, stating, "God of his vnspeakeable goodnes did reueale and lay it open in very strange sorte, therby to make knowne vnto the worlde, that their actions were contrarye to

the lawe of God" (A3r). As Laura Kolb points out, "Essentially, the dramatic story written and revised over the months of interrogation, trial and execution exemplifies a theological viewpoint that legitimizes the earthly power of kings through the association of the king's power with God's own" (339). While the accused of North Berwick present uncertainty, *Newes from Scotland* positions James as the one who will resolve it and uncover the truth.

The pamphlet's strategy of associating the king with God and locating the truth in his powers of discernment is crucial since the king's direct involvement and excessive interest in the stories and demonstrations of the accused has the potential to backfire and implicate him along with them. Kolb explains that "…the creation of a witch narrative in the legal setting is essentially collaborative: the back-and-forth of interrogation facilitates a swapping of beliefs between the accused and their questioners" (339). This collaborative process necessarily involves the questioner in the narrative to some extent. To be excessively curious about witchcraft means running the risk of becoming involved in it. Levine identifies this tension in *Daemonologie*, pointing out that "…when Philomathes, the questioner in the dialogue, implores [Epistemon], 'discourse me somewhat of [the Magician's] cirkles and conjurations,' Epistemon rebuffs him by saying, 'I thinke ye take me to be a Witch my selfe' (16)" (57). Because evidence of witchcraft is often itself witchcraft, those who administer justice constantly face the dilemma of becoming involved in the practice themselves.

The problem of gathering enough evidence to judge a witch trial justly without giving witchcraft a platform is an old one. Levine observes the same problem in Jean Bodin, explaining, "If witchcraft is theatrical, it is necessary for justice not to be. The two

must, by definition, be opposites. Bodin virtually says this himself when he talks about the danger of justice becoming a 'sorcery.' One problem with this explanation, though, is how terribly alike justice and witchcraft are in Bodin's discussion" (Levine 32). In *Newes from Scotland*, James's judicial process is so close to the witchcraft that it examines that it nearly works to implicate James himself along with the accused. Not only does James require the accused to recount their stories in detail; he also watches them perform. For example, when Agnis Tompson comes before the king, she explains that she and around two hundred other witches travelled together by sieve to Lothian and danced a reel when they went ashore. Tompson first recounts the lyrics of the song: "Commer goe ye before, commer goe ye, / Gif ye will not goe before, commer let me" (B1v), and explains that Geilles Duncane had played a small Jew's trump, a lyre-shaped wind instrument, as the witches had entered the Kirk of North Berwick together (B1v). At this point, James "sent for ye said Geillis Duncane, who vpon the like Trump did playe the said daunce before the Kings Maiestie, who in respect of the strangenes of these matters, tooke great delight to bee present at their examinations" (B1v). James openly expresses delight in seeing a witches' dance. A demonstration occurs a second time when James reportedly declares that the witches "were all extreame lyars" (B2r) and Agnis Sampson insists on proving her credentials as a witch by taking James aside and "declar[ing] vnto him the verye woordes which passed betweene the Kings Maiestie and his Queene at Upslo in Norway the first night of their mariage, with their answere eache to other" (B2r-B2v). Again, when Dr. Fian (John Cunningham) confesses that he had used witchcraft to make a gentleman go mad, "for the veritie of the same, he caused the Gentleman to be brought before the Kinges Maiestie…and in his Maiesties Chamber, suddenly he gaue a great

scritch and fell into a madnes, sometime bending himselfe, and sometime capring so directly vp, that his head did touch the feeling of the Chamber…so that all the Gentlemen in the Chamber were not able to holde him" (C1v). In the North Berwick trials, confession becomes a performance of supposedly real elements of witchcraft. Even the accompanying woodcuts illustrate this; an image near the beginning of the pamphlet shows four women kneeling on the ground before James, who is seated on his throne as a spectator (B2v). The other illustrative woodcuts show details of the action that the accused would have been unable to perform before the king: a cauldron brew, a boat floundering in a storm at sea, the devil himself in the Kirk pulpit (C1v), and a cow dancing before Dr. Fian (C3v). Each of these illustrations add to the pamphlet's preoccupation with detailed evidence, but also draw the readers in to details they perhaps should not be involved in. If performance works as evidence in these trials, this means that the courts read performance as real witchcraft practice, and the fact that James specifically orders these performances means that he is partially responsible for the production of actual witchcraft.

These public performances of the witches' abilities not only work as evidence to prove them guilty, but also work to drag James into their story as an active participant more than a spectator. In fact, near the end of the pamphlet, James, rather than the accused, is the main storyteller. Near the end of the trial narrative, Dr. Fian, who had previously made a full confession, escapes. When he is recaptured, he steadfastly denies his previous confession. At this point, "the kinges maiestie perceiuing his stubbourne wilfulnesse, conceiued and imagined that in the time of his absence hee had entered into newe conference and league with the deuill his master, and that hee had beene agayne

newly marked" (C4v). Here, rather than extracting a confession, James is inventing the story himself; the text even acknowledges this with the word "imagined" (C4v). Though Dr. Fian is searched for this new mark and tortured until he will never be able to walk again, no mark is ever found and he never confesses (C4v-C4r). This lack of any evidence or confession means that the story is purely James's personal invention—he is, at this point, more involved in the witchcraft narrative than Dr. Fian is—he is directing the story, and perhaps even creating witchcraft where none exists. The fact that *Macbeth*, a fictionalized story, includes details of the real trial muddies the boundary between the real and imagined, and restages the question of how much of the North Berwick narrative was imagined in the first place—perhaps even by the judge himself.

Newes from Scotland seems self-aware about the danger of James being so personally involved in gathering evidence and makes a point of reassuring its readership. Of course, the pamphlet cannot condemn the king himself of being too involved in the witchcraft interrogations, but it does bring up a related concern: "This strange discourse before recited, may perhaps giue some occasion of doubt to such as shall happen to reade the same, and thereby coniecture that the Kings maiestie would not hazarde himselfe in the presence of such notorious witches, least therby might haue insued great danger to his person and the generall state of the land" (D1v). Here, the pamphlet aims to reassure readers of the king's safety rather than justify his involvement, but its response covers both objections:

> the King is the child & seruant of God, and [the witches] but seruants to the deuil, hee is the Lords annointed, and they but vesselles of Gods wrath: he is a true Christian, and trusteth in God, they worse than Infidels,

> for they onely trust in the deuill, who daily serue them, till he haue brought them to vtter destruction. But heereby it seemeth that his Highnesse caried a magnanimious and vndanted mind, not feared with their inchantmentes, but resolute in this, that so long as God is with him, hee feareth not who is against him. (D1v)

The only way the pamphlet can justify James's excessive involvement in the details of the witchcraft trials is to associate him so strongly with God that he remains untainted. *Newes* paints James and the witches as opposite sides of a binary: he is a servant of God; they are servants of the devil.

However, *Macbeth*'s reference to the witch of Endor story and portrayal of a character who starts as a hero and descends into tyranny both demonstrate that this binary of the servants of God vs. the servants of the devil is not as fixed as James would like to believe; King Saul's story proves that all rulers are in danger of gradual decline. In the North Berwick trials, King James's questioning quickly begins to blur the boundary between seeking knowledge and actively participating in the witchcraft that he witnesses. His demands for truth rapidly become directions for performing more magic. Levine points out this tension in James's *Daemonologie*. "Learned men, [James] says…become unsatisfied [with their knowledge]…and 'so mounting from degree to degree, vpon the slipperie and vncertaine scale of curiositie; they are at last entized, that where lawfull artes or sciences failes, to satisfie their restles minds, even to seeke to that black and vnlawfull science of *Magie*.' The moment is one of several in the book which criminalize curiosity" (Levine 55). Even James acknowledges "the slipperie and vncertaine scale of curiositie," realizing that it is possible to slide from being a self-proclaimed servant of

God to a servant of the devil. However, Levine explains that while *Daemonologie* criminalizes curiosity, warning against this slippery slope, it creates an awkward tension by stimulating the same curiosity that it condemns (56-7). This is the dilemma of the demonologist—he must acquire knowledge, but to acquire too much knowledge could make him no better than the people he seeks to convict. Levine continues, "…the book hovers precariously towards an identification with that which it officially eschews. It is tempting to say that James titillates our curiosity because he is much more interested in witchcraft than he would admit…" (57). As judge, James is supposed to act as the source of truth, and yet in his attempt to do so, he must place himself in danger of sliding down the slippery scale of curiosity.

Referring to the ruler or judge as a source of truth is also dangerous since the ruler himself could be a tyrant in disguise who is not invested in the best interests of the people. In *Basilicon Doron*, James writes,

> consider first the true difference betwixt a lawful good King, and an vsurping Tyran…The one acknowledgeth himselfe ordained for his people, having received from God a burthen of gouernment whereof he must be count-able: the other thinketh his people ordayned for him, a pray to his passions & inordinate appetites, as the fruites of his magnanimitie. And therefore, as their ends are directly contrarie, so are their whole actions. (55)

However, while James portrays the good ruler and the tyrant as a binary—two opposite characters who meet ends which are "directly contrary"—he still expresses concern about a slippery slope that leads from one to the other, explains that it is possible for a good

ruler to be a tyrant in disguise, and expresses anxiety that it will be impossible to tell the difference between them. He writes that the tyrant will "[counterfeit] the Saint while he once creepe in credite, [and] will then by inverting all good Lawes to serve onely for his unruly private affections frame the common-weale ever to advance his particular" (qtd. in Bushnell 57). He later comes back to this problem, writing, "remember that among the differences that I put betwixt the formes of the gouernment of a good King, and an vsurping Tyran; I shewe how a Tyran would enter like a Sainte while he found him-self fast vnder-foote, and then would suffer his vn-rulie affections to burst forth" (61). Macbeth demonstrates this tyrant counterfeiting the saint from the moment he enters the stage as king of Scotland. He enters his coronation banquet welcoming Banquo as his "chief guest" (3.1.11), claiming, "we should have…desired your good advice" (20), and "wish[ing Banquo's] horses swift and sure of foot" (37). However, moments later Macbeth is secretly promoting his own "unruly private affections" and arranging for Banquo's murder (73-142). Again, in 3.4, Macbeth moves between "play[ing] the humble host" (5) and receiving news of Banquo's murder (13-33). Macbeth's double nature illustrates the danger of a tyrant, who appears to be trustworthy but hides a darker reality.

In *Macbeth*, all the uncertainty of the North Berwick trials is preserved, but there is no longer a ruler who can be relied on as a source of truth—the position in which *Newes from Scotland* placed James. Rebecca Bushnell writes, "the tyrants' power to 'cloake' themselves in the garb and demeanor of kings presents the terrifying prospect that no one would be able to tell the difference… Like the actor who shifts from role to role, the cloaked tyrant is represented as having no 'real' or single self on which moral or political character can be grounded…the Renaissance representation of the tyrant brings

into question the fixity and coherence of the sovereign self" (58). In *Macbeth*, when the title character first contemplates murder, he says, "My thought, whose murder is yet but fantastical, / Shakes so my single state of man" (1.3.138-139). In a footnote, Greenblatt interprets "single state of man" as "My undivided self. Macbeth feels that his wholeness is coming apart under the pressure of his criminal thought" (2584). Macbeth's cloaked tyranny and his soliciting of the weird sisters in the same manner as King Saul leaves the play without any kind of stable judge who can be looked to as a source of truth. In the absence of stability, the weird sisters become an unanswerable question which cannot be contained by any judge.

However, while *Macbeth*'s weird sisters and the North Berwick witches share clear similarities, *Macbeth*'s weird sisters have significantly less power than the North Berwick witches allegedly have, demonstrating that in the absence of a just ruler, tyranny and not witchcraft is the most significant threat to the nation. While the North Berwick witches are apparently able to raise a storm that makes King James fear for his life, the damage the weird sisters can do is limited. They explain, "And in the very ports [the winds] blow, / All the quarters that they know / I'th' 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 sennights nine times nine / Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine. / Though his bark shall not be lost, / Yet it shall be tempest-tossed" (14-24). The weird sisters admit to certain limitations, explicitly saying that "his bark shall not be lost" (23). Most importantly, *Macbeth*'s witches, though they mirror a perceived attack against James I, orchestrate their own attack against a common sailor, despite the fact that the play is filled with royal characters under attack. In fact, the dispute with the sailor's wife

over chestnuts (1.3.1-9) clearly follows the charity-refused paradigm outlined by Alan Macfarlane and Keith Thomas, in which a typically impoverished person would appeal to one of (usually) her neighbours for a small act of charity, be denied help, and become angry. When calamity befell the neighbour, their loved ones, or their livestock or crops, they would blame the misfortune on the supposed witchcraft of the charity-seeker (Macfarlane 159). This phenomenon is typically rural, involving local prejudices, often accumulated over many years of living in proximity, and threatening cattle, crops, small livestock, food, or children. King James, on the other hand, was primarily interested in the application of witchcraft to harm his royal person, household, or interests. For example, after James became involved in the North Berwick trials, the accusations escalated from David Seaton accusing his maid servant, Geillis Duncane, of local healing (67) to Agnis Sampson admitting, under torture, to attending a sabbat of two-hundred witches intent on sinking the king's ship (70). This trial document clearly illustrates a divide between the small local concerns that could get a woman accused of witchcraft and the large-scale plots and sedition that King James was paranoid of falling prey to. *Macbeth* undercuts the idea of the witches posing a royal threat by suggesting a similarity between the weird sisters and the North Berwick witches and then turning it into a small, local dispute involving witches who are not even capable of collaborative murder or sinking a fishing vessel. In *Macbeth*, tyranny, rather than witchcraft, is Scotland's greatest danger.

At the end of the play, it is Macbeth's own choices that lead to both his downfall and the decline of Scotland. Nowhere is this clearer than in the opening line of the last scene of the play, in which Macbeth references King Saul once again, asking, "Why

should I play the Roman fool and die / On mine own sword?" (5.8.1-2). In 1 Samuel 31, when Saul sees that he is losing the battle against the Philistines, he "said…unto his armour bearer, Draw out thy sword, and thrust me through therewith, lest the uncircumcised come and thrust me through and mock me: but his armour bearer would not, for he was sore afraid. Therefore Saul took a sword and fell upon it" (vs. 4). Although Macbeth refuses to die by his own sword in the way that Saul did, his allusion to suicide—specifically to falling on his own sword—calls to mind the death of King Saul after the battle that follows his encounter with the witch of Endor. This association again aligns Macbeth with the Biblical King Saul, and demonstrate that both characters' tragic ends happen as a result of their own poor decisions. It is also specifically because Macbeth has become a tyrant that he must be deposed; Macduff states this charge at least twice before finally killing Macbeth. As he enters the stage in 5.7, Macduff orders, "Tyrant, show thy face!" (15), and as he fights Macbeth in 5.8 he declares, "We'll have thee, as our rarer monsters are, / Painted upon a pole, and underwrit / 'Here may you see the tyrant'" (55-7). Not only does Macduff label Macbeth, exposing the tyranny that Macbeth had once attempted to hide behind the façade of a benevolent ruler, he also names Macbeth as a "rarer monster," demonstrating that tyranny is Scotland's greatest threat.

Scholars have often interpreted *Macbeth*'s weird sisters as part of an elaborate compliment to King James in a Scottish play that seems designed to glorify his ancestry and condemn regicide. However, *Macbeth* instead uses the weird sisters to critique abuses of monarchical power. First, the play stages the central demonological question of the witch of Endor episode in 1 Samuel 28, which James refers to in *Daemonologie* and

Reginald Scot addresses in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. *Macbeth* presents both the possibility that witchcraft is demonic and that it is theatrical forgery, but never fully resolves this question, instead focusing on the ruler as the one whose corruption leads him to solicit witches in the first place. Regardless of the explanation for Samuel's ghost in 1 Samuel 28, the main point of the story is that King Saul has become corrupt through his own choices and God has rejected him. Similarly, Macbeth becomes the leading figure in 4.1, revealing his utter corruption as a ruler as he demands information. Secondly, as Macbeth's morality rapidly deteriorates throughout the story as he ignores his conscience and pursues his ambition, the play repeatedly places him in the position of the devil or describes him as a devil. This association places the blame for Macbeth's tragedy squarely on Macbeth himself rather than on demonic forces seducing him. Lastly, the play's frequent allusions to the North Berwick trials work to recall a time when King James himself ran the risk of becoming overly involved in witchcraft. Though the play does not directly accuse the monarch, it does point to James's own association with witches and to the possibility of a slippery slope into corruption and tyranny. The weird sisters, rather than validating James's pet anxieties about demonic forces, instead point to the total depravity of earthly rulers as the greatest threat to a nation.

CHAPTER 5: INVERTING INVERSION: MASQUE AND ANTIMASQUE, COURT AND COVEN IN THOMAS MIDDLETON'S *THE WITCH*

Thomas Middleton's play, *The Witch*, and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* have long been entangled thanks to some recognizable elements in Middleton's play migrating into *Macbeth*, likely around 1616. Because it is likely that Middleton was inspired by the Scottish play and likely revamped it with his own additions (and likely excisions as well), it is worth examining these two witchcraft plays in connection with each other. As with *Macbeth*, hints of contemporary events in this play provide clues about likely first performance dates. According to Marion O'Connor, it was likely written "in the middle of 1616, after the convictions of Frances Howard and Robert Carr for their parts in the murder of Thomas Overbury and amid other coded outcries against the King's protection of the couple from the full penalty of the law" (1128). Many scholars agree that the play includes references to the Overbury scandal, and it is possible that this political connection is part of the reason that the play has remained in obscurity for so long. The play was never printed in Middleton's lifetime, there were no known performances following its debut, and little is known about its first performance, beyond the fact that it was prepared for the King's Men at the Blackfriars. Some believe the play's obvious political references or nearly cartoonish witches landed the play in trouble with the authorities (Clare 179). Regardless of what happened to *The Witch*, shortly afterward Middleton had a hand in reviving and adapting Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and used some of the material from his scorned *Witch* to embellish the script of *Macbeth*. While this chapter deals primarily with Middleton's "ignorantly ill-fated labour" (Middleton qtd. in Clare 179) and its use of witchcraft and inversion for political critique, it also takes up several

of his subsequent interpolations into *Macbeth* to demonstrate that, while Middleton's *Witch* may have been silenced after only one performance, his politically dangerous message endured in the work of a more conventionally acceptable playwright.

In *The Oxford Handbook of Thomas Middleton*, a rare comprehensive collection of essays on the playwright, Gary Taylor and Trish Thomas Henley declare that "For Middleton there is no 'great tradition'…By comparison with other major writers of his epoch—Shakespeare, Milton, Donne—there survives, in the first centuries after his death, little commentary on Middleton, and even less that is any good" (1). Scholars have speculated on why a writer as prolific, controversial, and popular as Middleton has no 'great tradition'; one possibility is that Middleton's frequent collaboration with other well-known playwrights drowned out his individual name (Stern 78). However, that this absorption into other contemporary works is often part of a larger dramatic strategy that gives political meaning to Middleton's writing, produces new meanings for past works by other playwrights, and protects the writer through association with other accepted works. In this chapter, I examine Middleton's 1616 play *The Witch* and its manipulation of both Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queenes* and Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* as well as the appearance of several of its songs in a 1611 restaging of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* to argue that, just as *Macbeth* breaks down the binary between the witch and the godly ruler in order to establish tyranny as Scotland's primary threat, Middleton uses and reuses witchcraft in his play to critique the Jacobean court through comparison, parody, and inversion.

5.1 "IGNORANTLY ILL-FATED": THE OVERBURY SCANDAL AND *THE WITCH*

Middleton's overt political commentary frequently landed him in serious trouble. For example, in 1599 the Bishop's Ban ordered the burning of all copies of *Microcynicon*, in 1601 a parliamentary commission examined *The Parliament of Threadbare Poets*, in 1608 a sermon condemned *The Puritan Widow*, in 1611 censorship removed passages from *The Lady's Tragedy*, and in 1624 the notorious *A Game at Chess* effectively ended Middleton's career in the theatre (Taylor and Henly 1-2). It is unsurprising, then, that *The Witch* (1616), a thinly-veiled parody of the Essex affair and the Overbury scandal (Bellany 123, Clare 180), was, by Middleton's own admission, an "ignorantly ill-fated labour" which "[lay] so long in an imprisoned obscurity" (qtd. In Clare 179), although it is difficult to say whether "ill-fated" means that the play had angered the censor or simply bored the audience. Regardless, Middleton was known for political controversy and was accustomed to receiving censure for his outspokenness, and *The Witch* seems to fit into this pattern. However, while most scholars agree that *The Witch* humorously stages Lady Frances Howard's marriage to two different men through Isabella, Antonio, and Sebastian; Robert Carr's supposed impotence with exclusively Howard through Antonio's storyline; and perhaps even Howard's plotting against Sir Thomas Overbury through the vindictive figure of the Duchess (Kaethler 76-82), few have thoroughly recognized the part that the titular witches play in Middleton's staged parody of the corruption of the Jacobean court. Critics have considered the witches as a contrast to the court of Ravenna and a means of exposing its corruption through the coven's surprising functionality (Loeb 32), and have observed that Frances Howard herself was often associated with witchcraft (Kaethler 80-81). While both of these

observations are helpful and add to an understanding of *The Witch* as a play designed to critique the corruption of the Jacobean court, I believe that the witchcraft in this play, rather than simply providing contrast or oblique association, is actually the core of the play's subtle political commentary. Middleton repurposes parts of Ben Jonson's earlier *Masque of Queenes* in order to invert the masque's praise of the court by turning the witches into masquers and the corrupt court of Ravenna into the antimasque. While Jonson's masque uses its witch characters as contrast to the queen and her ladies (of whom Lady Frances Howard, of Essex at the time, was one), the play repurposes many of the same songs and stage effects from *Masque of Queenes* (Loeb 32, Austern 193) to invert the earlier praise of the virtuous court into critique of its scandal and corruption.

