

WITCHCRAFT AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SIXTEENTH  
AND SEVENTEENTH CENTURY DRAMA

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
the Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Houston

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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by  
Donna Dudley  
August 1966

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## ABSTRACT

From the very earliest times, mankind recognized the existence of witchcraft, but, apart from isolated cases which impinged too deeply upon society's consciousness, the dark practice was relatively ignored by society, thus allowing it to flourish until the Renaissance. At that time, witchcraft burst forth and raged furiously, becoming the chief purveyor of evil in every field, particularly those of politics, amours, and vice, forcing society to rise against it in a raging protest.

So thoroughly did witchcraft penetrate the reigns of James I and Elizabeth that it influenced many facets of everyday life. Many of the ladies and nobles of the court dabbled in the dark art, either in practice or in consultation, and Elizabeth herself was known to favor Doctor Dee, a necromancer. Therefore, in order to procure a more complete understanding of the deep penetration of witchcraft into Renaissance England, it is necessary to examine briefly the history of witchcraft prior to the Renaissance and to investigate more thoroughly the English practices and beliefs during the Renaissance. Consideration of the essential documents is indispensable to this study, for without an understanding of these writings, the evolution of witchcraft as an influence on drama is impossible. Part One of this thesis, therefore, will deal with the history of witchcraft, the Renaissance belief in goety and the supernatural, and the principal written works dealing with the subject of witchcraft.

Part Two of this thesis will deal with the presence of witchcraft on the English stage. Three unquestionably great works, Macbeth, Hamlet,

### Abstract (Cont'd.)

and A Tragicall History of Doctor Faustus, as well as numerous minor plays which have goety and witchcraft as their basis, will not be included in this study. The three great plays have been expounded upon to such lengths in the past that any endeavor to include them would be superfluous. It is, of course, an impossibility to include a large number of the minor plays, so the six which were chosen were selected on the basis of the witchcraft in their contents and on their graduating coverage of the later Renaissance, the initial one dating 1588 and the last one dating 1681. The evolution of witchcraft as a prominent influence upon English stage productions throughout the century under observation is noteworthy. The plays included in this study are Middleton's The Witch, Lyly's Endimion, Greene's Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay, Jonson's The Sad Shepherd, Shadwell's The Lancashire Witches, and Rowley, Ford, and Dekker's The Witch of Edmonton.

It is intended that this thesis will be an unbiased account, as it originated in neither the extreme of complete scepticism nor that of complete belief. The intention is to present facts as they exist and opinions as they are concluded through research and thought.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. THE WITCHCRAFT BACKGROUND . . . . .	1
II. THE INFLUENCE OF WITCHCRAFT ON THE STAGE . . . . .	45
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	89

"A witch is one who worketh by the Devil or by some curious art either healing or revealing things secret, or foretelling things to come which the Devil has devised to ensnare men's souls withal unto damnation. The conjurer, the enchanter, the sorcerer, the diviner, and whatever other sort there is encompassed within this circle."

George Gifford, 1587

# I

## THE WITCHCRAFT BACKGROUND

The Renaissance is recognized as an age of change and upheaval, caused chiefly by the ancient Greek and Roman ideas and culture ascending into prominence and the civilized world emerging from the Dark Ages into an era of thought and productivity. The surface of the Renaissance portrays a time of scientific discovery, medical curiosity, architectural change, and literary development, as well as progression in various other fields. Underlying the surface, however, was the inability of man's nature to progress with the speed of the development of the arts and sciences, for evil and greed were prominent and man's basic ties with paganism and superstition were much in evidence. In an age when ignorance and a fear of the unknown were the lot of the average man, it is small wonder that witchcraft came into such prominence and gained so large an influence upon so many phases of Renaissance life. The stage, which is often a mirror of the times, reflected the importance of witchcraft; but, before the influence of goety upon drama can be fully understood or appreciated, it is necessary to become acquainted with the history of witchcraft. Only in this manner can the incarnate evil of the dark art be recognized and the feelings and actions of the people of the Renaissance be comprehensible to modern readers.

Witchcraft did not begin with the Renaissance but had its roots deep in earlier centuries. \*Primitive man, with his lack of knowledge, absence of scientific devices, and consequential tendency toward

superstitions and need for simple explanations of events, was susceptible to an unquestioned belief in witchcraft.

. . . the mere creed--the belief that witches exist and that they can work supernaturally to the injury and even to the destruction of their enemies--is the heritage of the human race. The Englishman of the sixteenth or seventeenth century . . . inherited it in an unbroken line from his primeval ancestors.<sup>1</sup>

A plausible theory is that witchcraft is possibly a survivor of Paleolithic worship rituals and fertility rites which were organized by magician-priests and that the persecutions of the Renaissance were determined efforts toward final suppression.<sup>2</sup>

At any rate, witchcraft was well known in the days of ancient Greece and Rome, for the peoples who religiously accepted the gods, goddesses, and demi-gods of Greek and Roman mythology, as well as the myths about them, could easily accept goety and witchcraft as plausible explanations for diseases and evils. Summers writes,

From the very earliest times there were inextricably reticulated in the complex Greek systems of universal mythology and symbolistic religious ceremonies various aboriginal beliefs and curious practices of ancient superstition which formed a primitive order of magic. . . .<sup>3</sup>

The ancient Greeks, therefore, interwove the supernatural of religion with the supernatural of witchcraft, surrounded both with an aura of

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✓ <sup>1</sup>George L. Kittredge, Witchcraft in Old and New England (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1929), p. 4.

✓ <sup>2</sup>Eric Maple, The Dark World of Witches (New York: A. S. Barnes and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 197.

✓ <sup>3</sup>Montague Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft (Evanston: University Books, 1958), p. 1.



mystery, and worshipped both with an equal amount of reverence and awe. They were aided in this mingling of the goetic and the religious by the priests and priestesses in charge of the sanctuaries, for these people were but religious sorcerers.\* "They delivered the oracles; they chanted incantations as the smoke of sacrifice ascended; they directed, they expounded, they advised; they healed, they dispensed noxious draughts; they pretended to lord it over nature by their arts. . . ."<sup>4</sup>

→ The best example of the blending of witchcraft and religion is that of the dualistic nature attributed to Diana, the maiden goddess of the moon, for on dark nights when the moon was hidden, she was called Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft and necromancy.\* Summers points out that it was not necessarily the moon that Diana and Hecate had as common ground, "so much as that the torches, wandering by night, hounds, and wild nature of Hecate admirably suited Artemis [Diana] as well."<sup>5</sup>

The actual origin of Hecate is not known; there are no myths about her; she is not depicted as a relative of any of the deities: these details cannot be ignored and are surely of importance when considering the mystery that surrounds the cult of Hecate and the goddess herself. Even after Hecate became associated with Diana, the goddess of witchcraft did not mellow. Instead, she became even more dreadful.<sup>7</sup>

Her rites were monstrous, but to be respected and revered; her worshippers were accursed, but to be dreaded and placated; her

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

prayers blasphemy; her sacrifices impious and terrible. It was in truth the very cult of hell.<sup>6</sup>

~~The~~ goddess of witchcraft, therefore, was worshipped as a religious deity and her "religious" rites carried with them all the aspects of a true religious ceremony. With such an example of the similarity between goety and religion present in the everyday lives of the ancient Greeks, it is not surprising that they made no distinction between the two, thereby allowing witchcraft a religious character which was inherited by succeeding ages.

Ergo, the Romans received an already solid conception of witchcraft from their Greek predecessors and easily incorporated it into their civilization. Roman authors frequently wrote of witches, portraying them either as proud women of mystery or as unkempt hags of ill repute, but both types were characterized by the terrible evil of which they were believed to be capable.

For a while, witchcraft was unhindered in its growth in ancient Rome, and, at times, was even encouraged. Many of the earlier emperors consulted witches, necromancers, magicians, and the like, and followed the injunctions set forth by these people. An excellent example of this use of the dark arts is the Emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, who, following the advice of an astrologer, ordered the death of an athlete of whom his wife, the Empress Faustina, was enamored. He did this, not out of jealousy or revenge, but to allow his wife to follow

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

the astrologer's advice, which was to bathe in the blood of the slain athlete. Having performed the gory blood bath, Faustina pronounced herself cured of her passion.<sup>7</sup>

Witchcraft presented difficulties, however, in the incarnate evil that accompanied it, and the Romans were eventually forced to take measures dealing with goety. One such action was a court case before the proconsul Claudius Maximus, circa 153 A. D. Lucius Apuleius was accused of sorcery by his wealthy wife's relatives, who hoped to prove that she had been tricked into marriage by magical arts and that Apuleius was only after her money. Apuleius argued his own defense, wherein he stated that a magician and a priest were the same, for the word for magician was the Persian word for priest and meant

. . . one skilled in ceremonial law and the sacrificial practice of religion--"an art acceptable to the immortal gods, full of piety and wisdom in things divine, full of honour and glory since the day when Zoroaster and Oromazes established it, high-priestess of the powers of heaven."<sup>8</sup>

Apuleius established his innocence to the satisfaction of the Roman court of law at a time when witchcraft was not yet legally forbidden, thereby indicating the trend of the coming centuries.

Depending entirely upon the whim of the reigning Caesar during pre-Christian and early Christian times, witchcraft was either illegal and persecuted, allowed by law, or banned but actually allowed to

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>8</sup>Charles Williams, Witchcraft (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1964), p. 25.

continue if practiced in a private manner. By the latter part of the third century, however, witchcraft was on the decline as far as legal and social acceptance was concerned, for the Emperor Constantine passed several laws against witchcraft, magic, and the like, which carried severe penalties for anyone who attempted to violate the edicts. Succeeding Caesars strengthened the laws, so that by the fifth century and the demise of the Roman Empire, "witchcraft was no longer the science of the heathen, but the portion of the heretic."<sup>9</sup>

→ The Caesars, of course, were not the only reason for the decline of witchcraft in ancient Rome. Christianity was coming into its own and a part of its newly found growth and power stemmed from the paradox of Christianity's similarity of rites to witchcraft's and its diametrical opposition of purposes. The uneducated pagan masses, who were denied legal indulgence in the magic of witchcraft easily found an ally in the miracles of Christianity.

‡ As the centuries passed and the Middle Ages arrived, the Church gained in power and influence and found itself confronted with many still animate pagan beliefs, of which witchcraft was one of the most prominent. The great difficulty of conversion was made more laborious by the fact that the people simply merged the new religion with their old beliefs and practices and believed conjunctly in the pagan deities and Christ. Christianity permitted the existence of this sort of heathenism not only because it could not kill it, but because the original

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<sup>9</sup>Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft, p. 57.

Christian leaders had performed miracles and had had powers which cured. It was not only difficult, but impossible, to explain the difference between these powers and miracles and those of magic and witchcraft, for the people of this period had a fixed association between pagan and Christian miracles. The Church realized that to eliminate the old beliefs would have raised considerable questioning of Christian mysticism and miracles. X

The Church of medieval times did not at first direct its attention to witchcraft in particular, but to heresy in general, for heresy was a determined refusal of an intellectual obedience, whereas witchcraft was simply a violation. Eventually, however, "the Church . . . began to need an opponent whom it could hate divinely. It might spiritually oppose, but it certainly was not allowed to hate, its persecutors."<sup>10</sup> Witchcraft became the chosen opponent and it and heresy began to fuse in the eyes of the Church because the witches' sabbat closely resembled the gatherings of the heretics and because many of the rituals of witchcraft were parodies of Church rites.

