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**Power and Performance: The Role of Witchcraft in the Leadership of Queen  
Elizabeth I and James I of England**

By  
Sabrina Garcia

Honors Thesis

In

Leadership Studies

University of Richmond

Richmond, VA

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Advisor: Dr. Kristin Bezio

## Abstract

### ***Power and Performance: The Role of Witchcraft in the Leadership of Queen Elizabeth I and James I of England***

Sabrina Garcia

**Committee members:** Dr. Lauren Henley, Dr. Julietta Singh, Dr. Kathleen Skerrett

Modern day beliefs about the Early Modern European witchcraft trials portray this time period as ignorant and superstitious, easily falling prey to religious fervor. However, when looking at the primary source materials from the Elizabethan and Jacobean reigns one can see that beliefs on witchcraft were quite varied and complex. By using primary documents, as well as popular plays at the time that focus on *malleus maleficarum* (harmful magic) this thesis attempts to explore what witchcraft beliefs can reflect about the leadership performance styles of the monarchs Queen Elizabeth I and James I of England. Witchcraft was an intellectual battleground where individuals were able to challenge and maintain power dynamics, with the stakes being life or death. Plays from this period use witches as a tool to explore different political and societal issues in a manner that relate to the way we use witches in the modern day to perform and assert power.

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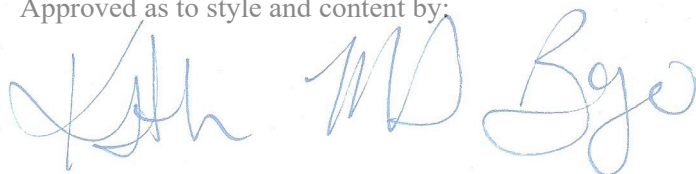
Power and Performance: The Role of Witchcraft in the Leadership  
of Queen Elizabeth I and James I of England

by

*Sabrina Garcia*

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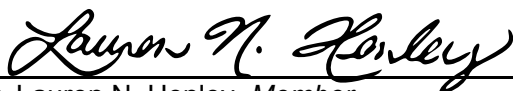
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Dr. Kristin M.S. Bezio, *Chair*

**Kathleen Roberts Skerrett**

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Dr. Kathleen Roberts Skerrett, *Member*

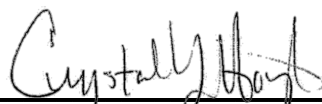


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Dr. Lauren N. Henley, *Member*



Dr. Julietta Singh, *Member*



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Dr. Crystal L. Hoyt, *Associate Dean for Academic Affairs*  
Jepson School of Leadership Studies

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## Chapter One: Writings on Witchcraft

Modern day beliefs about the Early Modern European witchcraft trials portray them as sources of mass hysteria, that centered around individuals falling prey to ignorance and superstition. Witchcraft trials have also been used in the present day to showcase how women were unfairly persecuted due to gendered transgressions. However, the way that gender is shown through these trials is not as simple as these portrayals present, as they imply that being a woman was the central reasoning for an accusation and death. There were various other factors that all intersected with gender, such as class, age, politics and so on that also must be considered when looking at the gendered implications of witchcraft trials. These concepts all culminate into witchcraft being influenced by gender in the way that gender impacted and interacted with all spheres of 17th century life. Witchcraft at this time presented itself as an intellectual battleground where monarchs, playwrights, theologians, scholars, and the common people could interact with the beliefs that were presented. The stakes of such arguments were quite literally life and death, as not only were people being killed through accusations of witchcraft but since it was so heavily debated and theorized it allowed individuals to use it as a tool to assert their own beliefs about those in power. This thesis focuses on using Elizabethan and Jacobean plays centering *malleus maleficarum* (harmful magic) to examine how playwrights used witchcraft to comment on and even critique the ruling monarchs. The very performance of witchcraft becomes a reflection of the way that subjects felt regarding their monarch's ability to effectively perform power. The use of witchcraft on Elizabethan and Jacobean stages reveals the continual intellectual battle to assert a definition of witchcraft that maintains or removes power from another. The way in which the early modern English population talked about and perceived witchcraft under the reigns of Elizabeth and James demonstrated a willingness to not only accept

a female monarch, but also allowed them to critique the ways in which the cultural norm of patriarchal power unfairly targeted those in marginalized positions.

This work specifically focuses on the ways that these plays allow witchcraft to be used in every imaginable way to express anxieties about Elizabeth I and James I of England. When looking at the unique and different leadership styles of each monarch, the use of witchcraft is not a static belief, but instead a sight of competing beliefs that showcase ideals of power. The tension between each monarch is due to the tension between competing witchcraft ideologies in Scotland and England. While Scotland views witchcraft as a crime against the state *and* God, England maintains the legal belief that witchcraft is a crime against the state. England also does not view the witch itself as harmful, only when she commits harm towards others. This difference reflects the modern-day use of witchcraft as it has been coopted by various groups; to express a reclaiming of the gendered implications through feminist readings of witchcraft, or even by those in power presenting the media as responsible for commandeering their very own witch-hunt. The witch is a symbol that has endured throughout the centuries and is continually used as a tool and a site to reclaim, maintain, or diminish power.

In understanding how anxiety about women in power produced the European cultural representation of witches as primarily female, the following literature was significant in leading and perpetuating the witch craze in Europe. Focusing on these portrayals of witches and witchcraft helps one to better understand the ways that the accused were prosecuted and how women were often seen as the main threat. Witchcraft is closely linked with politics, and therefore one cannot overlook how witchcraft anxieties tie into gendered anxieties about women who held great power.

Each work that is discussed speaks to a view on witchcraft that is culturally significant to Early Modern thoughts on witchcraft. There is certainly not homogenous thought on what one should do with witches and how they should be punished, but there is an overall portrayal of witchcraft as something linked to the malice of women. William Perkins ties this wickedness to the betrayal of Eve in causing the Fall of Man and connects women to be more predisposed to witchcraft due to this sin. *Malleus Maleficarum*, by Henreich Kramer, again points to women as being more susceptible to the charms of the Devil, and more likely to give into their carnal desires of lust. King James VI's infamous work *Daemonologie* is monumental in understanding a powerful monarch's view of witchcraft and how this would influence his country's own witch craze. There were also many views that were against common witchcraft trial methods such as torture. Reginald Scot, Henri Boguet, and Frederich Spee were all men who questioned the authenticity in using confessions of torture to prosecute accused witches. They call out the unreasonableness of the tests used to find evidence of witchcraft and pose the question of if these hunts ever truly resulted in justice. All these works function together to form a foundation of witchcraft-related beliefs that are different in their views of how one should think about witchcraft, but similar in a condemnation of women as more susceptible to being a witch.

### **Women and Witchcraft**

Witchcraft scholar Christina Lerner explains that witchcraft hunts were certainly sex-related, but not sex-specific. The hunting of witches was done to get rid of the evil of witches. This totality of evil was not directed at one specific sex, for Lerner points out that the Devil himself is male. However, it is noteworthy that witch-hunting was directed at 'enemies of God' and that eighty percent of the accused were women.<sup>1</sup> The female witch stereotype is something

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<sup>1</sup> Christina Lerner, *Enemies of God: The Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (Baltimore, Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1981), 92.



that existed before actual witch hunts. These thoughts rest upon the Aristotelian views of women as “imperfectly human— a failure of the process of conception,” and the Biblical view in Christianity that women are the source of sin.<sup>2</sup> The fact that women can give birth and menstruate suggests that women are capable of potentially having strange powers, particularly since a scientific understanding of menstruation was lacking in this period. Women became a source of fear and anxiety because they were seen as a source of disruption in European patriarchal society. There was a need to subjugate and control women’s bodies as they were able to continually receive in sexual intercourse, whether or not it was for pleasure. This created the myth that women were sexually insatiable, since they do not rely on phallic potency, as men do, to engage in sexual acts. Due to this stereotype of insatiable lust, witches were “alleged to cause impotence and to satisfy their own lusts at orgies with demons.”<sup>3</sup> The woman was consistently portrayed as someone who is *less than*, largely because of the objectification of their bodies as impure in connection with their weak morals.

For example, English Protestant minister William Perkins, though introducing a theory that men could also be accused of witchcraft, relied heavily on the belief that there were more female than male witches. In his work *The Damned Art of Witchcraft*, published in 1608, he argues that the essence of the crime of witchcraft was the pact made with the Devil, instead of the practice of harmful magic. Protestants specifically focused on the pact as an essential part of witchcraft, while the crime was outlined in English law as exclusively in the context of *maleficium*, which focused on harm that those accused inflicted upon others.<sup>4</sup> Perkins writes the following regarding women and their affinity for witchcraft:

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<sup>2</sup> Larner, *Enemies*, 92.

<sup>3</sup> Larner, *Enemies*, 93.

<sup>4</sup> Brian P. Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 94.

First, to give us to understand, that the women, being the weaker sex, is sooner entangled by the Devil's illusions with this damnable art than the man. And in all ages it is found true by experience that the Devil hath more easily and oftener prevailed with women than with men. Hence it was that the Hebrews of ancient times used it for a proverb, 'The more women, the more witches.' His first temptation was with Eve, a woman, and since [then] to pursueth his practice accordingly, as making most for his advantage.<sup>5</sup>

This work reiterates how influential the Bible was in shaping thought around women's purpose in larger society. The anxiety of betrayal by women is an extension of the story of Adam and Eve, and the betrayal of Eve in eating the fruit of Knowledge of Good and Evil. By continually pointing to the text and word of God to remind individuals that women were the weaker sex, such sentiments bled into other areas of society. This can become quite apparent when most writings on witchcraft, while often mentioning the possibility of male witches, overwhelmingly focus on the female as the one who has turned her back on God.

Larner points out that there is a focus specifically on the adult woman as the witch, and not so much the young girl. This again relates to the sinful nature of a young girl going through adolescence as they then are tainted by menstruation and their budding sexuality. She explains how the religion surrounding the Reformation and Counter-Reformation demanded that "women for the first time [become] responsible for their own souls."<sup>6</sup> However, along with this independence in the ways that women were able to claim power over their own souls came an increased enforcement of the patriarchal parts of Christian religion. Consistently women were reminded that they were morally inferior, with the Fall of Man being the key example pointed to.

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<sup>5</sup> William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (University of Cambridge, 1608), 167-185.

<sup>6</sup> Larner, *Enemies of God*, 101.

## The Bible

There were no specific mentions of witches that detailed what could be considered or defined as witchcraft in the Bible. Religious individuals looked to the Bible to explain the workings of everyday life. People looked to the Bible to explain the misfortunes in their lives, and the belief in the existence of witches allowed people to separate themselves from their misfortune. Negative events were no longer due to their own sins, but instead could be blamed on another. This removal of blame was appealing to people who wanted answers to misfortunes but did not want to see it as God punishing them for their sins. There were no specific mentions of the word “witch” in the Bible until King James VI published the King James Bible in 1611 that would be well circulated and used in the Early Modern period. There are only a few references to the confirmation of witches in the King James Bible, the first being in Exodus 22:18, “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” This line provides much of the basis for justification that witches are beyond redemption and must be executed for their crime in turning away from God. More detail about witchcraft can be seen in Deuteronomy 18:10-12:

Thou shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch. Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all that do these things are an abomination. For all that do these things are an abomination unto the LORD: and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.

There is not much in this passage that distinguishes who and what can be considered witchcraft; it is instead clearly stated that witchcraft is a direct act against God. The mention of consulting with ‘familiar spirits’ is also relevant to the future prosecutions of witchcraft, as this would translate into the common thought that witches kept certain animals as their familiars.

The central aspect of European witchcraft that was necessary for prosecution, was the act of doing magic to *harm* another individual, or *malefica*. As outlined by Larner, there is the need

for the individual performing witchcraft to want to harm the individual who has offended them, through a variety of possible ways. The ones that Larner mentions include “cursing, incantation, sorcery, or the sheer force of her ill will, should cause illness or death to the livestock, family, or person of the individual concerned.”<sup>7</sup> Although there was often little legitimate proof that the accused had committed harm against the accuser, individuals wanted to find reasoning behind their bad luck and misfortune. With the common religious theology reminding individuals of the wickedness of women and seeing women around them begin to gain power in forms of government, there was a general fear that this would disrupt the balance of the patriarchal system that had ruled.

### ***Malleus Maleficarum* (1486)**

Also known as *The Hammer of Witches*, *Malleus Maleficarum* was published in 1486 by Henrich Kramer. He was a Dominican theologian and wrote the work in response to the resistance he received while attempting to prosecute witches in Germany. Although this work was written in 1486, it would go on to be reprinted nineteen times between 1569 and 1669, when witch-hunting in Europe was at its peak. What is central to *Malleus Maleficarum* was the villainization of women as more likely to be weak of will and seduced by the powers of the Devil. The work states the following:

What else is a woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted with fair colours! Therefore, if it be a dancer to divorce her when she ought to be kept, it is indeed a necessary torture; for either we commit adultery by divorcing her, or we must endure daily strife.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Larner, *Enemies of God*, 71.

<sup>8</sup> Henrich Kramer, *The Malleus Maleficarum* (London: Montague Summers, 1928).