While scholars have tended to focus on the echoes of the Overbury scandal in Middleton's play, Middleton himself offered a quite different explanation for the play's poor reception, claiming, "Witches are (ipso facto) by the law condemned, and that only, I think hath made [*The Witch*] lie so-long, in an imprisoned obscurity" (qtd. in Clare 179). Middleton's suggestion that the legal status of witchcraft was the main reason for his play's obscurity may seem reasonable at face value (despite his proclivity for irony), but becomes increasingly unlikely in context of plays involving witchcraft that preceded it and were well received. For example, *Macbeth* was likely first performed for a royal audience, and was obviously at least tolerated by James since it was then performed at the Globe and restaged in 1616. Similarly, Jonson's *Masque of Queenes* (1609) notoriously featured multiple witches who chanted gratuitously grotesque lines before the entire court, after which the queen herself entered the drama in costume. Not only were plays featuring witches fairly common, but by 1616, it is possible that James's affinity for

witch hunting and perhaps even belief in the validity of some types of witchcraft was waning—he dismissed several cases personally. For example, when Elizabeth Jackson was accused of using witchcraft to afflict fourteen-year-old Mary Glover with violent fits, a jury found her guilty (Paul 104), while the king released her and charged neither of the women (111), opting for a scientific solution over a demonic one. Similarly, when Brian Gunter accused Elizabeth Gregory and Mary Pepwell of bewitching his daughter Anne in 1605, the king, who personally witnessed Anne's violent fits, acquitted the accused (Shapiro 70). While the king treated some witchcraft and possession cases with scepticism, this does not necessarily indicate that he was dismissive of witchcraft in general, but only of certain manifestations of it. Regardless, given the king's willingness to consider multiple explanations, both natural and supernatural, in these trials, Middleton would have known that his play would not warrant censure solely based on its inclusion of witch characters. I believe that Middleton knew exactly why his play fell into disfavour—because of its blatant criticism of the Overbury Scandal and the abuses and excesses of the Jacobean court more broadly—but could not admit the reason in print, which was why he turned to an excuse that seemed plausible on the surface, but was unlikely to actually cause him trouble.

It was not the presence of the witch characters themselves that made Middleton's play dangerous, but his clear strategy of juxtaposing them with the English court in order to expose the court's corruption. Although Ravenna's fictional location in Italy may seem to distance it from the English court (and thus perhaps afford Middleton some level of protection), the play demonstrates several demonstrable parallels between the fictional court of Ravenna and the contemporary Overbury scandal in the English royal court. As

Andrew Loeb puts it, "The juxtaposition between court and coven suggests that Ravenna and the conventional forms of power it represents is deeply disordered and confronts the play's audience with the possibility that the nobles are not so different from the witches they fear and persecute" (41). However, while Loeb writes that the functional and cooperative coven presents a hopeful alternative to the debauchery of the court (32), I argue that the play uses the witches as contrast to emphasize the rottenness of the court rather than to hint at an optimistic solution. Deliberately calling attention to the depravity of the court could be a dangerous venture. For example, Alistair Bellany writes, "[The court] was the centre of national, political, financial, and legal administration and their accompanying bureaucracies. It was a vital point of contact between the monarchy and its more powerful subjects…In principle, the court was also supposed to be a centre of *conspicuous morality*" (117-8, emphasis mine). However, Bellany continues to explain, "For all of James's protestations about virtue, his own court became indelibly associated with scandalous immorality" (119). Although this was well-known, it was not meant to be widely admitted. David Lindley explains both that Howard's association with the court alone was enough to stain her reputation and that the playwrights and poets of the time were never at liberty to say this directly, instead either presenting the court as a paragon of virtue despite its well-established reputation for debauchery, or providing didactic examples for the court to aspire to. In a 1606 letter to Mr. Secretary Barlow, Sir John Harington evocatively describes the atmosphere at court, explaining, "we are going on hereabouts, as if the devil was contriving every man should blow up himself by wild riot, excess, and devastation of time and temperance" (qtd. in Lindley, *Trials* 244). This "wild riot" was notorious, and Lindley writes, "[A] major factor in the corruption of Frances

Howard is held to be her presence in the court itself, characterized as a place of moral laxity and vain self-indulgence" (*Trials* 46). However, he later explains that when Carr and Howard were married, "Everyone judged it in their best interests, whatever scruples they might have had, to perform the obligation of honouring the marriage of the King's favourite, from whom benefits could be expected in future to flow" (123-4). He goes on to explain that playwrights and poets, including Campion, Jonson, Donne, Chapman, and even Middleton wrote plays, masques, and poetry on the celebration of Carr and Howard's wedding at least partly in order to achieve or maintain lucrative patronage or favour at court (123-44). Libels written about Howard prior to her marriage indicate that the wedding was a hotly contested issue. For example, a contemporary ballad makes the suggestion that Howard's virginity test had been faked and that Devereux's selective impotence was absurd with the bawdy lines, "But when as her Earle had an other girle / His wimble could pierce her flanke / His nagg proved able by Changing his stable/ O there was a quo ad hanc./ This dame was inspected butt fraud interjected / A mayd of more perfection/ Whome the Midwives dooe handle/ while the Knight houlds the kandle/ O there was Cleere inspection" ("There was an ould ladd rode on an ould padd"). However, as slanderous and bawdy as these verses were prior to the marriage, once the wedding received royal approval, even though it was widely accepted that the court was corrupt and even though it was widely suggested that Howard herself was immoral and adulterous (whether or not this was true), writers refrained from critiquing either the court itself or the decisions of the king publicly in their poetry or performances (although libels still circulated). Middleton's error in *The Witch* was not that he may have chosen to critique either Carr or Howard, but that he represented the entire court as a place full of

debauchery, sexual deviance, and scandal, something he achieved especially through the use of witches.

The opening two scenes of *The Witch* set up a clear parallel structure between court and coven, demonstrating the marked corruption of the court of Ravenna. In scene one, Sebastian laments that Isabelle, his betrothed, is married to Antonio (1-23); the prostitute Florida laments that her lover, Antonio, has now taken a wife (46-51) while Gaspero assures her that one woman will not be enough to satisfy Antonio, who fully intends to keep a mistress (52-4); Almachildes threatens to forcibly kiss an unwilling Amoretta (76-87); Francisca worries that her illegitimate pregnancy will be revealed (133-6); and the Duchess plots to murder the Duke after he dishonours her dead father (137-141). Importantly, every single romantic relationship in this opening scene is corrupt in some way—unfaithful, adulterous, coercive, illegitimate, or violent. A 1616 libel written during the Overbury trials reduces Frances Howard down to four terms in the pithy lines, "A page a knight a Viscount, and an Earle, / was matched Lately to an English girle / But such A one as nere was seene before / A mayde, a wife, a Countess and A whore" ("A page a knight a Viscount, and an Earle"). Marion O'Connor suggests that Frances Howard could at once be considered "A maid, a wife, a widow, and a whore" (1124), and that *The Witch* portrays each of these possibilities through separate characters in order to sidestep direct equivalencies: "Middleton's dispersion of [contemporary references] across three plots may have ensured that no single figure or configuration would run the risk of being cited as a representation of the crimes of his social superiors. That they are nonetheless to be seen, ensemble, as just such a representation is secured by the presence of the witch in the title" (1126). O'Connor goes on to explain that Hecate

serves as a useful linchpin to bring together the various plotlines of the play "by bringing its central strands together around a single figure, Frances Howard" (1126). However, while the play is almost certainly both inspired by and (not particularly subtly) commenting on the Essex affair and the Overbury scandal, it takes up more than the single figure of Frances Howard in its critique.

While Middleton rarely avoids critique of powerful political figures, *The Witch* casts Isabella as the only mildly sympathetic character in the entire narrative, as she is a victim, forced by the Duke to marry Antonio (1.1.9-13), not knowing that Sebastian is still alive (5.1.130-131). Middleton is well known for his bold—and at times foolish—political commentary in many of his plays (Clare 177) and many scholars agree that he alluded to Francis Howard and the Essex Affair and Overbury scandal at least twice, both in the character of Beatrice-Joanna in *The Changeling* and in the central love triangle in *The Witch.* However, his lenience and even compassion for Isabella's character may align with a growing sympathy for Howard that developed during her trial in 1616. Christina Luckyj explains that there was "a shift in attitudes to the women at the centre of the scandal. By early 1616, Howard and Turner… were heralded as models of Christian virtue even as Carr obstinately refused to confess and the king refused to have him executed" ("Querelle" 134). This widespread compassion for and even praise of women who were tainted by Catholicism, pleading guilty of murder, and routinely ridiculed in libels and treatises, might seem initially surprising. However, their humility and performative repentance, in stark contrast to their male accomplices, made them seem not only virtuous by comparison, but like the victims of the men with whom they collaborated. Luckyj writes, "No longer viewed as malicious agents but as scapegoated

victims of a court rife with masculine corruption, women and their voices could be deployed to redirect blame at the king and his disgraced and unrepentant base-born favourite" ("Querelle" 134). This blame redirected at the king is critical. Far from making an argument for Howard's innocence, the play is instead focusing on the widespread corruption across the entire court, pointing out that it does not all reside in one maligned woman.

The multiple plotlines may certainly serve to distract from the single woman who inspired them, but they work equally well to represent a court that is rotten to the core and not merely contaminated by one deviant person. Middleton is doing more here than attacking the character of Frances Howard (low-hanging fruit, as every libelist in England had already been writing verse about her for years); he is exposing the corruption and degeneracy of the entire court system that is just as corrupt as Howard. The very beginning of the play represents the court as filled with scandal and literal backstabbing, setting up multiple characters rather than just one as deviant in some way, in contrast with the portrayal of the witches' coven in the very next scene.

Immediately after this opening scene, the play turns to the witches' cave and a system of government that seems much more cooperative and functional—a direct contrast to the Duke's dysfunctional banquet. Andrew Loeb points out that, "Hecate and her coven…forge a vibrant sense of communal identity, a shared solidarity that resists and alleviates their marginal status on the outskirts of the play's normative social world—the badly dysfunctional court of Ravenna" (32). In fact, as soon as Hecate enters the scene, calling for, "Titty and Tiffin, Suckin / And Pidgin, Liard and Robin! White spirits, black spirits, grey spirits, red spirits! / Devil-toad, devil-ram, devil-cat and devil-dam!

Why, Hoppo and Stadlin, Hellwain and Puckle?" (1.2.1-5), Stadlin immediately answers her from offstage with, "Here, sweating at the vessel" (6). This exchange instantly establishes a hierarchy involving many players, all of whom appear to be functioning cooperatively and obeying Hecate to the letter, even in her absence. For instance, when Hecate orders, "Boil it well" (7), Hoppo responds, "It gallops now," (8), indicating that even before she issued an order, her assistants were running the operation competently. As if to emphasize this point, Hecate asks, "Are the flames blue enough / Or shall I use a little seeton more?" (9-10), to which Stadlin replies, "The nips of fairies upon maids' white hips / Are not more perfect azure," (11-12), indicating that even before Hecate asked, the procedure was running perfectly. Again, no sooner has Hecate commanded, "Send Stadlin to me with a brazen dish" (11), when Stadlin enters echoing her order, "Here's Stadlin, and the dish" (14). Compared with Francisca trying desperately to conceal her unlawful pregnancy, the Duchess plotting revenge on her husband, and Sebastian seeking to dissolve a marriage, Hecate's court, as Loeb suggests, seems orderly, well-managed, and highly functional.

In addition to the obvious parallels between the court at Ravenna and the witches' coven, Act 1, scene 1 and 2 offer parallel banquet scenes that reveal the court to be more corrupt than the coven. At the end of scene 1, the Duke, Duchess, Lord Governor, Antonio, Isabella, and Francisca enter the stage for a highly dysfunctional banquet celebrating Antonio and Isabella's wedding. The Duke, with no clear motive, announces that "A health in a strange cup…shall go round" (106), producing the skull of his wife's dead father, filled with wine. Almost no one at the banquet accepts this idea willingly—the Lord Governor tries to dissuade the Duke from offering the toast (107-9), Isabella

"thank[s] heaven" (115) that she does not have to drink since she is the bride, Antonio remarks that the skull is "an ill bride-cup for a marriage-day" (125), Francisca worries that the gruesome goblet will make her secret pregnancy known (133-136), and the Duchess quietly swears, "I'll endure't no more. 'Tis in my heart since: / I'll be revenged, as far as death may lead me" (140-1). Only Almachildes drinks without complaint, but even he murmurs cryptic rebellion under his breath as he comments, "Am I the last man, then? I may deserve / To the first one day" (142-3). In contrast to the Duke's gruesome cup and the various horrified or rebellious responses that it elicits, the witches' banquet in scene 2 is commonplace and peaceful, contrary to Almachildes's expectations. When Hecate invites Almachildes to "sup with [her] tonight" (224), he responds, "How? Sup with thee? Dost think I'll eat fried rats / And pickled spiders?" (225-6), to which she answers, "No, I can command, sir, / The best meat I'th' whole province for my friends, / And reverently served in, too" (227-9). Hecate proceeds to honour her word, leading to a distinct contrast between the best meat in the province served in the witches' cave and wine served out of a human skull at court. In addition, only a few lines earlier, Almachildes says, "And now you talk of frogs, I have somewhat here. I come not empty-pocketed from a banquet…Look, Goody Witch, there's a toad in marzipan for you" (214-7). It is unclear here whether the toad is made of marzipan or a real toad combined with marzipan as Hecate thanks Almachildes and seems to think the toad will be adequate for her potion, and Almachildes also offers "…a spawun or two / Of the same paddock-brood too, for your son" (119). Whatever the case, Almachildes's offering of several toads that come from the Duke's banquet that he has just attended immediately precede his assumption that Hecate will be serving rats and spiders at her own banquet and the

revelation that his assumption is incorrect. While the Duke's banquet in the court of Ravenna includes human skulls and toads, the witches' banquet comprises "the best meat 'I 'th whole province" (227), demonstrating the obvious corruption of the court in comparison to the practically civilized coven.

Not only do the order of the coven and the disorder of the court stand in obvious contrast, chaos is only introduced to the coven when the court infiltrates it. Before Almachildes is even onstage, Firestone explains,

> There's the bravest young gentleman within, and the fineliest drunk. I thought he would have fall'n into the vessel! He stumbled at a pipkin of child's grease, reeled against Stadlin, overthrew her, and in the tumbling cast struck up old Puckle's heels with her clothes over her ears…I was fain to throw the cat upon her to save her honesty, and all little enough. I cried out still, 'I pray, be covered!' (183-191)

While Puckle and Stadlin were working in harmony under Hecate's orders only moments ago, Almachildes's entrance throws their operations into chaos and even threatens Puckle's modesty, a revealing inversion of the usual stereotypes about witchcraft. Again, as Almachildes appears before Hecate, Firestone is offended by his rude behaviour, an inversion of what one might expect from a courtier visiting a witches' cave. When Almachildes mishears the word "pismires" (210), declaring, "Give me a chamber-pot" (211), the incensed Firestone says, "You shall see him go nigh to be so unmannerly, / He'll make water before my mother, anon" (212-3). Again, the chaos, corruption, and even poor manners contrast the orderly coven.

As Almachildes introduces disorder to the witches' cave, there is, further, a suggestion that the corruption of the court possibly even supplies Hecate and her underlings with the materials they need for their witchcraft. In a dark parallel, both 1.1. and 1.2 include an illegitimate baby. In 1.1, Francisca reveals her illegitimate pregnancy to the audience with an aside when the Duke compels the banquet guests to drink from the skull: "This is the worst fright that could come / To a concealed great belly. I'm with child, / And this will bring it out, or make me come / Some seven weeks sooner than we maidens reckon" (133-6). Only moments later, as act 2 begins, Hecate enters carrying, along with other properties, a baby, which she describes as an "unbaptized brat" (15). In a disturbing cliché, the witches plan to boil the baby in order to produce the ointment that allows them to fly (16-20). This immediate transition from Francisca's illegitimate baby to Hecate's "unbaptized brat" shows a clear parallel between these unbaptized, illegitimate children, suggesting the corruption of the court may even be working to supply Hecate's sorcery. The idea that the immorality of the court is providing the coven with ingredients is reinforced when the baby prop appears yet again at the beginning of act 2, scene 3 as Aberzanes and an old woman with a baby enter (2.3.1 s.d.). Aberzanes begins the scene with, "So, so: away with him! I love to get 'em / But not to keep 'em" (1-2). By this point in the play, Aberzanes has already fathered Francesca's illegitimate child, but this scene establishes him as a serial child-abandoner. When he asks the old woman, "Dost thou know the house?" (2), she replies, "No matter for the house—I know the porch" (3), suggesting that a similar exchange has happened several times as Aberzanes has foisted off his unwanted offspring. The scene goes on to suggest that Aberzanes is not alone in this behaviour, as he explains in a soliloquy,

My tailor told me he sent away a maidservant

Well ballast of all sides, within these nine days—

His wife ne'er dreamed on't—gave the drab ten pound

And she ne'er troubles him. A common fashion,

He told me 'twas, to rid away a scape,

And I have sent him this for't. I remember

A friend of mine once served a prating tradesman

Just on this fashion, to a hair, in troth!

'Tis a good ease to a man: you can swell a maid up

And rid her for ten pound. There's the purse back again

What'er becomes of your money, or your maid. (5-15)

Aberzanes speaks of illegitimate children as a common problem that he and others who he knows have to contend with routinely. Though none of these illegitimate children explicitly make their way to Hecate's cave during the play, it is not difficult to make a connection between the supply of men like Aberzanes and the demand of women like Hecate. Unlike in *Masque of Queens*, where the witches exist as a foil to exalt the court, Middleton's court of Ravenna works to keep the witches in business.

5.2 INVERSION AND BEN JONSON'S *MASQUE OF QUEENS*

These parallels and contrasts between court and coven become even more revealing in context of some of the likely source texts for Middleton's *The Witch*. Tiffany Stern writes that "The masque in *The Witch* gives every sign of having itself been borrowed from Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queenes*…This had been put on at Whitehall by the King's Men, who were later to perform *The Witch* and *Macbeth*; perhaps they, or

perhaps Middleton, decided to reuse dances they had already learned" (75). Not only were songs and dances likely reused from Jonson's masque (a common practice), but Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge also speculate that "even…properties, costumes…and stage effects were imported from the court production of that masque" (13). A close comparison of the description of the witches in Jonson's masque and the props referred to in *The Witch* 1.2 shows that this borrowing is possible and even likely. For example, Jonson writes, "I prescribed them their properties of vipers, snakes, bones, herbs, roots, and other ensigns of their magic" (306), and in *Witch* 1.2, Hecate enters "with properties and habits fitting including a baby, serpents and snakes" (1.2.1 sd). Both plays make repeated use of snakes as stage props, and *Masque of Queens*, like *Witch*, also includes reference to a baby with the line, "I had a dagger: what did I with that? / Killed an infant, to have his fat" (150-1), suggesting the possibility that both productions used the same baby prop for the witches as well. While such borrowing and reusing was a common practice born out of practical considerations, Middleton made much of this connection between Jonson's play and his own masque, leaning into the reuse of stage effects and songs by also borrowing language and structure from the older work in order to strengthen his own critique of the Jacobean court. For example, *Masque of Queens* references a likely skull prop when the fourth hag announces, "And I ha' been choosing out this skull / From charnel houses that were full, / From private grots and public pits, / And frighted a sexton out of his wits" (142-5). If Middleton's later play reuses the properties from Jonson's masque, it is possible that the hag's skull prop later ends up in the hands of the Duke as he proposes his toast in 1.1. The image of a ruler holding a witches' prop is surely jarring, and even if the skull is not the identical prop from

Jonson's masque, a visual association is still certainly possible. As I have previously demonstrated, the opening two scenes of Middleton's play draw a clear contrast between court and coven; however, this contrast is heightened by a deliberate inversion of Jonson's masque.

In his prelude to *Masque of Queens*, Ben Jonson writes, "Her Majesty [Queen Anne], best knowing that a principal part of life in these spectacles lay in their variety, had commanded me to think on some dance or show that might preceded hers, and have the place of a foil or false masque… [I] therefore now devised that twelve women in the habit of hags, or witches, sustaining the persons of Ignorance, Suspicion, Credulity, etc., the opposites to Good Fame, should fill that part, not as a masque, but a spectacle of strangeness" (305). The masque then begins with a scene set in hell and the entrance of the witches in elaborate costume (305-6). This "spectacle of strangeness" was specifically designed, at the request of the queen, to contrast her own noble arrival with her ladies and act as a foil against which their own virtue and fame might shine all the brighter. Middleton's play, on the other hand, begins in the court of Ravenna, which, with the depths of its depravity exposed from the beginning, acts as a foil to the later entrance of the witches—an obvious inversion of Jonson's masque which paints the court as corrupt in contrast to the coven. While few scholars have pointed out this parallel structure, Loeb argues that,

> Middleton's play interpolates and inverts the musical conventions of the court masque, and particularly Ben Johnson's *Masque of Queens* (1609), which frames witches as the unruly others against which English royal power, in the figure of the king and court, can be defined and authorized

> as a source of stability, order, and virtue. Middleton's play adapts and satirizes the conventions of representation embodied in the masque form to critique the politics of community identity those representations produce. (32)

While Loeb deftly explains Middleton's inversion of Jonson's masque, the implications of this inversion are greater than Loeb suggests. He argues that "The songs…offer an implicit critique of the social order that structures the court—pervaded by both overt and covert instances of patriarchal dominance—that has led to that dysfunction by encouraging the audience to envision an alternative centred on a joyful, supporting community of rebellious women" (32). He continues to explain that this inversion "invit[es the] audience to explore alternative social formations" (32). However, I argue that this inversion seeks to expose the corruption of the existing court—rife with scandal at the time *The Witch* was performed—as opposed to setting up a preferable alternative.