— From the late Roman period throughout the Middle Ages, the Church pursued its missionary efforts toward the northern parts of the Continent. In the process, it found that the pagan beliefs and practices of the Mediterranean countries were mirrored in the colder climates to the north, as the forests of the Germanic tribes echoed with the mythical cries of the Valkries and the blows of the hammer of Thor, for, as the

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<sup>10</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 37.

Greeks and Romans had clung to their polytheistic beliefs even though vowing faith in Christianity, so their northern neighbors mingled the old gods with the new God of Christianity and retained their pagan rites, including witchcraft.

The pagan beliefs had accompanied the Angles and the Saxons when they settled in the British Isles and had permeated the tribal culture~~x~~ as attested by S. Augustine, an emissary of the Church, and his fellow monks when they landed on the Isle of Thanet in the spring of 597. They

. . . had continually to battle with the opposing powers, . . . [which] were not easily to be driven from the fair land of Britain, whose inhabitants already knew and dreaded their influences, as is shown by the fact that King Aethelbert immediately suspected . . . [Augustine] to be some mighty magician and insisted that their first meeting take place under a spreading oak tree where no incantations could prevail.<sup>11</sup>

King Aethelbert was convinced of the merits of Christianity and was converted to the new religion, with his subjects following their monarch's decision. This victory for the Church was short-lived, however, for "after the death of Aethelbert in 616 great reverses befell Christianity, and witchcraft notably increased throughout the land."<sup>12</sup> Still, the priests labored to distinguish between Christian miracles and pagan magic and to adjust the people's ideas of spirits to suit the Christian outlook on salvation, creation, and life. The average convert,

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<sup>11</sup>Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft, p. 73.

<sup>12</sup>Montague Summers, A Popular History of Witchcraft (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Ltd., 1937), p. 205.

however, could not possibly clear his mind of heathen rituals and observances, much less pagan beliefs. It is possible, of course, that upon accepting Christianity some people may have renounced their old gods; but, for the most part, the converts either practiced their original religion while giving lip service to Christianity, or combined paganism and Christianity by simply adding one more god to their beliefs.

During the sixth century, no noteworthy action was taken against witchcraft by the Church, but in the seventh century, S. Theodore, the Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote the first collection of ecclesiastical disciplinary laws in England. The book, entitled Liber Pœnitentials, had an entire section devoted to magic practices and ceremonies with a penance duty assigned for each offense. These penances are as follows:

If anyone sacrifices to demons, one year of penance if he be a clown of low estate, if he be of higher degree, ten years. If anyone sacrifice a second or a third time to demons he shall do penance for three years. If anyone commits sacrilege, that is if he consulteth soothsayers who divine by birds or in any other forbidden way he shall do penance for three years, and of these one shall he fast on bread and water.<sup>13</sup>

In 959, King Edgar's ecclesiastical laws directed,

. . . that every priest zealously promote Christianity, and totally extinguish every heathenism; and forbid well worshippings, and necromancies, and divinations, and enchantments and man worshippings, and the vain practices which are carried on with various spells, and with frith-splots, and with elders and also with various other trees, and with stozes, and with many various delusions, with which men do much of what they should not. . . . And we enjoin, that on feast days there be complete abstinence from heathen songs and devil's games.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft, pp. 65-66.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 72.

Proof of the presence and influence of the dark art in all levels of Renaissance life is the above ecclesiastical edict on a legal and more intellectual level, while tales, ballads, and stories of witchcraft circulated among the common folk. One example is the following account: There was an old woman living in Berkley, who, upon her deathbed, confessed her wealth had come from a pact she had made with the Devil. Because she was afraid of going to Hell, she asked that her body be sewn into the hide of a stag, placed in a stone coffin, and the coffin bound with heavy iron chains. Fifty psalms were to be sung each night and fifty masses to be said each morning for three days. Upon the fourth day, if her body remained safely in the church and away from Satan, it should be buried deep within the churchyard so that the Devil would not find it.

Accordingly, the monks and nuns chanted their nocturnes on the first night while demons wailed and howled outside the church. On the second night, the demons invaded the church, but the prayers of the nuns and priests prevailed against the demons' cries. On the third night, however, a terrible tempest shook the church, the howls and wails of the demons grew louder, and the Devil himself appeared. The Devil called the woman by name and told her to follow him. She replied that she could not, as she was bound by chains. The Devil broke the chains as if they were threads, pulled the woman from the coffin, and dragged her to the door, where he flung her on his coal-black horse. They then rode off into the night, leaving the air ringing with agonized screams



of the woman.<sup>15</sup>

Maple observes that the fifteenth century showed a violent outburst in the practice of sorcery and witchcraft and concludes that the reason for this was the arrival of the gypsies to the English countryside. As he says, "the impact of this invasion upon the English peasantry, whose magical beliefs were never far from the surface, must have been profound."<sup>16</sup>

It is worth noting that cases of witchcraft were appearing in the courts of the fifteenth century. In 1483, for example, Richard of Gloucester charged Jane Shore, his brother's mistress, with sorcery. Richard's accusation was that Jane, by her sorcery and witchcraft, had "wasted his body." Whereupon, he pulled up his left sleeve and exhibited "a weirdish withered arme and small." It was well known that his arm had been deformed since birth, but it was, nevertheless, looked upon as evidence against her. When Richard became King Richard III, Jane was tried before the court and condemned. Richard thereafter kept her a close prisoner in Ludgate. She was released, however, when Henry VII came to the throne, but she was absolutely destitute and without friends.<sup>17</sup>

Concurrent with Elizabeth's ascension to the throne in 1558, a change was occurring in England. The Renaissance was in full flower

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 79-80.

<sup>16</sup> Maple, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>17</sup> Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft, p. 110.

and England was developing in numerous fields, including that of witchcraft. Because changes were prevalent, the people followed a natural and more primitive pattern of thought, resulting in mental reflexes which displayed a more superstitious foundation.

➔ "By the middle of the sixteenth century the sorcerers must have represented a vast parasitic growth upon society, and it was perhaps inevitable that they should have been regarded with a growing disfavor. This attitude was reflected in the courts."<sup>18</sup> The legal authorities were not the only persons interested in the development of the dark powers, however. The Reformation was, by this time, an important movement and when the religious element issued a demand for the suppression of witches and sorcerers, it was "reinforced by other organs of opinion, both medical and political, [and] became a force which could not be ignored."<sup>19</sup>

The Witchcraft Act of 1542, therefore, was a logical reaction to a threat against society, for England, like other witch-persecuting countries, felt that she must defend herself against an evil menace.

Under this law any person or persons who invoked evil spirits to find money or treasure, to waste or consume persons or property, or to invoke unlawful love or to pull down crosses, or to tell the whereabouts of lost or stolen goods, was a felon and liable to the penalty of death and confiscation of property. Both the witch and those who solicited her services were equally punishable. No protection was extended to the clergy, nor could sanctuary protect the offender.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 35-36.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 41.

This act was never fully enforced and was eventually abolished due to its offense to the Protestants. Of this law, Kittredge states:

" . . . it is true to English tradition. It penalizes . . . witchcraft . . . [but] it does not in the remotest way recognize the existence of Satanic assemblies or of demon-worship en masse." <sup>21</sup>

Elizabeth's law of 1563 was more rigorous, more intensive, and more forcibly executed than its predecessor. The provisions of the act are as follows: the death penalty was imposed for witchcraft practiced with an intent to kill; a year's imprisonment and a heavy fine was the penalty for a first offense in the destruction of goods or the maiming of persons, and the second offense was punished by death; a sentence of one year's imprisonment was passed upon those who used witchcraft for determining the location of stolen goods or treasure; a sentence of one year's imprisonment was also imposed upon those who employed witchcraft or sorcery for the acquisition of unlawful love. <sup>22</sup>

When James I became the king of England, he strengthened Elizabeth's law even further, so that the Witchcraft Act of 1604 imposed the death penalty upon all of the above offenses.

It is from . . . laws, both lay and ecclesiastical, that we are able to measure the strength of magical beliefs among the English population even after several centuries of Christian rule. They indicate the persistence of the old faiths, in spite of every stricture and penalty, and they reveal too a growing awareness of the danger inherent in magical survivals on the part of the civil and ecclesiastical authorities. <sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Kittredge, op. cit., p. 247.

<sup>22</sup>Summers, A Popular History of Witchcraft, p. 216.

<sup>23</sup>Maple, op. cit., p. 25.

Witchcraft, therefore, was accorded cognizance by all classes of English society. Not only the peasants, but many of the most learned men of the Renaissance awarded firm credence to the dark practice of witchcraft, for highly intelligent minds of many centuries, "amongst them . . . such supreme authorities as S. Augustine, . . . S. Thomas Aquinas, . . . Erasmus, . . . the gallant Raleigh, Lord Bacon, . . . and Sir Thomas Browne . . . ,"<sup>24</sup> had stated beliefs in goety, and it can hardly be doubted that there was at least a somewhat stable basis for the beliefs, accusations, and persecutions which were so prevalent in the Renaissance.

The common people, on the other hand, did not need rationalization to convince them of the existence of witchcraft. They were moved by fear, imagination, a desire for revenge, and a need for excitement. Any person was suspected for almost any reason.

. . . They felt the sudden unexpected moments when anything or anyone . . . might be something else, disguised and malicious. Nowadays we do not, at those times, habitually think of sorcery and the hidden coven. They did. It needs but for a moment to contemplate another human being with that possibility in mind, in the street or in the train or the house, to understand what happened. Add the temptation, the fever, the panic fear; add the longing--so universal though so generally denied nowadays--for hate, for anger, for destruction. The moment of doubt, of horror, of enjoyment of the thrill, resolved itself into belief instead of into disbelief . . . and that resolution provoked . . . action.<sup>25</sup>

— Often an old woman of the village would fall into disfavor with her neighbors. She would then become the subject of jeers and scorn,

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<sup>24</sup>Summers, A Popular History of Witchcraft, pp. 64-65.

<sup>25</sup>Williams, op. cit., pp. 168-169.

and any retaliatory remark from her would be construed as a threat of malice which could be possible only with the assistance of the Devil. Gossip would travel from house to house and the old woman would become even more disliked and scorned. If anything should happen to the family of the person to whom the remark was made, the village had all the proof it deemed necessary to be convinced that the old woman was a witch. Such circumstantial evidence was often enough, especially at the height of the witchcraft panic, to have a suspect brought into court, often tortured until he confessed, tried, convicted, and hanged. \*

The accused witch was not always an innocent victim, however. Often the woman, or occasionally the man, possessed a rather thorough knowledge of herbs and poisons, and this, combined with the power of malice, could work an impressive amount of evil; for, if the witch's power of instilling fear was not great enough to influence the mind of the disliked person, a gift of a fruit into which poison had been injected would accomplish the desired end. ←

As one writer notes,

. . . We may picture most of the English witches as poverty-stricken women, old, ugly, decrepit and diseased, ill-clad, unkempt and dirty, muttering and mumbling as they hobbled about begging their livelihood, feared by many of the neighbours, hated by others who blamed them for misfortunes, giped at by urchins, often spurned and treated harshly by their betters, and scratched and beaten by every one who had an unusual ailment.<sup>26</sup>

Summers, however, has a less benevolent picture to present, for he sees

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<sup>26</sup>C. L'Estrange Ewen, Witchcraft and Demonianism (London: Heath Cranton Ltd., 1933), p. 67.