The framing of women in this work is through an assertion that they are individuals who tend towards sinfulness, and that there is no redeeming them. There is a consistent repetition of women as possessing negative attributes, and a caution to men that marriage is not an enjoyable experience and is instead a cause of much torture. There is no blame placed upon the man for any unhappiness that may persist in the relationship; the blame is placed solely on the woman. There is a foundation laid out explaining the ways that women cause harm and unhappiness to the lives of man. This work goes on to then point to the bodily ways that women are more likely to be wicked due to their simple carnal nature:

But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than man, as it is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives.<sup>9</sup>

The carnality of the female body is central to the blaming of women in the *Malleus Maleficarum*. Outlined in this work are the ways that women make oaths to the Devil through the form of engaging in intercourse with the Devil to promise both body and soul to him. The presence of sexuality is key to proving the wickedness of women. After all, the Bible points to Eve as the reason why man was punished by God. This interpretation of women as inherently wicked was not something radical; it was part of accepted Christian theology. Due to this belief in female frailty, the jump that women were therefore more susceptible to witchcraft was not an unreasonable assumption to be made.

Kramer also contemplates the reasons why women can be seduced by the promises of the Devil. This is based upon the notion that women's lives and purpose are centered around their ability to attract the attention of men. He writes the following:

There is also a third method of temptation through the way of sadness and

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<sup>9</sup> Kramer, *Malleus*.

poverty. For when girls have been corrupted and have been scorned by their lovers after they have immodestly copulated with them in the hope and promise of marriage with them, and have found themselves disappointed in all their hopes and everywhere despised, they turn to the help and protection of devils; either for the sake of vengeance by bewitching those lovers or the wives they have married, or for the sake of giving themselves up to every sort of lechery.<sup>10</sup>

This passage reiterates the sentiment that the problems women face is due to their sexual promiscuity. Kramer alludes to the blame that is put upon women when they give up their virginity to one who promises them marriage but does not follow through. The concept of virginity is extremely important to a woman attempting to be married, as society during this time held a woman's virginity in high regard. The reasoning for scorned women to turn to witchcraft and the Devil relates either to vengeance or to the desire to submit to carnal pleasures, both of which limit the capacity to see women as multi-dimensional individuals. The basis of their allegiance to the Devil must be because they were scorned in some way by man. The framing of this passage alludes to the portrayal of women as dependent on men. This, in some ways, can be seen through the inability of women to advance throughout society without marriage. Although Kramer mentions poverty as a potential reason, he does not explicitly highlight the ways that, for many women, marriage is the primary means to live a life free of poverty. The phrasing of this passage instead asserts that a woman scorned intends harm due to her emotional state of rejection. It also asserts that women look to men only as a means of advancing in society and does not see them as individuals capable of various emotions and motives. The mention of copulating with the Devil, and a want to fully give in to desire, is a common theme of witchcraft theology at this time. It also furthers the narrative that women are more likely than men to give into their sexual desires and are naturally predisposed to immoral behavior.

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<sup>10</sup> Kramer, *Malleus*.

### ***Daemonologie* (1597)**

Few monarchs explicitly wrote about their positions on witchcraft, unlike King James VI of Scotland, who would become James I of England in 1603. His specific role in leading witch hunts around Scotland, as well as his authorship of *Daemonologie* in 1597, was extremely rare at the time, and impactful as James was a powerful monarch. The work is structured as a dialogue between Epistemon, a demonologist, and Philomathes, who acts as the skeptic in their conversation.<sup>11</sup> In the fifth chapter of his argument, Philomathes questions why there are so many more women who are witches than their male counterparts. To this question, Epistemon answers the following:

The reason is easy, for as that sex is frailer than man is, so is it easier to be entrapped in these gross snares of the Devil, as was over well proved to be true, by the serpents deceiving to Eve at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sex sensine.<sup>12</sup>

Yet again, James reiterates the role of women in witchcraft as more likely to succumb to the charms of the Devil, echoing Kramer's assertion in the *Malleus*. He quotes the Bible as a central justification, again citing the story we most often hear about in popular culture to this day: the temptation of the apple from the tree of knowledge and Eve's role in damning man. Due to this being the common rhetoric surrounding women, and their predisposition to being weak in morals based on the story of Eve, James simply reiterates this common belief. It could be argued that James reaffirmed this belief in part due to his want to take over the English throne after Elizabeth passed. By spreading such beliefs that females had weaker morals, he could lay more of a substantial claim to the throne as his right.

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<sup>11</sup> Katherine Howe, *The Penguin Book of Witches* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 31.

<sup>12</sup> Howe, 37.

James had many anxieties surrounding witchcraft due to his fears surrounding his frequently threatened hold on power in Scotland and his desire to eventually claim the English throne after Elizabeth's death. Almost any misfortune that befell him, he blamed on the influence of witchcraft. This can first be seen in his claim that witches attempted to intervene in the journey of his bride, Princess Anne of Denmark, to Scotland, in 1590.<sup>13</sup> Witches were also the supposed cause of many assassination attempts on his life, and there can certainly be connections drawn between James's anxiety regarding his hold on power and his assertion that witches were a genuine threat to the people of Scotland and his claim to the throne.

The role of the King participating and even leading witch hunts as a representation of his power is also a potential reason why he so heavily participated in the prosecution of witches. Due to his belief in the Divine Right of Kings, he frequently used witch hunts to solidify his power and as proof of his Divine Right.

The Divine Right of Kings was a concept that had been in use since the Middle Ages but had fallen out of favor with the English and Scottish people. James VI's view of the Divine Right of Kings was the assertion that God had chosen him to be King, and therefore he any act that he decreed would be supported by the divine. This belief was used to portray the King as a God, and force this belief onto his people, as he was chosen by their Lord. James VI was riddled with fears about potential threats to his life, as he was kidnapped as a child when his claim to the Scottish throne was not as strong. Seeing himself as a divine presence meant that the existence of witches would be another enemy that he would need to be aware of. The very existence of witches act as a direct threat to his rule, as they are enemies of God and therefore enemies of the King. If he was able to defeat these agents of the Devil, then that would only assert his Divine Right as an

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<sup>13</sup> Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 140.



agent of God. The ability to hunt these witches would not only prove their existence, but also prove himself as the hero of his people and the rightful heir to the throne chosen by God, who was the ultimate authority.

Witchcraft was considered a sin because it was not only conspiring with the Devil, but also a conscious choice to turn away from God. Witches were not less than human, they were humans who had created a pact with the Devil to do harm. By punishing those who were sinners and condemning those who had been accused of violence towards their neighbors through *malefica*, James could reaffirm himself as a king who was upholding the divine right of not only God, but of the monarchy itself.

In *Daemonologie*, James also lays out specific rules and restrictions in terms of what can be counted as evidence in witchcraft trials, as well as proper punishments for those accused and found guilty. He outlines how there should be caution when adjudicating witchcraft trials, but that the crime was very serious, so he therefore permitted the testimony of children, wives, and other confessing witches.<sup>14</sup> The use of spectral visions as evidence was also permitted; such visions were seen by the afflicted of those who caused them the harm. The pricking of witches to find the Devil's Mark was also used in investigation, as well as the swimming test. This test focused on binding the accused and throwing them in a body of blessed water. If the individual sank, they were said to be innocent, and if they floated, they were guilty of the crime. This practice was done in the belief that witches were individuals who were not baptized or who had rejected baptism, and therefore their bodies would reject the water and stay afloat. The swimming test was mainly used by local communities and was not typically seen as a legitimate

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<sup>14</sup> Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 140.

method of gathering evidence or lawful.<sup>15</sup> Therefore James's approval of the method was extremely influential on local communities looking to find and persecute witches in their own ways.

The following excerpt from chapter six of *Daemonologie* discusses the lack of mercy that should be afforded to individuals who are accused and found guilty of witchcraft. There is also an explanation on why the swimming test would have merit in witchcraft trials:<sup>16</sup>

P: But what kind of death I pray you?

E: It is commonly used by fire, but that is an indifferent thing to be used in every country according to the law or costumes thereof.

P: But ought no sex, age nor rank to be exempted?

E: None at all, being so used by the lawful magistrate, for it is the highest point of idolatry, wherein no exception is admitted by the law of God.<sup>17</sup>

James goes on to revise this statement by saying those who are children are exempt from being prosecuted as they are not within the age of reason and are unable to make a conscious choice to turn away from God. The character of Epistemon, who was a defender of witches being seen as a serious threat to the devout Christians, then goes on to explain the swimming test:

So it appears that God hath appointed, for a supernatural sign of the monstrous impiety of the witches, that the water shall refuse to receive them in her bosom that have shaken off them the sacred water of baptism, and willfully refused the benefit thereof. Not so much as their eyes are able to shed tears (threaten and torture them as ye please) while first they repent (God not permitting them to dissemble their obstinacy in so horrible a crime) albeit the womenkind especially be able otherways to shed tears at every light occasion when they will, yea, although it were dissemblingly like the crocodiles.<sup>18</sup>

This portion from *Daemonologie* focuses on not only the legitimacy of the swimming test, but the ways that witches are able to deceive those who were hunting them. James not only addresses

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<sup>15</sup> Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 140.

<sup>16</sup> Note that P stands for Philomathes and E for Epistemon.

<sup>17</sup> James VI Stuart, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597), 77.

<sup>18</sup> James VI, 77-81.

this deception, but especially puts an emphasis on the ways that women are more likely to cry and show emotions in the face of torture. He compares this to ‘crocodile tears,’ expressing the sentiment that these women are insincere in this expression of emotion. This portrayal of women also suggests that women are more likely to be emotional and connects this with a negative attribute of manipulation. This is something that continues to affect women throughout time, as the portrayal of emotions is still seen in modern society as a sign of weakness. The implication of women again throughout James’s *Daemonologie* reiterates not only the fear of witchcraft, but a fear of the female based on the stereotypes of women as emotional, sinful, and deceptive.

### **The Anti-Witchcraft Perspective**

In fact, *Daemonologie* was largely written as a rebuttal to Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). This treatise focused on questioning the basis for witchcraft trials and was seen as extremely radical. Scot was an educated Englishman who was Calvinist. His skepticism about witchcraft was due to his belief in the sovereignty of God and the lack of a biblical basis supporting the necessity of witch hunts. Scot’s work is divided into four sections, each highlighting a different area of his skepticism. The first, which focused on a look into who is being accused, pointed out that poor women are most often those who are considered evil. His second argument lies in there being no biblical basis to beliefs in witchcraft and that it was dangerous to suggest that witches had powers that God may have possessed.<sup>19</sup> He then presents an analysis of the crime of witchcraft and uses philosophy and science to show how witchcraft is not possible.

Scot states the following regarding who is often accused of witchcraft:

One sort of such as are said to be witches are women which be

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<sup>19</sup> Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 286.

commonly old, lame, bleary-eyed, pale, foul, and full of wrinkles; poor, sullen, superstitious, and papists, or such as know no religion in whose drowsy mind the devil hath gotten a fine seat so as what mischief, mischance, calamity or themselves, imprinting in their minds and constant imagination hereof.<sup>20</sup>

This statement shows that there was a common conception of a witch that had been circulated by the 1580s through both writings and word of mouth. The focus is on the traits of the impoverished woman who seems unsightly, who begs for food and other necessities from the community of people around her. These communities in turn show disapproval of these outcasts who take resources from their own families. The tense relationship between those impoverished individuals and those in the community is further shown when the paranoia about witchcraft spread.

The fact that elderly women were most often targeted also suggests some disapproval about the female form as it ages. These older women could no longer reproduce and were not seen as providing for their town. They were unable to take part in the one thing that the Bible stresses is their role on earth: reproduction and the raising of children. Along with this, many of these women on the fringes of society were widowed and had an independence to them that many other women at the time did not. Although these beggar women were impoverished, they were a representation of an independent woman, one who was not living their life to provide for a man or children. Their situation, while not ideal, certainly would rouse negative feelings among villagers who were compelled to give to these women out of their Christian duty.

The seventh chapter of Scot's treatise also contains a statement on the role of women in their confessions when accused. It reads as follows:

It is confessed (say some by the way of objection) even of these women themselves, that they do these and such other horrible things as deserveth death with all extremity etc. Whereunto I answer that whosoever considerately

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<sup>20</sup> Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584).

beholdeth their confessions shall behold all to vain, idle, false, inconstant and of no weight, except their contempt and ignorance in religion, which is rather the fault of their negligent pastor than of the simple woman.<sup>21</sup>

Scot is pointing out that the confessions of those under torture should not be held as legitimate by any means. The reason for this is that these women are confessing under conditions that would cause them to say anything that would make their suffering stop. But, again, there is the phrasing of the witches as female and the connotation that they do not know any better than to confess under the pains of torture. The phrase ‘simple woman’ is one that reads as an insult to women, despite Scot’s point of calling these confessions illegitimate pieces of evidence. Though there are objections to the beliefs of witchcraft, there seems to be no statement regarding the scapegoating of women or the need to see women as not inherently sinful. This speaks to the fact that although Scot has an issue with the methods by which the accused confess, he takes no issue with the fact that more women are being accused and tortured. In this way the accusations of women as witches are not what is ludicrous about the trials, but instead the means of torture used to get them to confess. There is a continued connotation of woman as less than, while also pointing to the ludicrousness of these trials as rational. Despite this, Scot’s views on witchcraft were seen as radical, and would inspire many to write pieces in response, most notably James.