The idea of using witchcraft as a contrast or opposition to virtue is well-established. Stuart Clark explains that the meaning of witchcraft was "located not positively in the actions of witches but negatively and contrastively in relation to the meanings of *other* actions known at the time. Witchcraft was construed dialectically in terms of what it was not; what was significant about it was not its substance but the system of oppositions that it established and fulfilled" (9). These established oppositions worked well in Jonson's case to demonstrate the virtues of the queen and her ladies—and, by extension, the court, in contrast to the witches from the opening scene. Lindley writes, "It is…vital to recognize the symbolic space the witches are made to occupy in the masque…The witches' opposites are the heroic martial women represented by the

masquers and presided over by the Queen" ("Introduction" 285). Queen Anna requested a foil to her masque, Jonson supplied that foil in the form of witches, and the court likely perceived this opposition as a compliment. Thus, by inverting Jonson's masque, Middleton was commenting on the morality of the court in a way that people familiar with the masque may have understood. This is especially interesting in light of the scholarly consensus that the play is commenting on Frances Howard, since "The Countess of Essex" (Jonson 648) is one of the twelve queens credited at the end of the masque script.

The contrast of the opening two scenes is not the only inversion of Jonson's masque that *The Witch* offers. Act 3 scene 3 again works to invert the masque as the witches depart on their nightly flight. In *Masque of Queens*, the twelve witches scatter when Heroic Virtue appears along with the twelve queens. In order to fully appreciate the interaction of 3.3 with Jonson's masque, it is important to note that, as O'Connor has pointed out, "In no plot of *The Witch* do the activities of the witch and her coven of companions determine the outcome nor even affect the actions of the human figures…The witch, then, proves useless within the dramatic fiction" (1126). While the titular witch and her companions may not actually drive the plot, they do at least interact with the other plotlines most of the time. However, in 3.3 the witches are divorced entirely from the main action and their meeting and flying, while likely entertaining, does nothing to support the rest of the plot. I believe that this scene that seems to solely exist to show the witches revelling in their magical ability, exists for the main purpose of repeating the inversion of *Masque of Queenes*. Jonson's description states,

> In the heat of [the witches'] dance, on the sudden, was heard a sound of loud music, as if many instruments had made one blast; with which not only the hags themselves but the hell into which they ran quite vanished, and the whole face of the scene altered, scarce suffering the memory of such a thing. But in the place of it appeared a glorious and magnificent building, figuring the House of Fame, in the top of which were discovered the twelve masquers, sitting upon a throne triumphal, erected in form of a pyramid and circled with all store of light. From whom a person, by this time descended, in the furniture of Perseus, and expressing heroic and masculine virtue, began to speak. (319-326)

By contrast, Middleton's witches in 3.3 "banish" Antonio, Sebastian, Isabella, and Francisca by replacing them onstage. Rather than mimicking Jonson's witches in this scene, Middleton's witches mimic Jonson's queens and invert Jonson's witches by turns. For instance, rather than "descend[ing]" (Jonson 325) like the queens or running into hell like the witches in the masque (320-1), Middleton's witches ascend into the sky on their nightly flight, performing the opposite action of Jonson's contained witches while simultaneously inverting the descent of Heroic Virtue and the Queens from the heavens. The flight of the witches is discussed in the scene, but is also likely visually performed with stage apparatuses as well, as is indicated by the repeated direction "from offstage or above" (38, 41, 44, 52, 54, 68 s.d.) and the direction that Hecate is "going up with cat" (58 s.d.). The flight of the witches in this scene has the effect of at once leaving the witches uncontained, unlike in Jonson's play, and making a mockery of the grand entrance of the queens who are supposed to banish them.

Like Jonson's queens arriving with the singular male figure of Perseus or Heroic Virtue, thought to represent Prince Henry, Middleton's witches appear with the singular male figure of Firestone, Hecate's son. Like Heroic Virtue, Firestone has a fairly lengthy speech in which he details the witches' flight. Jonson's Heroic Virtue heralds the queens, beginning his speech, "So should, at Fame's loud sound and Virtue's sight, / All dark and envious witchcraft fly the light. / I did not borrow Hermes' wings, nor ask / His crooked sword, nor put on Pluto's casque…" (327-330). Similarly, Firestone begins with reference to the witches' flight: "They're all going a-birding tonight. They talk of fowls i'th'air, that fly by day: I'm sure they'll be a company of foul sluts there tonight. If we have not mortality after it, I'll be hanged, for they are able to putrefy it, to infect a whole region" (3.3.15-19). While both Heroic Virtue and Firestone open by referring to flight, Heroic Virtue is using the word "fly" to mean "flee," and referencing the banishing of the witches in the face of the court's virtue, while Firestone instead explains that the witches' flight makes them free, uncontained, and able to spread their corruption broadly. Similar to Middleton's witches, Firestone here reverses the role of Heroic Virtue, announcing the spread of the witches' corruption rather than their containment, and growing angry and resentful at the flight of his masters, rather than praising them like Heroic Virtue.

Middleton's witches invert and parody *Masque of Queens* a third time when they appear onstage in act 5, scene 2, and cook up a potion at the Duchess's request. As they end the scene, they join in "the witches' dance" (87 s.d.), likely choreography reused from the masque. In her musical analysis of *The Witch*, Amanda Eubanks Winkler writes,

> After the charm song, Hecate commands the "air to strike our tune,"
> [V.ii.83] to provide accompaniment for their dancing. John Cutts has

> posited that a witches' dance from *The Masque of Queens* was used here, and if it was, then the witches' last moments onstage would have been spent dancing a grotesque antimasque dance, which, in its original context, musically and visually emphasised the hags' estrangement from the idealized harmony of the aristocratic body. However, unlike Jonson's hag, Middleton's coven is not dispelled by courtly order, by the loud music of Fame. Hecate and her cohorts simply disappear. They are not punished for their deeds; in fact, they prosper (34).

Once again, unlike in Jonson's masque, Middleton's witches are left uncontained. More than that, their actions are even requested and sanctioned by the court that is supposed to dispel them.

If Middleton did indeed reuse elements of *Masque of Queens* for *The Witch*, deliberately subverting the masque to critique the court it was once meant to praise, what would the impact have been on an audience, considering that *Masque of Queens* had been designed for court entertainment and had been played likely at least seven years prior?[3] Evaluating the possibility of similar or re-used choreography from *Masque of Queens* in *The Witch* and in the later restaging of *Macbeth* with Middleton's additional scenes, Inga-Stina Ewbank states, "If there was a sameness, it would be lost on an audience at the Globe, though effective at a court performance" (1167). However, *The Witch* was likely first staged at Blackfriars, not at the Globe. Robert Leach explains, "…in 1608…the King's Men took [Blackfriars] over….they soon found that the smaller theatre was best for the first performance of a new play" (Leach 248). This is far from conclusive, of

[3] I am dating the play from 1616, as Ed Esch suggests (24-5).

course, but considering that the King's Men performed *The Witch*, a first performance at Blackfriars seems likely (O'Connor 1129). The theatre in which the play was first performed is important if we wish to speculate on the extent to which the audience would have been aware of any similarities to Jonson's masque or have been able to read the play's social commentary and general critique of court corruption. The price of admission at Blackfriars was significantly more expensive than at the Globe, and with seating for only roughly 750 people, this theatre attracted a richer and more exclusive clientele (Gurr 26, 79). According to Andrew Gurr, "the main clientele must have been the privileged, principally gallants, law students, the wealthier citizens and the nobility. They were a 'select' audience, as Marston called them, selected by their affluence, who could relish the fiction that they attended a 'private' playhouse, away from the common throng" (26-7). Leach adds some detail to this social disparity: "The Globe could accommodate six times as many spectators, but…at Blackfriars patrons were charged at least six times as much, often more" (Leach, "The Second Blackfriars Theatre"). *The Witch*, therefore, likely first played before an audience much more familiar with the inner workings of the court and court masques like Jonson's *Masque of Queens* than the crowd that usually frequented the Globe. There would likely have been overlap between those who appeared at court and those who could afford a show at Blackfriars theatre as well.

To further examine the kind of audience *The Witch* may have had, I want to consider an incident that occurred in Blackfriars in the winter of 1631-2 and was later recorded in a letter by John Pory to the Viscount Scudamore. Though this incident occurred roughly fifteen years after *The Witch*, I believe it is still revealing, since Herbert Berry claims, "it is one of the reliable suppositions of Elizabethan stage history that

Blackfriars was not seriously altered from its expensive rebuilding by Shakespeare's company in 1596, and its occupancy by the same company in 1609, to its closing in 1642" (164). Pory writes about a fight that broke out between two young gallants in Blackfriars:

> This Captaine attending and accompanying my Lady of Essex in a boxe at the playhouse at the blackfryers, the said lord coming upon the stage, stood before them and hindered their sight. Captain Essex told his lordship they had payd for their places as well as hee, and therefore intreated him not to deprive them of the benefitt of it. Whereupon the lord stood up yet higher and hindred more their sight. Then Capt. Essex with his hand putt him a little by. The lord then drewe his sword and run full butt at him, though hee missed him… (qtd. in Gurr 28)

The Essexes in question here are likely Robert Devereux's second wife, Elizabeth Pawlett, who he had married in 1630, following his annulment from Frances Howard (Berry 165-6). The Captain involved in the petty fight was likely "Charles Essex, a professional soldier who was a protégé of the Earl of Essex" (166). While we certainly cannot speculate on whether any of the Essex family were present for the performance of *The Witch* some sixteen years earlier, it is still important to note that the kinds of patrons taking priority seating in Blackfriars were on some occasions the very ones related to the court scandals that Middleton satirised. As I have mentioned, we know that Frances Howard herself played a role as one of the masquers in *Masque of Queens* when she was still Lady Essex, and we also know that updated members of the Essex family occupied an expensive box at Blackfriars years later. Who exactly saw Middleton's play and to

what extent they were able to connect it to the court masque we cannot say, but it is reasonable to suggest that these two audiences ran in similar circles and occasionally overlapped.

Beyond the social composition of the Blackfriars audience, I believe that the positioning of the audience reinforces my interpretation of *The Witch*, if indeed it was first performed there. Gurr explains that one of the key differences between the Globe and Blackfriars was that the audience was arranged in opposite ways. In larger theatres, like the Globe, the cheapest tickets were for groundlings nearest the stage while the richer playgoers opted for more expensive gallery seating. In private theatres like Blackfriars, on the other hand, the most expensive seats were closest to the stage while cheaper seats were further away (27). Not only were the wealthiest patrons nearest the stage, as we can see from the encounter between Captain Essex and the Lord Thurles of Ireland (the young Gallant on the stage who blocked Captain Essex's view), they were also occasionally seated or standing on the stage itself. (Berry 167). This information is already clear from other sources, like Thomas Dekker's satirical 1609 text *The Gull's Horn Book*. Dekker mockingly writes about gallants who paraded their own status by taking a place on the stage, sarcastically noting, "By spreading your body on the stage, and by being a justice in examining of plays you shall put yourself into…true scenical authority…And to conclude, whether you be a fool or a justice of peace, a cuckold or a captain, a Lord Mayor's son or a dawcock, a knave or an under-sheriff, of what stamp soever you be, current or counterfeit, the stagelike time *will bring you to most perfect light, and lay you open*" (209, emphasis mine). Though Dekker's piece is mocking, the idea that the line between the audience and the stage was sometimes so blurred in

Blackfriars theatre that the rich young gallants on the stage could be "la[id] open," is particularly interesting in the context of *The Witch*—a play that seems tailor made to "bring to most perfect light" and "lay open" the rampant corruption of the Jacobean court. The theatre allowed for the play to not only expose the court in the form of the drama, but to make wealthy patrons subjects for spectacle and perhaps even implied ridicule as well. Perhaps it was this ridicule that led to the "ill fate" of the play.

5.3 *THE DISCOVERIE OF WITCHCRAFT* AND *THE WITCH*

In addition to inverting a well-known court masque to expose and ridicule the corruption of the Jacobean court, *The Witch* uses a controversial and skeptical source to inform much of its representation of witches. Many scholars accept that Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* was a key source for *The Witch* (Esch 31). Comparing the witchcraft scenes in the play with excerpts from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* demonstrates that not only does Scot's text serve as a useful sourcebook; Middleton nearly lifts whole passages from it. There was no shortage of demonological texts for Middleton to model his fictional coven after. For example, King James's *Daemonologie*—a book that was in part a response to Scot—had already been a source for *Macbeth*. I believe that Middleton deliberately used a skeptical source for his play, even calling attention to his use of it, in order to emphasize his critique of the court by rendering the witches ridiculous and stripping them of their villainy. If the titular witch is really a character that Middleton represented satirically, the main source of evil in the play is undoubtedly the court of Ravenna rather than Hecate and her coven. Middleton would also likely have understood that using Scot's text so obviously was politically risky. Though it remains unclear whether or not King James ever ordered *The Discoverie*

of Witchcraft burned, as a popular legend suggests (Almond, "Burning," 213), it is clear that he vehemently disliked it. Philip C. Almond writes, "There is no doubt that James intensely disliked Scot's *Discoverie*. In the Preface to the Reader in his *Daemonologie*, first published in Scotland in 1597 and in England in 1603, James singled out Scot along with the German physician Johann Weyer as two of the chief instigators of scepticism about witchcraft" (210). *The Witch* uses clear passages from *The Discoverie* to represent Middleton's fictional witches as emphatically that—fictional.

Though some passages in *The Witch* merely seem to take inspiration from *The Discoverie*, others echo it almost word for word or at least concept for concept, making it nearly impossible to deny that Middleton is not merely borrowing from but pillaging Scot. For example, when the witches are first introduced in act 1, scene 2, they are making ointment that they will later use to fly. Hecate commands, "There, take this unbaptized brat / Boil it well; preserve the fat. / You know 'tis precious to transfer / Our 'nointed flesh into the air" (18-21). The idea of making ointment for flying, especially from the flesh of unbaptized babies, is recorded in detail in *Discoverie*:

> Then [the devil] teacheth them to make ointments of the bowels and members of children, whereby they ride in the aire, and accomplish all their desires. So as, if there be anie children unbaptised, or not garded with the signe of the crosse, or orizons; then the witches may and doo catch them from their mothers sides in the night, or out of their cradles, or otherwise kill them with their ceremonies; and after buriall steale them out of their graves, and seeth them in a caldron, untill their flesh be made potable. (23)

The idea of using unguents or potions to fly was well-known, as Scot himself was recording this idea from "Bodin, Nider, Danaeus, Psallus, Erastus, Hemingius, Cumanus, Aquinas, Bartholomaeus, Spineus, &c." (23). Nevertheless, Middleton's portrayal mirrors Scot's text closely, a decision that is telling when we consider the context of Scot's passage.

Scot's recitation of this recipe appears in the first chapter of his third book, subtitled, in part, "*The witches bargaine with the divell…*" (23). According to Scot's understanding, this recipe for a flying potion is clearly tied to the concept of the demonic pact. Scot outlines the entire process of making a pact with the devil, beginning with "certaine assemblies…in which conference the divell exhorteth them to observe their fidelitie unto him," then moving to description of witches proving their devotion to the devil through "renunciation of Christian faith, in despising anie of the seven sacraments, in treading upon crosses, in spetting at the time of the elevation, in breaking their fast on fasting daies, and fasting on sundaies…" (23), then explaining the vitally important giving of the soul to the devil (23), and, finally, ending with the recipe for the flying potion. Therefore, Middleton's repetition of the recipe Scot cites is not only a deliberate reference to a text that actively seeks to debunk witchcraft belief, but a move that places the witches in 1.2 in service to the devil. However, Middleton never includes the beginning stages of this pact—instead, the scene opens in media res, as the witches are "sweating at the vessel" (1.2.6). The devil is conspicuously missing from the stage. Only moments earlier, in 1.1, a kind of demonic pact does occur, but this demonic pact happens not between the witches and a stage devil, but between the Duke of Ravenna and his courtiers. I have already mentioned the importance of the skull props and explained its

connection to the witches. In 1.1, the Duke of Ravenna conducts a pseudo-demonic pact ceremony using the skull as a wine goblet. The Lord Governor and the Duke both use the language of a "pledge" several times as the Duke proposes the toast. For example, as the Duke suggests the toast, the Lord Governor responds, "Your grace need not doubt that, sir, having seen / So many pledged already. This fair company / Cannot shrink now for one, so it end there" (1.2.107-9). The Lord Governor is reassuring the Duke that the entire company has already pledged loyalty to him, and yet the Duke feels the need to insist on forcing them to demonstrate this loyalty in the most gristly manner he can conjure. The Duke repeats the language of the pledge a few lines later when he says, "Our duchess, I know, will pledge too" (116). The Duke's insistence on making the banqueteers pledge is strikingly similar to Scot's description of "the divell exhort[ing the witches] to observe their fidelity unto him" (23). As if to demonstrate that these parallels are not a coincidence, Middleton even incorporates a novice member—Antonio—who is being introduced to the ritual for the first time, similar to Scot's reference to the witches "commend[ing] a new disciple (whom they call a novice) unto [the devil]" (23). The Duke says to Antonio, "A boy tonight at least: I charge you look to 't, / Or I'll renounce you for illustrious subjects…And you'll do well, for one that ne'er tossed pike, sir" (1.2.146-9). Therefore, not only does Middleton clearly reference Scot as he introduces the witches in 1.2, he also maps the demonic pact at the beginning of Scot's chapter onto the Duke's banquet scene in 1.1, carrying the reference through to the next scene. By associating the pact with the Duke and his court, Middleton casts court as more corrupt than coven and brings Scot's sceptical material to a political setting in which it is metaphorically possible for people to make a pact with a kind of devil (the Duke), while

simultaneously using the most outwardly grotesque passage in the chapter to cast the witches as a fictional threat by comparison.

Later in the same scene, Middleton's witches fit into the charity-refused paradigm, as they discuss getting petty revenge on their neighbours who have wronged them. While the charity-refused paradigm is common and represented in many texts, Middleton's representation seems to make specific reference to Scot's discussion of the pattern. For instance, Scot writes, "It falleth out many times, that neither their necessities, nor their expectation is answered or served, in those places where they beg or borrowe; but rather their lewdnesse is by their neighbors reprooved…so as sometimes she cursseth one, and sometimes another; and that from the maister of the house, his wife, children, cattell, &c. to the little pig that lieth in the stie" (5). Middleton mimics this idea of cursing every member of a household down to the pigs in Hecate's lines: "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. / Seven of their young pigs I've bewitched already, / Of the last litter" (1.2.53-58). Middleton's specific reference to the pigs suggests not only influence, but perhaps a deliberate reference to Scot. Once again, Middleton's reference to a sceptical text is already interesting, but the context of the reference is even more revealing. Scot talks about the charity-refused paradigm as the key reason that people believe witches have real power and the reason why some women accused of witchcraft also genuinely believe that they are witches. For Scot, the charity-refused paradigm relies on pre-existing enmity between the accused witch and her neighbours. He writes, "These miserable wretches are so odious unto all their neighbors, and so feared, as few dare

offend them, or denie them anie thing they aske: whereby they take upon them; yea and sometimes thinke, that they can doo such things as are beyond the abilitie of humane nature" (5). It is clear from Hecate's long monologue that she is on hostile terms with her rural neighbours. She is actively working to produce three months of sickness in a farmer and his wife (1.2.43-7) and harm their livelihood (53-61). However, only moments later, Almachildes enters (193) with the purpose of conducting civil business with the witches. Clearly, becoming "odious to their neighbors" (Scot 5) does not extend to their courtly neighbours. By referencing Scot here, Middleton establishes that not only do Hecate and the other witches map onto Middleton's "*manifest declaration of the cause that mooveth men so commonlie to thinke, and witches themselves to believe that they can hurt children, cattell, &c. with words and imaginations*," they also trade and traffic with the court, undercutting the very reason they are thought to be harmful and obliterating any gap that exists between them and their wealthy patrons, since enmity between witches and their neighbours is fundamental in establishing who is and is not a witch.

The Witch even replicates specific ingredients that Scot lists, often repeating them verbatim. For example, when Almachildes comes to Hecate for a love charm, she tells him, "I'll give thee a remora shall bewitch her straight… A little suck-stone; Some call it a sea-lamprey, a small fish…The bones of a green frog too, wonderous precious, / The flesh consumed by pismires. (1.2.211-216). Scot gives a similar recipe for a love potion, but in the context of debunking and even mocking it. His recipe falls under the heading, "*It is proved by more credible writers, that love cups rather ingender death through venome, than love by art*" (71). Scot's recollection of a love potion includes, "…a little fish called Remora…the bone of a greene frog, the flesh therof being consumed with

pismers or ants…" (71). Similarly, slightly later in the scene, Hecate says, "I could give thee / Chioconita, adincantida, / Archimadon, marmaritin, calicia, / Which I could sort to villainous barren ends" (1.2.159-162). These terms seem lifted right from Scot, who writes: "Archimedon, which would make one bewraie in his sleepe, all the secrets in his heart: Adincantida, Calicia, Mevais, Chirocineta, &c: which had all their severall vertues, or rather poisons" (67). These repetitions suggest not only a borrowing of concepts, but almost heavy-handed allusion to Scot's text, and particularly to a passage outlining love potions as ridiculous. Laura Levine notes Scot's characteristic repetitions of incantations and ingredients throughout *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. She asks, "if Scot doesn't believe the incantations he cites have any magical power, why does he recite them at such length?" (39). Her solution is that "Scot's recitation of charms and incantations functions in part to exorcise from his own way of thinking habits of mind which have a potential grip on him and which share a fundamental similarity with those of the 'witchmongers' he exposes. In this way he expels them as irrational" (39). Middleton similarly exposes witchcraft as irrational when he mimics Scot's exhaustive laundry lists of ingredients, thereby representing the witches as ridiculous while exposing the real and dangerous corruption of the court.