. . . the witch as she really was--an evil liver; a social pest and parasite; the devotee of a loathly and obscene creed; an adept at poisoning, blackmail, and other creeping crimes; a member of a powerful secret organization inimical to Church and State; a blasphemer in word and deed, swaying the villagers by terror and superstition; a charlatan and a quack sometimes; a bawd; an abortionist; the dark counsellor of lewd court ladies and adulterous gallants; a minister to vice and inconceivable corruption; battenning upon the filth and foulest passions of the age.<sup>27</sup>


→ It should be mentioned that there was a white as well as a black magic--the former being beneficent, the latter malefic. White witches were regarded as friends of mankind, as they often healed diseases and made efforts to undo the work of their evil counterparts. For the most part, there was little persecution of the white witch, whereas the black witch was hunted down with all of the intensity a hate-blinded, fear-ridden mob could muster. Witch-hunting, or witch-finding, became an occupation, and witch-finders, as people so employed were called, combed the land searching for likely victims.


Matthew Hopkins was the most renowned witch-finder in England and was employed by townships throughout the land for the purpose of ridding them of witches, be they real or imaginary. Hopkins was an ideal person for the despicable vocation which he chose to pursue. Although he was a minister's son and an orthodox Puritan, he used religious principles as a disguise for his narrow views and energetic desires for personal financial success. He was aided by John Stearne and Goody Phillips, the latter being especially adept in finding witches' marks on the

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<sup>27</sup>Montague Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1956), Introduction, p. xxii.

bodies of accused persons. This trio managed to put more than two hundred persons to death in the period from 1645-1647.<sup>28</sup>

 The methods employed in witch-finding were fairly standardized. Perhaps the most widely accepted proof a witch-finder could produce were witches' marks or devils' marks on the body of the accused, for this mark was looked upon as the sign of Satan upon the flesh of his protégé and servant. Any person possessing such a mark would necessarily have had it inflicted as the final rite of the induction ceremonies when he was admitted into a coven of witches, and it was therefore looked upon as unquestionable proof of guilt.

The witches' marks were sometimes natural spots on the body, but were more often artificial marks or, occasionally, complete figures. Both types of marks were supposedly insensible to pain and would not bleed, no matter how deeply they were pricked with pins. The mark was supposedly inflicted by the Devil, for, as Reginald Scot says, "The Diuell giveth to euerie nouice a marke, either with his teeth or with his clawes."

One author suggests witches' marks were a form of tattooing, for the marks were of two colors, red and blue, the red being small and circular, the blue being larger and more elaborate; they were permanent; they were inflicted by pricking or tearing the skin; and they could be

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<sup>28</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 188.

<sup>29</sup>Reginald Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1964), Book III, 43.

severely and enduringly painful.<sup>30</sup> Witches' marks could be located anywhere on the body, but were more often found in hidden and private spots. As Delrio says,

"In uirorum enim corpore soepe uisitur sub palpebris, sub labiis, sub axillis, in humerus, in sede ima: feminis etiam, in mammis uel muliebribus locis."<sup>31</sup>\*

Another sign accepted as incontrovertible proof of a practitioner of witchcraft was the "witch-pap," or "little teat," which was a supernumerary nipple located anywhere on the body of a witch. This "teat" was said to secrete milk and blood which was the necessary nourishment for the witch's familiar. Actually, polythelia is not uncommon even today, for many "warts" are, in reality, supernumerary nipples. In the Renaissance, however, this was not known, and many "witches" were condemned on just such evidence, for blood, to the average person, connoted life itself, and when the familiar was supposedly suckled at the witch's "teat," this was a strengthening of malice and a continuance of an evil personification.

Each witch was expected to have a familiar in attendance, either to obey her commands or to enable her to divine by some characteristic of an animal or bird.

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<sup>30</sup> Margaret Murray, The Witch-Cult in Western Europe (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921), p. 87.

<sup>31</sup> Summers, The History of Witchcraft, p. 71, citing Disquisitiones magicæ, Vol. I, sect. 4 t. 2.

\* "In men it may often be seen under the eyelids, under the lips, under the armpits, or the shoulders, on the fundament; in women, moreover, on the breast or on the pudenda."



. . . The details of this particular method of augury are by no means clear. Probably the witch observed the gait of the animal, its action, [or] the tones of its voice easily interpreted to bear some fanciful meaning. . . .<sup>32</sup>

The familiars were usually animals--dogs, cats, ferrets, rats--but occasionally they were birds, reptiles or even small children.

For as to the formes, to some of the baser sorte of them he obliſhes him ſelfe to appeare at their calling vpon him, by ſuch a proper name which he ſhewes vnto them, either in likenes of a dog, a Catte, an Ape, or ſuch--like other beaſt; or elſe to anſwere by a voyce onlie.<sup>33</sup>

A witch might possess as many as four or five familiars, but the usual number was one or two. Each familiar had a name with which it was "christened" when it was presented to its mistress. A few of the more common titles were: Tittey, Robin, Tom, Jacke, Tyffin, and Suckin.

It was believed that familiars were either imps in the form of animals or actual animals which had received the imp into its body. The duty of the familiar was not only to do any sort of mischief which its mistress bid, which made it a servant, but also to watch its mistress and report to the Devil any failure on her part to do evil. This made the familiar a master of sorts. Many of the witches became quite fond of their familiars, and occasionally required them to take the form of a human being so they could become the witch's lover.

There were four methods whereby a witch could obtain a familiar: "1, by gift from the Devil; 2, by gift from a fellow-witch; 3, by

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<sup>32</sup>Summers, The History of Witchcraft, p. 101.

<sup>33</sup>King James I, Dæmonologie, ed. G. B. Harrison (London: John Lane, Ltd., 1924), Book I, Ch. 6, p. 19.

inheritance; 4, by magical ceremonies."<sup>34</sup> The first method was usually employed during a Sabbat, and was not as commonly practiced as the second and third methods. The inheritance of a familiar was only normal, for witchcraft was thought to be hereditary, as was proven by the case of the famous Essex witches, who were tried in 1645. Several of the women accused of witchcraft admitted the practice thereof, saying that they had learned the art from their mothers and had inherited their mothers' familiars. The fourth method, that of magical ceremonies, was used when the Devil caught a person in the act of cursing or blaspheming, as in the case of the Witch of Edmonton, Elizabeth Sawyer.

Upon capture of the witch by the constable, or some other representative of good, the familiar, like the Devil, deserted her and she and her familiar lost all power to do evil. Once the necessary marks and possessions which identified a witch were established, there were certain tests administered to provide further proof against the accused. The foremost of these tests was the ordeal by swimming, which was employed throughout England, especially by Matthew Hopkins, until it was forbidden by the courts.

This test was based on the ancient theory that water, being a holy element, would reject a person who had done wrong, while an innocent person would readily sink. Accordingly, the accused person had his thumbs tied to opposite big toes, a rope tied around his waist, and was lowered into a stream or pond. The results of this test were a

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<sup>34</sup>Murray, op. cit., p. 222.

determinant in the fate of the accused~~ts~~

Another test which was popular in Renaissance England was that of witch-watching. A person suspected of practicing witchcraft was tied in an uncomfortable sitting position and placed in the center of a room. The doors and windows were closed, but one or more official watchers remained with the suspect. The watcher's purpose was to report the appearance of any animal or insect. If an animal or insect approached the witch, it was thought to be a familiar making an effort to aid or advise her. This was looked upon as infallible proof of guilt.

A test which was recommended in Malleus Maleficarum was that of tear shedding. It was believed that witches were unable to weep, for tears were signs of penitence, which was displeasing to the Devil. A witch had to be watched closely in this test, for she might attempt to smear saliva on her cheeks in an effort to give the appearance of weeping.<sup>35</sup>

If a person were ill and he accused someone of bewitching him, the scratching test was employed. This meant that the suspect was pricked and scratched until blood appeared. If the ill person then recovered, the suspect was judged guilty of witchcraft. There were other tests administered to determine the guilt of a person accused of witchcraft, but the above were the most widely used and accepted.

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<sup>35</sup>Henricus Institoris and James Sprenger, Malleus Maleficarum, trans. Montague Summers (London: The Pushkin Press, 1951), p. 227.

The administrators of the witch tests believed fully in witchcraft and the power of witches, as did the average person in sixteenth and seventeenth century England. Because witchcraft was an esoteric art, those who were not practitioners knew almost nothing of its characteristics and abilities. Everything for which they had no explanation was accredited to the supernatural and to those who possessed knowledge of it. Witches, therefore, received credit for many evil things regardless of their guilt.

One of the abilities attributed to witches was that of creating bad weather. Two authorities state their belief in this weather control, but accredit the witches' power to God's generosity in allowing them to perform. King James I says, "They can rayse stormes and tempestes in the aire, either vpon Sea or land, though not vniuersally, but in such a particular place and prescribed boundes, as God will permitte them so to trouble."<sup>36</sup> Also, the authors of Malleus Maleficarum write, "That devils and their disciples can by witchcraft cause lightnings and hailstorms and tempests, and that the devils have power from God to do this, and their disciples do so with God's permission. . . ."<sup>37</sup> The witches were supposedly able to produce storms by stirring water with their fingers and by throwing a powder into the air. Lea, however, gives the credit to the Devil:

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<sup>36</sup> King James I, op. cit., Book II, Ch. 5, 46.

<sup>37</sup> Institoris and Sprenger, op. cit., p. 147.

Witches cannot cause tempests, etc.; but the devil, who knows when storms are coming, persuades them that by throwing a few stones behind them to the West, or casting sand into a torrent, or dipping a broom in water and sprinkling it towards the sky, . . . or boiling hogs' bristles in a pot, or placing sticks transversely on the shore, they can evoke tempests to damage their enemies.<sup>38</sup>

Worthy of note is that many of the witches confessed to having caused storms and that there are numerous eye-witness accounts of their successes.

Witches also possessed the power necessary to damage property, for there was case after case of complaint and accusation registered against those suspected of being witches. Loss of crops, diseased poultry, poor farm produce, and death of cattle were blamed on the revenge of witches. Malleus Maleficarum not only credits witches with this power, but tells how they practice it.

And with regard to the manner whereby witches kill animals and cattle, it should be said that they act very much as they do in the case of men. They can bewitch them by a touch and a look, or by a look only; or by placing under the threshold of the stable door, or near the place where they go to water, some charm or periapt of witchcraft.<sup>39</sup>

In regard to their abilities in bewitching people, witches are given even more credit, for in the days when medical science was in its incubative stage and little was known about diseases and their causes, witches were natural scapegoats for every infirmity that occurred. Then, too, the mind is a powerful agent, and with the belief in witch-

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<sup>38</sup>Henry C. Lea, Materials Toward A History of Witchcraft (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1939), p. 504.