Henri Boguet, who was a judge and demonologist, also presented doubts about the correct manner to prosecute witches. He rejects the swimming test method that James approved of and calls out the unjust nature of this use of torture.<sup>22</sup> Bouget writes the following in his 1602 series of articles, *An Examen of Witches*:

There are others who make use of the ducking stool. But I doubt whether this practice does not serve rather to tempt God than to prove anything against the witch who is

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<sup>21</sup> Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.

<sup>22</sup> Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*, 136.

ducked. For Satan may ley a guilty one sink to the bottom, or an innocent one float on the water.<sup>23</sup>

There was much controversy among individuals about whether the evidence that one found when the accused was tortured could be seen as legitimate. Although James was certainly a key figurehead in the witch hunt craze in Scotland, it is vital to examine other literature about the ‘proper’ way to prosecute witches. These bodies of works were conversations and showed the variety of thoughts that individuals had regarding witchcraft and the correct way to gather evidence. There was no one thought regarding how witch trials should be executed as there were varying schools of thought on who was considered to be a witch and how they should be handled.

Another important and influential text is Friederich Spee’s *A Condemnation of Torture*, written in 1631. Spee was a Jesuit priest who was also a professor at the University of Paderborn during a period of witch hunts in the surrounding area. He strongly argued against confessions being convincing evidence of witchcraft, as many who confessed did so after torture. He especially criticized the ways that German princes and judges seemed to believe rumors as fact and advocated for accused witches’ right to lawyers. His central argument, though not discrediting the existence of witches, made the point that anyone accused would eventually be killed, even if they were innocent.<sup>24</sup>

There are two passages that should be looked at to gain further insight into the procedures of witch hunt trials during this period in Germany. This first quotation focuses on what happens while women are awaiting trial for witchcraft, and the second quotation focuses on exposing how women who are accused are never given fair trials. In terms of torture,

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<sup>23</sup> Boguet, Henri. *An Examen of Witches*. Trans. E.A. Ashwin. London, 1929, 212-226

<sup>24</sup> Levack, *The Witchcraft Sourcebook* 145.

19. However, before he tortures her, the torturer leads her aside. So that she may not strengthen herself against the pain with some kind of magic charm, he shaves and searches her entire body— even that part by which her sex shows is most imprudently searched. Of course to this day nothing has ever been found.<sup>25</sup>

Again, Larner's gender-based framework can be applied to these quotations, as one can see the variety of ways that the female is punished for her existence as a woman. The process of shaving and searching a woman's entire body, including her head, is dehumanizing as well as defeminizing, as long hair can be seen as a symbol of femininity. There is also the assault on a woman's body that takes place when someone searches for a witches' mark or inspects her vagina for an apparent object. This process was most certainly traumatic for these accused women, and, to speak to Larner's point, there may have also been an extreme sense of control for the men leading these 'examinations.' The search of the accused's body allows the individual doing the searching to have an extreme level of power over the accused. For if one refuses such a search, they would be automatically deemed guilty. Therefore, this aspect of certain witch hunts, shaving women completely and requiring them to be vaginally searched allowed men to reclaim ownership in a very tangible and physical way over women who were seen to be rejecting their roles in society.

In the second passage, Spee focuses on the ways in which women were unable to be seen as innocent in any way:

26. Should Gaia in her torment roll her eyes in agony or stare, then this is new evidence. If she rolls her eyes, look! they say, she is searching for her concubine! If she states, look! they say, she has already found him; she is looking at him. But if she does not break her silence after several rounds of torture, if her face is twisted in pain, if she sinks into unconsciousness, etc., they shout that she is laughing or sleeping during the torture, that she is using the sorcery of silence, and she must be so much the guiltier.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Friedrich Spee von Langenfeld, *Cautio Criminalis, or a Book on Witch Trials*, ed. Marcus Hellyer. (Charlottesville, VA, 2003), 214-222.

<sup>26</sup> Spee von Langenfeld, 214-222

Although there were male witches accused throughout witchcraft trials, the focus and reiteration of the female form as wicked and more predisposed to witchcraft is apparent in trial documents and confessions. The use of torture and the woman's response to torture in this passage cannot benefit her in anyway. As James discusses in *Daemonologie*, one should beware of witches' 'crocodile tears' when they are pleading under the examination of torture. Spee explains how even when women accused are being tortured, their every response is used against them. The rolling of their eyes or their focus on a man to ask for help is seen as the woman attempting to seduce the man as her next concubine. Despite the complete degradation and pain that the woman is feeling, she is still seen as a sexual object. If a woman does not respond and instead falls unconscious or silences her screams, then she has used witchcraft to stifle her suffering. By framing the response to trials in this manner of there are no winners, Spee allows his readers to see the injustice in trials, questioning the legitimacy of confessions under torture.

Even though this final text is from Germany and published after the reign of James, it highlights how the narratives surrounding witchcraft continued to change as trials were taking place. There was also a spread of this knowledge to neighboring countries, which allowed for individuals to engage with witchcraft theology and law from potentially contradictory perspectives. This text also shows the way that all these witchcraft writings are linked with one another.

Despite this continued repetition of similar themes within witchcraft literature, writings about witchcraft were not all homogeneous in thought. While there were works being shared about the dangers of witchcraft, there were also works condemning the witch hunts as unjust due to the deaths of innocent people. There were varying schools of thought, and debates on what should be considered evidence of witchcraft, and how those accused should be tried and



punished. For one to think witchcraft trials were merely a byproduct of a time where people did not have access to information would be to discount the various economic, social, and religious structures that led to these accusations.

Although the overall basis for witchcraft theology is sex-related, there may not be an explicit theology of witchcraft solely having to do with women (this would be a discredit to the many men who lost their lives during the trials), but the numbers for women are far greater and should not be ignored. There is a basis in religious theology and social stigmas that allow women to be seen as more likely to be possessed or seduced by the Devil. There is an anxiety building around women due to their bodies, as they are able to give birth to life and menstruate.

Women at this time in politics are also rising to positions of power, with Elizabeth I of England being seen as a strong and powerful monarch despite her gender. In other European nations, women also held significant positions of power in the mid-to-late sixteenth century, including the dowager Queen of France, Catherine de Medici, and James's own mother, Mary Queen of Scots. The social anxieties that were caused by seeing women in power, and seeing women as potentially changing the patriarchal power dynamics that had been in place for so long, influenced the likelihood of seeing women as the likely perpetrators of witchcraft.



## Chapter Two: Elizabethan Plays

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I of England there were few examples of witches or witchcraft in English plays that adhered to the concept of *malleus maleficarum* that was being used at the time. There has been much debate about the correct definition of witchcraft, as many scholars argue on what similarities are consistent through accusations and discourse around the subject. Witchcraft scholar Ronald Hutton outlines a few conditions that he believes are persistent among various cultures and time periods that he uses to ascertain the definition of a witch. The first condition is that the witch causes harm by uncanny means, the second that a witch is an internal threat to a community, the third that the witch works within a tradition, the fourth that the witch is a force of evil, and the fifth that the witch can be resisted.<sup>27</sup> He uses the term ‘resisted’ in the sense that witches are able to be defeated through a variety of methods, such as being bled or burned at the stake. Though the witch is a symbol of evil, they are not the ultimate symbol and can be defeated. Though Hutton’s understanding is a bit broader, Larner puts forward a definition of witchcraft that specifically applies to the fifteenth through eighteenth centuries. For these centuries the definition of witchcraft could be split into two types: white witchcraft, which centered on healing, and black witchcraft, which focused on harming. The third type, which was developed in the fifteenth century, evolved out of a Christian theology; central to this definition of witchcraft was a demonic pact. As Larner describes, “At this meeting, in return for renunciation of baptism, services on earth and the soul of the witch at death, the Devil promised material advantages and magical powers.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Ronald Hutton, *The Witch: A History of Fear, from Ancient Times to the Present* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017), 25.

<sup>28</sup> Christina Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (New York, NY: Blackwell, 1984), 1.

This pact that is made between mortal and immortal is seen widely throughout the writings of different early modern thinkers. William Perkins's definition of witchcraft is as follows: "A Witch is a Magician who either by open or secret league, wittingly and willingly consenteth to use the aide and assistance of the Devil, in the working of wonders."<sup>29</sup> From these similarities, the definition of witchcraft that is being used relies on two main components: that a witch is one who does harm to others and is created through a pact with a demon or the Devil.

Though witchcraft trials began to occur in increasing numbers in the local villages and towns throughout England, the cities were not seeing similar numbers reflected. The plays that are examined in this chapter exemplify sentiments that those in cities had during the time period about witchcraft, as the plays were heavily relying on the performance of witchcraft to captivate audiences. Using these conditions stated above, there are very few existing plays that fit within the parameters of what can be considered "evil" magic.<sup>30</sup> Two plays from the early modern period that fulfill these conditions are *Doctor Faustus* by Christopher Marlowe and certain scenes from the end of Shakespeare's *I Henry VI* featuring the character of Joan la Pucelle. Both works show witchcraft as black magic that relies on harming others, though at great cost to those using the dark magic. Though magic is portrayed in this negative manner, it only occurs in foreign places, not in England. Both *I Henry VI* and *Doctor Faustus* take place in foreign countries: France and Germany. In this way, the topic of witchcraft can be discussed and used to explore the implications of religion on statehood, but with the backdrop of understanding that witchcraft of this sort does not occur in England. It is also important to note that if there were a

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<sup>29</sup> Perkins, 167.

<sup>30</sup> There are certainly other magic plays from the time, but they do not fit the definition of witchcraft that is being focused on. There is also the unfortunate fact that many plays that would have been performed during this time were lost over time.

widespread and legitimate fear of witchcraft, then the summoning scenes in *Faustus* and *I Henry VI* would not have existed, or they would have been seen as immediately dangerous and as promoting witchcraft ideology in showing individuals how they could also make a pact with the Devil. But the plays were not censored by the Office of the Revels, nor were they unpopular or condemned. These works therefore show us the disconnect between the rural witchcraft panic that took the lives of hundreds of individuals and the use of this panic as performance in Elizabethan theatre. These plays also use witchcraft as a tool to both uphold nationalistic pride yet express an uncertainty regarding the reigning monarch's ability to assert and perform power. For *I Henry VI*, Joan's performance as a witch is used to emphasize her threat to the English throne as the deceitful foreign power who is defeated, but her transgressions of gender can be seen as the threat that women in power possess in disrupting the line of succession. In *Doctor Faustus*, the witch is used to question the legitimacy of power in both church and state. Both plays use witchcraft to interrogate their fears surrounding the future of England with no named heir and a queen close to death. In the case of Elizabeth I there was an implicit connection between the witch as a female with power threatening patriarchal order and the potential ruin that England faced with its first longstanding female monarch.

In order to understand the reception of witchcraft in popular Elizabethan theatre there needs to be a foundation of understanding about the culture of witchcraft in everyday society at this time. There is little writing to be found by common people in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, as they were often not educated enough to write and keep records of such thoughts. However, the thoughts and feelings of these individuals should not be trivialized as being unintelligent, foolish, or anything of the like. Many common people of the Elizabethan era were not consciously misinformed on the nature of witchcraft. They were individuals who attempted

to craft lives of meaning in a time period that did not afford much comfort. Although today's media attempts to portray Early Modern people's understanding of witchcraft as one-dimensional, with a view of every individual wholeheartedly believing accusations as truth, the reality is that many people had a varied perspective on witchcraft, and more likely viewed the belief through more of a superstitious lens. Some individuals would have viewed witchcraft as being completely in the realm of possibility, others would have actively sought out witches in their own communities, and others would have thought witchcraft as a hoax. Much like the witchcraft literature of the time, opinions on witchcraft were not uniform. As James Sharpe outlines, there was a distinctive mental world that those who were superstitious or believed had that was heavily influenced by religion, not so much in the way that religion is learned through study of the Biblical text, but instead in a way that allowed it to reinforce methods of community. Sharpe states:

For most people (again to the despair of theologians), Christian belief of this type was perfectly compatible with a greater or lesser acceptance of areas of belief which both we and their educated contemporaries would describe as superstitious. There is ample evidence that people accepted the reality of ghosts, fairies, poltergeists, the power of prophecy and spirits of all sorts.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, it can hardly be surprising that there were individuals who on some level believed that *malleus maleficarum* was possible. Supernatural elements were part of their everyday beliefs, and ways that they understood and interacted with the world. Witchcraft is then not outside of the realm of possibility when there is a shared history of explaining misfortunes with intervention from the supernatural.

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<sup>31</sup> James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 59.