The Witch, in fact, ends with the unsatisfying reconciliation of the Duke and Duchess, despite obvious treason. As the Duchess enters the stage, she is deep in her scheme, stating, "One poor night / Ends Almachildes now. / Better his meaner fortunes wept than ours … Such lives as his / Were only meant to break the force of fate / Ere it came at us, and receive the venom" (5.2.64-70). The Duchess's statement about using Almachildes for her political purposes and then shifting the blame onto him to save

herself seems similar to the popular view of Robert Carr at the time, who was unrepentant, refused to confess, and allowed Turner and Howard to take the blame for the Overbury murder alone (Luckyj, *Liberty*, 134). The close but dysfunctional relationship between the duke and duchess in the play may mirror that of Robert Carr and King James, who, despite Carr's treachery, was reluctant to punish him. The duke ends the play by declaring, "Live a duchess, / Better than ever loved, embraced and honoured! …Nay, since in honour thou canst justly rise, / Vanish all wrongs" (5.3.126-8). James, like the Duke, had the power to instantly "Vanish all wrongs," and in fact did so. Lindley states that, "The Somersets lived in some comfort in the Tower before they were finally released" (*Trials* 191). Though Middleton would not have been able to foresee this release while writing the play, he likely had plenty of reason to expect eventual leniency given the King's reluctance to bring about any consequences for his favourite. In the same way, the duchess spends the entire play soliciting the witches and others to try to murder several members of the court including the duke. As the main schemer, her crimes clearly run deeper than those of Hecate and the other witches, who only agree to be accomplices, and yet she is immediately and completely pardoned at the end of the play.

In addition to reproducing Scot and thereby clearly linking itself to a sceptical text that King James deeply disliked, *The Witch* adapts material from *The Discoverie of Witches* and takes it even further than Scot was prepared to go. Not only does *The Witch* parrot scepticism; it heightens the absurdity of already patently ridiculous examples, doubling down on the fictional nature of the witch characters. For example, Scot records that "…certeine magicall heretikes…assemblie themselves everie good fridaie at night; and putting out the candles, doo commit incestuous adulterie, the father with the

daughter, the sister with the brother, and the sonne with the mother" (25). Middleton makes reference to this passage in 2.1 when Firestone confesses his plan to "overlay a fat parson's daughter" (91), and Hecate sullenly responds, "And who shall lie with me, then?" (92). However, while Scot stops at incest, Middleton takes the taboo one step further to bestiality when Firestone replies, "The great cat / For one night, mother: 'tis but a night! / Make shift with him for once" (92-4). Similarly, later in the scene, Hecate repeats ingredients listed in Scot, but adds to his description, making it even more grotesque. Scot writes, "…manie other follies there be to this purpose…as namelie, the garments of the dead, candels that burne before a dead corps, and needels wherwith dead bodies are sowne or sockt into their sheetes: and diverse other things, which for the reverence of the reader, and in respect of the uncleane speach to be used in the description thereof, I omit (71). While Scot gallantly omits "diverse other things…for the reverence of the reader," Middleton does the opposite, openly listing whatever might have been grotesque enough for Scot to omit. In 2.1, Hecate lists the same ingredients as Scot, but includes additional detail: "More I could instance— / As the same needles thrust into their pillows / that sews and socks up dead men in their sheets, / A privy gristle of a man that hangs / After sunset" (163-167). In an explanatory note in his critical edition of *The Witch*, Edward J. Esche translates "A privy gristle" as "penis? not in OED" (221), and quotes an editor of Scot, "'A privy gristle,' etc., as given by Middleton, was, I presume, one of the things which, 'for the reverence of the reader,' Scot omits, though whence the former got it I know not" (Nicholson qtd. in Esche 221). Middleton's borrowings from Scot signal skepticism towards witchcraft, but his gristly and increasingly taboo additions to Scot increase doubt to incredulity and even absurdity. The

result is that Middleton's witches are made clearly ridiculous while the evils of the court (fathering illegitimate children, assassination attempts, infidelity, etc.) seem a much more concrete source of evil by comparison.

In addition to alluding to and adding to Scot, Middleton also uses a reference to Scot to create an inversion of Ovid, similar to his inversion of Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, again emphasizing the corruption of the court over the evils of the witches. Middleton has Hecate parrot a Latin passage that Scot takes from Ovid in act 5, scene 2. The passage Hecate recites is nearly identical to a quotation in Scot; both passages begin and end the passage on identical lines, so Middleton neither shortens nor lengthens Scot's selection. However, one line is omitted from Middleton's rendering, which has caused some scholars to question whether its origins are in Scot or somewhere else. For example, in his introduction to *The Witch*, Esche explains, "Alexander Dyce claims that Middleton is following a source other than Scot for some of the Latin in *Witch*. He argues that Middleton took the Ovid Latin quotation at Vii.18-25 from Jean Bodin because, unlike Scot, both Bodin and Middleton omit one line of text" (33). However, regardless of the source of this particular quotation, and whether or not Middleton lifted it from Scot or Bodin, it is clear that Middleton and Scot start and end their passages at the same line, and the likely comparison to Scot is suggestive. At the beginning of Book XII, Chapter VIII, after quoting passages about witchcraft from several different poets in Chapter VII, Scot writes, "You see in these verses, the poets (whether in earnest or in jest I know not) ascribe unto witches & to their charmes, more than is to be found in humane or diabolicall power. I doubt not but the most part of the readers hereof will admit them to be fabulous; although the most learned of mine adversaries (for lack of scripture) are

faine to produce these poetries for proofes…" (130). Middleton's inclusion of the exact passage Scot uses to ridicule those who use poetry as proof places Middleton's witches firmly in the realm of the fictional.

However, beyond simply placing Hecate in the realm of the laughably fictious witch and even subtly mocking certain scholarly standards of proof, I believe that Middleton's allusion calls attention to the original source of Scot's quotation: Ovid's *Metamorphosis*. Giving the stage rendition of Hecate a line from Ovid's Medea certainly fictionalizes her, but I argue that the context of the quotation makes this allusion richer. A note in Marion O'Connor's edition of *The Witch* mistakenly claims, "In Book VII of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Medea, abandoned by Jason, speaks these lines within a vengeful prayer to the gods of the groves and the night" (1161). However, a closer look at Arthur Golding's 1565 translation of Ovid's metamorphosis reveals that Medea speaks these lines not as she is planning revenge on the unfaithful Jason, but as she is preparing to altruistically prolong the life of Jason's father, earlier in the story. Jason pleads, "O wife… if enchauntment can, …abate thou from my yeares, / And adde them to my fathers life" (82). Medea, moved by his request, responds,

> O husband fye,
> What wickednesse hath leapt your mouth? Suppose you then that I
> Am able to your life the terme where I will to bestow?
> Let Hecate never suffer that. Your sute (as well you know)
> Against all right and reason is. But I will put in prose
> A greater gift than you require and more for your behoof.
> I will extend your father's life by cunning to prolong,

And not with your yeeres for to make him yong againe and strong. (82)

By contrast, when Middleton's Hecate recites these lines, she is preparing to commit murder at the request of the Duchess (5.2). As Middleton inverts Jonson, he also inverts Ovid in order to emphasize the corruption of the court. In fact, in direct opposition to Jason's request that Medea extend Acton's life, the Duchess and Hecate have a discussion about the timeframe necessary to end Almachildes's life:

HECATE What death is't you desire for Almachildes?

DUCHESS A sudden and a subtle.

HECATE 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.

DUCHESS In what time, prithee?

HECATE Perhaps in a moon's progress.

DUCHESS This must be done with speed, dispatch this night

If it may possibly.

HECATE I have it for you!

Here's that will do't. Stay but perfection's time,

And that's not five hours hence." (5.2.1-13)

Rather than extending a lifespan here, Hecate and the Duchess discuss how quickly they can reduce it. Rather than soliciting a magic-worker to prolong a life, the Duchess is requesting a murder. Additionally, though Hecate is the one working to perform the

request, the Duchess is responsible for making the request and insists on speeding up the process, again demonstrating the corruption of the court of Ravenna.

5.4 *MACBETH* AND *THE WITCH*

Both Middleton's inversion of a masque that was intended to flatter the king and his flippant usage of Scot may have contributed to the play becoming "ignorantly ill-fated" (though ignorance might have less to do with it than Middleton suggests). Middleton's later inclusion of some of the songs from *Witch* in a re-staged production of *Macbeth* suggests that he may have been trying to rehabilitate his play by associating it with *Macbeth*, a play that had already been well-received. O'Connor states, "…[Middleton] interpolated the two songs and a dance from the 'ignorantly ill-fated' *Witch* which, probably written in 1616, had fallen foul of the censor; and…in order to motivate the appearance of Hecate in these, he added the rest of what is now 3.5 and some lines in 4.1 (39-43; 143-50)" (1166). Middleton may have added songs and dances that were used both in Jonson's *Masque of Queens* and in *The Witch* into the restaging of *Macbeth* in order to create a through line between early and later witch plays by adding continuity in retrospect. According to Linda Phyllis Austern, "witches' song-and-dance routines…[were] lifted as modules from one work to another, such as the song shared between *The Witch* and *Macbeth*, and the dances whose music and choreography may have been used in both of these as well as Jonson's *Masque of Queens*" (193). The decision to reuse songs and dances was surely in part practical, as all three performances were staged by the King's Men. Adding this same music and choreography to a later staging of *Macbeth* creates a logical progression of three plays that all include witches and grounds the ill-fated *Witch* in a series of plays that had received no such censure. It is

impossible to attribute a clear motive to Middleton's additions to *Macbeth*, but I believe one or both of two things is possible: firstly, as mentioned earlier, Middleton may have been trying to rehabilitate his ill-fated play by associating it with similar plays that had enjoyed success; secondly, Middleton may have understood exactly why his *Witch* was "ill-fated" and been using the song and dance of his own critique in order to reinterpret the other plays in a similar way.

In order to examine the second of these two possibilities, it is necessary to understand which parts of *Macbeth* were written by Shakespeare and which were adapted or inserted by Middleton—no easy feat, as my analysis of Gary Taylor's exhaustingly thorough work on Thomas Middleton in my previous chapter clearly demonstrates. For the purposes of *The Witch*, I will focus on the two scenes that the vast majority of scholars since the 1980s have agreed likely belong to Middleton: the 3.5 scene with Hecate and the Black Spirits song in 4.1 (Taylor 387). These are the musical numbers (and possibly choreography as well) that appear in *The Witch*, and that may have been added to *Macbeth* immediately after *The Witch*. Gary Taylor reasons,

> if *The Witch* was suppressed for political reasons, then the King's Men would have had an incentive—if they were going to make use of the songs from that play at all—to use them soon. The author would already have been paid for the script, a composer may have been paid for the music, the boy actors may already have learned the songs. Moreover, in November 1616 Middleton's *Civitatis* claims that the 'many thousand faces' of a crowd 'Look like a moving wood' (139); this image is not suggested by anything in the context, and looks like Middleton's reminiscences of a part

> of *Macbeth* which no one believes that he wrote. *Macbeth* seems to have been fresh in Middleton's mind in autumn 1616. The most likely date for the adaptation would thus seem to be the summer or autumn of 1616 (shortly after Shakespeare's death). (385)

Of course, this conclusion necessarily includes a significant amount of speculation, but it does stand to reason that it would be practical for the company to reuse songs in quick succession so that players would have less material to memorize, and it may also have been practical to stage these two witch plays close together to reuse props and costumes. If these two plays were in fact performed close together with some overlapping material, and if Middleton in part reused some of this material because *The Witch* was suppressed in some way,[4] I think it is possible that Middleton not only managed to salvage some of the material from *Witch* in *Macbeth* but also subtly preserved his subversive political message. Inga-Stina Ewbank writes that by adding to 3.5 and 4.1, "Middleton may well have seen himself as both underscoring Shakespeare's intentions in the play and adding his own stamp by local subversions of those intentions" (1166). Perhaps the restaging of *Macbeth* gave *Witch* a cloak of respectability to live on in partial form, extending Middleton's critique of the court.

The placement of Middleton's songs in *Macbeth* bears some similarity to how the songs function in *The Witch*, demonstrating that Middleton may have added them for interpretive as well as entertainment value. For example, the "come away" song appears in *Macbeth* immediately after the banquet scene in which Macbeth sees Banquo's ghost.

[4] This is a conjecture as there is no evidence that "ignorantly ill-fated" means that the play ran into trouble with a censor rather than simply being poorly received by audiences.

This structure of a court banquet followed by a sudden cut to the witch world (especially when such a move appears to have no plot relevance), mimics the structure of 1.1 and 1.2 of the *Witch*, where Middleton moves from the disorderly and grotesque court banquet of the Duke of Ravenna to the surprisingly orderly and cooperative witch banquet, subverting Jonson's masque and anti-masque from *Masque of Queens*. Adding a witch scene to *Macbeth* where there likely had not been one before has a similar effect to the opening scenes of *Witch*. Macbeth, attempting to unite his new court with a banquet, is immediately pulled away from his pretence of stability, first by the murderers who have come to report that Banquo is dead (3.4.8-31)[5], then by the appearance of Banquo's ghost (48-72), and lastly by Lady Macbeth's impassioned scolding (72-109) and Macbeth's supposed temporary madness (115-120), which end the banquet prematurely. Like in *The Witch* 1.1, this scene includes a banquet that demonstrates a court in chaos. In fact, Lady Macbeth even says, "you have displaced the mirth broke the good meeting / with most admired *disorder*" (3.5.108-9, emphasis mine), taking on the language of the antimasque. Of course, Shakespeare, while sensible that a royal banquet in chaos was a simple visual shorthand for a kingdom in chaos, would not have been thinking ahead to Jonson's masque, three years into the future. However, Middleton's imposition of the witch scene in 3.5 makes the banquet scene read like a subverted masque, which really resembles an antimasque, while the witches, which should be an antimasque, are orderly and harmonious as the main masque. In his adaptation of *Macbeth,* Middleton preserves his

[5] In this chapter, I will be using the version of *Macbeth* edited by Gary Taylor to show Middleton's possible adaptations. This copy is the most useful for work focused on *The Witch*, though I have reservations about many of Taylor's suggestions.

strategy of exposing court corruption by making witches the main masquers and transforming the court into the antimasque.

Unlike the introduction to the witches in *The Witch* 1.2, in which all of the witches perform Hecate's orders perfectly in her absence, Hecate enters *Macbeth* 3.5 scolding the other witches for "trad[ing] and traffic[ing] with Macbeth" (3.5.4) without consulting her first. Her speech shows a clear sense of enforced hierarchy which immediately contrasts with Macbeth's greeting to the Scottish nobles at the beginning of 3.4, in which he acknowledges their clear sense of their own places and even pretends to honour them with false humility: "you know your own degrees sit down at first and last / the hearty welcome…ourself will mingle with society / and play the humble host" (1-4). Conversely, Hecate enters 3.5 by putting the witches in their place, calling them "bedlams" (2) and "saucy and overbold" (3) and instructing that they "make amends now get you gone / and at the pit of Acheron / meet me i'th' morning thither he / will come to know his destiny" (14-17). However, though 3.5 begins in disunity, Hecate's domination quickly earns the cooperation of the other witches, and the scene moves quickly from disorder to order as the entire group performs a song and collaborative aerial choreography. While the court of Scotland moves from a pretence of order and hierarchy and devolves into chaos, the "court" of Hecate begins in disagreement and quickly moves to resolution. In Middleton's added scene, witches readily agree to "make up the count" (3.5.45), declare that "all goes still to our delight" (52), and fly high above danger where "no ring of bells to our ears sounds / no howls of wolves or yelps of house / no nor the noise of waters' breach / or cannon's throat our height can reach" (65-9). In stark contrast, in 3.4, Macbeth's court falls apart as he begins to unravel under the pressure of his own

guilt. If Middleton had wanted to echo his earlier comparison between court and coven from *The Witch* and subvert Jonson's masque once again, he could not have placed the song in 3.5 more perfectly.

As if to emphasize the point, Middleton's second addition of witch material in 4.1 follows 3.6, in which Lennox and another anonymous Scottish Lord begin to guess Macbeth's treachery: "the right valiant Banquo walked too late / whom you may say if't please you Fleance killed / for Fleance fled…how monstrous it was for Malcolm and for Donalbain / to kill their gracious father…" (5-10). Again, while the Scottish court begins to collapse under suspicion and corruption, the witches cheerfully work together, as Hecate praises them, "O well done I commend your pains / and everyone shall share i'th' gains" (4.1.39-40). In *The Witch*, the witches perform "Black Spirits" while they tend a cauldron meant to help the Duchess kill Almachildes—one of the casualties on her way to killing the Duke (5.2). In *Macbeth*, the witches perform "Black Spirits" as they prepare to meet with Macbeth, who, like the Duchess, has committed treason by planning to take the life of a ruler. Again, Middleton's additions allow for a reinterpretation of *Macbeth* as a series of subverted masques and antimasques, ultimately exposing the corruption in the court of another Scottish monarch.

While I remain unconvinced that all of Taylor's suggestions are necessarily additions from Middleton, as I explain in the previous chapter, (and as Taylor himself admits is far from conclusive), one short section of the revision he proposes is particularly compelling in light of the new angle the added witch scenes give to the 1616 performance of *Macbeth*. Taylor attributes all of 4.2, the scene with Lady Macduff and her son, to Shakespeare except for Macduff's son's most famous lines and his mother's

replies from 35-56. He explains, "The repetition of the same phrase by the same character, and the change from verse to prose, suggest that the intervening material has been added; stylistically the prose resembles Middleton" (1190). The most significant part of this observation for my purposes is Lady Macduff and her son's dialogue on traitors:

> SON what is a traitor
>
> WIFE why one that swears and lies
>
> SON and be all traitors that do so
>
> WIFE everyone that does so is a traitor and must be hanged
>
> SON and must they all be hanged that swear and lie
>
> WIFE every one
>
> SON who must hang them
>
> WIFE why the honest men
>
> SON then the liars and swearers are fools for there are liars and swearers enough to beat the honest men and hang up them (4.2.47-56)[6]

Taylor comments, "the added material seems to allude to the Overbury scandal of 1616 (with its perjury, hangings of some but not all of guilty, related accusations of treason, the issues of remarriage, and survival of a mother / wife after her husband had been condemned to death)" (1190). The idea that there are not enough honest men left to hang the traitors is certainly already thematically consistent with the rest of *Macbeth*. However, if Middleton did write these lines, they are particularly damning when applied

[6] This version of the scene comes from Gary Taylor's edition in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works* since I am discussing this scene as a possible Middleton addition. Taylor represents the lines without added punctuation in his edition.

to a court so corrupt that it seemed not to have enough honest men left to hang the traitors. Additionally, if the line belongs to Middleton, and if it is a barb directed at the Overbury trials as Gary Taylor suggests, I believe that Middleton's adaptation of *Macbeth* seems more concerned with extending *The Witch*'s critique of the Jacobean court than with rehabilitating *The Witch* itself.

Middleton's *The Witch*, therefore, does much more than only represent the Essex affair and the Overbury scandal. Instead, I argue that the play uses these events as a recent and recognizable topics in order to expose the corruption of an entire royal court. Deftly interacting with multiple influential witchcraft texts of its time, the play represents the established court as disorderly and rotten to the core while the contrasting witches are organized and collaborative. *The Witch* draws on and reinterprets other dramatic works once intended for court entertainment and flattery, at the same time shamelessly referencing a witchcraft skeptic that James I particularly disliked. I argue that, rather than critiquing one court scandal or a few deviant people, *The Witch* persistently satirizes, parodies, and inverts the entire establishment, and that the witches themselves, rather than acting as an entertaining sideshow to the main action, are fundamental to a holistic understanding of the play and absolutely deserving of the title.

CHAPTER 6: "THIS ROUGH MAGIC": ABSOLUTISM, WITCHCRAFT, AND THE ETHICS OF AUTHORITY IN *THE TEMPEST*

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, the final play that this dissertation examines, deals with the concept of corrupt authority, but in a much broader sense than either *Macbeth* or *The Witch*. *Macbeth* stages a ruler who breaks down the ideological binary between the witch and the godly ruler by denigrating the role of ruler through his tyranny and usurpation. Similarly, *The Witch* inverts the binary of Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, which was intended to glorify the royal court, by portraying the court of Ravenna as the antimasque and as more corrupt than the witch characters. In *The Tempest*, the breakdown or inversion of the binary between the godly ruler and the witch becomes broader, working to critique an entire theory of rulership rather than a single monarch or even an entire court. The magician Prospero, who rules over the island on which he landed during his exile, does not represent any one ruler; rather, his frequently-vacillating leadership style demonstrates the difficulties and failures of absolutism. The witch, Sycorax, though she never appears in the main action of the play, is an integral backdrop to *The Tempest*'s questions about rulership, succession, and legitimate forms of government. While Prospero attempts to recreate the binary of the witch and godly ruler, repeatedly working to construct his own right to rule the island against the witch Sycorax's supposed corruption, her history and magic use are so similar to Prospero's that she deconstructs his myth of legitimacy at the same time as he uses her to construct it. A closer look at their respective magic use also demonstrates that, according to the law and learned ideas of witchcraft in 1611, Prospero's diabolic magic is actually far more condemnable than what we know of Sycorax's primarily malefic practice. Sycorax's origins in Montaigne's

deeply skeptical and sympathetic essays about witch trials in Europe creates an even greater distance between Prospero and Sycorax, raising the question of whether or not he has the right or the evidence necessary to condemn her. Finally, by the end of the play, both Prospero's magic and absolutist rule crumble as he acknowledges his own responsibility, and Ferdinand and Miranda's wedding sets up the possibility for a different future of collaborative, contractual government as an alternative to absolutist rule.