<sup>39</sup>Institoris and Sprenger, op. cit., p. 146.

craft raging so strongly throughout the countryside, many people undoubtedly convinced themselves that they were ensorcelled. The belief was made even firmer by Malleus Maleficarum, then considered the handbook of witchcraft. It states,

But there is no bodily infirmity, not even leprosy or epilepsy, which cannot be caused by witches, with God's permission. And this is proved by the fact that no sort of infirmity is excepted by the Doctors.<sup>40</sup>

One of the foremost accusations brought against suspects was that they caused sexual abnormalities, particularly sterility, abortions, and disappearance of the genital organs. Young married couples would often blame their lack of sexual adjustment on witches.

Witches were supposedly capable of not only affecting a person's health, but also of transforming him into an animal, just as they sometimes transformed themselves. Modern science attributes this belief in transformation to a form of hysteria termed lycanthropy from the Greek story about Lycanthropus who, in the form of a wolf, had his paws severed. Upon returning to human form, he was lacking both hands and feet. There is probably a great deal of validity in the theory that lycanthropy was the basis for the metamorphosis ascribed to witches, for there is little or no evidence of any actual transformation having occurred.

The origin of the belief in the transformation is possibly in the ancient worship of animal deities. In an effort to be more closely aligned with their god, the worshippers probably adorned themselves with

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

the skins of their animal-god and imitated the animal's movements and voice. If done in a state of trance, the imitation could have become an actuality to the persons involved.

Malleus Maleficarum, however, supports transformation with the following logic:

And at first as follows: Our bodies naturally are subject to and obey the angelic nature as regards local motion. But the bad angels, although they have lost grace, have not lost their natural power, as has often been said before. And since the faculty of fancy or imagination is corporeal, that is, allied to a physical organ, it also is naturally subject to devils, so that they can transmute it, causing various phantasies, by the flow of the thoughts and perceptions to the original image received by them.<sup>41</sup>

Logic is also used in The Discoverie of Witchcraft, however, to arrive at the opposite conclusion:

Now, if a witch or a divell can so alter the shape of a man, as contrarilie to make him looke downe to hell, like a beast; Gods works should not onelie be defaced and disgraced, but his ordinance should be woonderfullie altered, and thereby confounded.<sup>42</sup>

Witches were attributed another capability to which modern science has given some support, that is their ability to produce effects with their brews. Witches quite often possessed an impressive knowledge of herbs and drugs which enabled them to produce either curative or fatal results. True, there was a great deal of superstition involved in the brews, but there were also a great many toxic and semi-toxic ingredients included in the concoctions. Some of the elements which seem mere foolishness upon initial investigation take on a different

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>42</sup> Scot, op. cit., Book V, 101.

aspect under closer scrutiny. For example, parts of a toad, which were often a necessary element in a witch's brew, can affect the consumer.

. . . The mention of toad skin . . . brings us within smelling distance of the classic witch's cauldron:

Toad, that under cold stone,  
Days and nights hast thirty one,  
Sweltered venom sleeping got,  
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot!

. . . bufotenin, venomous product of the skin of a toad, does appear to have certain effects on the mind of man. . . .<sup>43</sup>

The plants and herbs which were mixed into the brews were also capable of producing significant effects.

Moss from the skull of a parricide, the horn of a goat that had cohabited with a girl--these and similar items must have cost the worried sorcerer many hours of anxious search. But what gave these brews their activity was not the inert ingredients mentioned above, but extracts of henbane, mandrake, or deadly nightshade, plants common enough throughout the countries of Europe, whose stupefying properties had been known for centuries.<sup>44</sup>

Anyone familiar with the actions of belladonna, henbane, thorn apple and similar members of the Solanaceae can have no doubt that the witches' brew of which these unfortunates partook contained these drugs and that the salve with which they anointed their bodies was composed of crushed belladonna leaves. These plants have long been known in some parts of Europe as "the sorcerer's herb" or "the herb of the devil."<sup>45</sup>

The brews were mixed to form both ointments, the most interesting of which is "flying ointment," and potions, the most famous being love potion. The "flying ointment" could be made from three formulas:

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<sup>43</sup>Robert S. DeRopp, Drugs and the Mind (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), p. 271.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 272.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 273.



1. Du persil, de l'eau de l'Aconite, des feuilles de Peuple, et de la suye.
2. De la Berle, de l'Acorum vulgaire, de la Quintefeuille, du sang de chauuesouris, de la Morelle endormante, et de l'huyte.
3. De graisse d'enfant, de suc d'Aconite, de Quintefeuille, de Morelle, et de suye.<sup>46\*</sup>

It should be noted that aconite, deadly nightshade (belladonna), and parsley (which closely resembles hemlock) are capable of fatal effects if used in large doses. However, used in small amounts and in the form of an ointment rather than a draught, this poisonous trio will produce psychological, cardial, and neurological effects. The ointment was rubbed over the entire body, but particularly into the quick of the nails, on broken areas of the skin, and between the legs. Treatment of the latter area was probably the most efficacious as the toxic ingredients could be absorbed into the blood stream through the vaginal membrane much more quickly than through the skin.<sup>47</sup> The mind of the person to whom the "flying ointment" was applied would be induced into a delirious state in which levitation and flying would be prevalent.

Even though the number of cases of authentic aerial transportation is few, Malleus Maleficarum supports the belief.

It is shown in various ways that they [witches] can be bodily transported; and first, from the operations of other Magicians. For if they could not be transported, it would either be because God does not permit it, or because the devil cannot do this since

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<sup>46</sup>Murray, op. cit., Appendix V by A. J. Clark, p. 279.

\*"1. Parsley, water of aconite, poplar leaves, and soot.  
2. Water parsnip, sweet flag, cinquefoil, bat's blood, deadly nightshade, and oil. 3. Baby's fat, juice of water parsnip, aconite, cinquefoil, deadly nightshade, and soot."

<sup>47</sup>Ewen, op. cit., p. 78.

it is contrary to nature. It cannot be for both greater and less things can be done by the permission of God; and greater things are very often done both to children and men, even to just men confirmed in grace.<sup>48</sup>

Love potion, the second mixture mentioned above, was widely believed in, for human nature tends to accept as true anything which it desires intensely enough. Actually, there seems to be no scientific basis for the belief in philtres, for even though lust may be aroused through the use of emotive drugs, love must spring from a pure inner feeling. Both Malleus Maleficarum and Dæmonologie uphold the belief that witchcraft could sway the emotions, but they did not give the credit to philtres, but to the Devil's work. King James I wrote:

They can make men or women to love or hate other, which may be verie possible to the Devil to effectuat, seing he being a subtile spirite, knowes well inough how to perswade the corrupted affection of them whom God will permit him so to deale with. . . .<sup>49</sup>

Scot disagreed, however, for he felt that love potions were more likely to cause insanity than affection, and used the love poetry of Ovid to confirm his beliefs.<sup>50</sup>

Also included in the witches' medicinal knowledge was the use of anesthetics, which enabled them to withstand the torture inflicted by their inquisitors as well as the aftereffects of the "flying ointment" and the application of the witches' mark, both of which were painful.

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<sup>48</sup> Institoris and Sprenger, op. cit., pp. 104-105.

<sup>49</sup> King James I, op. cit., Book II, Ch. 5, 45.

<sup>50</sup> Scot, op. cit., Book VI, 116-117.

The final witches' power to be mentioned is that of image magic. An effigy of the victim was made, usually of either wax or clay. It was then pierced with nails or pins and slowly burned or possibly drowned or buried. As the image deteriorated, the victim also declined. King James I ascribed the teaching of this form of witchcraft to the Devil:

. . . hee [the Devil] teacheth how to make Pictures of waxe or clay: That by the roasting thereof, the persones that they beare the name of, may be continuallie melted or dried awaie by continuall sicknesse.<sup>51</sup>

Malleus Maleficarum went farther than the royal author in that it attributed the power behind image magic to the Devil.

. . . although the injury is actually done to the image by the witch or some other man, and the devil in the same manner invisibly injures the bewitched man, yet it is deservedly ascribed to the witch. For, without her, God would never allow the devil to inflict the injury, nor would the devil on his own account try to injure the man.<sup>52</sup>

The most famous case of image magic occurred during the reign of Queen Elizabeth when a wax figure of Her Highness was found in Lincoln's Inn Fields. The effigy was pierced through the breast with a pin, meaning the Queen would be fatally affected. The court was seriously alarmed and Elizabeth called in Doctor John Dee, her personal astrologer and necromancer.<sup>53</sup>

It can easily be seen that

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<sup>51</sup>King James I, op. cit., Book II, Ch. 5, 44.

<sup>52</sup>Institoris and Sprenger, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>53</sup>E. A. Wallis Budge, Amulets and Talismans (New Hyde Park: University Books, 1961), pp. 485-486.

. . . witchcraft, in the course of time, and under political urgencies, not infrequently began to impair the powers of the state. It progressively spread into public policies, national issues, even interfering with royal successions. . . . At times, too, the machinations of the wizard caught and held the personal interest of the ruling class, with consequent public danger of excessive, undue influences.<sup>54</sup>

In witchcraft trials, ladies and nobles of high estate and great political influence were often implicated and occasionally directly accused of either consulting witches or practicing the dark art themselves. It is possible, of course, that there was some basis for the implications, but many were purely for political reasons. "Measures, therefore, had to be taken to safeguard the functions of empire, the stability of sovereignty, the perpetuity of traditional mores."<sup>55</sup> The measures taken were the trials conducted under the reigns of Elizabeth and James I.

~~—~~The English witch trials were not as abominable as those of Scotland and the Continent, where several methods of torture were employed, based on the idea that pain lowered the resistance of the human spirit to the point of confession. Torture became a popular practice inflicted upon most suspects, making even the most innocent confess to the vilest guilt. The English outlawed torture, but they adopted rather strenuous methods of persuasion. The tests, pricking the witches' mark, scratching the witch, watching the witch, and the like, were

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<sup>54</sup>Harry E. Wedeck, Treasury of Witchcraft (New York: Philosophical Library, 1961), p. 245.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 246.

painful, to say the least, and the infamous reputation of the English prisons is well known. The cells were rat-infested; there was no heat or sunlight; the food was only slightly better than garbage; and chains and manacles were employed~~X~~. It is no wonder, then, that Mother Demdike of the Lancashire witches died before she came to trial, and that Elizabeth Stile, who was healthy and able to walk twelve miles to prison upon being apprehended, had to be taken to her trial in a wheelbarrow as her limbs were insensible and her toes rotted away.

The witch trials have a remarkable amount of similarity to each other. The prisoners, who had confessed to witchcraft when pressure was applied, often denied the confession when brought before the court. Rather than witnesses, the court often had only a written deposition as the main testimony, and the prisoner had no lawyer or witnesses for the defense, except in an occasional case concerning a person of high estate.

It would be difficult to over-estimate the unfairness of these trials. The scales of justice were heavily weighted against the prisoner, with malice, perjury, prejudice, and ignorance. The magistrate, sometimes with an axe to grind, having taken down the evidence, produced it in court, poisoning the mind of the judge privately, or by speaking from the bench. The juries were completely misled by irrelevant matter, unsupported opinions, and tittle-tattle which should have been inadmissible; and the witnesses were often spiteful enemies, young children or demented persons.<sup>56</sup>

→ Some of the accused prisoners were actually guilty of practicing witchcraft, however, for they were able to relate many of the evil rites of the dark art from experience. The most infamous rite was known as

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<sup>56</sup>Ewen, op. cit., pp. 125-126.

the Witches' Sabbat, or the Black Mass. This ceremony was a combined business meeting, mock religious service, and Bacchanalian orgy.