There were many who were skeptical about the legitimacy of witchcraft trials, and the legitimacy of witchcraft in general. Perhaps the most famous work detailing the skepticism of this time is Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Witchcraft was defined by Scot as a "cousening art, wherein the name of God is abused, prophaned, and blasphemed, and his power attributed to a vile creature."<sup>32</sup> Scot points out that witchcraft is an art, and his central argument throughout is that those who proclaim themselves to be witches are simply performing tricks and slights of hand. He breaks down various elements of the demonic pact that are essential to witchcraft as he states that it has no legitimate scriptural basis and that to suggest that an everyday person is able to do miraculous feats is blasphemous to the power of God. Scot also puts forth an archetypal argument for how witchcraft accusations would often occur. He identified elderly women as individuals who might "go from house to house, from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yest, drinks, pottage, or some such releefe; without which they could hardline live."<sup>33</sup> If a neighbor did not provide this relief, then they would often be cursed at by the elderly beggar woman who was in need of aid. This cursing was not something formal such as the wronged performing a spell, but instead an exclamation of disdain after a neighbor did not help. If misfortune followed after, such as family members falling ill or livestock dying, then the cursed individual would likely think back on the words of the elderly beggar woman who had visited them several days prior and would accuse them of witchcraft.

The audience of these plays is also important, as these works were being visibly performed in front of people creating a connection and interaction between the story on stage and off. Anyone was able to attend these performances, and therefore these plays reflect the lives of

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<sup>32</sup> Sharpe, 51.

<sup>33</sup> Sharpe, 52.

the community and the issues that they had with their leaders. The plays being discussed were not just read in the comfort of one's home but were an immersive experience. Witchcraft was another tool used to draw audiences in and challenge cultural expectations as the witch was used to express concerns regarding politics, gender, and class. The witch is performed and presented in each of these plays, in different and unique ways, touching upon issues with current power dynamics. Those writing these plays would have known those in the Court and understood their motives on a more intimate level than the common people, therefore the theatre was a way to discuss these political ideals in a manner that could be enjoyed by the everyday individual and the reigning monarch alike.

Shakespeare's *I Henry VI* uses witchcraft as a way to portray the character of Joan la Pucelle, as an enemy of the English monarchy. Based on the character of Joan of Arc, the character of Joan la Pucelle distorts her martyrdom into something that can be used to champion the Tudor Myth. Joan's performance as a transgressor of gender expectations causes her to be declared as a witch. There is much ambiguity present throughout the play on who or what Joan is. Her name itself has a variety of interpretations. In Smith's essay on the nature of witchcraft in *I Henry VI* and *Richard III*, she breaks down the multitude of options that Joan's name could mean. Joan's last name is spelled "Puzzell" in the First Folio, but then "Puzel" in the Arden Edition of the play.<sup>34</sup> Edward Burns, in the introduction to the Arden Edition, provides further meanings for her name:

In English, "pucelle" means virgin, "puzel" means whore... there is a further pun available in the puzzle of Joan la Pucelle—on a pizzle, an Elizabethan term for penis. The woman in man's clothes wielding a sword is a pucelle with a pizzle, and therefore a puzzle. The play expands the figuration implicit in the term to create in one role a

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<sup>34</sup> Kristin M. Smith, "Martial Maids and Murdering Mothers: Women, Witchcraft and Motherly Transgression in Henry VI and Richard III," *Shakespeare* 3, no. 2 (August 1, 2007): 146.



summation of binary categories normally seen as discrete—saint/witch, peasant/gentry, villain/hero, man/woman, virgin/whore.<sup>35</sup>

Joan's entrance into the play showcases these dual natures and automatically provides the audience with reasons to be suspicious of her true motives. Upon her meeting with the Dauphin, she immediately refers to him by his first name with no regard for his title. She then introduces herself as having been visited by the Virgin Mary:

[JOAN] God's mother deigned to appear to me  
And, in a vision full of majesty,  
Willed me to leave my base vocation  
And free my country from calamity:  
Her aid she promised and assured success.  
(*IH6* 1.2.66)

This play, written for an English audience, showcases the fact that although Joan claims to be visited by a divine presence assuring her of her country's victory through God's will, that she must be false in her claims (because she is French and Catholic). These claims also act as prophecy, which through the Protestant faith would be regarded as heresy, causing Joan to reveal her first transgression as the witch figure. Prophesizing witches are also seen in the later *Macbeth*, and the threat of these prophecies would carry over into Elizabethan life, as Tudor authorities became fearful of the effects of prophesying, causing them to issue a statement forbidding "soothsaying, divination, or any form of sorcery."<sup>36</sup> However, Joan's statement of contact with a divine and holy presence cause the English confusion as to whether these claims are true. Shakespeare then uses this confusion and her transgressive and duplicitous nature to portray her not as a saint or martyr as she so claims, but as a woman who turned from God to prevent the English monarchy from ruling in France.

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<sup>35</sup> William Shakespeare, *King Henry VI, Part 1* / Edited by Edward Burns., The Arden Shakespeare. Third series (London: Thomson Learning, 2000), 26.

<sup>36</sup> *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, 2:126 Qtd. In Bezio, Kristin M. *Staging Power in Tudor and Stuart English History Plays: History, Political Thought, and the Redefinition of Sovereignty*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015.

In her interactions with the prince, a variety of sexual innuendos are used to portray Joan as a sexually promiscuous woman, which contradicts her proclaimed image of saintly virgin. Her interactions with the prince not only transgress the gendered expectations of her as a woman, but the sexual innuendos made in the dialogue do not allow her claims of piety to be taken as legitimate. As she and the prince banter back and forth before their battle, Joan claims that she has a “keen-edged sword” (*IH6 1.2.98*) presenting herself in a masculine manner, with a weapon usually only used by men. She also states, “And while I live I’ll ne’er fly from a man” (*IH6 1.2.103*). Although in the moment this is taken as a sentiment of Joan’s courage and commitment to battle, it also is taken in a sexual manner, the root of the comedy taking place is in the fact that although this woman is attempting to show strength, she also reminds the audience of her sexual nature in the sense that she will never turn down a man. The word *fly* also has connotations with her eventual transformation into a witch. It was commonly thought that witches had the ability to summon demons to help them fly at night or had the power to do so on their own.

The main issues that Joan presents are her rejection of God and her trespassing into spaces specifically deemed as masculine, such as the battlefield. In her scenes fighting Talbot, he states the following upon seeing her enter the battlefield:

Here, Here she comes, I’ll have a bout with thee—  
Devil, or devil’s dam, I’ll conjure thee.  
Blood will I draw on thee— thou art a witch—  
And straightway give thy soul to him thou serv’st.  
(*IH6 1.5.15*)

This description is straightforward and clear in naming Joan as a witch. This belief that Joan has sold her soul to the Devil lies in her ability to defeat great English soldiers on the battlefield. It would insult the grandeur of the English monarchy if their army was able to be defeated by the strength of a French woman, no matter how saintly in demeanor. Therefore, she must be a witch.

Joan's performance of power is deemed as too masculine, and her inability to present herself as a genuine saintly figure highlights the hypocrisy of her claim as a virgin, likening herself in image to the Virgin Mary. Talbot, Burgundy, and Bedford point out her impurity when discussing her allegiance to the Devil. Talbot assures the men of Joan's eventual ruin by stating, "Well, let them practise and converse with spirits. / God is our fortress" (*IH6* 2.1.21). The words 'practise' and 'converse' have connotations of not only dealing with the occult, but also imply sexual intercourse. This is especially relevant to witches often being accused of having sexual relations with the Devil to affirm their allegiance to him. The idea of sexual impurity was commonly associated with witches, as they were seen to give into the carnalities of the Devil and part of completing this pact not only required their soul, but their body.

The most striking scene involving witchcraft is when Joan attempts to summon the demons necessary to defeat the English. In this moment she clearly professes herself as a witch, but to her surprise, though the demons appear, they refuse to serve her. She begins to offer various parts of herself including her blood, body, and soul, if they help to defeat the English, but again they refuse. In her pleading with the demons surrounding her, she begs, "Help me this once" (*IH6* 5.2.28), which suggests that this is the first time that Joan has summoned the demons. It is in this scene where Joan's performance of witchcraft fails, as the demons themselves disappear despite her desperate pleas. This refusal to aid in the destruction of the English army suggests that God has chosen England as the blessed country to aid, not France.

The final scene where Joan appears she proclaims her holiness despite her success in summoning demons to the stage a few scenes prior:

First let me tell you whom you have condemned:  
Not me begotten of a shepherd swain,  
But issued from the progeny of kings;

Virtuous and holy, chosen from above  
By inspiration of celestial grace  
To work exceeding miracles on earth.  
(*IH6* 5.3.43)

In this speech, Joan evokes biblical language to profess innocence to the charges of which she is being accused. She asserts that she is “A virgin from tender infancy” (*IH6* 5.3.50), and that she has worked in the name of God. When the English, York, and Warwick, show no mercy towards her pleas, she then asserts that she is with child and that while they may want to burn her at the stake for being a witch, they should not kill her child. The Englishmen mocked her, as she had so vehemently asserted her virginity, yet now claimed that she was with child. When she realizes it will not work, she resorts to cursing them while she is led away to what the audience can assume is her death.

Although Joan is initially portrayed as a potential martyr by the French, her eventual reveal as a witch assures the security and sanctity of English power. Although this play portrays female power as dangerous, the reasons that Joan threatens order is because of her nationality and religion. In this way, witchcraft is used to make a mockery of Catholicism and foreign beliefs. Joan becomes a hypocrite for claiming to be a virgin while being prepared to sell her body and soul to the Devil for her country. She serves as a juxtaposition to England’s very own Virgin Queen, Elizabeth I. Willis comments on this comparison when writing that “Elizabeth is a counter-example to figures like Joan and Margaret, whose political power resonates with and gives birth to corruption, sorcery, and tyranny.”<sup>37</sup> Joan’s performance of power is one that cannot be founded in any genuine truth as the hypocrisy of claims of being supported by the divine is usurped by the potential of her promiscuity with the Dauphin. She cannot be both “maid and

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<sup>37</sup> Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* / Deborah Willis. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 178.

marital.”<sup>38</sup> This sinful nature culminates in her reveal as a witch, and Joan, is defeated by the English to promote the succession of the Tudor line.

The witch therefore serves as an antithesis to the reign of Queen Elizabeth I. Her ability to maintain an image that was suitable in the public eye allowed her to perform power in a way that would not be seen as transgressive to her gender. In order to assert her power as legitimate, she often relied on the performative elements of the monarchy, one example being the stage. As Bezio writes in her work on staging power in Tudor and Stuart plays:

Any performance of sovereignty, positive or negative, therefore reflected back on the perception of the reigning monarch, a reciprocal and cyclical relationship between stage and state that Elizabeth sought to both control and exploit.<sup>39</sup>

This relationship is clearly seen in *I Henry VI* as the French are portrayed as a foreign threat to the English monarchy. Although Joan represents the fear of a female in a masculine role, this gendered transgression is done to assert that the Tudor monarchy is one of divine choosing, as the demons that Joan attempts to summon refuse to aid her in defeating the English. Joan rejects her gendered role in society with a totality that Elizabeth carefully balanced. Elizabeth would be careful to present herself in a way that was nurturing and dignified, but along with these feminine qualities, she was sure to perform more masculine qualities such as courage and bravery. In a 1566 address to Parliament she states, “though I be a woman, yet I have as good a courage answerable to my place as ever my father had. I am your anointed queen.”<sup>40</sup> This continued performance of both gender roles, along with her image of femininity being tied to an image of chastity, as she refused countless proposals on the basis that she was married to her

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<sup>38</sup> Smith, 151.

<sup>39</sup> Bezio, 39.

<sup>40</sup> Qtd as Elizabeth I in Bezio, Kristin M. *Staging Power in Tudor and Stuart English History Plays: History, Political Thought, and the Redefinition of Sovereignty*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2015, 97.

country, allowed her to successfully perform power in a manner that did not see her as transgressor.

In the image that Elizabeth puts forth, she heavily relies on the notion of the body politic that is discussed in Plowden's *Commentaries, or Reports*:

The King has two Bodies, viz., a Body natural, and a Body Politic. His Body natural... is a Body mortal, subject to all infirmities that come by Nature or Accident... But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People... and this Body is utterly void of...natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to.<sup>41</sup>

This distinction between bodies allows there to be dual bodies and varying roles that Elizabeth is able to inhabit to maintain both masculine and feminine attributes without transgressing the gendered dynamics that were acceptable. Joan is unable to maintain these varying roles as she cannot claim to be a divine soul due to her (implied) promiscuity. Her eventual summoning of demons further damns her to be the witch threatening English rule when she offers her body and soul in exchange for assured French victory. This transgression into sexual deviance is highlighted through the following lines: "Cannot my body nor blood-sacrifice. Entreat you to your wonted furtherance? / Then take my soul — my body, soul, and all" (*IH6* 5.3.20-2). This complete corruption of the maternal further reflects Joan's inability to adhere to the submissive women's role. This play reflects anxieties surrounding the maternal in how the witch becomes a means by which male anxieties about female power can be worked through, resulting in punishment of the transgressor.

Sharpe discusses possible reasons why women were so often linked to the role of the witch, and how there was a shifting in hierarchical familial roles during this time, which can most adequately be represented by the ruling of Elizabeth. He states the following:

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<sup>41</sup> Edmund Plowden, *The Commentaries, or Reports of Edward Plowden*, vol. 1 (Dublin: H. Watts, 1792), 212.