6.1 FIRST PERFORMANCE AND SOURCE TEXTS

In order to consider *The Tempest*'s preoccupations with theories of rulership, it is important to establish probable dates, historical contexts, and source texts. The first known performance of *The Tempest* was, according to the *Revels Account*, on "Hollomas nyght," the first of November, 1611, "at Whitehall before the Kinges Maiestie" (qtd. in Demaray 4), though David Lindley argues that "It would have been unusual if the play had not already been performed publicly by the King's Men. The earliest date for its composition has usually been set as 1610" (2). Regardless of an exact first performance date, we can safely say that the play was written and performed no later than the end of 1611. The timing of the play is important to the parallels many scholars have noted between the events of the play and the wreck of Sir Thomas Gate's ship in the Bermudas in 1610 (2). Alden T. Vaughan notes, "Although Strachey's 'True Reportory' did not reach print until 1625 in Samuel Purchas's massive anthology, *Purchas His Pilgrimes*, the assumption has long persisted that somehow Shakespeare read Strachey's manuscript (or a copy) and that the play reveals its influence" (245). William Strachey's letter to an unknown lady spends five pages describing the violent storm that eventually wrecked the Sea-Adventure in the Bermudas, including the mysterious sighting of a "sea-fire" (1737),

that seems to match Ariel's declaration "Now on the beak, / Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin, / I flamed amazement. Sometime I'd divide and burn in many places; on the topmast, the yards and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly" (1.2.196-200). Strachey notes that this sighting of a sea fire was unusual enough that "The fuperfitious Sea-men make many conftructions of this Sea-fire" (1737), and feels the need to stress that it was a natural phenomenon, a fact which makes it seem likely that Ariel's description of fire in the storm he creates is inspired by this unusual and eerie detail in Strachey's account. Strachey continues to detail the wreck and the island where the crew landed:

> We found [the land] to be the dangerous and dreaded Ilands of the *Bermuda*…they be so terrible to all that euer touched on them, and such tempests, thunders, and other fearefull obiects are seene and heard about them, that they be called commonly, *The Deuils Ilands*, and are feared and auoyded of all sea trauellers aliue, aboue any other place in the world…it [is] counted of most, that they can be no hahitation for Men, but rather giuen ouer to Deuils and wicked Spirits. (1737)

Again, while Strachey is quick to debunk this superstition, *The Tempest* is peppered with references to devils from Ferdinand's famous declaration, mediated through Ariel, "Hell is empty, / And all the devils are here' (1.2.213-4) to Prospero calling Caliban, "A devil, a born devil" (4.1.187), suggesting that the play may have taken creative license from Strachey's account.

Most scholars agree that "there is 'little doubt' about the connections between *The Tempest* and the events of the 1609-1610 Sea-Adventure shipwreck en route for Virginia" (Sokol, *Brave New World*, 80), but the extent to which these echoes manifest in the play

as a critique, or, at least, recognition of the colonial practices that were beginning in the New World remains a matter of debate. According to Duke Pesta, "The tradition of viewing *The Tempest*…as [an example] of colonialism and Western exploitation has a long history outside the West, dating back to the nineteenth century. For over a hundred years, writers from the Caribbean, Africa, and central and South America have associated the play with the entire gamut of evils linked to Western colonialism" (127). However, in the late 1990s, "the revisionists call[ed] for a move to counteract some 'deeply ahistorical readings' of *The Tempest*, a play that [was then] seen to be…a cultural phenomenon that has its origin in and effect on 'historical' events, specifically in English colonialism" (Skura 60). David Kastan writes that,

> as long ago as 1927, E.E. Stoll emphatically denied that [*The Tempest*] had any relation to the New World at all. 'There is not a word in *The Tempest*,' he wrote, 'about America or Virginia, colonies or colonizing, Bermudas, once barely mentioned as faraway places, like Tokio or Mandalay.' And more recently Geoffrey Bullough stated bluntly: '*The Tempest* is not a play about colonization.' (94)

Kastan goes on to argue that "Stoll and Bullough are, of course, too absolute, but if the play has a relation to the New World colonial activity, it is not writ deep into its texture; the relation is allusive and elusive, existing primarily in the negations, like Ariel's or Trinculo's, that deny that the experience on the island is the experience of the Americas" (94). Kenneth Muir, while he recognizes the connection between *The Tempest* and Strachey's letter, believes that "the extent of the verbal echoes…has…been exaggerated" (qtd. in Sokol, *Brave New World*, 80). Meredith Anne Skura argues that a view that

focuses too narrowly on a colonial narrative in the play, "not only flattens the text into the mold of colonialist discourse and eliminates what is characteristically 'Shakespearean' in order to foreground what is 'colonist,' but it is also—paradoxically—in danger of taking the place further from the particular historical situation in England in 1611 even as it brings it close to what we mean by 'colonialism' today" (63). Kastan contends that the play is "much more obviously about European dynastic concerns than European colonial activities, but this has largely slipped from view—or at least from critical comment" (94), and B.J. Sokol argues that "*The Tempest* and its historical context offer no evidence of a limitation on thought that 'exiles the unthinkable' in order to sustain a belief in the impassivity of any transgression on the part of the colonial power'; on the contrary, claims of just such transgressions were hotly contested in Shakespeare's time" (*Brave New World*, 78-9).

Like Kastan and Sokol, I take a view in the middle, neither arguing that the play has few colonial influences, nor that colonialism is ingrained into its fabric. Rather, I argue that echoes of the New World in *The Tempest*, including references to the wreck of the Sea-Adventure in the Bermudas and the disaster of the Jamestown colony, are simply an integral part of its larger concerns with rulership, usurpation, and the rights and obligations of authority that also manifest in the play's representation of Prospero's "rough magic" and his predecessor, the witch Sycorax.

The date of *The Tempest* is not only important because of the play's likely connection to Strachey's letter, but also because of the European dynastic concerns of the time that Kastan alludes to (78-9). Kastan notes that Emperor Rudolf II has a similar story to Prospero, explaining, "In 1606 the Habsburg archdukes stripped administrative

control from the Emperor Rudolf II, conferring it upon his brother Matthias. In 1608 Rudolf was forced to surrender to his brother the crowns of Austria, Hungary, and Moravia, keeping only the imperial crown and the crown of Bohemia. In April of 1611, Rudolf was deposed from the throne of Bohemia as his brother was proclaimed emperor" (98). While the first known performance of *The Tempest* was in November 1611 before King James (although it is possible that there were earlier performances), the "second and the only other documented performance of the play in Shakespeare's lifetime was again before King James at Whitehall in 1613 in celebration of the marriage of the King's daughter, Princess Elizabeth, to Frederick Elector of Palatine" (Demaray 5), a wedding that was a strategic request from the deposed Emperor Rudolf to attempt to secure his reinstatement to the throne he had lost (Kastan 98). While the play was performed before the royal wedding, Demaray speculates that,

> Shakespeare could very possibly have composed *The Tempest* in late 1610 and in 1611, introducing visionary spectacles and a visionary betrothal masque in anticipation of a likely staging of the work in the Masquing House at a royal betrothal or wedding celebration. For some 12 months before the performance of the play at Whitehall on 1 November 1611, report circulated in the English court of the impending betrothal of the King's daughter Princess Elizabeth to a prospective ruler, most probably to the King's constant favourite, Protestant Frederick V of Palatine. (10-11)

The idea that Shakespeare may have prepared for the possibility of staging the play at Frederick and Elizabeth's wedding certainly fits well with the play's theme of strategic royal weddings, first with "the marriage of the king's fair daughter Claribel to the King of

Tunis" (2.1.66-7) which occurs just before the king and his company make their eventful voyage back to Naples, and later with Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage, which makes "Milan['s]…issue…become kings of Naples" (5.1.205-6). At the end of the play, Gonzalo exclaims, "O rejoice / Beyond a common joy, and set it down / With gold on lasting pillars: in one voyage / Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis, / And Ferdinand her brother found a wife / Where he himself was lost" (5.1.206-11). Shakespeare, then, may have written a play that celebrates marriages to secure alliances, kingdoms, and dukedoms in part for the wedding of King James I's daughter to a Protestant Elector at the request of an emperor who was losing his position to his younger brother and was seeking help from other European monarchs to be reinstated in his former position.

The similarities between Elizabeth and Frederick's wedding and the fictional royal weddings in *The Tempest* become even more obvious when one considers that Rudolf II "had brought about his own troubles by being irascible, indecisive, and increasingly unavailable" (Kastan 98). Like Prospero, Emperor Rudolf II had slowly withdrawn from his duties to his state, spending his time studying science and magic. The archdukes who worked to depose him, "justified the reassignment of authority to Matthias by commenting that '[h]is majesty is interested only in wizards, alkymists, Kabbalists, and the like, sparing no expense to find all kinds of treasure, learn secrets, and use scandalous ways of harming his enemies' and noting his 'whole library of magic books'" (98). Thus, while *The Tempest* almost certainly draws inspiration from the wreck of the Sea-Adventure and early reports of Jamestown, it seems equally influenced by the politics of succession and strategic royal marriage in the Old World as by the colonialism and conquest in the New. I argue that these two influences on the play, at home and

abroad, are not mutually exclusive or opposed to each other, but rather work together, fitting logically into the play's larger questions of the rights, obligations, and extent of authority.

The Tempest is, at its core, a play about authority. The driver of the play's main action is Prospero's desire to reclaim his dukedom. As previously mentioned, the play includes two strategic royal weddings, and the story contains no fewer than three attempts of usurpation. It is in this setting—of usurpation, strategic weddings, insecure European thrones, and new, disorderly settlements in the New World—that witchcraft forms an important part of the backstory. Sycorax, Caliban's dead and absent mother, though she never features in the main action of the play, is referenced multiple times by both Prospero and Caliban as an integral part of this troubled landscape of authority. Caliban famously fights for his right to the island by invoking his mother: "This island's mine by Sycorax my mother, / Which thou tak'st from me" (1.2.332-3). While Caliban uses Sycorax to construct his right to rule through succession, Prospero repeatedly references her black magic and tyranny to justify his own rule of the island. For example, he maintains control of Ariel by reminding the spirit of his misery under the island's previous ruler: "Thy groans / Did make wolves howl, and penetrate the breasts / Of ever-angry bears. It was a torment / To lay upon the damned, which Sycorax / Could not again undo. It was mine art, / When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape / The pine, and let thee out" (1.2.287-93). After Prospero recounts Sycorax's evils (and finishes by threatening Ariel), Ariel agrees to "be correspondent to command / And do [his] spiriting gently" (1.2.297-8). Sycorax, then, though she never appears, is integral to the play's central questions of succession and the right to rule.

6.2 THE ORIGINS OF SYCORAX

There are a variety of scholarly opinions on the origins of Shakespeare's witch character, Sycorax. For example, many have pointed out possible references to Greek mythology in her name (Warner 100). Since Michel de Montaigne's essay "Of Cannibals" has long been acknowledged as a source for the play, Stephen Orgel argues that the reference to Scythian soothsayers in this source text may be behind Sycorax's name, and Kenji Go agrees, "a number of verbal as well as conceptual parallels and analogues found between the narrative of *The Tempest* and that of Montaigne-Florio's 'Caniballes' seem to support Orgel's theory… that the name *Sycorax* was originally forged in Shakespeare's mind as a composite of Scythian and korax (raven)" (464). Marina Warner also picks up on the possible raven connection in Sycorax's name, but notices a classical element as well: "Behind Sycorax lie two of the most notorious witches of antiquity: Circe and Medea…Corax may be compounded in her name with Greek sus, for pig or hog: she is a 'swine-raven'…several references to pigs and piggishness scattered in the play stir resonances with…Circe, whose English name Sycorax echoes phonetically" (100-1). In contrast to the classical resonances that Warner notices, Barbara Mowat casts Sycorax as a deliberate contrast to what she views as Prospero's philosopher-magus practice: "The image…of [Prospero]…drawn throughout from the magus tradition, is sharpened by the contrasting image drawn in the same scene of Sycorax, the witch who copulated with the devil, who whelped Caliban, who worshipped the god Setebos, and whose sorceries were 'terrible to enter human hearing'" (197). Mowat seems to overlook the fact that these details about Sycorax are mediated through Prospero, Caliban, and Ariel, three biased

sources with much at stake, and that it is impossible to say how much of what they say about her is true within the world of the story.

Many scholars have also noted the obvious parallels between Prospero and Sycorax in the play: both are exiled from their respective homelands (1.2.144-51; 263-7), come to the island with a young child (1.2.152-4; 269), enlist the abilities of the local spirits (1.2.293-4; 271-3), and threaten Ariel with imprisonment in a tree (1.2.774-81; 294-6). Prospero uses Sycorax's cruelty of trapping Ariel "into a cloven pine" (1.2.267) for twelve years to justify his own rule over the spirit as a better master, but at the end of his opening conversation with Ariel he threatens, "If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak / And peg thee in his knotty entrails till / Thou hast howled away twelve winters" (1.2.294-6). Beyond speculating about the origins of Sycorax's name (in what I would argue are readings that are increasingly *too* close), finding her source material in classical texts and Montaigne's "Of Cannibals," and noting the similarities and differences between her backstory and Prospero's, scholars sometimes seem at a loss to know what to do with Sycorax—a dead witch from the past with unclear abilities, for whom no character's narrative can be trusted, exiled for an unknown offense yet allowed to remain alive for unclear reasons, and mother of a prominent character characterized as a monster, but whose actual paternity and appearance remain a matter of speculation. I argue that Sycorax is central to *The Tempest*'s concerns with rulership. Prospero uses this absent witch as an example of tyranny against which he can construct his own right to rule, portraying himself as the moral and preferable option. However, these frequent parallels between the two demonstrate that Prospero is not as diametrically opposed to Sycorax as he would like to make his subjects believe. Instead, he not only mirrors her story, but also

practices a kind of magic that was widely considered more dangerous than Sycorax's reported act of maleficia.

6.3 PROSPERO'S BENEVOLENT AND TYRANNICAL ABSOLUTISM

The Tempest is troubled with the problem of good rulership and saturated with the language of power. Every human connection in the play is hierarchical, and nearly every relationship involves conflict. For example, the play opens with a storm that is constructed as a conflict between the weather and the ship's passengers and crew (although the next scene reveals that this conflict was really with Prospero); the Boatswain literally speaks to the storm: "Blow till thou burst thy wind, if room enough!" (1.1.6-7), and tells Gonzalo, "You are a councillor; if you can command these elements to silence, and work a peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more—use your *authority*" (18-20, emphasis mine). The ship's crew and the king's company are also engaged in a power struggle, flinging insults at each other; the Boatswain asks the lords, "What do you here? Shall we give o'er and drown? Have you a mind to sink?" (33-4), challenging their authority in a situation in which their status no longer matters. Sebastian responds to the power struggle by insulting the Boatswain: "A pox o'your throat, you bawling, blasphemous, incharitable dog" (35), and Antonio similarly rages, "Hang, cur, hang, you whoreson, insolent noisemaker" (38). Scene two represents Prospero in a power struggle with everyone he speaks to: with Miranda in a disagreement over the storm (1.2.1-21), with Ariel over the spirit's expired contract (245-299), with Caliban over his forced servitude and claim to the island (322-374), and lastly with Ferdinand, who he accuses of being a spy (458-64). Prospero even constructs love in terms of power; as he watches Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love, he says in an aside, "They are both in

each other's powers" (1.2.449), which is nearly identical to his later line in response to controlling his enemies with magic: "they are now in my power" (3.3.90).

Although stranded on a sparsely populated island, Prospero is consumed with wielding his power effectively and ensuring the obedience of the "subjects" around him. The idea of Prospero needing to rule on the island or categorize island dwellers as subjects at all is already patently ridiculous—the only creatures who live on the island appear to be Prospero himself, his own daughter Miranda, Caliban, Ariel, and some other assorted spirits, who, though they are forced to do Prospero's bidding for his own selfish ends, do not seem in particular need of governance. Nevertheless, Prospero struggles to govern even his tiny island "kingdom," and his rulership style makes several major shifts throughout the play as he attempts to navigate how best to manage his few subjects.

Prospero's rulership reflects the arguments of Desiderius Erasmus's *The Education of a Christian Prince* (1516) and Niccolo Machiavelli's *The Prince* (1513) by turns. These may not be source texts for *The Tempest*, but I argue that both are integral to early modern theories of rulership, and offer a useful framework for understanding Prospero's vacillating rulership on the island. On the surface, these texts seem like extreme opposites. Machiavelli writes, "It is far better to be feared than loved if you cannot be both" (52), while Erasmus argues, "He who is feared by all must himself be in fear of many, and he whom the majority of people was dead cannot be safe" (36). Erasmus argues for loving rulership that demands extreme sacrifice from the ruler for the good of the people while Machiavelli argues for oppressing the people to secure the position of the ruler. In *The Tempest*, Prospero attempts both leadership methods by turns,

and both fail him. As Prospero is benevolent and tyrannical by turns, his few subjects are disobedient, resentful, or even usurping, regardless of which extreme he adopts.

Prospero's early leadership strategy mirrors Erasmus's model of love over fear. Erasmus says, "The tyrant strives to be feared, the king to be loved" (164). When Miranda asks her father why his enemies did not kill him when they usurped his dukedom, he responds, "Dear, they durst not, / So dear the love my people bore me; nor set /A mark so bloody on the business; but / With colours fairer painted their foul ends" (1.2.140-143). However great Prospero's sin of neglecting his state, it seems as though his subjects in Milan at least loved him. Of course, this narrative is not completely reliable at it is mediated through Prospero himself, but it is supported by the material proof that he and his daughter remain alive. However, while the love of the people may have saved Prospero's life, it failed spectacularly to secure his dukedom.

Erasmus, like many other political theorists, also conceives of the ruler as a father to the state, writing, "Do you want to know what distinguishes a real king from the actor? It is the spirit that is right for a prince: being like a father to the state" (17). When Prospero first arrives on the island, he seems to have still been operating by Erasmus's model of good rulership. He describes his relationship with Caliban as a father to his child, reminding Caliban, "I have used thee, / Filth as thou art, with humane care, and lodged thee / In mine own cell, till thou didst seek to violate / The honour of my child" (1.2.346-349). Caliban was initially living with Prospero and Miranda, like a member of a family—Prospero was literally acting as a father to his state. However, this model failed Prospero again as Caliban abused Prospero's kindness by trying to "violate / The honour of [his] child" (1.2.348-9). Erasmus further states that the education of the people as well

as the monarch is the key to an orderly state. He writes, "…the chief hope for the state is founded in the proper training of its children. Consequently, the utmost care must be taken over public and private schools… In this way it will come about that there is truly no need for many laws or penalties, because the citizens follow the right course of their own accord" (72). Erasmus argues that if citizens are properly educated, they will become self-regulating. However, this strategy of education also fails for Prospero. Miranda recalls that she spent time teaching Caliban, but not only does he repeatedly rebel against authority; he weaponizes his education against his ruler. He says, "You taught me language, and my profit on 't / is I know how to curse" (1.2.362-3). While education does allow Caliban to learn language, it does not turn him into an obedient, self-governing subject, but an autonomous subject who rises up against his ruler.

After the Erasmian model of government fails Prospero in the play's backstory, he turns to Machiavellian rulership in the main action of the play. Machiavelli writes particularly to princes taking over territories which are not their own, advising, "…anyone in a country which differs from his own…should endeavour to weaken those which are strong" (9). As soon as Caliban rebels, Prospero endeavours to weaken him by setting him to gruelling physical labour with harsh consequences if he does not immediately obey. Prospero's Machiavellian methods, however, are no more effective than the Erasmian ones. Caliban still attempts to overthrow him at the first available opportunity. Machiavelli also advises that, "…a wise prince must devise ways by which citizens are always and in all circumstances dependent on him and on his authority; and then they will always be faithful to him" (33). Prospero rules Ariel in this way, constantly using blackmail to remind Ariel that he is dependent on the ruler for his freedom, and

demanding, “Dost thou forget / From what a torment I did free thee?” (1.2.250-1). While Machiavelli believes in ruling by fear to quell uprisings as quickly as possible, Prospero’s tyranny is the cause of at least one usurpation attempt against him; Caliban proposes murder to Trinculo and Stephano, beseeching, “Wilt thou be pleased to hearken once again to the suit I made to thee?...I am a subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island” (3.2.33-8). While Caliban, Trinculo, and Stephano’s assassination attempt fails spectacularly, it does cause Prospero some distress (4.1.139-43), and it is motivated by his tyrannical rule.

At the end of the play, however, Prospero seems to be reconsidering his harsh, Machiavellian rulership and returning to his Erasmian style. Erasmus counsels, “if you choose to tolerate injuries rather than avenge them at great cost to the state, your empire is likely to be reduced to some extent. Put up with it, and consider that you have gained an enormous amount by bringing harm to fewer people than you otherwise would have done” (19). At the end of the play, rather than resorting to punishment with hard labour as he did at the beginning of his island rule, Prospero is lenient with all the usurpers. He tells Antonio, “For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother / Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive / Thy rankest fault—all of them” (5.1.130-2). When Ariel brings Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban to Prospero after their botched attempt on his life, Prospero sends them to his cell with the mild instruction, “As you look / To have my pardon, trim it handsomely” (5.1.290-1). The play never explains what consequences they face for their rebellion. The ending of the play, however, leaves lingering doubts about both of Prospero’s methods of rulership. Although Prospero pardons Antonio, Antonio does not seem to regret his actions, remaining silent after receiving mercy and expressing

no repentance or thanks. Both ruling as a father and ruling as a tyrant fail Prospero as he attempts to govern both Milan and his few island subjects.