Although Friday was the favorite, on any appointed night one could see men and women silently walking toward a gathering place. Sometimes the meeting was in a graveyard, sometimes in an open but secluded place, and occasionally in a house. The method of transportation varied according to the distance to be traversed; walking was the most common means, but horseback riding was not uncommon and levitation was claimed by a few, as was transportation by a human transposed into an animal form, a familiar, or the Devil. This claim was probably due to the belief in "flying ointment."

Upon reaching the appointed place, the coven began its proceedings with the witches paying homage to the Devil or his emissary, who sat upon a throne or rock in the center of the gathering place. The Devil of the Sabbat may or may not have been believed to be Satan, for the members of a coven referred to the Grand Master of the district, as well as all the officers, as devils, and much confusion has ensued as a result. Regardless of his actual identity, he was adored as the Devil. Usually he was dressed as a huge goat, being dressed in a headdress, skin, and mask; occasionally, however, he appeared as a man dressed entirely in black. The homage consisted of the renewal of fidelity vows, kissing the Devil on any part of his person he so designated, often his feet or buttocks, and sometimes turning a certain number of times withershins.

The homage was followed by the recital of their evil deeds by

the witches. These reports were given in full detail and contained every bit of malice the witch had been able to accomplish since the last meeting; for, if a witch were truant or even neglectful of wickedness, she would be punished or beaten, an action reported by the witches to be severely painful.

The ritual then progressed to the initiation of new witches. Although the number varied with each coven, each initiate was required to accept approximately twelve articles of witchcraft:

1. Pact: The neophyte had to conclude a pact with the Devil. In this agreement, the Devil consented to grant the wishes of the witch and bring her happiness after death in return for her consent to do every malice possible.

Satan promises to give his votaries all they desire; knowledge, wealth, honours, pleasure, vengeance upon their enemies; and all that he can give is disappointment, poverty, misery, hate, the power to hurt and destroy. He is ever holding before their eyes elusive hopes, and so besotted are they that they trust him and confide in him until all is lost.<sup>57</sup>

The pact was sometimes a signed document, more often a verbal agreement, but always a voluntary thing.

2. Renunciation: The proselyte had to solemnly renounce the Christian faith. If the religion she had previously claimed were Catholicism, she had to vow to discard the Holy Rosary, insult the Virgin Mary, break images of the Saints, and abstain from confession. Regardless of the religion, however, she had to repudiate baptism and refrain from communion.

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<sup>57</sup>Summers, The History of Witchcraft, p. 70.

3. Worship: The novice had to promise to worship the Devil and his imps, both in private and at assemblies. In order to show fidelity in her worship, she was required to attend Sabbats regularly.

4. Recruit: It was the duty of the new witch to join her fellow devil-worshippers to enlist as many new members as possible into the organization. This, of course, was looked upon as the most commendable feat a witch could perform.

5. Baptism: The Devil conducted a parody of a Christian baptism in which the subject had either her head or face dipped in unblessed water. She then renounced her former baptism, was given new godparents in the form of imps, and was renamed by the Devil. Occasionally there was a blood baptism in which the Devil sucked some of the witch's blood and sprinkled it on her head, thus baptising her.

6. Offering: The new convert gave the Devil a piece of her clothing in recognition of her rights to all the property she could accumulate with his evil aid.

7. Confirmation: The neophyte was made to stand in a circle drawn by the Devil and swear allegiance to Satan. The circle had mystical significance in that it often contained a cross upon which the witch stood. Her oath from a place containing such religious symbolism was mockery of Christianity and was designed to show undefiled scorn of the Church.

8. Transference: The witch's name was removed from the book of life, or Christ, and inscribed in the book of death, or Satan. The Devil wrote the name with his claw or hoof, depending on his appearance



at the time. Such books were guarded with extreme care and only rarely were found by officials.

9. Sacrifice: The witch was required to sacrifice to the Devil with offerings in the form of evil deeds or the bodies of murdered children. The former offering was more popular except in the case of witches who were also midwives. In such circumstances, witches were infamous for jabbing a long pin into the brain of an infant as it issued from the mother's womb. The child was pronounced dead at birth and the witch had a sacrifice to offer to her evil Lord.

10. Gifts: In addition to sacrifices to the Devil, the new witch pledged gifts to the Devil's helpers, demons and imps. This could include anything from feeding them if they were hungry to lying with them if they wanted sex.

11. Identification: The Devil inflicted his mark, commonly called the Witches' Mark, on some part of the witch's body. He reputedly did this with his claw or hoof.

12. Silence: The last agreement the new witch had to make was to keep silence in regard to all the rites and practices of witchcraft. Supposedly, it was because they broke this agreement that the Devil deserted the witches when they were captured.<sup>58</sup>

When the initiations were concluded, the assembly continued its business with plans for evil deeds to be performed before the following

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<sup>58</sup>Ewen, Witchcraft and Demonianism, p. 61, citing Compendium Maleficarum, pp. 13-16.

Sabbat<sup>x</sup> These plans ranged from individual endeavors to malice involving the entire coven. "Not infrequently high politics were the question . . . , and the more powerful witches strove to decide the fate of countries and the lot of kings."<sup>59</sup>

The business . . . of the Sabbat having been dispatched, there followed the pleasures, which as may well be supposed, were of the foulest and grossest kind. They mainly consisted in dancing and feasting. Sometimes they dance before eating and sometimes after the repast. The dances are generally performed in a circle and always round to the left . . . nor are they graceful and elegant movements, but the most erratic and ungainly caperings, jiggings and leapings, which prove wearisome beyond words. . . . Nor will the demon excuse any from the dance. . . .<sup>60</sup>

The banquet of the Sabbat varied from a tasty repast to a form of garbage, depending upon whether a rich man or a peasant paid for it. The meal was accompanied by wines and brews concocted by the witches.

These drinks were intoxicating not only because of their alcoholic content but because of the inclusion of the leaves or berries of belladonna and henbane. It is no wonder, then, that sex orgies and promiscuous intercourse followed the banquets. "The demons took part, and the President himself. This, like the banquet and the wine of the celebration, was in many cases intensely disagreeable: one said it was as agonizing as travail. . . ."<sup>61</sup> On the other hand, women often said it was a great pleasure and a source of contentment in their lives. In either case,

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<sup>59</sup>Summers, A Popular History of Witchcraft, p. 149.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>61</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 165.

the general concession is that an artificial phallus was often employed, for many of the witches complained of the coldness and heaviness of the Devil; then, too, it was not possible for the Grand Master, a human, to satisfy or service so many women.

Just before dawn, at cockcrow, the Sabbat broke up and the witches dispersed. The participants went to their homes so that they would be in bed when their families awoke. Later that day, they were about their business, just as ordinary people were, but they had the concerns of the coven in mind and secretly carried out the business of evil.

The popularity of these rites and ceremonies grew for two reasons. First, this was the only way a peasant could revolt against everything-- God, Christianity, his master, customs. For the peasant, the others at the ceremonies were his equals with whom he was willing to share everything. He was free to do as he wished. The peasant felt a fellowship with witchcraft and demonology because both he and the practice of these rites were oppressed.<sup>62</sup>

Secondly, it is fairly common knowledge that many of the women of the Renaissance were extremely insecure, inasmuch as the family revolved around the elder son. His sisters belonged to him, body and soul, until he married. If the son married, his wife could lawfully turn her mother-in-law out of the house. On the other hand, if the son did not marry, his mother, in addition to his sisters, must give herself to him, if he

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<sup>62</sup>Kurt Seligmann, The History of Magic (New York: Pantheon Books, 1948), p. 260.

so desired.<sup>63</sup> As witches, the women had a place in the world. For centuries, women had had no rights, no position; witchcraft not only gave the woman a place, but often she filled offices, such as that of priestess, at Sabbats.

The orgiastic rites of the Sabbat were never totally suppressed by the Church, therefore, and were forced into concealment only by the constant persecution of the covens by the legal authorities. The persecutions and trials caused a great deal of interest among people of all classes, including the nobility and several learned men. Large quantities of pamphlets began to appear and several books on the subject of witchcraft were either written or reprinted. The pamphlets were aimed at informing the plebeian strata of English society of the witchcraft trials and cases. The books, however, were written on a higher plane and a copy of one or more of the authoritative books, Malleus Maleficarum, The Discoverie of Witchcraft, and Dæmonologie, was owned by nearly every judge and magistrate in England. These books were influential because they served to direct legal authorities through a world of evil which was alien not only to their knowledge, but to the very fiber of their beings.

Men . . . , women . . . , lawyers . . . , and gentlemen of education were as children when confronted by the fear of the Unknown. The dark world of witchcraft was a heritage which imprisoned each generation, only now it was not the superstitious men and women of the villages who were the accusers. It was the State in all its majesty.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup>Jules Michelet, Satanism and Witchcraft (New York: The Citadel Press, 1946), pp. 114-115.

<sup>64</sup>Maple, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

Malleus Maleficarum, or The Hammer of Witches, written by Henricus Institoris and James Sprenger, was published in 1487. It

. . . provided a complete guide, theoretical as well as practical, for the discovery, examination, torture, trial, and execution of witches. It was reprinted more than a dozen times within a half century of its publication and exercised a potent influence on Roman Catholic and Protestant alike for more than two centuries.<sup>65</sup>

Eric Maple looks at the darker side of Malleus Maleficarum when he writes,

It defined witchcraft in terms that made it impossible that any suspect could ever escape the inquisitorial net and it laid down methods of interrogation and torture that would invariably result in a confession.<sup>66</sup>

Montague Summers, on the other hand, praises the merits of it when he states,

Certain it is that the Malleus Maleficarum is the most solid, the most important work in the whole vast library of witchcraft. One turns to it again and again with edification and interest. From the point of psychology, from the point of jurisprudence, from the point of history, it is supreme.<sup>67</sup>

Actually, Malleus Maleficarum is a product of interest in Catholicism and its perpetuation. It deals with witchcraft, which its authors felt would destroy the Church if allowed to remain unchecked. It attacks the Devil and his instruments, witches, never even questioning the existence of witches. Throughout the entire book, God is given credit for allowing the witches, and the Devil, to do evil, but no attempt is ever

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<sup>65</sup>R. Trevor Davies, Four Centuries of Witch-Beliefs (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1947), p. 4.

<sup>66</sup>Maple, op. cit., p. 30.

<sup>67</sup>Institoris and Sprenger, op. cit., Introduction, xv.

made to question God's judgment in these matters. Malleus Maleficarum is a thorough study of witchcraft, but it is too Church-prejudiced to be considered entirely equitable or fair.

Reginald Scot's The Discoverie of Witchcraft may be considered a direct opposite to Malleus Maleficarum, for Scot did not believe in witches or witchcraft and endeavored to explain his reasons in The Discoverie of Witchcraft. Briggs contends that Scot was impelled to write it ". . . partly by a plain man's impatience of nonsense and unreason and partly from an impulse of chivalry and a desire to protect those old, weak and ignorant people for whom no one spoke."<sup>68</sup>

Scot, who was a country gentleman, had been interested in witchcraft for many years before he wrote The Discoverie of Witchcraft, for his book contains ample quotations from every prominent work dealing with the subject. Then, too, he must have attended a good many trials and learned many of the contemporary witch stories, for evidence of this is scattered throughout the book.