One possible facet of these fears was worry that male domination, that central element of contemporary notions of hierarchy, was being threatened by female insubordination. In an age which was patriarchal, and in which the patriarchal family was seen as the basic unit and (for many) model of political authority, the spectre of the rebellious woman, most often found in the cultural stereotype of a scolding wife, was a threatening one.<sup>42</sup>

These anxieties about women translated to the stage as Joan becomes the witch who threatens not only the Tudor line, but also successfully ends the lineage of the Talbot name. The character of Talbot is defeated by Joan as he adopts her language and replicates her transgressions. Smith explains how despite Talbot's 'masculine strength' he threatens to "conjure thee" in reference to his battle with Joan. Quoted earlier, this passage draws on the fact that Talbot places himself in a position where he is at the mercy of Joan, as he states, "Blood will I draw on thee," suggesting that he is the devilish figure that she has summoned. Smith argues that "Talbot unknowingly (and unwillingly) corrupts himself by entering into Joan's linguistic space and overcome by female language, is no longer able to perform the role of English hero."<sup>43</sup> This linguistic space is central to Joan's power in the play as the inability for the English to figure out if she is truly divine or devilish allows her to maintain power through the performance of both witch and saint.

Talbot's demise is further seen as a travesty when he dies without an heir. This represents the longstanding anxiety that is present alongside, and acting through, the witchcraft motif on stage: the question of who would rule England after Elizabeth's death. The premise of *1 Henry VI* further supports the Tudors as being divine in their legacy; therefore, the reference to succession anxieties in the play itself would have been understood. The play was written in 1589, shortly after the English defeat of the Spanish Armada, and just fourteen years before Elizabeth's death. There was continued fear about the unrest that would occur after the Queen's death, as she

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<sup>42</sup> Sharpe, 173.

<sup>43</sup> Smith, 148.

refused to claim an heir. Although this was due to her wish to quell uprisings that would have taken place while she was alive, she was the end of the Tudor line, and the Stuart reign would bring tumultuous times for England's former glory. In this way Joan, although presented as a counter to Elizabeth, can also represent deeper anxieties present in the male-dominated Parliament about the choices of their female ruler. Willis surmises the purpose of the witch in the following: "The witch helps to make visible problems that Shakespeare's renegotiation of male identities cannot seem to resolve— problems linked to contestations aroused by patrilineality."<sup>44</sup> In these ways, Shakespeare's use of a witch in *I Henry VI* is not to be feared because of the power of witch, as she is defeated, but instead because she is attempting to undermine familial lines and English success, issues that were relevant to the Elizabethan political moment. Though the reign of Elizabeth I allowed England to see that the court could be ruled successfully by a woman, it did not remove the anxiety that surrounded the country about what would occur after their beloved Queen passed.

Succession anxieties and a furthering of English nationalism are also present in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*. These worries are presented differently as the protagonist of the play, Faustus, is a man practicing witchcraft. The use of the witch in this text has more to do with the tension surrounding King James I's potential succession to the English throne and what it would mean to have someone considered an outsider ruling. *Doctor Faustus* is a striking example of how fear of who would lead England, and with what beliefs that ruler would lead, culminates in the creation of a damned man continually choosing his own downfall.

Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* is based upon the German story; the earliest English version was published in London in 1592 after Marlowe's play was first performed and known as

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<sup>44</sup> Willis, 177.



“Faustbuch.”<sup>45</sup> The play itself focuses on the character of Doctor Faustus who, when studying divinity, becomes bored and wishes instead to attempt to study necromancy. This work was first performed in 1589 and was considered a popular play of the Elizabethan era. The story of Doctor Faustus focuses on his fall to eventual damnation as he chooses to study magic and eventually learns how to summon a demon, named Mephistopheles. With this demon, Faustus makes a pact with the following conditions:

*On these conditions following: first, that Faustus may be a spirit in form and substance; secondly that Mephistopheles shall be his servant and at his command; thirdly that Mephistopheles shall do for him and bring him whatsoever; fourthly, that he shall be in his chamber or house invisible; lastly, that he shall appear to the said John Faustus at all times in what form or shape soever he pleases.*

*(Doctor Faustus 2.1 92-104)*

With this pact Faustus vows to give the Devil his soul after twenty-four years of servitude from Mephistopheles. Faustus uses this pact in quite foolish ways, by playing tricks on the Pope, visiting the courts of Europe, and performing for royals. By the end of the twenty-four years, Faustus has had multiple chances to repent, but refuses to do so, yet still fears the end that he has caused. On the final night of his life, he attempts to repent but God has no mercy for him, and Faustus is damned to eternal suffering in Hell.

In looking at the A Text (the earlier of two versions) of *Doctor Faustus*, there is a clear relationship between Faustus and the Devil that adheres to the definition of witchcraft. In looking at Faustus’ reasoning for making a pact with the Devil, he is full of desire to have an aide, “To give me whatsoever I shall ask, / To tell me whatsoever I demand/ To slay mine enemies and aid my friends, / And always be obedient to my will” (*Doctor Faustus* 1.3.94-97). Besides the greed for power that is evident in these desires, Faustus wishes to use his pact with the Devil to harm

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<sup>45</sup> Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus: A Two Text Edition (A Text, 1604; B Text, 1616)*, Edited by David Scott Katsan. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2005), 182.

others by slaying and tormenting his enemies, causing his actions to fall into the category of witchcraft. There is also the general fact that Faustus is creating a pact with the Devil, and in doing so gives up his soul and renounces God. Faustus's pact with the Devil is reminiscent of the what is written in the popular witch hunting text, *Demonolatry*, in relation to how Satan tempts the prospective witch "by providing drugs to poison those upon whom a man wishes to be avenged, or to heal those to whom a man owes a debt of gratitude."<sup>46</sup> By having Faustus pledge his soul to the Devil in return for power and wealth, there is a pact being made, one that appears all the more evident by the blood that is spilled to solidify the deal. This is similar to the common belief that witches must sign their name in the Devil's book to pledge their allegiance to him. The summoning scene itself shows the detailed steps of how one would call a demon and create a pact to do one's evil bidding. The inclusion of this summoning scene in such detail shows that there must have been no doubt from Marlowe that witchcraft was impossible. If there were any legitimacy to dark magic, then Marlowe would not have included an accurate summoning in his work for fear that the Devil himself could appear on stage. This is different from the other plays included as they do not portray accurate summoning scenes, which makes it especially clear that Marlowe did not believe in witchcraft.

Central to this work is the questioning of the religious beliefs and challenging the Renaissance ideals that value knowledge above all else. Before writing this work, Marlowe would have been heavily debating such topics at Cambridge, where he took his Masters. The Elizabethan era allowed for such religious discussion, as Dawley has pointed out:

[The Queen's] original settlement of religion had been constructed to rest on the broadest possible base of agreement on the essentials of Christian doctrine rather

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<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Remy, *Demonolatry*, End. trans ed. M. Summers. (London: Lyone, 1920), 1.

than on the precise and rigid theological definitions familiar in the sixteenth-century confessional systems.<sup>47</sup>

This lack of structure in terms of what practicing religion was correct allowed scholars to have debates on such religious topics without much fear of persecution by the state. However, despite this less rigid state, there was a common anti-Catholic sentiment that can be found in *Doctor Faustus*. This play was first performed the year after the Spanish Armada first attempted to attack England. From this attack came an anti-Catholic sentiment being linked to proto-nationalism and anti-Spanish (as well as anti-Catholic) attitudes, as the Pope had helped to instigate the Spanish into attempting an invasion. This anti-Catholic sentiment is portrayed through witchcraft as Faustus mocks Catholic traditions to summon the demon, Mephistopheles, as well as his overall cynical view of the Pope. As Nouh Al Ghazo argues, “Marlowe is not only attempting to undermine Catholicism by presenting Catholic rituals as superstitious, but he is criticizing the basic doctrines of Christianity by viewing the Scriptures as superstitious and clergy as deceptive.”<sup>48</sup> In this manner, Marlowe is expressing England’s growing anxieties on religious conflict as Elizabeth is growing older and continually refusing to name an heir. The character of Faustus serves as a questioning of whether one can truly ever be saved by religion, as England nears uncertainty about Catholic powers taking over the English throne. Though Faustus is never himself called a witch, he fits the definition of what would be considered witchcraft at the time as he practices *malleus maleficarum* by causing harm to those around him and partaking in creating a pact with the Devil. Faustus mocks Catholicism and even alludes to common witchcraft tropes when he states:

The god thou servest is thine own appetite,

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<sup>47</sup> Mils Dawley Powell, *John Whitgift, and the English Reformation* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1954), 216.

<sup>48</sup> Nouh Al-Ghazo, “Anti-Papistical Sentiments in Doctor Faustus,” *Dirasat: Human and Social Sciences* Volume 43, no. No. 3 (2016), 2537.

Wherein is fixed the love of Beelzebub.  
To him I'll build an altar and a church  
And offer lukewarm blood of new-born babes.  
(*Doctor Faustus* 2.1.11-14)

In this passage Faustus is mocking Catholicism through using the altar and including the offering of blood as the process of transubstantiation during mass causes the wine that is offered to symbolically transform into the literal Blood of Christ. However, the 'newborn babes' part of these lines references common accusations that would have been levied against supposed witches. As Brian P. Levack writes about the witches' sabbath, "At these meetings witches allegedly engaged in a variety of amoral and often obscene activities, including naked dancing, sexual intercourse with the devil and other witches, the sacrifice of infants to the devil, and cannibalism."<sup>49</sup> The combination of the anti-Catholic sentiment and the witches' sabbath creates a link between the two that causes *Doctor Faustus* to be read as a text that not only rejects Catholicism, but makes it synonymous with witchcraft.

Another example of anti-Catholic sentiment present is Faustus's request for Mephistopheles to take shape as a friar:

I charge thee to return and change thy shape;  
Thou art too ugly to attend on me.  
Go, and return an old Franciscan friar;  
That holy shape becomes devil best.  
(*Doctor Faustus* 1.3 23-26)

Faustus turns to witchcraft when his mind becomes idle from current studies. In this way witchcraft becomes a new area of knowledge to pursue, and then becomes a representation of greed in wishing to understand concepts that are not for mortal life. According to William Perkins, the act of witchcraft a sin from men desiring to become gods: "not satisfied with the

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<sup>49</sup> Brian P. Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland: Law, Politics and Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 7.

measure of the inward gifts received, as of knowledge, wit, understanding, memory and suchlike... to search out such things as God would have kept secret.”<sup>50</sup> When Faustus first picks up the book that will teach him the dark arts he states: “These metaphysics of magicians / And necromantic books are heavenly” (*Doctor Faustus* 1.1.49-50). The stage directions before indicate that Faustus puts down the Bible to pick up the book of magic, suggesting that Faustus believes he can only find the knowledge he seeks through the Dark Arts. As Al Ghazo explains, “Faustus considers that the Christian religion limits his freedom of achieving eternity and clarifying the vagueness that surrounds him; therefore, he resorts to the devil to solve these mysteries.”<sup>51</sup> In this way witchcraft becomes a new area of knowledge to pursue, and a rejection of Christian Scripture.

Marlowe also reflects Scot’s views of witchcraft aligning with anti-Catholic views. As Sharpe points out, Scot considered the fictitious elements of witchcraft to be aligned with the superstitious components of Roman Catholicism. He is cited as saying, “I see no difference between these and popish conjurations: for they agree in order, words, and mater, differing in no circumstance, but that the papists do it without shame openlie, the other doe it in hugger mugger secretlie.”<sup>52</sup> This work heavily shows how witchcraft would come to be seen as synonymous with Catholicism especially after the Spanish Armada. Witchcraft in *Doctor Faustus* is used in this manner to continue this anti-Catholic sentiment, but also extends outward to an open rejection of religion being an honorable cause kill and be killed over.

James VI of Scotland, who would eventually become James I of England when Elizabeth died, had a precarious history with witchcraft; however, he certainly did believe in the existence

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<sup>50</sup> Perkins, 59.

<sup>51</sup> Al-Ghazo, 2540.

<sup>52</sup> Sharpe, 54.

of witches as he not only published works on how to hunt them, but actively participated in trials himself. The following chapter will touch more upon his background, but at this moment in history there was tension in the Elizabethan court about who would rule after her death. This tension was out of fear of eventual civil war, and these anxieties were reflected in various plays, which can be seen in *Doctor Faustus*, as Faustus turns his back on religion in order to follow his own greed and desires. Bezio discusses this national paranoia and the role of theatre in the following:

By presenting these moments of historical conflict, these plays engage in contemporary discussions concerning the scope of sovereign limitation and subject participation in the English polity, and the use of historical matter permitted a certain amount of ideological flexibility that allowed playwrights and players to circumvent both social and legal structures— perhaps even with the approval (implicit or explicit) of the regime.<sup>53</sup>

Marlowe may not have been explicitly commenting on his disapproval of James as heir to the throne, but he was certainly commenting on religion and its role on creating violence. Faustus's reasoning when choosing a friar for Mephistopheles's appearance was because he could imagine no better fit for a Devil. Marlowe's own life was certainly entangled with being troublesome by Christianity's standards as he was associated with Walter Raleigh's School of Night, which was considered unorthodox, as it was said to deny the existence of divinity and embrace the Devil.<sup>54</sup>

While it may not have been as extreme, Marlowe surely understood the ways that having different beliefs would cause one to be labeled as a heretic and potentially dangerous to the Protestant state. Witchcraft trials themselves were a show of power by the state in the case of England, as witchcraft trials in England were much less centered around heresy charges than potential to cause harm to others or treason. The political implications of the Pope declaring

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<sup>53</sup> Bezio, 57.