While Erasmus and Machiavelli's models of government seem like extreme opposites, I argue that they are, in fact, two extremes on the same spectrum of absolutist rule and that Prospero's leadership fails not because he is either too harsh or too lenient with his state, but because he fails to enter into a contractual relationship with it. King James I wrote several treatises on government, including *The True Law of Free Monarchies*, in which he writes that the king is "a loving father and careful watchman, caring for [his subjects] more than for himself… the king becomes a natural father to all his lieges at his coronation" (56-57). While this excerpt sounds like James is endorsing Erasmus's model of government, he also writes, "…the king is overlord of the whole land, so is he master over every person that inhabiteth the same, having power over the life and death of every one of them" (71). Although James does not endorse tyranny, it is clear that he would rather have tyranny than rebellion. He uses the metaphor of a father and son to condemn rebellion under even the worst conditions:

> consider…what duty his children owe to him and whether upon any pretext whatsoever it will not be thought monstrous and unnatural to his sons to rise up against him, to control him at their appetite, and, when they think good, to slay him or to cut him off... Or can any pretence of wickedness or rigour on his part be a just excuse for his children to put hand unto him?...Yea, suppose the father were furiously following his sons with a drawn sword, is it lawful for them to turn and strike again or make any resistance but by flight? …we know that there are many sorts of

> beasts… that will beat and banish their young ones from them… but we never read or heard of any resistance on their part, except among the vipers. (74)

While James's own conception of rulership would seem to align him with Erasmus, his own writing admits that he knows how easily an absolute monarchy can become Machiavellian if a ruler is corrupt. He represents the worst tyranny in order to condemn rebellion even in extreme circumstances, but, in doing so, exposes the risk of absolutist government becoming tyrannical in the first place and the possibility that the people could use this tyranny to justify rebellion. His pre-empting this objection demonstrates that he knows it will become one.

Like King James I, Prospero repeatedly justifies his absolutism by invoking the threat of anarchy and reasoning that tyranny is a safer option. He rages to Ariel, "Dost thou forget / From what a torment I did free thee?...Hast thou forgot / The foul witch Sycorax, who with age and envy / Was grown into a hoop? Hast thou forgot her?" (1.2.250-1; 257-9). Prospero refers to Sycorax's tyranny to coerce Ariel into obedience—he reasons that Ariel should obey him because his rule is less oppressive than hers. King James writes of subjects as "vassals" (70) and "children" (73), the only kinds of subjects Prospero has on his tiny island monarchy. Prospero's "subjects" on the island include his own biological daughter, (creating a literal father/daughter relationship in the island state), Caliban, who has gone from being "lodged… / [i]n [Prospero's] own cell" (1.2.347-8) like a *son* to being an "abhorred slave" (1.2.352) and is forced to perform menial labour, and Ariel and the other spirits who are in a kind of contract with Prospero, but not one they have agreed to willingly and one he seems more than willing to break as

it serves his purposes. However, although King James uses the terms "vassals" and "children" to pre-empt and avoid rebellion, this absolutist model of government fails Prospero; whether he acts as a father or a tyrant, his "subjects" are in constant rebellion or disagreement with him. For example, though Miranda never violently rises up against her father, she constantly expresses opposition to him, begging him to calm the storm and spare the passengers on the ship (1.2.1-13) and speaking to Ferdinand against Prospero's direct order (3.1.37-8). Though one could argue that Miranda's resistance always conforms to Prospero's ultimate plan, since he always intends to spare the ship's passengers and arrange for her to marry Ferdinand, the fact that he reasons that "this swift business / I must uneasy make, lest too light winning / Make the prize light" (1.2.449-451) and proceeds to forbid the match knowing that Miranda will disobey him, suggests an unease with his daughter's willingness to submit to his authority. Ariel, as a vassal, obeys orders "[t]o every article" (1.2.195), but constantly reminds Prospero, "Thou did promise / To bate me a full year" (248-9) and Caliban explicitly curses Prospero at length and tries to organize an assassination attempt against him. Prospero's subjects are neither content nor obedient except when manipulated through magic or directly threatened.

6.4 DIABOLIC AND MALEFIC MAGIC IN *THE TEMPEST*

While Prospero uses Sycorax's rumoured corruption to justify his own rule of the island, the two characters, as many have noted, are almost parallels. Stephen Orgel notes,

> On the surface, Prospero and Sycorax are antitheses…but as the play progresses, the similarities between the two sorcerers grow increasingly marked…the rage, the demand for unwilling servitude, the continual threats of constriction and painful imprisonment are characteristic of both.

> And late in the play, the identification of the two in Shakespeare's mind becomes strikingly manifest (l qtd. in Warren 160).

I, like many others, agree with Orgel's point that while Prospero constructs himself as Sycorax's opposite, there are many clear parallels between the two magic workers. However, I push this argument further and suggest that though Prospero constructs Sycorax as far worse than himself, the kinds of magic the island rulers each practice demonstrate that Prospero is the more dangerous of the two. Orgel has pointed out that, "If Prospero in his moment of triumph speaks as Medea, then we have no grounds for making easy distinctions between white and black magic, angelic science and diabolical sorcery" (qtd. In Warren 160). I argue that, not only is Prospero's magic uncomfortably similar to that of the witch who he casts as an evil tyrant, it is in fact, according to Jacobean law and belief, much more serious than hers.

Mowat takes an in-depth look at all the different forms of magic worker that Prospero embodies, from the classical witch to the court magician to the Biblical wizard to the stage magician. While some of these distinctions are useful, she misses the fundamental distinction between Prospero and Sycorax, found in the witchcraft laws and trial practices of early modern Europe. As noted in other parts of this study, witchcraft historians have observed an important distinction between common and elite concerns about witchcraft practice, noting that accusations at the rural level are often concerned with crops, cattle, and love spells—or malefic witchcraft, but turn to concerns with prophecy, devil worship, and regicide—or diabolic witchcraft—under royal examination. In *Daemonologie*, King James I also makes a distinction between two kinds of witchcraft, writing, "There are principallie two sortes, where-vnto all the partes of that vnhappie arte

are redacted; whereof the one is called *Magie* or *Necromancie*, the other *Sorcerie* or *Witch-craft*" (5). King James is also careful to mention that, "Vpon custome, we see that diuerse Christian Princes and Magistrates seuere punishers of Witches, will not onelie ouer-see Magicians to lieu within their dominions; but euen some-times delight to see them prooue some of their practicques" (17). However, he argues that in "the Lawe of God…are all *Magicians*, Diuiners, Enchanters, Sorcerers, Witches, & whatsoeuer of that kinde that consultes with the Deuill, plainelie prohibited, and alike threatnd against" (20), marking magicians and witches as equally guilty according to scripture, and even going as far as to say that both witches and magicians alike "ought to be put to death according to the Law of God, the ciuill and imperial law, and the municipall law of all Christian nations" (53). Therefore, while some of James's contemporaries might have simultaneously condemned witches and entertained court magicians, King James not only argues that both are deserving of death, but suggests that magicians are more likely to practice diabolic magic, which he considered more dangerous and insidious than malefic magic. Even the 1604 Witchcraft Act, "An Act against conjuration witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits," illustrates the distinction between diabolic, or elite perceptions of witchcraft and malefic, or popular beliefs about witchcraft; it instituted the death penalty for necromancy, entertaining spirits, and killing or physically harming people, but was far more lenient on malefic witchcraft, imposing only a year in prison and a quarterly day in the pillory ("An Act against conjuration witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits" 57-58). Shakespeare's *The Tempest* includes both diabolic and malefic magic; while descriptions of Sycorax are limited to apolitical malefic magic, Prospero practices diabolic magic in an attempt to influence the political state. Prospero

constructs Sycorax as a "foul witch" (1.2.258), using her reported past malefic practice to justify his own claim to rule and attempting to absolve himself of guilt by blaming an absent witch whose testimony cannot be properly examined.

Though Sycorax is absent from the stage, and information about her is scarce, the magic mentioned in connection with her is malefic. For example, malefic witches were believed to be able to control the weather and create storms, thereby damaging crops and livelihood that common people depended on for survival (Macfarlane 192). Christina Hole writes, "it was…the witches who were most often blamed for bad weather and high winds and the consequences that followed them" (57). The idea of witches causing storms appears to have been a widespread popular notion; in 1592, a German visitor to England observed, "Many witches are found there…who frequently do much mischief by means of hail and tempests" (Greenblatt, *Will in the World*, 343-344). A witch's curse was also thought to bring disaster on ships. In a typical popular example of witchcraft revenge, a Dartmouth woman named Alice Trevisard was accused of cursing a sailor named William Thompson after he insulted her and struck her with his musket while drunk. Thompson's ship reportedly caught fire for no discernable reason and sank with nineteen casualties (Hole 58). In *The Tempest*, Sycorax, like these malefic witches, is (according to Prospero) able to create storms and control the weather. Prospero says, "[Caliban's] mother was a witch, and one so strong / That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs, / And deal in her command, without her power" (5.1.268-70). This reference to Sycorax raising storms, however, is never connected to a political agenda.

While raising storms is consistent with contemporary beliefs about malefic witches, King James and others who feared diabolism and attempts on the royal family

feared storms raised by witches because of their potential for regicide rather than mere destruction of crops. In *The Tempest*, both Prospero and Sycorax are capable of raising storms, but while the one mention of Sycorax and storms does not specify the purpose of their destructive power, Prospero's storm at the beginning of the play is for an overtly political purpose. Even before the play reveals Prospero as the mastermind behind the storm, the members of court and the crew aboard the ship are fixated not only on their own personal danger in the titular tempest, but particularly on the fact that the life of the king is in danger. The boatswain, experiencing the power of Prospero's storm, exclaims, "What cares these roarers for the name of king?" (1.1.15-16) to which Gonzalo responds, "Good, yet remember whom thou hast aboard" (1.1.17) clearly referring to the fact that Alonso's life is in danger. Later, Gonzalo again makes reference to the danger that the royal family are in: "The king and prince at prayers! Let's assist them, / For our case is as theirs" (1.1.46-7). Later, as the ship splits, Antonio declares, "Let's all sink wi'th'king" (1.1.54), constructing the loss of the monarch as worse than his own imminent demise. The next scene reveals that the storm that threatens the king's life is orchestrated by Prospero for political purposes. When Miranda inquires, "And now I pray you, sir— / For still 'tis beating in my mind—your reason / For raising this sea storm?" (1.2.175-7), Prospero answers, "bountiful Fortune, / …hath mine enemies / Brought to this shore" (1.2.178-80). Although Prospero is careful to ask, "But are they, Ariel, safe?" (1.2.216), he nevertheless raises the storm for the specifically political reason of restoring his dukedom, and in so doing at least seems to endanger the life of the king.

Though Mowat argues that Prospero's claims of being able to raise storms and raise the dead "lift us suddenly into a world quite antithetical to Hermetic magic, into a

world of Medeas, of Thessalian witches, of such 'old enchantresses'" (197), Prospero's storm for the purposes of capturing a royal ship returning from wedding festivities is reminiscent of King James's own experience in a dangerous tempest on his return to Scotland from Denmark with his bride. James later connected this threat to his life with the North Berwick witchcraft trials; the pamphlet "Newes from Scotland" details confessions from several witches of purposefully raising the storm by means of a christened cat and "the cheefest partes of a dead man" (B3r) to endanger the king and his new queen. The pamphlet records,

> …it is confessed, that the said christened Cat was the cause that the Kinges Maiesties Ship at his comming foorth of Denmarke, had a contrary winde to the rest of his Ships, then being in his companye, which thing was most strange and true, as the Kings Maiestie acknowlegeth, for when the rest of the Shippes had a faire and good winde, then was the winde contrarye and altogether against his Maiestie" (B3r).

Like King James, Alonso and his company are shipwrecked on their return voyage from "the marriage of the King's fair daughter Claribel to the King of Tunis" (2.1.65-6)—both royal parties are deliberately attacked by magical powers on their return journeys from royal wedding celebrations. Prospero's storm, unlike those of Sycorax, not only deliberately detains the king and his company for political reasons but echoes the experience of King James I and his own concerns about witchcraft.

In addition to raising storms in an effort to restore his dukedom, Prospero claims to practice the diabolic art of necromancy, which was of particular concern to King James. Demaray explains, "there remains about the Magus and his magic a moral

ambivalence. Prospero has performed virtuous works of reconciliation while admitting to the raising of tempests and the dead. These last actions would have been recognized as blasphemous deeds of black and necromantic magic in violation of God's natural law, deeds that certainly would have been condemned by King James and officials of his court" (128). Henry Paul explains, "There were two schools among the Protestant writers on necromancy. One held that the devil only took the form of a dead person, and the other held that the devil exhumed actual dead bodies, entered them, and spoke from dead lips. King James in his book supported the latter view" (287-288). In one of his final speeches, Prospero claims, "graves at my command / Have waked their sleepers, oped, and let 'em forth / By my so potent art" (5.1.48-50). Prospero confesses to having exhumed physical dead bodies from their graves, following King James's beliefs about necromancy. In Jacobean England, necromancy involved not only exhuming dead bodies, but prophecy by the dead. In *Daemonologie*, James writes, "this word *Necromancie* is a Greek word…which is to say, the Prophecie by the dead. This last name is given, to this black & vnlawfull science by the figure *Synedoche*, because it is a principal part of that art, to serue them selues with dead carcages in their diuinations" (6). He elaborates, "[the devil] will oblish himselfe, to enter in a dead bodie, and there out of to giue such answers, of the euent of battels, of maters concerning the estate of commonwelths, and such like other great questions…" (14). In his *Basilicon Doron*, King James I warns his son, "Consult therefore with no Necromancier nor false Prophet on the success of your wars" (qtd. in Paul 261). For King James, necromancy was not only the act of raising or exhuming dead bodies, but prophecy by the dead. While Prospero does not explicitly mention predicting

the future through dead bodies, a Jacobean understanding of exhuming dead bodies through magic would likely have assumed their use for prophecy.

By contrast, the play never associates Sycorax with necromancy or prophecy, an interesting omission given the possible origins of the character. Kenji Go notes the phonetic similarity between the name "Sycorax" and "Scythian" and argues that Montaigne's description of "the burning to death of Scythian soothsayers… may well have reminded Shakespeare… of the same cruel method used in the execution of European 'witches' at the time… Shakespeare was writing *The Tempest* amid the European witch hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when those accused of witchcraft were customarily burnt at the stake in Scotland and continental Europe" (466). The Scythian soothsayers that Montaigne references were punished for false prophecy, and Montaigne comments, "Those which manage matters subject to the conduct of mans sufficiencie, are excusable, although they shew the utmost of their skill. But those that gull and conicatch vs with the assurance of an extraordinarie facultie, & which is beyond our knowledge, ought to be double punished" (103). If Shakespeare takes inspiration for Sycorax from the Scythian soothsayers, it is interesting that she, by contrast, never performs any prophecy—a diabolic rather than a malefic act, and one that deeply concerned King James. Rather, it is Prospero who is associated with necromancy, and prophecy by extension. While Prospero practices diabolic magic, Sycorax seems limited to malefic magic, allegedly raising powerful yet not politically-motivated storms and causing Ariel limited bodily harm—she requires "help of her more potent ministers" (1.2.275) to imprison Ariel in a pine tree, and "it was a torment… which Sycorax / Could not again undo" (1.289-91). Prospero's diabolic magic, however, involves raising storms

against the king's ship for personal political reasons, (much like the storm King James encountered on his return voyage from Denmark), and practicing necromancy.

6.5 MICHEL DE MONTAIGNE AND SKEPTICISM

Not only does *The Tempest* construct Sycorax's malefic magic as less harmful than Prospero's politically-motivated diabolic magic, the play's possible references to Michel de Montaigne's essays demonstrate a skepticism about witchcraft accusations in general and suggest that fault often lies with the accusers for inability to consider their own actions. For centuries, scholars have accepted Montaigne's "Des Cannibales," translated by Florio, as a source for Gonzales's speech in *The Tempest* 2.1.140-165. As early as 1780, Edward Capell argued that this speech was the "only indisputable echo of Montaigne's in the plays of Shakespeare" (qtd. in Go 455). Edmond Malone later argued that Shakespeare likely used Florio's translation of Montaigne's essays, a view that most scholars now accept (Go 456). Eleanor Prosser has argued that Montaigne's essay "Of Crueltie" is a likely source for Prospero's speech in 5.1.25-28 (Paster 91). Gail Kern Paster points out, "if Shakespeare consulted two essays of Montaigne not particularly close to one another in the collection during his work on *The Tempest*, he may well have consulted others" (91). In several of Montaigne's essays, including "Of the Force of Imagination," "It is follie to referre Truth or Falshood to our sufficiency," "Of Cripples," and, of course, "Of Cannibals," he references witches and European witchcraft trials, and in every instance he demonstrates skepticism about witchcraft itself, expresses his reluctance to trust his own judgement in witchcraft cases, and suggests that those who make witchcraft accusations are blind to their own faults. In referencing Montaigne's

essays, *The Tempest* demonstrates Prospero's hypocrisy as a ruler as he projects his own faults onto an absent Sycorax and her son.

Since Sycorax is notably absent from the stage, and only exists in the play's backstory, narration about her is necessarily unreliable. Prospero's narration about her is particularly so, since Sycorax died during the twelve years that Ariel was trapped in a pine tree (1.2.275-81), years before Prospero even arrived on the island. When Prospero asks, "hast thou forgot…?" (1.2.258), the story he tells Ariel is likely a story Ariel told him in the first place—Prospero says to Ariel "As thou report'st thyself" (1.2.271)—and without any direct access to a version of the story from Ariel's mouth, it is impossible to say whether it is true. Not only does some of Prospero's narration come second hand, some of it was likely filtered through even more narrators. For example, Prospero says to Ariel, "This damned witch Sycorax, / For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible / To enter human hearing, from Algiers / Thou know'st was banished. For one thing she did / They would not take her life. Is this not true?" (1.2.263-7). Though Ariel responds, "Ay, sir" (1.2.268), there is simply no way to know how Ariel got this information and whether it is true since Ariel cannot have met Sycorax before her arrival on the island. Prospero later tells Alonso's company, "[Caliban's] mother was a witch, and one so strong / That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs, / And deal in her command without her power" (5.1.268-70). Again, it remains uncertain where Prospero got this information and whether it is accurate.

In addition to "Of Cannibals," several of Montaigne's other essays reference witches and witch trials and may also have acted as inspiration for the characterization and treatment of Sycorax. For example, scholars have long puzzled over the

characterization of Sycorax as a "blue-eyed hag" (1.2.269). Stephen Greenblatt et al., the editors of the Norton Shakespeare, suggest, "Blue eyelids were thought to be a sign of pregnancy" (3073), but Claire R. Waters points out, "Thomas Nashe associates bleared eyes with witchcraft, noting that the devil 'askest no better throne than a bleare eye to sey vp his state in.' Reginald Scot had made the link outright in his Discouerie of Witchcraft—'The most of such as are said to be witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, blear-eyed, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkes'" (604-605). In "Of the Force of Imagination," Montaigne also mentions eyes in connection with witches. While he does not refer to witches' eyes as blue in particular, he does reference their potential to cause harm:

> Antiquitie hath held, that certaine women of *Scithia*, being provoked and vexed against some men, had the power to kill them, only with their looke. The Tortoises and the Estriges hatch their egges with their looks only, a signe that they have some ejaculative virtue. And concerning witches they are said to have offensive and harme-working eies… tender Lambs I cannot see, But what bad eie, bewitched be. (44-45)

Not only does Montaigne again mention Scythians here, he also elaborates an ancient belief that witches' eyes were supposed to harm or even kill their enemies. Prospero's particular reference to Sycorax's eyes may simply be a way to connect her with great power, since Prospero soon after recalls her "most unmitigable rage" (1.2.276).

In addition to contributing to Sycorax's characterization, Montaigne's essays include an attitude of extreme skepticism toward witchcraft, which may find its way into *The Tempest*. For example, in "Of Cripples," Montaigne recalls travelling through the

territory of a prince who allowed him to see several prisoners accused of witchcraft. (582). He writes about the trial process and his own discomfort in accusing the woman, explaining, "yet am not easily carried away by preoccupation. In the end, and in my conscience, I should rather have appointed them Heleborum, than Hemlocke" (582). In other words, Montaigne explains that he would rather have medicated these old women than had them executed. He then quotes Virgil in Latin, a line that Florio translates to, "The matter seemed liker to minds captivate then guiltie" (582), attributing the case to madness rather than malignant magic. Throughout Montaigne's essays, references to witchcraft are met with skepticism and attributed to madness or imagination. For example, in "Of the Force of the Imagination," Montaigne uses witchcraft as an example of the potential of the human imagination to mislead, constructing witchcraft as only a product of the imagination. He provides two examples of unlikely sorcery: the case of Amasis king of Egypt nearly convicting his wife of sorcery because of his sudden and unexplainable impotence on his wedding night and the aforementioned ancient belief that some Scythian women were able to cause harm with their eyes. He lends no credence to Amasis's suspicions of his wife, rather attributing this suspicion to merely "fantasie" (42). Similarly, after outlining the ancient belief in the harmful properties of witches' eyes, Montaigne comments, "Magitians are but ill respondents for me" (45). In "It is follie to referre Truth or Falshood to our sufficiency," Montaigne not only attributes witchcraft to imagination, but says,

> I [was] sometimes wont to [disdaine and condemne that for false, which to us seemeth to beare no shew of likelihood or truth], and if I heard any body speake, either of ghosts walking of foretelling future things, of

> enchantments, of witchcrafts, or any other thing reported, which I could not well conceive, or that was beyond my reach… Dreames, magike terrors, witches, vncouth-wonders, / Night-walking sprites, Thessalian conjur'd-thunderers. I could not but feele a kinde of compassion to see the poore and seely people abused with such follies. (87-88)

Montaigne goes a step further, not only suggesting that witchcraft accusations are a figment of the imagination, but arguing that people should not trust themselves to make harsh judgements in matters they do not understand. He first decries his own tendency to dismiss the fantastical: "And now I perceive, that I was as much to be moaned myself: Not that experience hath since made me to dicerne any thing beyond my former opinions… but reason hath taught me, that so resolutely to condemne a thing for false, and impossible, is to assume unto himselfe the advantage, to have the bounds and limits of Gods will…tied to his sleeve" (87-88). Montaigne does not even trust his own judgement in such matters, reiterating in "Of Cripples," "When all is done, it is an over-valuing of ones conjectures, by them to cause a man to be burned alive" (582), framing legal decision on witchcraft cases as "conjecture."