Montague Summers does not have a high regard for Scot, however. He says,

. . . His mind was naturally sceptical and in religion he would nowadays be a pseudo-scientific modernist. That is to say, he was utterly without imagination, a very dull, narrow, and ineffective little soul. When he has exposed certain egregious impostures of contemporary date, enlarged upon card tricks and prestidigitation at inordinate length, . . . this myopic squireen deems that the whole matter is settled once and for all.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>68</sup>K. M. Briggs, Pale Hecate's Team (New York: The Humanities Press, 1962), p. 31.

<sup>69</sup>Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft, pp. 128-129.

Briggs, on the other hand, expresses a favorable opinion of Scot. She concludes,

Reginald Scot has been accused of atheism and complete scepticism; he was a man of sturdy, if Protestant, piety. . . .

. . . . .

The serious intention behind . . . [his books] . . . is apparent, but Scot's lively style served him ill in one way. The book contains such a various collection of curious matter so racily set forth that it served as a kind of storehouse to writers on witchcraft, who used the material and neglected the argument; so that it is possible that the book sometimes worked in a contrary direction to that which left the readers' minds open to the possibility of scepticism.

. . . . .

It must have taken some moral courage to write as he did, against the trend of fashion and current belief.<sup>70</sup>

It cannot be denied that Scot was a sceptic, but in the face of the witch panic then raging, his doubt should be applauded rather than condemned, for his beliefs sprang from much research and an attempt toward rational thinking rather than conformity to the accepted ideas of many of his peers.

In 1597, King James I wrote Dæmonologie, a treatise in the form of a dialogue. The book was written partially to express His Majesty's quite definite opinions in regard to witchcraft and partially to retaliate against Scot's The Discoverie of Witchcraft, which King James felt to be entirely too sceptical.

King James possessed a natural interest in the occult, which was sharpened considerably by a personal experience of a witch conspiracy

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<sup>70</sup>Briggs, op. cit., pp. 31-33.

directed against him by Bothwell.

James with good reason feared and hated Bothwell, who, events amply proved, was Grand Master of a company of more than one hundred witches, all adepts in poisoning, and all eager to do away with the King. In other words, Francis Stewart, Earl of Bothwell, was the centre and head of a vast political plot. A widespread popular panic was the result of the discovery of this murderous conspiracy.<sup>71</sup>

Dæmonologie, therefore, was not likely to depict its author as anything less than believer in witchcraft. Of the book, one author says,

. . . It is a shrewd, able, and well-written book, and . . . [was] widely read.

. . . . .

As it was based on a careful study of all the leading continental works, it did much to reinforce the continental beliefs in . . . [England]. . . . The fact that James refused to accept every belief--that in werewolves, for example--gave an impression of severely critical judgement and, consequently, of exceptional trustworthiness.<sup>72</sup>

Dæmonologie sums up the most important problems that witchcraft and demonology had created. The first book is devoted to magic and necromancy, the second to witchcraft per se, and the third to the different species of spirits.

Because of his intense interest in the subject, King James would occasionally take a personal interest in a case of witchcraft. One of the most noteworthy examples of this was the case of a boy in Leicester. The boy

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<sup>71</sup>Institoris and Sprenger, op. cit., Introduction, xli.

<sup>72</sup>Davies, op. cit., pp. 46-47.



. . . had fits; he was reported bewitched; nine persons were found guilty of his sufferings and hanged; another six were in prison when the King's Majesty reached the town. He heard of the prosecution, sent for the boy, and questioned him. The boy made a slip; the king ordered him to be sent to Lambeth, to the Archbishop, where he was examined again at more leisure. Before the king had finished the progress, the boy had been sent back to him, with the fraud confessed. The king forgave him, but he showed his displeasure to those concerned with the executions.<sup>73</sup>

Cases such as this gave the King reason to doubt his theretofore solid convictions, and by the end of his reign, King James was by no means as firm a believer in the dark art as he had been.

In conjunction with the more influential books written on witchcraft, the Bible should be at least mentioned, for much of the attitude of Christians found its basis in the Holy Book. The people of the Renaissance quite often felt that if they denied the possibility of witchcraft, they were denying the teachings of the Bible.

. . . the Bible literally interpreted text by text without regard to historical background or historical criticism of its documents seemed quite decisive on the subject of witchcraft . . . and on many of the current accusations against witches. . . . The command "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus xxii, 18) seemed in these circumstances to settle the matter once and for all, as did the fuller specification of diabolical practices enumerated in Deuteronomy (xviii, 10-11). Sceptics about the power allowed to the Devil and his servants in this world could be silenced by the story of the witch of Endor (I Samuel xxviii) and the permission given by God, to Satan to afflict Job (Job i, 7-12).<sup>74</sup>

\* It can easily be seen, therefore, that witchcraft was a very real problem in Renaissance England, and caused a great deal of concern among the populace. There is no way to determine the accurate number of

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<sup>73</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 208.

<sup>74</sup>Davies, op. cit., p. 45.

executions for witchcraft, for many cases were unrecorded and, where records were kept, many records were inaccurate. A conservative estimate of the number of English executions from 1542 to 1736 would be less than one thousand.<sup>75</sup>

So the stage was set for the dramas which used witchcraft as a part of their themes. Dramatists, as a rule, are very much people of their age, so it was only fitting that witchcraft be prevalent in the plays of the witchcraft panic era.

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<sup>75</sup>Summers, A Popular History of Witchcraft, p. 234.

## II

### THE INFLUENCE OF WITCHCRAFT ON THE STAGE

The Elizabethan and Jacobean reigns were times of change in England. The English people mirrored this change in their attitudes and ways of thinking. As one critic points out, the Elizabethan minds were

. . . now wholly carefree, pleasure-loving, and amoral and now burdened with the sternest consciousness of sin, fired with the zeal of a Savonarola or a Luther. The imaginative genius of the age realized in fancy, if it did not practice in actuality, the darkest of possible crimes. It delighted to conceive either an individual or a social group sold to the devil.<sup>76</sup>

It is not the least implausible, then, to find that the dramatists of the times catered to the audiences' love of excitement and need for an atmosphere of moral austerity, for these two factors sprang respectively from the primitive element, which was still very much present in the English culture, and from the Puritan influence, which made itself felt not only from the pulpit but from most aspects of English life as well. These two factors are particularly evident in Elizabethan drama, but less so in Jacobean plays, for the audiences of the Jacobean period were maturing both in taste and culture just as the playwrights were developing in the treatment of a subject. Whereas the Elizabethan drama was marked by an enthusiasm and a certain amount of unrestraint, Jacobean plays were characterized by darker, more melodramatic thought. Ellis-Fermor feels that the causes of this were

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<sup>76</sup>Henry W. Wells, Elizabethan and Jacobean Playwrights (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), p. 18.

. . . the apprehensions and the disillusionment that spread through political and social life with the death of Elizabeth, the accession of James, the influence of his court and the instability of the first years of his reign.

. . . . .

One immediate corollary of this is a preoccupation with death where the Elizabethan had been in love with life.

. . . . .

These things then were the heritage of the Jacobean drama on the threshold of its growth: spiritual uncertainty . . . and . . . fear of the impending destruction of a great civilization.<sup>77</sup>

This dramatic change is noticeable in the plays to be discussed in this thesis, for they range from late sixteenth to late seventeenth century, covering the development of the dramatic treatment of witches and witchcraft as well as displaying the growing change in drama. The first play to be considered is John Lyly's Endimion, The Man in the Moon, which is the earliest play in the group, being written in 1588.

Lyly's euphuistic style of writing no longer appeals to readers, nor does his mode of thought, for courtly love is the central theme of most of his plays. This convention seems rather unemotional and affected to us today, but to the Elizabethans, it was something novel and entertaining, owing largely to the polished, sophisticated dialogue. Another attribute of Lyly is his adaptation of classical myths and legends with more or less veiled references to contemporary events, rumors, or persons. Endimion is based on the myth of a mortal named Endimion, who was beloved by the goddess of the moon. The myth is found in the

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<sup>77</sup>Una Ellis-Fermor, The Jacobean Drama: An Interpretation (London: Methuen and Company, Ltd., 1953), pp. 2-3.

writings of several of the ancients, notably those of Theocritus and Ovid.

Lyly's characters, when not wholly classical, are often drawn from Elizabethan court circles. There is little doubt that Endimion is abundantly supplied with such figures.

. . . Cynthia was understood by its [Endimion's] audience of slyly smiling, whispering "insiders" to connect Elizabeth with the story in a closer and subtler role than merely as the recipient of the direct compliment in the Epilogue; that Tellus stood for Queen Mary of Scotland, and Endymion for King James VI of Scotland, dependent . . . for the throne . . . on the favor . . . and estate of Cynthia, or perhaps Leicester or Oxford. . . . The Elizabethan world was full of good counselors like Eumenides and of comically vain and tedious egotists like Sir Tophas.<sup>78</sup>

The witch, Dipsas, however, is not to be found in Elizabeth's court. She is a character from the common stock of people and one of the first witches in drama. She is described in the play as a person "whom many honor for age as wonder at for cunning" (I, iv, 15-17), as "a black saint" (IV, ii, 46), and as "a notable witch" (V, ii, 110). Yet for all her cunning, Dipsas does not quite fit the picture of offensiveness and evil painted by Ewen and Summers.<sup>79</sup>

In Endimion, Tellus seeks the sorcery of Dipsas in an effort to gain the affection of Endimion. Tellus has been unsuccessful in her employment of all the natural means of acquiring Endimion's love, for he has lost his heart to Cynthia through no effort whatsoever on the

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<sup>78</sup>Felix E. Schnelling and Matthew W. Black (eds.), Typical Elizabethan Plays by Contemporaries and Immediate Successors of Shakespeare (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1949), discussion, p. 95. Note: All references from Endimion, and Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay are from this text.

<sup>79</sup>Cf. ante, pp. 15-16.

part of Cynthia. Hence Tellus feels that unnatural means are her last resort, and in so deciding she becomes a more malicious character than Dipsas, for Dipsas has become professionally evil and regrets it, but Tellus allows jealousy to move her to impair her reason, become malevolent and harm another human being, one she loved, at that. Thus she told Dipsas:

Tell. It is the only thing I crave, that, seeing my love to Endymion, unspotted, cannot be accepted, his truth to Cynthia, though it be unspeakable, may be suspected.

Dip. I will undertake it, and overtake him, that all his love shall be doubted of, and therefore become desperate: but this will wear out with time that treadeth all things down but truth.  
(I, iv, 59-67)

Dipsas acquiesces, as she later reveals, because, if Tellus "could not have entreated . . . by fair means, she would have commanded by menacing, for from her gather we all our simples to maintain our sorceries" (II, iii, 57-61). Tellus, therefore, exercises some control over the witches; however, one of Lyly's flaws in the play is in never revealing just what the connection is.

The method which Dipsas uses in carrying out Tellus' wishes is not one used in the actual practice of witchcraft. Dipsas instructs her servant, Bagoa, to fan hemlock over Endimion's face as he sleeps in order to make him sleep throughout his youth and awaken an aged man. The employment of hemlock was well-known in witch circles, but it was used in concoctions rather than as a fan. Lyly, in all likelihood, utilizes a fan because of its stage effect--a fan is more easily comprehended by an audience than is a brew.