<sup>54</sup> Al-Ghazo, 2538.

Elizabeth an illegitimate ruler in 1570 were very grave, as they caused every Catholic to become a potential traitor to the state.<sup>55</sup> Religious persecution in this way increased as Catholics became synonymous with traitors to the English crown. Anti-Catholic sentiments and England's unique position of witchcraft as an intellectual battleground can be seen in *Faustus*. The role of Mephistopheles as the most truthful character in this play shows the unique perspective present through much of English religious belief. There was more debate on what and who could be considered witchcraft as English law did not execute witches due to heresy but instead under treason. The crime of a witch was not simply existing but the harm that they would cause others. As Levack writes, "Owing to the greater strength of Calvinist thought in the northern kingdom, the devil had a more commanding and therefore more frightening presence in Scotland than in England."<sup>56</sup> Though he was not an insignificant figure in England, he just did not hold the same fear and power that he did in Scotland.<sup>57</sup> This was due to the government's persecution of witches and agents of the Devil as being a crime of heresy. Due to James' claim of Divine Right the line between heresy and treason is all but invisible in the case of witchcraft. This makes the character of Mephistopheles even more complicated as he proves to be an honest demon; he answers any of Faustus's questions about the reality of Hell truthfully. Including the reasoning why the demon answered Faustus's call in the first place:

For, when we hear one rack the name of God,  
Abjure the Scriptures and his Savior Christ,  
We fly in hope to get his glorious soul;  
Nor will we come unless he use such means  
Whereby he is in danger to be damned.  
Therefore the shortest cut for conjuring  
Is stoutly to abjure the Trinity  
And pray devoutly to the prince of hell.

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<sup>55</sup>William Shakespeare, *Macbeth: Texts and Contexts*, Edited by William C. Carroll. (Boston: Bedford St. Martin's, 1999), 12.

<sup>56</sup> Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland*, 11.

<sup>57</sup> Levack, *Witch-Hunting in Scotland*, 11.

(*Doctor Faustus* 1.3.47-54).

Mephistopheles does not attempt to trick Faustus or convince him to sign over his soul to the Devil; Faustus does this all on his own accord. There is also the suggestion in this passage that Mephistopheles only comes to the call of those who truly intend to turn their backs on God and repentance. Marlowe's portrayal of the demon allows the blame for Faustus's eventual damnation to only be placed upon himself.

Marlowe's own unorthodox beliefs cause this story to be a speculation on the playwrights own fate as Michael Hattaway writes, "Marlowe... may well have been a true but tentative atheist—the kind who is going to need to blaspheme—standing above and beyond that desolate battlefield between good and evil that defines the religious life in *Doctor Faustus*."<sup>58</sup> Therefore the struggle that Faustus faces could reflect the anxieties that Marlowe had about his own fate if he truly rejected the existence of God or did not follow the proper Protestant methods of worship. Marlowe's use of anti-Catholic themes and rejection of Christianity allows there to be an implicit rejection of the state. The anxiety that was plaguing the country about an eventual Civil War was centered around who would be claimed heir, with the country having a distinct aversion to a Catholic heir. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* uses the character of the witch to express his disapproval of religion being a reason for civil war as the court anxiously waited to see what would occur after Elizabeth's death. Witchcraft is performed in a realistic manner in this play through an accurate summoning scene which showcases the English skepticism on the legitimacy of witchcraft, and how it was a tool to express other concerns about the political moment.

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<sup>58</sup> M. Hattaway, "Marlowe: Ideology and Subversion," in *Marlowe: Contemporary Critical Essays*, Ed. Avraham Oz. (New York: MacMillan, 2003), 56.





## Chapter Three: Jacobean Plays

Although the problem of English Succession was resolved quite peacefully with James VI of Scotland taking the throne after Elizabeth's death, the English were not exactly thrilled at the idea of a Scottish King. The newly crowned King James I wished to unify the two countries under his leadership, but this was not a popular and welcomed idea. The two countries have a long, complex history that is full of strife, and much of the literature about Scotland painted the Scottish negatively. As Carroll explains:

It was thought to be a wild place, dominated by dangerous extremes of geography and weather, inhabited by a learned Protestant King, yes, but also by an ungovernable, clannish nobility that continually challenged (and even occasionally imprisoned) its monarch, and a near-barbarous populace descended from the Picts.<sup>59</sup>

These stigmas about the Scottish created tension within the English Jacobean court, as James brought various advisors and courtiers from his Scottish court. To the English, it very much seemed as though the Scottish were invading their royal court and reaping unfair benefits due to their relationship to the King. Sir Francis Osborne described the Scots at court as following, hanging "like horseleeches on" James, "till they could get no more, falling then off by retiring into their own country, or living at ease, leaving all chargeable attendance to the English."<sup>60</sup>

There was a condemnation of the ways that the King showed favor to the Scottish, and during his reign he was responsible for the greatest increase in honors and titles. It very much decreased the honor of these positions, as they were no longer something given to special individuals who had truly served the monarchy in an honorable way. Although James was a Protestant King, which aligned with Elizabeth's Protestant rule, his mother was the Catholic Mary Queen of Scots, who,

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<sup>59</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 27.

<sup>60</sup> Francis Osborne, *Traditional Memoirs on the Reign of King James the First: The Secret History of the Court of James I.*, Ed. Sir Walter Scott. (Edinburgh: 1811), 270.

in the eyes of the English, was a traitor executed in 1587 for conspiring with a murder plot against Queen Elizabeth. James did have a claim to the throne through being a descendent of Henry VII's daughter, but his Scottish origins caused him to be seen as a foreigner who was taking the English throne.

There was much discourse surrounding how Scotland should be viewed when James took the throne as Scottish and English writers discussed the pros and cons of having a Scottish King as the new King of England. James did have the benefit of having two children by 1600, which would not recreate the same succession problem that had been the central focus of Parliament and the Privy Council at the time of Elizabeth's death. James was also a learned monarch, having been raised as a King in the Scottish court. The central drawbacks to having a Scottish King were the differences in culture and politics between the two countries and the fact that the unification that James was promoting was not welcomed by many. To the English, Scotland was not their equal and to imply such was an offense. Xenophobic attitudes continued to increase, especially when James proposed to Parliament that the two kingdoms be united legally and politically under his rule in 1604.<sup>61</sup>

Another substantial difference between the two countries was their respective positions on witchcraft. As discussed in the previous chapter, witchcraft trials were not as popular in England as compared to the rest of Europe during the Elizabethan era. In England witchcraft was not defined in exclusively religious terms as it was in Scotland and other European countries. As Levack states:

The English witchcraft statute of 1563 did not appeal to the biblical injunction against magical practices in condemning magical practices. Nor did it call for the execution of witches on the basis of biblical authority. Not all English witches

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<sup>61</sup> Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, 272.

were executed, and when they were, they were hanged like other felons, not burned in the matter of heretics.<sup>62</sup>

Although witches were deemed as harmful, the crime in England was not simply existing as a witch, which was often the case in Scotland, as the act of being a witch was against the laws of religion. The only way that one could be charged and executed under English law was if the witch had committed an act of harm towards another individual resulting in the injury or death of the individual, their family, or their property. Another reason why England did not prosecute many witches is because England had a prohibition against using torture to extract confessions. Levack explains that suspected witches not being forced to “to confess to having made pacts with the devil or attended nocturnal assemblies with him” made it harder for judges to present a legitimate case during the legal process.<sup>63</sup> The Privy Council was also much less likely to take witchcraft accusations seriously, as they only intervened when there was a potential threat against the Queen’s life. The English Central Government also had greater control over local witchcraft trials. Almost all the English witchcraft trials based on statutes from 1563 and 1604 took place at country courts where judges from the central law would serve.<sup>64</sup> Although this would not necessarily improve an accused witch’s chance of survival, it does mean that there was more supervision by the government to make sure that these trials followed judicial procedures. Scotland’s central government was not as involved, meaning that local governments were able to try the accused using methods such as torture to extract forced confessions. Another large difference between the two countries in terms of witchcraft trials was how involved the reigning monarch was. In terms of Queen Elizabeth, there are no surviving documents of any

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<sup>62</sup> Levack, *Witch Hunting in Scotland*, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Levack, *Witch Hunting in Scotland*, 10.

<sup>64</sup> Levack, *Witch Hunting in Scotland*, 27.

opinions that she had on witchcraft and her beliefs on whether or not witches were real.

However, for King James, it was the exact opposite. He wrote extensively about his beliefs on witchcraft, publishing the popular witchcraft treatise *Daemonologie* and even was a part of witch hunts himself. He is the only example of a monarch who was so heavily involved in witch hunts and trials.

James I was known to be quite a paranoid man, as he had been kidnapped in his youth, and later after his ascension to the English throne, his life would almost be taken in the infamous Gunpowder Plot. James became heavily involved in witchcraft trials when he believed that he had almost been killed by witches. This notion is based on there being several large storms that impeded and almost took the lives of the King and his new bride, Queen Anne of Denmark when they were attempting to meet after their marriage. In 1582 he had been kidnapped in an attempted coup but managed to escape. Then in 1589, before a trip to visit his wife in Denmark, there was a rebellion from Catholic nobility and an uprising along the borders.<sup>65</sup> As these events all took place during a time where James did not have a very secure hold on the Scottish throne, which had more of an impactful effect on his paranoia. The central contribution that James added to Scottish witch hunting was its politicization and link to treason. As Levack explains, “James had fused the demonological fantasy of the witches’ sabbath with the traditional idea of politically motivated sorcery, thus transforming witchcraft [...] into a political as well as a religious crime, tantamount to treason.”<sup>66</sup> His difficulty in uniting with his wife after her marriage and the deaths that occurred due to the storms were seen as supernatural in nature by the Danish. When James arrived in Denmark, he was told this theory and believed that due to his

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<sup>65</sup> Levack, *Witch Hunting in Scotland*, 36

<sup>66</sup> Levack, *Witch Hunting in Scotland*, 41.

Divine Right, witches had a natural disposition to kill the most righteous agent of God, the King. Therefore, all witches could be deemed a potential threat to James and should be treated not only as sinners but as individuals committing high treason.

James had a change in attitude after moving to England, as he became significantly more skeptical about the ideas that he had previously written about in *Daemonologie*. This change is largely shown by his involvement in the possession of Anne Gunter. There were suspicions that Anne was falsely showing signs of possession to blame individuals that she did not like in the hopes to get them tried and killed for witchcraft. She was examined at Oxford by doctors and even interviewed several times by the King himself in 1605. Eventually the King asked that she be investigated and tried for false accusations of witchcraft.<sup>67</sup> This a prime example of the way that after James became the English king, he was more skeptical about the validity of accusations, and was less enthusiastic about getting involved in witchcraft prosecutions except on occasions, such as the Gunter case, where false accusers were tried.

### **Jacobean Witchcraft Plays**

In order to focus on the variety of critiques that the English had regarding King James's leadership, this chapter will use the following plays to discuss how witchcraft was used to discuss a particular aspect of the Jacobean Era. The first is *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare, which again discusses the tensions surrounding James's succession while affirming the King's claim to the Scottish throne. *The Witch* by Thomas Middleton focuses on literary and academic witchcraft knowledge, while *The Witch of Edmonton* by Thomas Dekker, William Rowley, and John Ford focuses on a witchcraft trial that actually occurred within the English community. All these plays comment on the variety of witchcraft beliefs, as well as views on the current

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<sup>67</sup> Levack, *Witch Hunting in Scotland*, 50.

monarch, as many playwrights continued to associate James with his prior obsession regarding witches. The performance of witchcraft in each of these plays is vastly different as *Macbeth's* witches are described as not conforming to a gender, as they seem to be women, but also have beards. These witches do not have any direct power, as they simply prophesize, and Macbeth is the individual who causes his own downfall due to his wicked interpretations of their words. *The Witch* uses witchcraft to again disrupt patriarchal lineage through love and impotency potions, but the actions are set in motion by human desires to disrupt and cause chaos. *The Witch of Edmonton* is the most explicit critique as the witch is performed in a way that causes the audience to sympathize with her and show that she is a product of an unjust society. The performance of witchcraft in each of these plays directly challenge James' own ability to effectively perform power as witchcraft is used to undermine stereotypical power dynamics in each play and showcase how man, not the supernatural, is responsible for its own shortcomings.

The first play, *Macbeth*, was written by William Shakespeare, most likely in 1606, and deliberates on the issue of succession that England was currently experiencing. As James had recently ascended to the throne in 1603, and the Gunpowder Plot had been attempted the year before in 1605, *Macbeth* attempts to cover many of the tensions that existed within the court at the moment. The Gunpowder Plot was a Catholic-motivated plan to assassinate the Protestant King and much of the royal court that was foiled when Guy Fawkes was found in the cellar beneath Parliament with thirty-two barrels of gunpowder.<sup>68</sup> As Bezio states, "The aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot produced two theatrical responses: first, a resurgence in nationalism as a reaction against Catholicism, and second, a profound disillusionment with the stability of

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<sup>68</sup> Bezio, 171.