Just as some of the inspiration for Sycorax may be derived from Montaigne's Scythian witches and harmless hag, Sycorax's son, Caliban, has characteristics similar to descriptions found in Montaigne's essays, reinforcing the theme of compassion over judgement and skepticism about Prospero's harsh judgements of both characters. In his comparison of Montaigne's "Of Cannibals" and *The Tempest*, Kenji Go writes, "It should be noted that, though the name *Caliban* has somethings been described as 'almost an anagram for "cannibal,"' the spelling *canibal* with a single n (just as the title of

Montaigne-Florio's essay, 'of the Caniballes') was apparently more common in Shakespeare's day than its current form *cannibal*" (468). However, while Caliban's name may be taken from "Of Cannibals," his characterization fits with another of Montaigne's essays: "Of a Monstrous Child" in which he writes about the experience of seeing a child fused to part of his conjoined twin. He writes of the "monstrous child," "Vnder his paps he was fastened and joyned to an other childe, but had no head, and who had the conduite of his body stopped, the rest whole. One of his armes was shorter then the other, and was by accident broken at their birth. They were joyned face to face, and as if a little childe would embrace another somewhat bigger" (409). This image of Montaigne's "monstrous child," with four arms and legs, is reminiscent of the comic scene in which a drunk Stephano discovers Trinculo and Caliban under Caliban's cloak and mistakes them for one monstrous man with multiple limbs. Upon discovering the "monster," Stephano exclaims, "I have not 'scaped drowning to be afeard now of your four legs (2.2.53-4), and, "This is some monster of the isle, with four legs, who hath got, as I take it, an ague" (2.2.59-60). Like the child Montaigne observes with the smaller conjoined twin, "as if a little childe would embrace another somewhat bigger" (409), Stephano even characterizes the "monster" as having "lesser legs" (2.2.89). Upon hearing Trinculo's voice, he says, "If thou beest Trinculo, come forth! I'll pull thee by the lesser legs. If any be Trinculo's legs, these are they" (2.2.88-9). Montaigne also describes the difficulty of feeding the child: "Hee would never take nourishment, but by his nurces breast; and what in my preference was offred to be put in his mouth, he chewed a little, and put it all out againe" (409). Similarly, Stephano has difficulty trying to ply the "monster" with alcohol. As Caliban cries out in his sleep, Stephano drunkenly reasons, "He shall taste of my bottle. If

he have never drunk wine afore, it will go near to remove his fit" (2.2.65-7). When Caliban appears to protest, Stephano insists, "Come on your ways. Open your mouth" (2.2.72), and again, "Open your mouth," (2.2.73), and yet a third time, "Open your chops again" (2.2.75). Though editors disagree on an accompanying stage direction, David Lindley includes *"[Caliban drinks and spits it out]* (2.2.74 s.d.). However, even without a stage direction for Caliban, this repetition from Stephano to Caliban to open his mouth, illustrates Stephano's difficulty feeding him, similar to the nurse's difficulty in feeding the child in Montaigne's essay. Stephano also refers to Caliban as a "moon-calf" (2.2.94), or "deformed creature, miscarriage, owing to the supposed detrimental influence of the moon" (Greenblatt et al. 3089), like Montaigne's poor infant. Additionally, just as Montaigne labels the child in his essay as "monstrous" in the title, Stephano and Trinculo continue to call Caliban "monster" for the rest of the play, even when the multiple limbs have been revealed as a joke. Trinculo, only recently mistaken as part of the monster, says of Caliban, "By this good light, this is a very shallow monster. I afeard of him? A very weak monster. The man i' th' moon? A most poor, credulous monster. Well drawn, monster, in good sooth." (2.2.122-4). Trinculo chimes in, "By this light, a most perfidious and drunken monster" (2.2.127). In fact, Stephano and Trinculo never learn Caliban's name, but go on to call him "monster" a total of forty-five times during the play.

While Caliban is only tied to witchcraft by virtue of the fact that Sycorax is his mother, his characterization as a monster from the pages of Montaigne serves a similar function to her identification as a witch. In the same way that Montaigne shows compassion towards victims of witchcraft accusations, he says of "monstrous" children, "Those which we call monsters are not so with God, who in the immensitie of his worke

seeth the infinitie of formes therein contained…From out his all-seeing wisdom proceedeth nothing but good, common, regular and orderly; but we neither see the sorting, nor conceive the relation" (409). In the same way that Montaigne refuses to condemn witches, he refuses to be repulsed by the child with the conjoined twin, acknowledging that all people are created by God and thus have value, and treating all social outliers with a degree of compassion. Caliban's characterization as a monstrous child from the pages of Montaigne reinforces Montaigne's message of compassion and empathy, which he also extends to condemned witches.

Montaigne's report of a "monstrous" child with the limbs of a conjoined twin, niche as it may seem, is part of a larger genre, particularly in England in the form of broadsheet ballads, that took morbid interest in children born with deformities. The language used to describe these children is also similar to the insults and descriptors that Stephano and Trinculo use when interacting with Caliban. While the term "monster" was surely applied to many early modern ideas or phenomena, David Cressy explains, "Malformed babies, defective tissues, irregularly shaped children, and incompletely separated twins, which might nowadays be regarded as genetic mistakes, chromosomal aberrations, or perhaps the consequence of chemical or radioactive contamination, invariably prompted sixteenth-century Europeans to think of 'monsters'" (29). Broadsheets "recounted the physical form of the newborn creature, and described in detail its monstrous features—missing or misshapen limbs, webs of skin or folds of flesh, dicephalic or horribly conjoined twins" (35). Many of these descriptors sound similar to Caliban, and several contemporary pamphlets represent details that characters in the play seem to echo. For example, a 1566 pamphlet entitled *The True Description of Two*

Monstrous Children represents conjoined twins, joined chest to chest, similar to Montaigne's monstrous child and Stephano's mistaken description of Trinculo and Caliban beneath the cloak. Another pamphlet from 1566 is entitled *The discription of a rare or rather most monstrous fishe taken on the East coste of Holland*, calling to mind Antonio's line about Caliban: "One of them / Is a plain fish, and no doubt marketable" (5.1.265). Just as Montaigne makes meaning from the monstrous child he sees, concluding that "Those which we call monsters are not so with God" (399), Cressy argues that readers of early modern broadsheets detailing monstrous births "expected to find moral, religious, or political meaning in aberrations of nature, and would have been disappointed by accounts that failed to draw lessons…Monstrous births might mean many things, but they could not be allowed to mean nothing" (35, 36).

Cressy goes on to explain several different meanings that these monstrous births could take on. Though these incidents were interpreted in a variety of ways, many of these ways can be applied to Caliban and how he is treated by those he comes into contact with. Cressy writes that monstrous children

> could be seen as freaks of nature or as manifestations of divine power; they could be interpreted as judgements and punishments against individual sinners, usually the parents, or as generalized warnings to the community at large; they would be seen as portents or prognostications, looking forward to some earthly catastrophe, or as precursors of the latter days, foresignals of the end of the world. And finally, for people who were moved by none of these explanations, the monster babes provided

opportunities for freak-show entertainment, occasions of idle amusement. (36-7)

While Prospero more than once refers to Caliban as the son of the devil, claiming that he was "got by the devil himself / Upon [his] wicked dam" (1.2.320-1) and describing him as "A devil, a born devil, on who nature / Nurture can never stick" (4.1.188-9), and although contemporary witchcraft belief held that witches could copulate with the devil, possible influences for Caliban in broadsheet reports of monstrous births cast doubt on Prospero's accusations. Unlike Prospero's repeated characterization of Caliban as the son of the devil, early modern pamphlet readers were more likely to have attributed a monstrous birth to the providence of God. Cressy notes, "It is remarkable that none of these publications attributed monstrous births to Satanic power or treated them as manifestations of witchcraft. Despite the ever-lurking abundance of *maleficium*, their origin lay with God, not the devil. This may explain why the babies themselves, the actual monsters, were more often viewed with compassion than with loathing" (44). Again, as in the possible source from Montaigne, "monstrous children" like Caliban would likely have been treated with sympathy rather than condemnation. More importantly, Prospero traces Caliban's origins to Sycorax's supposed copulation with the devil (1.2.320-1), an act which would have been evidence of the demonic pact. However, an early modern understanding of children like the one Montaigne describes associates them with the power of God, and not with the devil. Caliban, Sycorax's "monstrous" son, only reinforces the play's skepticism of Prospero's accusations of Sycorax.

While monstrous children themselves seem to have been treated with a degree of compassion, their births "could be interpreted as judgements and punishments against

individual sinners, usually the parents, or as generalized warnings to the community at large" (36-7). If Caliban as monstrous birth is to be interpreted as a judgement upon his wicked mother Sycorax, the parallels between Sycorax and Prospero become especially apparent by the end of the play when Prospero admits, "This thing of darkness, I / Acknowledge mine" (5.1.274-5), uncomfortably aligning himself with Caliban's supposed demonic father, who he alludes to only seconds earlier as he calls Caliban a "demi-devil" (271).

6.6 CONTRACTUAL GOVERNMENT

While Prospero attempts to establish the absent Sycorax and, by extension, her son, as a binary opposite to his own rule on the island, *The Tempest* deconstructs this binary by demonstrating that Prospero's magic is more dangerous than Sycorax's alleged magic and even uses source texts which reference skepticism about witchcraft. Though Prospero tries ruling on both ends of the absolutist spectrum, using love and fear by turns to rule his few island subjects, every form of government ultimately fails him. However, while this play demonstrates the failure of absolutist government, blaming that failure on the ruler rather than disenfranchised subjects scapegoated by the ruler, the play does not end without hope for a better future. *The Tempest* presents two alternatives to anarchy. The first is Gonzalo's dream of a utopia that is the exact opposite of absolutism—a "kingdom," (ironically enough), where hierarchy no longer exists. He pontificates,

> I'th'commonwealth I would by contraries
> Execute all things. For no kind of traffic
> Would I admit; no name of magistrate;
> Letters should not be known; riches, poverty,

And use of service, none; contract, succession,

Bourn, bound of land, tilth, vineyard, none;

No use of metal, corn, or wine, or oil;

No occupation, all men idle, all;

And women too, but innocent and pure;

No sovereignty— (2.1.144-153)

Sebastian facetiously remarks, "Yet he would be king on't" (2.1.153), pointing out the impossibility of a world free from some kind of government. The irony of Gonzalo's speech is, of course, that while he says there would be no magistrates, contracts, or succession, the entire speech is about that he would execute and what he would admit. Sebastian and Antonio, though they are so invested in the hierarchy of the state that they are attempting to seize higher positions on that hierarchy through unlawful means, nevertheless speak truth when they point out that there would be "No marrying 'mong his subjects…all idle; whores and knaves" (2.1.162-3). A kingdom without hierarchy results in the opposite of tyranny—anarchy. Anarchy is the first alternative to absolutism that the play presents, but this option is never taken seriously by any character other than, perhaps, Gonzalo. However, Sebastian and Antonio's allusion to marriage as they mock Gonzalo's vision of utopia presents the second alternative in the play: contractual government. This second alternative is more fully worked out through the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. While this marriage is undoubtedly strategic and even calls to mind the strategic marriage of Frederick and Elizabeth, it is also a consensual agreement in which both parties have duties and obligations to one another. It also presents the

opposite of Prospero's tactic of scapegoating Sycorax in order to justify his own rule—in marriage, ruler and subject operate through collaboration rather than opposition.

Prior to Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage, the play provides no examples of married couples on the island, or even a mother figure. Sycorax is dead and Miranda's mother is mentioned, but absent. All the characters on the island are either vassals or children under Prospero's rule. While some political writers including Erasmus and James I used the metaphor of fathers and children to describe the relationship between the state and ruler, some early modern political theorists instead used the metaphor of husband and wife to portray this relationship because this metaphor provided much more room for resistance. Constance Jordan explains that,

> early modern political patriarchalism tended to focus only on the monarch's paternal role; his marital duties were elided for strategic reasons…If…the commonwealth was analogically the king's wife…if she, as contemporary marriage doctrine allowed, understood that her duty to obey did not forbid her to counsel her husband in light of a conscientious regard for divine law above any other, then the monarch's position as husband was inherently less absolute than his position as father. He was likely to encounter the most imposing challenges to his will precisely by filling the office of 'husband.' (308-309)

Although early modern readers would have understood that the role of the wife was to submit to her husband, there was still room in this relationship for the wife to call her husband to account if necessary—a right that children did not have.

At the end of the play, Ferdinand and Miranda, newly married, play a game of chess, a game that requires a king and a queen and two players. John Kunat writes that "…the figure of sovereign authority is the weakest piece of the board, barely capable of movement and completely dependent upon the queen for protection… the citadel is a male, utterly reliant not on his own impregnable defenses, but on the assistance of weaker subjects" (314). This chess game demonstrates that the king is dependent on the good will of his subjects and illustrates the need for him to work in cooperation with them.

For the majority of the play, Prospero tries desperately to maintain paternal authority over his subjects, ruling them either by love or fear as a situation demands; however, I argue that Prospero's abjuration of magic at the end of the play points to a hopeful future in a new form of contractual government. Prospero's "rough magic" represents his absolutist rule—his coercive magical power is often his only means of manipulating his subjects into following his wishes, often against their own wills. While he wields his magic, Prospero rules by force and not by mutual contract. In fact, his subjects frequently express unwillingness to conform to his will, and he uses his power to force them into submission. For example, Ariel asks repeatedly to be set free, a request which Prospero denies over and over—even after he promises to release the spirit. In the first scene in which Ariel appears, he reminds Prospero of an earlier promise, stating, "Let me remember thee what thou hast promised, / Which is not yet performed me…my liberty" (1.2.243-5). In response, Prospero threatens Ariel with his magic to manipulate the spirit into submission (294-6). Though Prospero promises, "after two days / I will discharge thee," (299), he once again struggles to keep his word at the end of the play and continues to request tasks from Ariel, even after his contract should have expired. In 5.1,

as Prospero works to conclude the play's several plots, he draws out releasing Ariel, promising the spirit freedom, but then requiring tasks from him several more times. He tells Ariel to help attire him, promising, "Thou shalt ere long be free" (87). A moment later, however, he gives Ariel another task, all the while promising the freedom he is delaying; he says, "I shall miss thee, / But yet thou shalt have thy freedom" (95-6), but then tells the spirit to go and get the king's ship (96-101). When Ariel returns from this task, he turns to Prospero and says, "Was't well done?" (240), and Prospero replies, "Bravely, my diligence. Thou shalt be free" (241). However, Prospero does not free Ariel with this line. Instead, in Prospero's last lines prior to the epilogue, he gives Ariel another task; promising Alonso and his party fair sailing weather, he turns to Ariel and says, "My Ariel, chick, / This is thy charge. Then to the elements / Be free, and fare thou well" (314-6). Until the end of the play, Prospero struggles to abjure his magic—his absolutist rule—and cooperate with his subjects rather than control them.

Cosmo Corfield outlines several scholarly interpretations of the word "rough" in the speech in which Prospero promises to abjure his magic: "For critics like Anthony Harris, Shakespeare's borrowings from Medea's incantation in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (the accepted source of the 'Ye elves' speech, lines 33-50) selectively stress the 'dark side of Prospero's art.' Harris thus [argues that] 'rough'…either indicates Prospero's self-dissatisfaction or a moral dubiousness" (32). I argue, however, that Prospero's magic is rough because it is the way in which he upholds absolutist rule—he can only lead by brute power and not with the will and cooperation of the people. He needs his "rough magic" for absolutism to function on the island. However, the play demonstrates that Prospero's rough magic is unsustainable and will never produce willing subjects, whether

he is benevolent or tyrannical. In Prospero's speech as he prepares to abjure his magic, he lists the many things he has been able to forcibly control through it. When he addresses the elves, he calls them "demi-puppets" (5.1.36), referencing the absolutist power he holds over them through his magic. He also claims to have been able to control "the noontide sun" (42), the "mutinous winds" (42), and made the dead walk (49-50). Prospero's magic is symbolic of his absolutist rule. Through it he manipulates his subjects to his will, but through it he also lost his Dukedom.

Like Middleton's *The Witch*, *The Tempest* uses the opposition of a masque and antimasque to critique a system of government. In 4.1, Prospero provides "[s]ome vanity of [his] art" (41) to celebrate Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage. This entertainment certainly resembles a main masque, with spirits entering dressed as the goddesses Iris, Ceres, and Juno. These three characters work in perfect harmony, referencing their cheerful obedience to a hierarchical system; Ceres greets Iris with, "Hail, many-coloured messenger, that ne'er / Dost disobey the wife of Jupiter" (76-7), and later refers to the marriage as "A *contract* of true love" (84, emphasis mine). While these three goddesses seem reminiscent of a main masque, like the queens in Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, Prospero's entertainment lacks an antimasque. The play, however, provides an antimasque in Prospero's own controlling behaviour and theatrical manipulation in the previous scene. In 4.1, Prospero and Ariel approach three other royal figures who represent the binary opposite of the obedient and virtuous goddesses in the marriage celebration: "three men of sin… That hath to instrument this lower world, / And what is in't" (3.3.53-5). Not only do Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio represent the binary opposites of Juno, Ceres, and Iris, who feature in the following scene, the way that

Prospero chooses to deal with them represents an opposing form of government to the contractual one established through the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. Prospero controls them through Ariel. The wedding masque, however, presents the virtuous contrast to the "three men of sin," and hope for the future of a contractual government.

However, even at this late stage in the play, Prospero struggles to abjure his magic and make the transition to contractual rule. Prospero puts an end to the masque early, crying out, "Avoid; no more!" (4.1.142) when he remembers "that foul conspiracy / Of the beast Caliban and his confederates / Against [his] life" (139-41). Having become accustomed to control rebellious subjects through force, Prospero is not yet ready to abjure his magic, and instead sends for Ariel (163) to help him neutralize the threat. Although Prospero wants to abjure his magic and turn to a system of contractual governance, this kind of rulership requires trust from his subjects—trust he cannot yet have. As a result, Prospero turns again and again to absolutist rule, delaying his abjuration until the end of the play.

In *The Tempest*, Prospero uses the threat of tyranny, represented by the witch, Sycorax, to justify his absolutist rule. However, while Prospero needs the threat of a power worse than himself against which to construct the necessity of his rule, a close examination of Prospero and Sycorax's magic demonstrates that, by early modern standards, his magic is much more dangerous and damaging to the state than hers. Not only does *The Tempest* hint that Prospero's power is more dangerous than Sycorax's, it also demonstrates skepticism about witchcraft in general by taking inspiration from Montaigne. Shakespeare's representation of witchcraft in *The Tempest* highlights Prospero's dangerous rulership rather than critiquing the persecuted figure of the witch.

Prospero's abjuration of his "rough magic" at the end of the play also gestures to the possibility of a new contractual government between ruler and subject, a system in which magical manipulation will no longer be necessary as ruler and subject become cooperative rather than opposed.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION: THE KING, THE WITCH, AND THE AUDIENCE

Many scholars have found it impossible to separate Jacobean witchcraft plays from the influence of James I. His involvement in multiple witch trials, both in England and Scotland, and the popularity of his demonological text make it difficult to interpret these plays without falling under the shadow of his royal opinion. Diane Purkiss explains, "Since James is actually alluded to in *Macbeth* in the scene where the witches display Banquo's heirs, conventional wisdom sees the witches as a compliment to him" (*History* 206). However, while James's own interests certainly seem to have contributed to the Jacobean trend of witchcraft dramas, considering these plays primarily as flattery to the king's interests is reductive. Rather than using the subject of witchcraft to bolster the king's ego or reinforce his right to rule, these plays instead subversively use witch characters to break down the binary between the godly community and the witch, or the ruler and the witch, in order to critique Jacobean structures of power in both the court and community, as well as to dismantle dominant theories of rulership.

Although interpretations of witchcraft plays have become more nuanced since Henry Paul's early reading, many analyses of witchcraft plays still assume that the witches centre on James, even if they complicate the idea that the witches are only a compliment to his personal interests. For example, in his 1997 introduction to *Macbeth*, Stephen Greenbatt explains, "On May 19, 1603…Shakespeare's company, the Chamberlain's Men, was formally declared to be the King's Men. The players had every reason to be grateful to their royal master for this lucrative distinction and to be attentive to his pleasure and interest. It has long been argued that one of the most striking signs of their gratitude is *Macbeth*" (1005). While Greenblatt admits that "Shakespeare's Scottish

play is far too complex about the nature of power—and far too frightening—to have served as a simple piece of flattery" (1005), he still argues that the King's Men would have relied on its potential to flatter in order to further their own interests and please their new patron. Scholars have considered witchcraft plays as monarchist flattery with varying degrees of complexity, but these interpretations—no matter how nuanced—still privilege James as the recipient of some kind of compliment by virtue of his interest in the subject of witchcraft.