The fairies mentioned in Act IV, scene iii, are probably inserted by Lyly in an effort to lengthen the play, for his plot is wearing thin and it is necessary to pad it with little interludes in order to have a five-act play. At any rate, the fairies seem to be a group of minor witches, for they are not content with pinching Corsites and putting him to sleep when he endeavors to move Endimion, which is an impossible task, in an effort to prove his love for Tellus; the fairies also make spots appear all over his body. They then go on to their "midnight heidegyes," which is a reference to the Witches' Sabbat.

In the last act, Cynthia strongly reprimands Dipsas: "Dipsas, thy years are not so many as thy vices, yet more in number than commonly nature doth afford or permit" (V, iii, 26-29). Dipsas is then reminded that, because of the goodness and protection of heaven, Cynthia is stronger than witchcraft. Dipsas replies, ". . . there is nothing . . . wicked that I have not done, nor anything so wished for as death . . ." (V, iii, 56-58), and makes known her desire for full repentance. Cynthia forgives her and Dipsas promises,

Dip. Madam, I renounce both substance and shadow of that most horrible and hateful trade, vowing to the gods continual penance, and to your highness obedience.

(V, iii, 384-387)

As has been pointed out, it was impossible for a witch to feel repentance,<sup>80</sup> and drama is the only place in which mere forgiveness of a witch would suffice. Briggs' comment, then, is worthy of note.

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<sup>80</sup>Cf. ante, p. 21.

The end of the play is a scene of universal reconciliation, so that too much should not be made of the forgiveness of the witch, and yet, at the same time, the fairy-tale happy ending would have included the punishment of the wicked, so that this gentleness is significant.<sup>81</sup>

Dipsas, therefore, is not a characterization of an actual witch. Her evil traits are toned down and somewhat explained away by Lyly and her repentant speeches make the audience more sympathetic toward her.

The second drama to be considered is Robert Greene's Frier Bacon and Frier Bungay, which was written in 1589, a year later than Endimion. Frier Bacon, on the whole, is a much better, more skillfully executed play than is Endimion, even though they both attempt to combine romance with the dark art, thereby creating a binary theme. The resemblance ends there, however, except that, like Dipsas, Frier Bacon repents at the close of the play.

Actually, Frier Bacon resembles Marlowe's Dr. Faustus in that both plays use magic rather than pure witchcraft in their themes, but except for the scenes of magic, there is little that is common to both plays. A theme of rivalry between the plays has been suggested.

In all probability Frier Bacon was written to rival Doctor Faustus and performed within a year after that play. . . . the rivalry could have been in the opposite direction, though it would perhaps be less usual to find a play in which magic is taken seriously inspired by an earlier one in which it is treated humorously. Some scholars doubt that there was actual rivalry.<sup>82</sup>

It does not seem likely that Greene would attempt to rival Marlowe, but it does seem logical for Greene to base a play on a successful work, as

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<sup>81</sup>Briggs, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>82</sup>Schnelling and Black, op. cit., p. 164.



plagiarism was not the least bit frowned upon in the Renaissance. It is doubtful that Greene meant Frier Bacon as either a rival or an imitation of Dr. Faustus; he simply combined Marlowe's idea with a theme made popular by a chapbook tale (that of contesting magicians) in order to appeal to popular tastes, and interwove them with an invention of his own:

. . . the passion of Prince Edward for fair Margaret, the betrayal of the Prince by Lacy, the friend he had engaged to woo the maid for him, the mutual love of Margaret and Lacy, the wrath of the Prince, and his final forgiveness of the lovers.

. . . . .

These scenes, quite new and fresh in English comedy, give the play its special and delightful charm.<sup>83</sup>

Such a combination could hardly fail to please an audience and the play was quite successful.

As for Greene's handling of the magic scenes, it is evident that he knew his material, for several of Bacon's speeches mirror the beliefs and practices of the time. A fine example of this is the fact that Bacon was a magician rather than a pure witch; Greene was able to show this in two ways. First, Bacon is an Oxford scholar simply gaining knowledge in the field of the supernatural, not being evil; and, secondly, Bacon does not make the diabolical contract with Satan and is therefore able to repent.

Early in the play, Prince Edward realizes that he must resort to something more than his natural charms in order to gain the affection of

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<sup>83</sup>Thomas M. Parrott and Robert H. Ball, A Short View of Elizabethan Drama (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), pp. 71-72.

Margaret. He says, "Ermsby, it must be necromantic spells and charms of art that must enchain her love, or else shall Edward never win the girl" (I, i, 136-138). So Bacon is chosen to carry out Edward's plans because of the friar's famous knowledge of magic. Bacon's reputation had been growing not only because of his abilities with magic but because of his plans to build a wall of brass around England and because of his construction of a head of brass that could tell of philosophy.

Bacon agrees to aid Prince Edward and takes him into the study where Bacon shows Edward the distant actions of Lacy, Edward's emissary to Margaret, in a crystal ball. Edward watches, aghast, while Lacy falls in love with Margaret and asks her to marry him. Edward pleads for Bacon to stop the marriage, which he does by muting Frier Bungay, who was to perform the ceremony. Bacon then sends a devil to bring Bungay to the study. This method of transportation was sometimes employed by witches, especially in reference to their methods of travel to a Sabbat.<sup>84</sup>

Later in the play, Greene introduces a German magician named Vandermast, who is traveling in England with King Henry III to see how well the English magicians know their trade. It is between Vandermast and the two friars that the contest of magic mentioned earlier takes place. Vandermast challenges Bungay to prove his magical prowess by performing some feat. Bungay complies by conjuring up the apple tree of Hesperides and a fire-breathing dragon. Vandermast considers this a

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. ante, p. 32.

very mundane performance and tops it by raising Hercules to tear down the tree and destroy the dragon. Bacon proves his skill by rendering Hercules powerless to carry out Vandermast's commands. Greene did not give any methods employed by any of the magicians, and so it can simply be said that they were magical feats rather than works of witches, for there is no evil in their intent.

The Brazen Head which Bacon built finally speaks near the end of the play, but Bacon is asleep and does not hear it. He has left his servant, Miles, to watch for its speech, but Miles becomes too excited to wake Bacon. The Head's speech consists of but seven words: "Time is! . . . Time was! . . . Time is past!"; but in the time necessary to give it, Bacon's opportunity for immortal fame is past. In other words, the Devil was willing, for a time, to aid Bacon in his magic, but as Bacon was incapacitated at the time, the Devil withdrew his support. Bacon knew that he needed at least some help from Satan in order to carry on his magic and that the aid was withdrawn forever with the last words of the Head. Thus Bacon cries: "My life, my fame, my glory, all are past.--Bacon, the turrets of thy hope are ruined down, thy seven years' study lieth in the dust" (I, xi, 115-118). Miles, who is the target of Bacon's displeasure, is cursed by Bacon, who punishes Miles by sentencing him to demonic transportation to Hell.

Bacon becomes disillusioned with magic, breaks his crystal ball, and repents:

. . . it repents me sore that ever Bacon meddled in this art. The hours I have spent in pyromantic spells, the fearful tossing in the

latest night of papers full of necromantic charms, conjuring and adjuring devils and fiends, with stole and alb and strange pentagonon,

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are instances that Bacon must be damned for using devils to counter-vail his God.

.....

Bungay, I'll spend the remnant of my life in pure devotion, praying to my God that he would save what Bacon vainly lost.

(I, xiii, 87-110)

His curse on Miles is fulfilled, however, for Miles, unable to find a job anywhere, goes to Hell on the back of a devil in order to be a tapster.

As for the witchcraft in the play, Greene simply says an act is performed, but does not give any background or clues as to the witchcraft basis. The demonic transportation and the belief that the dark art can control affairs of the heart are the only beliefs that are traceable directly to witchcraft. Of the play in general, it may be said that

Greene's purpose seems to have been simply to provide as many different kinds of entertainment as he could. If so, he succeeded. It is only fair to add that the three strands of actions are at least related by contrast, and that all possible varieties of appeal are derived from each; for example, the scenes of magic are sometimes humorous, sometimes terrifying, sometimes ingenious and fascinating; the love story is by turns tender and pathetic; and the whole is crowned with the pomp and ceremony of a double wedding at court.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Schnelling and Black, op. cit., p. 166.

In The Witch of Edmonton, written in 1621 by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford, English drama has its first true witch play, for The Witch of Edmonton presents the witch as she really existed during this period. This was possible because the play was based on an actual person, Elizabeth Sawyer, known as the Witch of Edmonton. Mother Sawyer, as she was called, is described in a pamphlet written by the chaplain of Newgate, Henry Goodcole, as being ugly, pale, and uneducated with a gleam in her eye; she was disliked and mistrusted by her neighbors and she, in turn, hated them.<sup>86</sup> It was on this pamphlet, The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch, late of Edmonton, and on popular stories, which sprang up from the trial, that the playwrights based The Witch of Edmonton. As Summers notes,

In some ways The Witch of Edmonton is the most interesting and valuable of the witch dramas, because here we have the hag stripped of the least vestige of glamour and romance presented to us in the starkest realism. We see her dwelling apart in a wretched hovel, "shunned and hated like a sickness" miserably poor, buckl'd and bent together, dragging her palsied limbs wearily through the fields, as she clutches her dirty rags round her withered frame. And if she but dare to gather a few dried sticks in a corner she is driven from the spot with hard words and blows.<sup>87</sup>

Such is the initial appearance of Elizabeth Sawyer, who is first seen gathering sticks and complaining of the treatment accorded her by the local townspeople. She says, "Some call me Witch; and being ignorant of my self they go about to teach me how to be one. . . ."<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Briggs, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>87</sup> Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology, p. 291.

<sup>88</sup> Fredson Bowers (ed.), The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker (Cambridge: University Press, 1958), III, The Witch of Edmonton, II, i, 8-10. Note: All references from The Witch of Edmonton are from this text.

A typical example of the deleterious treatment of Elizabeth Sawyer is the way in which one of the farmers, Old Banks, deprives her of the sticks which she is gathering on his land, and threateningly orders her off his land. She curses him, causing him to beat her. She tells him,

Strike, do, and wither'd may that hand and arm whose blows have  
lam'd me, drop from the rotten Trunk. Abuse me! beat me! call me  
Hag and Witch! What is the name? where and by what Art learn'd?  
What spells, what charms, or invocations, may the thing call'd  
Familiar be purchas'd?

(II, i, 31-36)

This speech shows her desire to become a witch and the reasoning behind it, for, as she says, "'Tis all one, to be a Witch, as to be counted one" (II, i, 13-14). Thus,

. . . the farmers declare she is a witch, and at length persecution makes her one. She is malignant and evil enough once the compact with the demon has been confirmed; she longs from the first to be revenged upon her enemies. . . .<sup>89</sup>

Elizabeth Sawyer becomes a witch through magical ceremonies,<sup>90</sup> that is, she is caught cursing by the Devil in the form of a black dog, who says, "Hol have I found thee cursing? now thou art mine own" (II, i, 14). After only brief hesitation, Elizabeth Sawyer makes a pact--sealed with her blood--with the Devil who promises to love her and aid her in gaining the revenge she wants so desperately. When the pact is sealed, thunder and lightning rumble and flash through the heavens as an omen of evil, but Elizabeth Sawyer is so excited over the possibilities of

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<sup>89</sup>Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology, p. 308.