James's rule."<sup>69</sup> *Macbeth* shows the latter of these two arguments, as although there is a nod to James's lineage through the character of Banquo, as James claimed he was descended from the character, the play is essentially about a King who believes in the prophecy of witches, which causes his own downfall. *Macbeth* itself reflects England's uncertain future as the Gunpowder Plot in the previous year reflected the rising tensions between Catholics and Protestants.

The witches begin the play by discussing when they shall meet again and declaring the meeting will occur "When the battle's lost and won" (*Mac.* 1.1.4). The reference to the battle in neutral terms allows the audience to understand that it does not seem as though the witches have a preference about who the winner of this battle is, so it is unclear whose side they are on. They all then proclaim at the end of this scene that "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (*Mac.* 1.1.10), which shows that the morals of these witches are completely backwards. They are not able to distinguish what is just and, because of this, the witches automatically become unreliable characters. These words are key to understanding the following events because they allow the audience to understand that the witches should not be trusted. The witches are also established through a variety of tropes, upon their initial introduction they reference their animal familiars, who were thought to be protectors of witches. They also discuss how they will meet again, "In thunder, lightning, or in rain" (*Mac.* 1.1.2), referencing a common trope that witches could be responsible for bad weather. This would be especially relevant when performed in front of King James, as his original interest in witchcraft began after a variety of shipwrecks prolonged his ability to get married to his wife, Queen Anne of Denmark. The witches are almost over the top with their stereotypical nature, as when one witch asks where the other has been, she responds, "Killing swine" (*Mac.* 1.3.2), which was a common accusation against suspected witches: harm

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<sup>69</sup> Bezio, 171.



to cattle and livestock. The witches prophesy that Macbeth will ascend and be King as they hail to him, with the titles of Thane of Glamis (his current title), Thane of Cawdor (the title he would soon receive) and 'king thereafter' (the title he would kill for). Although Macbeth eventually murders King Duncan, it is important to note that the witches never said that Macbeth needed to kill to receive the title. He is the one who immediately jumps to this conclusion and is encouraged to do so by his wife, Lady Macbeth. Macbeth and his wife take this prophesizing as divine intervention, as Lady Macbeth writes to her husband, "All that impedes thee from the golden round / Which fate and metaphysical aid doth seem / To have thee crowned withal" (*Mac.* 1.5.24-26). Although the witches are often charged with altering the events of the play, they really do not do anything other than give Macbeth the agency to commit such heinous acts that he imagines himself.

After Macbeth and his wife succeed in their plan to kill Duncan, Macbeth begins to see ghosts as he is racked with guilt at the crime he has just committed. He seeks out the witches again and he encounters them while they are casting spells into a cauldron, another stereotypical depiction of a witch. In this meeting, the witches show Macbeth three apparitions that will lead to his eventual demise; however, Macbeth also asks about the possibility of Banquo becoming King, and the witches answer by showing an apparition of Banquo at the dinner table as the eighth King, the final one suggesting his sons' eventual rule. This is especially important as it is a nod to the Stuart dynasty, as King James was said to be a descendent of a Banquo and such an assertion would affirm King James's right to the throne. In this case, Macbeth becomes the anti-hero as he attempts to kill both Banquo and his sons to prevent the line of succession.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Although Macbeth is successful in killing Banquo, he fails to kill Banquo's sons who would be the true threat to Macbeth's power and rule.

There are many complexities as to whom the character of Macbeth is supposed to represent. Although the witches' prophecy proclaims Banquo's children as a threat to Macbeth's reign, this questions the validity of James's own accession to the throne, as he was not the first-born son of an English monarch. At the same time, it is juxtaposed with the fact that James is viewed as a paternal and familial monarch with two sons that will prevent another succession crisis. As Bezio explains:

In this context Macbeth more closely resembles Elizabeth than James; like Macbeth, Elizabeth was a childless monarch destined to pass her crown to a child whose mother she had executed, just as the prophecy suggests Macbeth will pass his to "the seed of Banquo" while his own throne remains "barren."<sup>71</sup>

The issue of succession is still fresh on the minds of the English as the Gunpowder Plot had just previously occurred the year before, therefore *Macbeth* showcases the instability of the current monarch and England's future. It also speaks to the ways that Macbeth's downfall is largely based on his acceptance of the witches' words as divine prophecy. As James was heavily involved with witchcraft theology in Scotland, there is a cautionary note that, like the fallen antihero of the play, there is danger in a monarch believing in superstitious forces.

The Witches in *Macbeth* also present complexities in the way that they are described by Banquo as he states:

You should be women,  
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret  
That you are so.  
(*Mac.* 1.3. 45-47)

This statement presents a transgression of gender dynamics as the typical depiction of the witch as a female character is mixed with the masculine nature of facial hair. The witches in this way can also represent a comical element, as they have the potential to look humorous to the audience

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<sup>71</sup> Bezio, 174.

as a twist on stereotypical witch characters. Either way, they exist in a middle ground that allows them to be both inhabitants of Earth and somewhere else; they are both male and female as they possess characteristics of both. Dianne Purkiss discusses this in-between state as she states:

The witches inhabit a borderland between clearly marked states. [...] Similarly, their words are ambiguous, inviting a variety of interpretations. The witch figure can stand for nothing concrete, but must evoke the disorder of the play's notion of order by intermediacy.<sup>72</sup>

Purkiss goes on to argue that the witches can be interpreted as chaos, and that seems to be the most accurate depiction of them. As they do not directly intervene in Macbeth's life, he is the one who has the initiative to commit heinous acts; it is he who is responsible for the violence that ensues. The witches are continually deliberated on, as they seem to serve no other purpose than to offer a comedic effect, but their addition allows the actions of Macbeth to become all the more complicated as the role of James as the natural heir to throne due to his lineage to Banquo is reaffirmed, yet the anti-hero of Macbeth can also be seen as James by some due to his association with witches. If anything, the uncertainty that surrounds Macbeth's actions reflects a Jacobean court that was unsure about the ability of their King to lead England effectively.

Such themes of witchcraft continue in Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, which is thought to have been written between the years of 1613 to 1616. This play is known as tragicomedy, as it has four plots that revolve around the drama between interpersonal relationships. The central plot revolves around Sebastian returning home from war to find his betrothed, Isabella, has been married to another man, Antonio. The second plot revolves around Almachildes, trying to seduce Amoretta, and failing in doing so. Both Sebastian and Almachildes visit Hecate the witch to ask for her aid. These two plots are the only ones that the witches interact with, and in ways that, like

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<sup>72</sup> Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 211.

in *Macbeth*, are not necessarily indicative of their own evilness. This play has a lot of different elements, betrayals, pregnancies, extramarital affairs, murder plots, etc., and although the witches do act as a catalyst in the sense that they give Sebastian an impotency potion and Alchachildes a love potion, they are not the vilest characters in the play. The sense of evil and chaotic nature comes from the human characters. Corbin and Sedge discuss this interesting relationship that the witches have with humans as one that the humans use purely to satisfy their own sexual desires, and for the witches to procreate with. They write:

In terms of the relative corruption revealed in the play, it seems that it is the human world which is the more vicious. By contrast Hecate and her followers appear, in their uncomplicated delight in their activities, almost innocent; though guilty of coarse and brutal crimes, they seem not much more culpable than neutral executor of the hypocritical and wicked intents of the court figures.<sup>73</sup>

Again, the witches in this play are portrayed with a sense of dark comedy that is similar to what was seen in *Macbeth*. There is a cauldron scene that depicts this kind of humor, as Hecate is creating a charm and states the following: “Into the vessel; And fetch three ounces of the red-haired girl / I killed last midnight” (*The Witch* 5.2.53-57). Though the witches reference committing these heinous acts, they are not portrayed as all powerful. Hecate, even associated with the moon and witchcraft, is written as having limits to her powers. Her charms only work with careful planning and within the bounds of what she can accomplish. This is relevant to establishing the idea that the witch is not a figure that can defeat man as she or he is still human in nature, and that the witch who is responsible for impotence is not able to continue the tradition which would upset the natural social order of the English body politic. In the case of Sebastian asking Hecate to remedy his issue of his love Isabella marrying Antonio by asking her to break the marriage, she explains:

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<sup>73</sup> Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays: The Tragedy of Sophonisba, The Witch, The Witch of Edmonton* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 17.

We cannot disjoin wedlock.  
'Tis heaven's fastening. Well may we raise jars,  
Jealousies, striges, and heart-burning disagreements,  
Like a thick scurf o'er life, as did our master  
Upon that patient miracle, but the work itself  
Our power cannot disjoint.  
(*The Witch*, 1.2.172-177).

In this way, the witches are represented as beings that are not all powerful and are again not able to be taken too seriously. Much like with *Macbeth's* witches having beards, Hecate's admission of weakness allows the witches to be seen in a light that does present a serious threat in the real world; instead, they can be used as a vessel to talk about real life events.

These real-life events include the Essex divorce case, which was one of the largest social and political scandals at the time, and the Overbury murder trial. The scandal began in 1610, with the divorce proceedings occurring in 1613, and the Overbury murder which resulted in the executions of those involved in 1615-16.<sup>74</sup> This scandal involved witchcraft through the Lady Essex requesting an annulment of marriage due to her husband's impotence and an inability to consummate the marriage. The Earl claimed that his wife, Frances Howard, had conspired with witches to cause his impotence. It was known that Howard was being pursued by Viscount Rochester, and they had a mutual attraction, which was the basis for her seeking out a witch to help end her marriage. As Thomas Overbury did not want his political influence affected by Rochester marrying Lady Essex, he published *A Wife*, which describes what virtues a woman should have. This work was basically known to be a direct attack on the character of Lady Essex. She was so influential that she was able to have him taken to the Tower of London and tried for treason. It was rumored and eventually confirmed through trial that she was responsible for

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<sup>74</sup> Corbin and Douglas, 14.

ordering him to slowly be poisoned to death while in the Tower.<sup>75</sup> The narrative of this story can be twisted in a way that causes women to become linked to transgressing their sex through murder. As Purkiss writes, “These discourses of conspiracy figure all the women involved as part of a terrifying network of secret power, power capable of destroying the order of society.”<sup>76</sup> As Lady Essex had been found to have sought help from a common ‘cunning’ woman, the transgression extends beyond gender dynamics and into class. Lady Essex was from the nobility and conspired with someone from below her class to cause damage to *the* male symbol of power the ability to recreate and continue familial lineage, which created extreme gendered anxiety that is reflected through the plays like *The Witch*.

This fear of the female transcends as the witch becomes a character that transgresses to disrupt male potency, and the destroy the future existence of a familial name. *The Witch* itself focuses on this fear as Hecate is the one who creates the impotency potion that will foil the marriage between Antonio and Isabella. Many of the tropes that Middleton uses are based on Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Purkiss emphasizes that many of Scot’s misogynistic views could have influenced the creation of Hecate, reinforcing the stereotype of witch being synonymous with female transgressor. She writes:

In particular, Scot’s misogynist distaste for women— as marked as anything that can be unearthed in the most hostile and excitable Continental sources — has the effect of linking witch-beliefs with a feminized popular culture which can then be stigmatized by virtue of its very femininity.<sup>77</sup>

However, as explained earlier, Hecate admits that she does not have much power, and the fact that she is an incestuous relationship with her son, or is able to end patriarchal lines, does not

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<sup>75</sup> “Sir Thomas Overbury.” In *Encyclopedia Britannica*, n.d. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Thomas-Overbury>.

<sup>76</sup> Purkiss, 217.

<sup>77</sup> Purkiss, 217.

have the same effect of fear because she is portrayed as a weak figure. Her powers can be undermined, and she does not have a limitless ability to what she is able to do. Middleton also changes the tension that exists in the very violent acts that Hecate is capable of by adding the character of her son Firestone who brings a lighthearted nature by being a comedic element. In revealing that they have an incestuous relationship, Hecate asks her son who will lie with her that night in his place, and he responds, “The great cat” (*The Witch* 1.2.97). This comedic line allows the audience to understand the terrible nature of this maternal relationship and lessens the impact of such information. In this way, Hecate cannot be a witch that is all powerful because then it would suggest that women implicitly also possess this same strength.

King James I again relates to the real events that influence the play as the Essex marriage was annulled due to the active support and pressure from the King himself. He did so because he strongly believed that selective impotence was possible from witchcraft interference. James I argued that a man may become impotent and “if the power of witchcraft may reach to our life, [so] much more to a member... wherein the Devil hath his principal operation.”<sup>78</sup> As this play would be performed directly in the years following the scandal, the audience would have been aware of the societal event that this play was influenced by, as well as the implication that the King was once again getting involved in witchcraft trials.