While several early modern plays may have enjoyed first performances before royalty (scholars believe this was the case for both *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*), these plays were also performed before a diverse audience of English subjects. Andrew Gurr examines the wide range of audiences that might have attended Shakespeare's plays and points out that that spectators at the Globe would have ranged from Lords and Dukes to "chimney boys and apple wives" (79). He explains that "Almost all of [the] distinct classes in the middle stratum can be found amongst Shakespearean playgoers. Their composition broadly defines the composition of a majority in the London playhouse audiences, though the complete social range goes all the way from earls and even a queen to penniless rogues…and the unemployed" (49). Although the Jacobean witchcraft trend certainly had something to do with the King's interests, this diverse audience deserves consideration. Diane Purkiss argues that "[b]ecause [*Macbeth*] lacks any interpretive figure who can make sense of events, correct interpretation of the witches in *Macbeth* lies outside the play itself, privileging the spectators in general and one (royal) spectator in particular" (*History* 207). These "spectators in general" have been overlooked by much scholarship on Jacobean witchcraft plays. These plays allow the "spectators in general" to

act as judges, both of the witchcraft material that the plays present and of the corrupt systems of power that they display. Rather than staging witches for the reigning monarch to interpret and judge, these plays are staged before a diverse audience that acts as a jury and to judge these corrupt communities, rulers, and systems of power.

Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's play, *The Witch of Edmonton*, restages the events of a contemporary trial and appoints the audience as members of the jury. The playwrights invert Goodcole's simplistic narrative of the binary of the godly community vs. the witch, first by populating the fictional Edmonton with corrupt and abusive people and secondly by introducing broader skepticism about witchcraft accusations. In his pamphlet account of Elizabeth Sawyer's trial, Goodcole sets up Sawyer in opposition to the godly society. He also includes himself and his readers as part of the community that forms her opposite, starting his work with an "Apologie to the Christian Readers" (302) and ending with a moralistic application for his readers to be as different from Sawyer as possible (315). He even describes Sawyer's physical form as marked by the devil and therefore distinct from her neighbours. He explains that the devil left her with "publike and private markes on her body as followeth. 1. Her face was most pale & ghoast-like without any bloud at all, and her countenance was still dejected to the ground. 2. Her body was crooked and deformed, even bending together, which so happened but a little before her apprehension. 3. That tongue which by cursing, swearing, blaspheming and imprecating…" (304). According to Goodcole, Sawyer is so distinct from the people around her that she carries the marks of the demonic pact on her body.

However, while Goodcole attempts to establish a clear divide between the godly community and the servant of the devil, representing her as debased, deformed, and

separate from the community, he struggles to make the division absolute. He ends his pamphlet with a warning to his Christian readers, urging them to "lay this to heart, namely the cause…that the Divell came unto her, then, even then when she was cursing, swearing, and blaspheming. The Divell rageth, and mallice reigneth in the hearts of many. O let it not doe so" (315). Even as he addresses his Christian readership and sets them apart from Sawyer in his closing remarks, Goodcole still acknowledges that the line between them and the servants of the devil is not absolute, and that they may be drawn into the same wickedness as Sawyer if they do not "stand on [their] guard and watch with sobriety to resist him, the Divell" (315). The division between the two is so crucial because this potential exists.

Rowley, Dekker, and Ford, however, not only acknowledge the potential for others to be drawn into the Devil's influence, but also portray the community of Edmonton as already aligned with the Devil, even as they persecute an initially innocent neighbour. Rather than warning the community to stand guard against the devil's influence, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford present the Edmontonians as already living in harmony with Dog, conversing with him (3.1.115-1172), accepting his whispered suggestions (3.3.1-40), and dancing the Morris while he plays the fiddle (3.4.60 s.d.). Not only do the playwrights demonstrate that the people of Edmonton have already submitted to Dog's influence and are not as opposed to the devil as they would like to believe, the playwrights even associate the Edmontonians directly with the devil by using the term "cur" to describe them multiple times (2.1.130-133, 4.1.92, 4.1.178) and describing the social sins they commit as "devils" (1.1.18-20). In *The Witch of Edmonton*, rather than acting as a binary opposition to the devil, the community is so integrated with the devil in

their daily lives that his influence is barely distinguishable from their own wicked decisions and even the terminology used to describe him is indistinguishable from their own identifying descriptions.

Rowley, Dekker, and Ford also trouble the binary of the witch vs. the godly community by introducing skepticism about witchcraft accusations, something which Goodcole cannot afford in his didactic pamphlet. In his opening apology, Goodcole addresses the possible skepticism of some of his readers, stating, "[I] would have beene content to have concealed [Sawyer's story], knowing the diversitie of opinions concerning things of this nature, and that not among the ignorant, but among some of the learned. For my part I meddle here with noting but matter of fact…it is none of my intent here to discusse, or dispute of Witches or Witchcraft" (302). This passage demonstrates Goodcole's awareness of a variety of opinions on the subject of witchcraft, even among a popular readership, that would have existed in England in 1621, and his need to defend his pamphlet against them, establishing his own account as a "matter of fact" (302). *The Witch of Edmonton*, by contrast, initially represents Sawyer as not yet a witch, and even ignorant of how to become one (2.1.35-38). The accusations of witchcraft that Sawyer faces from Old Banks, the Morris dancers, and Cuddy Banks near the beginning of the play (2.1.2.1.17, 19-20, 100, 105-6, 108-113) are all demonstrably false since Dog does not enter to make a pact with her until after multiple people have already accused her of being a witch (2.1.135 s.d.). While the play certainly represents this pact with Dog as real (2.1.2.1.136-165), the fact that it also portrays an entire community referring to Sawyer as a witch before this pact ever takes place demonstrates an awareness that accusations of witchcraft could easily be false.

As Brian Levack has established, conviction rates for crimes of witchcraft began to drop because ordinary people began to realize that people were being condemned and executed for crimes they had not really committed ("Decline" 379). As ordinary jury members were tasked with weighing evidence to come to a judicial decision, the role of individual conscience became essential (Hutson 45), a fact that some have attributed to low conviction rates in England (Gaskill "Witchcraft and Evidence" 40-1). In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the community of Edmonton at first falsely condemns Sawyer of being a witch, treating her so badly because of this false accusation, that she finally learns to become one (2.1.8-10). The play restages the details of Goodcole's "matter of fact" (302) account (embellishing some elements and downplaying others), to allow the audience to act as a jury based on the information in front of them. Having broken down the binary between the godly community and the witch by representing the depravity of the community along with Sawyer's initial innocence, the playwrights invite the jury to employ their consciences and make their own judgements. While Goodcole's ending warns the readers to guard against the attacks of the devil, the last line of the play, prior to the epilogue that was likely added in the 1630s (Munro 260), warns against making decisions that cannot be undone or atoned for. After several of the characters forgive Frank before his execution (5.2.111-162), the Justice finishes the play by saying, "Join, friends, in sorrow, make of all the best. / Harms past may be lamented, not redressed" (191-192). While the context suggests that the Justice is talking about Frank's past harm of murdering Susan, which can never be put right, this statement is also reminiscent of the harms the community has committed against Mother Sawyer, which they have no opportunity to put right, and, more broadly, the potential for false judgements which can

never be redressed. While Goodcole's ending reinforces the separation between the community and the witch by urging the community to guard against the devil's influence, the play's ending undermines that separation by reminding the audience of the harms that led to Sawyer's downfall in the first place, and of the impossibility of ever redressing an unfair judgement to a false accusation.

In Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, rather than accusing an innocent woman of being a witch until she becomes one, the merry wives use the costume of a woman who, like Sawyer, has been accused of being a witch, to punish Falstaff outside the confines of the law. Like *The Witch of Edmonton*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* breaks down the binary of the godly community vs. the witch. It does this first by showcasing Falstaff's unruly behaviour and the failures of the community leadership to contain him, and thus representing the community as already infiltrated by corruption with they cannot expel or, at times, even recognize. The play often makes an association between Falstaff and witchcraft or Falstaff and the devil to demonstrate that he represents the corruption that is infiltrating the community of Windsor. Secondly, the play demonstrates that Ford's prejudice against a local woman whom he suspects to be a witch is unfounded and absurd, instead marking Falstaff, and, to a certain extent, Ford and the other men of the community, as the characters most in need of reformation. By breaking down this binary between the corrupt witch and the godly community, *The Merry Wives* critiques the inept authorities rather than the witch.

From the first mention of the old woman of Brentford, the play suggests that Ford's accusations of the old woman (who never appears in the play), are likely inaccurate. The fact that Mistress Page says, "My maid's aunt, the fat woman of

Brentford, has a gown above" (4.2.54-5) suggests a close or at least friendly relationship between the merry wives and the suspected witch. Similarly, when Mistress Ford says, "I would my husband would meet [Falstaff'] in this shape! He cannot abide the old woman of Brentford; he swears she's a witch, forbade her my house, and hath threatened to beat her" (73-6), her language suggests that she does not share her husband's opinion, as she specifies that *he* swears she's a witch. When Ford hears that the old woman of Brentford is in his house and erupts with, "A witch, a quean, and old cozening quean! Have I not forbid her my house?...Come down, you witch, you hag you, come down, I say!" (150-156), Mistress Ford contradicts him with a simple, "Nay, good sweet husband—Good gentlemen, let him not strike the old woman" (156). She refuses to acknowledge the language of witchcraft that Ford uses to describe the "old woman." Similarly, as Ford beats Falstaff in disguise, Mistress Page declares, "Are you not ashamed? I think you have killed the poor *woman*" (164-5, emphasis mine). The merry wives use Ford's false assumptions about the woman of Brentford to redirect another of his false assumptions—that his wife is being unfaithful. The merry wives use the "witch" costume to set Falstaff apart from the community, to expose his infiltration, and to manipulate Ford into punishing him without directing his violence against either of them. In this instance, the witch costume works to construct another binary, not between the witch and the community, but between the community and Falstaff—a man whose discordant behaviour puts the cohesion of the home and community at risk. When Ford bursts into his own home in search of evidence that his wife is carrying on an affair with Falstaff, he says, "Now shall the devil be shamed" (4.2.105-6), little knowing that he is about to shame the true devil of the play.

Jacobean witchcraft plays concerned with kings, courts, and rulership similarly use the figure of the witch to break down the binary between the ruler as the servant of God and the witch as the servant of the devil, first by staging tyrannical, corrupt, or inept rulers, and secondly by invoking widespread skepticism about witchcraft trials. As witchcraft plays stage both uncertainty about the guilt or innocence of witches and display the abuses of rulership, the mixed audience becomes the jury, using their own consciences to make a judgement. For example, *Macbeth* adapts and restages elements of the North Berwick trials which James I had presided over. While Purkiss argues that the lack of a central "interpretive figure" in *Macbeth* makes King James the main interpretive figure, the play had many other spectators and several performances at the Globe, where the royal interpreter would have been absent. Instead of privileging James's perspective, *Macbeth* inverts the normative structure of the North Berwick trials in which a king is a judge over a group of subjects who may be witches and instead stages a corrupt ruler for judgement before a large group of subjects.

Macbeth associates the weird sisters with the witch of Endor from 1 Samuel 28, subtly restaging a question demonologists had been asking for many years—the question of whether the witch of Endor was really in league with the devil and displaying borrowed supernatural power through raising the ghost of Samuel as a demon in a particular shape, or if she was only a dishonest charlatan, fooling a weak and desperate King Saul. The play never resolves this question, leaving the weird sisters and their theatrical special effects open for the audience's interpretation.

However, invoking the Endor question also necessarily associates Macbeth with the Biblical King Saul, a king who started his rule as a good king, but deteriorated into

madness and corruption as he rejected the God who legitimized his rule. Saul is also the king that the Israelites specifically asked for, contrary to God's wishes. God tells Samuel that he should give the people what they asked for, but that he should warn them that a king will take their sons, daughters, fields, vineyards, olive trees, seed, maidservants, and sheep (1 Samuel 8). *Macbeth* alludes to this passage in 4.3 when Macduff and Ross go to England to ask for a king. Malcolm (albeit, supposedly lying), tells them that if they wish to have him be a king over them, they will need to be prepared for him to take their wives, daughters, lands, jewels, and houses (60-84), and "[u]proar the universal peace, confound / All unity on earth" (98-99). This conversation with Malcolm allows Macduff and Ross to evaluate whether or not they want to bring a rightful king back to Scotland, knowing that he has confessed that he will be a tyrant. Like 1 Samuel 8, the play asks the question of whether it is worthwhile to have an earthly king who will have the authority to exploit the people and descend into tyranny if he wishes. Macduff and Ross, however, endorse Malcolm despite his confessed vices. Macduff responds to the first part of Malcolm's confession by saying, "Boundless intemperance / In nature is a tyranny. It hath been / Th'untimely emptying of the happy throne / And fall of many kings" (4.3.66-69). Here, Macduff acknowledges that Malcolm's intemperance has the potential to develop into tyranny and create the same problems Scotland endures under Macbeth. However, like the Israelites who demand a king in 1 Samuel 8, Macduff finishes by telling Malcolm, "But fear not yet / To take upon you what is yours" (69-70). The play ends with Malcolm inviting all the people to his coronation: "So, thanks to all at once and to each one / Whom we invite to see us crowned at Scone" (5.7.104-5). By ending the play with this invitation to the wider population, Malcolm includes the general audience in the

invitation to the coronation as well. Malcolm's assumed character and references to the echoes of the Biblical warning against kings demonstrate that the king rules in part because the people endorse and support him. However, when a king turns tyrannical, this may lead to "Th'untimely emptying of the happy throne" (4.3.68). By staging witches as an unanswered demonological question, alongside Macbeth as a tyrant following the downward trajectory of King Saul, the play invites the audience to judge both witches and tyrants, reminding them that their willing cooperation upholds the monarchy.

Middleton's *The Witch*, with far less subtlety than *Macbeth*, overtly stages an inversion of Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, a masque designed to flatter the royal court through opposition. *Masque of Queens* explicitly employs the binary between witches as servants of the devil and rulers as the servants of God to flatter royal and noble spectators. An antimasque of witches enter first in order to make the queens in the main masque appear more virtuous and noble by contrast. Middleton deliberately inverts this binary by opening his play in the corrupt court of Ravenna (1.1) before moving to a parallel banquet scene in the witches' cave, in which the women are working in practiced harmony (1.2). In Middleton's inversion, the corrupt court appears even more corrupt when contrasted with a group of witches who should be morally repugnant, but instead display the unity and cooperation that the court severely lacks. While *Masque of Queens* was intended for a court audience, *The Witch* (to our knowledge) was performed at Blackfriars, before a mixed audience. Not only does Middleton's play invert a flattering court masque to instead expose and criticize the court in the wake of the Overbury scandal, it also inverts the audience, denigrating the court before the subjects rather than praising the court before king and his courtiers. Not only would the audience at

Blackfriars have had a chance to watch and judge this critique of royalty, the arrangement of the audience in Blackfriars, with the wealthiest playgoers near or even on the stage, may have even drawn the most noble patrons visually into the court of Ravenna while the audience judged the corruption of both the fictional court and the one it clearly represented.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, rather than critiquing a court or a monarch like either *Macbeth* or *The Witch*, breaks down the binary between witch and ruler to question the entire theory of absolutism which King James often used to justify his rule and the rule of monarchy in general. While the other plays in this study all stage witches (even Falstaff appears on stage in a costume), *The Tempest* never stages Sycorax. Not only is Sycorax conspicuously absent, she is long dead. Prospero repeatedly uses Sycorax as justification for his own authority, contrasting her supposed corruption with his own self-imposed rule. However, Sycorax's absence calls her entire characterization into question since her story is filtered through biased narrators. Sycorax's characterization also seems partly drawn from Montaigne's essays, which are deeply skeptical about witchcraft cases. This source text coupled with Sycorax's absence and unreliable narration about her demonstrates that the binary between king and witch that Prospero relies on in order to establish legitimacy may not even exist.

Further destabilizing the binary between himself and Sycorax, Prospero openly practices magic at the same time as he attacks Sycorax for her witchcraft. Far from acting as the binary opposite to Sycorax, Prospero seems more like her parallel, even when we compare the two through Prospero's own prejudiced narration. Each arrives on the island following exile along with a child, each uses magic to control their subjects and rule the

island, and each enslaves Ariel to do their bidding. Not only is Prospero nearly a parallel with Sycorax rather than her opposite, the kind of magic that he uses is actually far worse, according to English laws at the time. Sycorax employs mostly malefic witchcraft, while Prospero openly uses necromancy and diabolic magic—a capital offense by James's 1604 witchcraft act. The supposed binary between witch and ruler fails spectacularly for Prospero, who is not only a parallel to the witch Sycorax, but a more dangerous and condemnable magic worker.

The Tempest also breaks down the binary between king and witch and destabilizes the theory of absolutism by demonstrating that Prospero's absolutist rule is ineffective and that the problems the play introduces only have a hope of resolution through a contractual government between the ruler and subjects. Prospero only rules over vassals and children, and his inconsistent rulership style perpetually slides from one end to the other end of the absolutist spectrum. Prospero is benevolent and permissive as a fatherly figure at times, and abruptly authoritarian and controlling at others. Whether he rules with generosity or sudden vitriol and revenge, Prospero faces rebellious subjects and a kingdom that, regardless of its tiny dimensions, he never manages to fully control. In fact, the only way that Prospero can manage his small kingdom through absolutism is by manipulating and controlling his subjects with magic, which paradoxically, makes him increasingly similar to the witch whom he claims to oppose. Prospero's absolutism creates the need to control his subjects as if he is their father and they are his subjects (which is literally true in Miranda's case). King James himself uses the language of fathers and children to justify controlling subjects by force and to condemn all acts of rebellion as unnatural (*The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* 74). However, while Prospero

echoes James's theories of absolutism and considers himself a father to his small state, many early modern political theorists instead used the metaphor of husband and wife to describe an ideal relationship between a ruler and his state. Though the wife may be submissive to the rulership of the husband, they reasoned, she could act as a valuable advisor who can wisely and respectfully hold her husband accountable when necessary. While this model still gave the king ultimate control, it provided much more room advising the monarchy. The metaphor of marriage also provided a framework for a contractual government, in which a king could rule because the subjects willingly gave their consent. In *The Tempest*, Ferdinand and Miranda's marriage—entered into by mutual agreement and genuine love—gestures to the possibility of a hopeful future in which governance involves willing cooperation rather than subjugation. Importantly, Prospero only promises to give up controlling others with magic after Ferdinand and Miranda are safely married. However, Prospero does not give up his manipulative, controlling form of power easily. He declares, "this rough magic / I here abjure. And when I have required / Some heavenly music—which even now I do— / To work mine end upon their senses that / This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff, / Bury it certain fathoms in the earth, / And deeper than did ever plummet sound / I'll drown my book" (5.1.50-57). Even as Prospero prepares to release his control, he decides that he must wait until he has created the conditions to charm Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Antonio, waiting to actually surrender his magic until the very end of the play. Similarly, Prospero promises to release Ariel several times, but struggles to keep his word, finding additional tasks for the spirit to complete until the last lines of 5.1 when he gives one final order: "I'll deliver all, / And promise you calm seas, auspicious gales, / And sail so expeditious

that shall catch / Your royal fleet far off. [*To Ariel*] My Ariel, chick, / That is thy charge. Then to the elements / Be free, and fare thou well" (311-320). It is impossible for Prospero to maintain his rule as an absolutist ruler without employing magic, a practice that should belong to his binary opposite. While Prospero uses the binary of the witch vs. the godly ruler to justify his right to rule, he ironically cannot rule without using magic himself.

As Prospero ends the play by relinquishing absolutist government, he turns to the people in the audience, testing his newfound contractual government. In the final epilogue, Prospero states, "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have's my own, / Which is most faint. Now 'tis true / I must be here confined by you, / Or sent to Naples. Let me not, / Since I have my dukedom got / And pardoned the deceiver, dwell / In this bare island by your spell" (1-8). Here, Prospero conceives of the audience as wielding all the power as he appeals to them to release him from the island of the stage. Without his own magic, Prospero now fears submitting to the will of others. However, while the epilogue may seem to indicate that the power balance has shifted entirely to the audience and that Prospero is now in their power, it really points to a kind of cooperative government that theatre itself routinely allows. Prospero as a character is subject to the audience's opinions. He pleads with the audience, "But release me from my bands / With the help of your good hands. / Gentle breath of yours my sails / Must fill, or else my project fails, / Which was to please" (9-13). While these lines sound as though Prospero is at the audience's mercy, it is clear that the relationship between stage and audience will be most beneficial for both if the audience can perform their role cooperatively, helping the project to succeed and, in so doing, ensuring their own

pleasure in the performance. It is only after Prospero relinquishes his magic and control that a trusting, mutual power dynamic can be established.

Although many scholars have interpreted Jacobean witchcraft plays as flattery of the monarch, I argue that these plays instead turn to the audience, inviting them to act as a jury and weigh the evidence against rulers and witches alike. These plays present inconclusive evidence against witch characters, often drawing on explicitly skeptical sources or casting doubt on real cases, never allowing for certainty. At the same time, these plays present a range of possibilities for corrupt, inept, or tyrannical rulership, breaking down the binary between the king and the witch and demonstrating that poor rulership is a greater and more likely danger to the state than witchcraft, which may be merely theatrical illusion.

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