The final play that this work will discuss is based on an actual accused witch and is the most blatant criticism of the King James’s abuse of power regarding his influence in legitimizing claims of witchcraft. *The Witch of Edmonton* was written in 1621 by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford. It is based on the real-life trial and execution of Elizabeth Sawyer, who

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted as by Lancashire, p. 177 in Corbin, Peter, and Douglas Sedge. *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays: The Tragedy of Sophonisba, The Witch, The Witch of Edmonton*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986, 14.

was executed in the months preceding the play's initial release. She was a poor woman who lived in Edmonton, Middlesex, and was convicted under the *Witchcraft Act* in April 1621. She was hung because she was accused of murdering her neighbor. She was an odd-looking woman, with a hunched back and only one eye, as it was said that she had accidentally stabbed her eye with a stick. Sawyer had been suspected of witchcraft, and the only account of her life comes from Henry Goodcole's pamphlet, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch*. The pamphlet claims that suspicions became worse, "to great presumptions, seeing the death of Nurse-children and Cattell, strangely and suddenly to happen."<sup>79</sup> She was tried on April 14, 1621, after being accused of murdering Agnes Ratcliffe and two children. The basis was that Ratcliffe had harmed one of her animals, and Sawyer got her revenge by killing the woman days later. Ratcliffe died proclaiming that Elizabeth Sawyer was her killer. Through methods of examination that would look for a witch's mark (quite often simply beauty marks or other growths), Sawyer was declared a witch, and through questioning confessed to the murders of the children, but not Ratcliffe. Sawyer was hanged at Tyburn on April 19, 1621.<sup>80</sup>

The play *The Witch of Edmonton* focuses on the story of Elizabeth Sawyer, yet it does a unique thing that no other witchcraft play had done until this moment. It portrayed Sawyer as a victim of human cruelty and the cruelty of Evil forces. Sawyer, though partaking in witchcraft, is portrayed in a sense that allows the audience to feel sympathy for her character. Her introductory monologue is as follows:

And why on me? Why should the envious world  
Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?  
'Cause I am poor, deformed, and ignorant,

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<sup>79</sup> Henry Goodcole, "The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, A Witch," 1621.

<sup>80</sup> "Sawyer, Elizabeth (d. 1621)." In *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004.  
<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001/odnb-9780198614128-e-66792?rskey=OK2vJV&result=1>.



And like a bow buckled and bent together  
By some more strong in mischiefs than myself,  
Must I for that be made a common sink  
For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues  
To fall and run into? Some call me witch,  
And, being ignorant of myself, they go  
About to teach me how to be one, urging  
That my bad tongue, by their bad usage made so,  
Forspeaks their cattle, doth bewitched their corn,  
Themselves, their servants and their babies at nurse.  
This they enforce upon me, and in part  
Make me to credit it.  
(*The Witch of Edmonton* 2.1.1-15)

Just from this introduction to the character of Elizabeth Sawyer, the townspeople and the community are portrayed in a negative manner. She does not have a positive relationship with those around her as they see her as a poor beggar woman, who is a witch because she fits many of the stereotypes set forth by Scot. However, the tone of this passage asks for sympathy and an awareness of the class structure that exists in this rural community. She suggests that the townspeople themselves make her into a witch as they, “teach me how to be one” with the insults and rumors they create. While Sawyer is not exactly innocent, as she does cause the eventual death of Anne in the play, she is a more so a character that is pitied and seems to have been driven to her fate due to the societal pressures and abuse.

In the play, Elizabeth is approached by a dog who initially acts as her animal familiar but is later revealed to be the Devil himself. This is based upon Goodcole's pamphlet that explained that Elizabeth had confessed to having met the Devil after she was in a fit of cursing. He would then visit her about three times a week and appear as a black dog named Tom. Out of fear, Sawyer had given him her body and soul, and, in exchange, he would do whatever she wished. In the play there is a similar scene with a Sawyer making a pact with a black dog that is sealed with blood. Instead of the demon/witch relationship in *Doctor Faustus* where Faustus is the one

actively pursuing a contract with the Devil, Sawyer is threatened and coerced into it. The dog states the following about their pact, “And seal it with thy blood. If thou deniest / I’ll tear they body in a thousand pieces” (*The Witch of Edmonton* 2.2.136-137). This is another way that Sawyer is portrayed as a human character merely falling prey to the evil Devil. The threatening nature of the Devil allows the fault to fall more heavily on the supernatural than on Sawyer herself.

What is so striking about this work is its ability to critique the societal structure and the ways that life in England was currently clashing with ideas of the old and the new. In this way the witch becomes a scapegoat representation for conservative outdated ideas of power, as it is stereotypically depicted as an elderly, disfigured woman, breaking the norms of society. As Keith Thomas argues, witch beliefs are able to “uphold the traditional obligations of charity and neighborliness,” out of a fear that to not do so would bring bad fortune.<sup>81</sup> However the opposite is also true as “once the conventions [of charity] had broken down they justified the breach and made it possible for the uncharitable to divert attention from their own guilt by focusing attention that of the witch.”<sup>82</sup> In this way, *The Witch of Edmonton* could be seen as historical fiction in the way that it showcases the complexities of rural life when as they were under duress from dissatisfaction with monarchy and those in power.

Sawyer is also clearly defined as a mortal woman who gives her soul to the Devil, different in nature from the previous witches studied in this chapter. In this way, mortal women again become the transgressors. There is a focus on how in the actual trial of Elizabeth Sawyer she was unable to defend herself justly and instead was only able to utter curses. Goodcole

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<sup>81</sup> Keith Thomas, *Religion, and the Decline of Magic* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 564.

<sup>82</sup> Thomas, 566-567.

wrote, “God did wonderfully overtake her in her own wickedness, to make her tongue to be the means of her own destruction, which had destroyed many before.”<sup>83</sup> In this way, the outspoken woman becomes one that must be punished. The power and threat that a witch carries can be reduced and belittled when linking such threats to masculinity, with the incorrect assumptions of feminine weakness.

The witches in these three plays are never able to transgress their gendered boundaries in any way that is truly meaningful. The witches in *Macbeth*, though neither male or female, are unable to be taken seriously due to the absurdity of their description as having beards and their inability to actually *do* anything. *The Witch* undermines Hecate by having her expose the limits of her power and by creating a comedic element through the relationship she has with her son. Finally, Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*, though refreshing in the sense that she is able to be seen as a character who fell to evil because of the treatment of others, is still painted as deserving her punishment due to her inability to conform to societal standards. James R. Keller also discusses these anxieties about female power, in the following:

The seventeenth-century witch had three particularly threatening characteristics. She was associated with sexual promiscuity, with the rejection of domestic and maternal obligation, and with the aggressiveness uncharacteristic of contemporary women.<sup>84</sup>

All three of these plays showcase elements of witchcraft that were essential to understanding witch beliefs in the Jacobean period. However, they also allow one to understand the complex dynamics of leadership not just on scale of the upper class, as seen in *Macbeth*, as it is a play about Kings, but also in a more microcosmic sense, as *The Witch of Edmonton* focuses on a rural

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<sup>83</sup> Goodcole, 384.

<sup>84</sup> James R. Keller, “Middleton’s *The Witch*: Witchcraft and the Domestic Female Hero,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 4, no. 4 (16) (1991), 39.

depiction of power and leadership. *The Witch* combines the two as those in the court and of high nobility seek out the immoral to satisfy their own greed. King James may have slowly decreased his interest in witches throughout his years as King of England, but he certainly helped increase their popularity on the stage. Through these plays, the witchcraft texts they were based on, and the analysis they inspired one sees the varied complexities of witchcraft belief and thought, and how witches were a method to represent and discuss all aspects of political and cultural critique.

With each play power is the central theme that is explored, who is wielding power and in what ways that could potentially be harmful to the national body politic. Each play examines these power dynamics in an interesting manner. While *Macbeth* can be seen as initially honoring the King's claim to the throne, the witches disrupt this ubiquitous claim as the belief of their prophecies as divine intervention unearths the true wickedness of Macbeth as a corrupt king. The parallel between Macbeth's self-induced paranoia is one that subtly hints at questioning the ability of James I to rule effectively if he also has a history in acting based on supernatural beliefs that were heavily contested at the time. *The Witch* elicits the power dynamics that were present at the Jacobean court during the time and the deepening tension of an unhappy noble population that was using witchcraft as a means of asserting their own power. Much like *Macbeth*, witchcraft is a means of affirming already existing power dynamics and attempting to subvert anyone who is considered 'transgressor.' In the case of the Essex trials, the King himself publicly came to the defense of the male figure accused of impotence, shifting the blame of masculine failure to supernatural elements. The King commenting on such a situation and writing about the role of the Devil causing impotence shows a continued assertion of power to shift the blame of infertility upon the figure that was most often portrayed as a woman. *The Witch of Edmonton* also talks about these dynamics, but more so under a class lens, showcasing

the dissatisfaction about the general state of witchcraft politics in England. Their previous queen, Elizabeth, had not allowed the same number of torture warrants to be approved for witchcraft trials, while James was a bit more eager with his signature to do so. His assertion that witchcraft was linked to political treason was due to his belief in the Divine Right of Kings. Elizabeth linked witchcraft with Catholicism as potential grounds for execution, but such an execution would be under the grounds of treason, not heresy. While Elizabeth carefully managed the amount of violence that she was enforcing as separate from the supernatural implications of witchcraft, James was heavily involved and influenced by witchcraft trials and tied them to the divine right to rule. This upset the power dynamics present in Parliament and the increase in violence would eventually culminate in the execution of James's own son Charles I in 1649. The tensions surrounding this issue are showcased through the trial of Elizabeth Sawyer, a woman who chose witchcraft due to societal pressures, removing extensive blame from herself, and instead blaming the tumultuous Jacobean society.



## Epilogue

Witchcraft in the Early Modern Period was extremely complex. Although in these days we like to think of witch trials as the result of mindless gender persecution, that was not the reality of the situation. Gender was certainly the central component, in the way that gender is not only a reflection of gendered roles but is impacted by class, age, politics, religion and power dynamics. Gender is all these components and therefore witchcraft cannot be looked at without considering the role that gender had on these trials. Women would often accuse other women, men were certainly tried and killed, and there was no one specific way that trials would be conducted. These beliefs paint a varied picture of not only how individuals thought about each other, but how they felt about religion, politics, and the general state of their country. It is no surprise that playwrights use witches in their works to allow themselves the freedom to explore the more politicized topics that witchcraft would imply. The influence of those in power was also significant, as Elizabeth I, though a beloved monarch who portrayed herself as almost holy through her image as the Virgin Queen, also was a source of tension regarding the ability for women to rule. James I was the most impactful when it came to a monarch's influence on England's beliefs about witchcraft. The former Scottish King caused the English to interact with ideas about witchcraft on a more intimate basis, as their King was someone who had written one of the most famous witch texts of the century. The witches in plays do not typically match up with the reality of witchcraft trials, as even *The Witch of Edmonton* includes some fantastical elements that were used to spice up the performance, but they do reveal the anxieties that would lead to them. The performance of witchcraft in the Elizabethan and Jacobean plays reflect a battleground for what is the correct ideology and who is persecuted and possibly killed because of that decision. Witchcraft then becomes even more powerful as a tool to use when discussing power, as it is a war of intellect whose outcome has life or death stakes.

Even today there is a vast and varied rhetoric surrounding witchcraft beliefs. Just a few years ago Donald Trump used the phrase “witch hunt” to describe how he felt regarding the media’s reporting on him. The witch motif was also being used as a symbol of feminist rebellion as many women used references to witches in signs for the Women’s March, one saying, “We are the descendants of the witches you could not burn.” In this way witches are used as a vehicle to suppress the power of those that criticize. Trump, much like King James, portrayed the threat to his power as being reliant on a few individuals, instead of the faults of his own leadership. Both also assert their right to ‘rule’ through the belief that they have every right to the position that they are in due to their inherent greatness. Even though for James these attacks could be seen as more literal, affecting his life, or his ability to provide children and prove his masculinity, these aspects were all part of his self-image as ruler. This threat of self-image is what causes Trump to attack those who disapprove of him to suppress the legitimacy of their critique.

Within this use of witches as martyrs for the feminist cause as displayed by protestors, they are using the witch to claim power, to directly push back against the assertion of the witch that Trump presents which portrays him as the victim. They directly oppose each other. The implications of this mirror the ways that, though these plays use witchcraft to subvert and enforce power dynamics, they are never giving the witches any lasting power to enforce changes. Witches are still an idea that can be defeated and are portrayed in ways that are secondary to the character and wills of humans, even though witches are not supernatural beings they are humans who have supernatural abilities through the Devil’s power. Despite the shift in this narrative that witchcraft trials were the result of women who were intentionally transgressing and rebelling against the state, this idea of witchcraft is completely different from the reality of what occurred in Early Modern England, and what would thus inspire the Salem witch trials that are so popular



in American culture today. Such a shift showcases the way witchcraft has been used as a means to subvert power dynamics or empower them through the history of gendered oppression that is associated with witches. The use of witchcraft in today's modern day is similar to that of the Early Modern Period as the performance of witchcraft has been used and argued by various groups to assert a stance of power. Though the stakes surrounding witchcraft do not mean life and death anymore, they certainly show a continuation of using witchcraft as a site to directly oppose or maintain power dynamics in the relationship between the accuser and the accused.



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