<sup>90</sup>Cf. ante, p. 20.

revenge that she does not heed them.

Elizabeth Sawyer's first act as a witch is to order the Devil to kill the farmer Banks. The Devil replies that this is impossible, for

. . . though he be curs'd to thee, yet of himself he is loving to the world, and charitable to the poor.

. . . . .

His Cattle and Corn, I'll kill and mildew: but his life (Until I take him, as I late found thee, cursing and swearing) I have no power to touch.

(II, 1, 154-160)

She then orders the Devil to ruin Banks' cattle and crops, a desire which he fulfills. Before he departs, however, the Devil teaches Elizabeth Sawyer a Latin orison which will aid her in any evil she wishes to do.

Thus far, the play has followed the Renaissance witch beliefs quite well, for revenge was often the reason for an old woman to take up the dark art. Then, too, the pact with Satan<sup>91</sup> was believed to be a requirement for any new witch, and the loss of cattle and crops was easily accredited to witchcraft.<sup>92</sup> It is evident, therefore, that the playwrights were well-versed in the folklore of witchcraft.

The first person to approach Elizabeth Sawyer in her capacity as the Witch of Edmonton is Banks' son, Cuddy, who is the comic element in the play. Cuddy's reason for meeting Elizabeth Sawyer is to obtain her aid either in winning the affection of Kate Carter or of ridding himself of his love for her. Elizabeth sees this as an opportunity to work

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<sup>91</sup>Cf. ante, p. 33.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

revenge upon the father through the son, so she agrees to help Cuddy and stamps her foot on the ground to call the Devil to her. To the Devil, who appears again as a black dog, she chants a charm, half in Latin and half in English.

Technically, there is no reference to any witch summoning the Devil through the stamping of feet, and it is probable that the authors used this merely for stage effect. Latin-English chants were used quite often, however, not only in calling for aid, but also in casting spells. Satan's appearance as a dog comes from popular witch beliefs and from Henry Goodcole's pamphlet, for the actual Elizabeth Sawyer confessed that "the Devil came to her in the shape of a dog, and of two colors, sometimes of black and sometimes of white."<sup>93</sup> Another instance of popular witch beliefs was that of malice being done simply for the sake of doing it.<sup>94</sup> This occurs in the play when the Devil, still in the form of a dog, rubs against Frank's leg, causing him to murder Susan rather than simply deserting her. This seems to be another method invented by the playwrights for stage effect, for while it was well known that the Devil could influence people to do such things, there is no record of his having done so by rubbing against them.

The next act opens with Old Banks and several other men talking among themselves and listing their grievances against Elizabeth Sawyer. She is accused of ruining cattle and a horse, of causing a wife to

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<sup>93</sup>Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology, p. 102, citing The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, 4 to.

<sup>94</sup>Cf. ante, p. 33.



commit adultery, and of causing the general downfall of all the women's morals. One of the men gets a handful of thatch from her roof and tells the others, ". . . they say, when 'tis burning, if she be a Witch, she'll come running in" (IV, i, 17-18). As the straw burns, Elizabeth Sawyer comes on the stage, cursing the men, which is all they need to determine her guilt, for one of them says, "This Thatch is as good as a Jury to prove she is a Witch" (IV, i, 26). As Briggs notes,

There were various methods of discovering who was bewitching one's children. One of the simplest was to burn a wisp of straw from the suspected witch's thatch, which would bring her at once to the spot. It was the means used to test the witch of Edmonton.<sup>95</sup>

The men are ready to hang her on such flimsy evidence, but they are interrupted by a justice who appears on the scene. The justice personifies objective thinkers who disbelieve witch stories and are sceptical of the "proof" so readily believed by average people. The justice says,

Just. Come, come; firing her Thatch? ridiculous: take heed Sirs what you do: unless your proofs come better arm'd, instead of turning her into a Witch, you'll prove your selves starke Fools.  
(IV, i, 40-43)

The justice succeeds in dispersing the group of men and he and Sir Arthur Clarrington question Elizabeth Sawyer. In the questioning, the fact that she maintains a familiar who sucks her is brought out, as is the fact that "for a word, a look, [or] denial of a Coal of fire, she will kill Men, Children and Cattel" (IV, i, 135-137). Elizabeth Sawyer defends herself well with the arguments that she is retaliating for the scorn heaped upon her and that there are others in the world who do as much as

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<sup>95</sup>Briggs, op. cit., p. 181.

or more evil than she. She denies no charge made against her, however, except to answer negatively when asked if she is a witch.

When Elizabeth Sawyer is alone once again, the dog--her familiar this time--joins her. She greets him saying, "My dear Tom-boy welcome. . . . Comfort me: thou shalt have the Teat anon" (IV, i, 147-151). This is consistent with the popular belief concerning the nourishing of a familiar through the means of witch paps or teats.<sup>96</sup> It also adheres to the records of the trial of the real Elizabeth Sawyer, for she was searched against her wishes.

The Bench commanded three women to search the body of Elizabeth Sawyer. They all three said, "that they a little above the Fundiment of Elizabeth Sawyer found a thing like a Teate the bignesse of the little finger, and the length of half a finger, which was branched at the top like a teate, and seemed as though one had suckt it, and that the bottome thereof was blew, and the top of it, was redde."<sup>97</sup>

Elizabeth Sawyer's next malicious act is to have her familiar cause Anne Ratcliff to go insane because Anne Ratcliff "for a little Soap lick'd by my Sow, struck, and almost had lam'd it . . ." (IV, i, 169-170). Such minor reasons were common causes for a witch to ensorcell the offender, and therein lay their power, control through fear. Elizabeth Sawyer's act, however, produced the opposite effect, for the townspeople went up in arms against her. Old Banks says,

Get a Warrant first to examine her, then ship her to Newgate; here's enough, if all her other villanies were pardon'd, to burn her for a Witch. You have a Spirit, they say, comes to you in the

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<sup>96</sup>Cf. ante, p. 18.

<sup>97</sup>Murray, op. cit., p. 91, citing The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, B 3.

likeness of a Dog; we shall see your Our at one time or other: if we do, unless it be the Devil himself, he shall go howling to the Goal in one chain, and thou in another.

(IV, 1, 213-218)

In Act V, the portrait of Elizabeth Sawyer is unusually good, for she is worried by the disappearance of her familiar for three days and astonished by his subsequent appearance as a white dog.

Perhaps Mother Sawyer's nearest approach to the melodramatic is the mystically terrifying invocation to the Dog . . . , and her . . . horror when he appears--no longer black, but white. This, however, is good drama, not melodrama; if we are to accept witchcraft and devil-possession, the significance of the Dog's change of color remains well within the limits of plausibility.<sup>98</sup>

The dog gives Elizabeth Sawyer the reason for his white appearance when he says, "Be blasted with the News; whiteness is days Foot-boy, a fore-runner to light, which shews thy old rivel'd face: Villaines are strip't naked, the Witch must be beaten out of her Cock-pit" (V, 1, 46-48). He then continues by informing her that she will be tried and condemned to death. It follows the beliefs of the time that the Devil and the witch's familiar desert her at such a time<sup>99</sup> and such was the fate of Elizabeth Sawyer. Left alone to face death, she becomes repentant. Her last words are: "Bear witness, I repent all former evil; there is no damned Conjurer like the Devil" (V, iii, 50-51).

It is beyond question that the authors created a sympathetic character in Elizabeth Sawyer, even though they undoubtedly believed in witchcraft. It has been said that "Dekker was enough of his time to

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<sup>98</sup>Robert R. Reed, Jr., Bedlam on the Jacobean Stage (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952), p. 105.

<sup>99</sup>Cf. ante, p. 20.

believe in witchcraft; he was far beyond his time in the pity that he felt for the witch."<sup>100</sup> Of their portrait of the witch, Summers has this opinion:

. . . it is, I think, beyond dispute that The Witch of Edmonton in the figure of Mother Sawyer offers us the best contemporary illustration of the Elizabethan witch. The drama itself is one of no ordinary merit and power, whilst the understanding and restraint which set the play apart from its fellows also raises it to the level of genuine tragedy. It should be noticed that we see a witch, so to speak, in the process of making.<sup>101</sup>

Also worthy of note is Briggs' comment on the play:

Lurking throughout it [the play], though nowhere explicit, there is the belief that evil can be disarmed by kindness. The old woman is indeed a witch, and malevolent; but she did not become a witch until she was believed to be one; the unkindness of her neighbours drew out malice in return.<sup>102</sup>

One of the poorer examples of a play dealing with goety is Thomas Middleton's The Witch, circa 1621. The exact date of the play is unknown, as it was not published until 1778, but it was presented at Blackfriars Theatre at an earlier date. One critic suggests that it was written two or three years after The Witch of Edmonton.<sup>103</sup>

In writing The Witch, Middleton seems to have been closely following Shakespeare's Macbeth, for the witch Hecate, two songs, and a witches' dance are merely interpolations in Macbeth made by Middleton. In such a situation, Middleton would necessarily come off second best,

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<sup>100</sup> Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 113.

<sup>101</sup> Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology, p. 308.

<sup>102</sup> Briggs, op. cit., p. 97.

<sup>103</sup> Davies, op. cit., p. 113.

for he is unable to reach the heights or the depths attained by Shakespeare. One critic has this to say of the play:

The Witch might . . . be recalled as a rather second-rate drama affording an instance of Middleton's scorched and unpoetic manner, with his active fancy for intrigue. The scenes passing in rapid succession are sensational in theme and commonplace in dialogue.<sup>104</sup>

The witch scenes in the play are very accurate in keeping with the witch lore of the time, as is to be expected, for Middleton relies heavily on Reginald Scot's The Discoverie of Witchcraft. The play suffers from this reliance, however, for the witch scenes lose much of the terror and dread with which they could have been endowed had Middleton made a closer study of his subject and a less hasty penning of the play. His plagiarism of Scot gives the witch scenes a wooden, stereotyped character rather than a sense of evil and mystery.

Hecate's initial appearance is in her abode where she and her fellow witches, Puckle, Stadlin, and Hoppe, are mixing a brew. Briggs notes that the reason for these four names might be an indication that Middleton was not well enough acquainted with witchcraft, but she also presents another possibility.

Though it seems strange to give his [Middleton's] old hag the name of the goddess of the witches, and to call her confederates Puckle, Stadlin and Hoppe, the one the name of a familiar spirit and the other two of well-known warlocks, it is possible that this type of nickname was one assumed by the witches, and especially that the head witch of a coven called herself Hecate.<sup>105</sup>

Hecate gives the recipe for the brew they are concocting, saying it contains an "unbaptized brat" whose throat is stuffed with magical

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<sup>104</sup>Wells, op. cit., p. 39.

<sup>105</sup>Briggs, op. cit., p. 82.

herbs.

His mouth crammed full, his ears and nostrils stuffed. I thrust in eleoselinum lately, aconitum, frondes populeas, and soot--you may see that, he looks so black i' the mouth--then sium, acorum vulgare too, pentaphyllon, the blood of a flitter-mouse, solanum somnificum et oleum.<sup>106</sup>

This recipe is taken directly from Scot, who gives the ingredients in the exact order that Middleton lists.<sup>107</sup> Worthy of note is the fact that the solanum somnificum referred to is now known as belladonna, the effects of which have already been noted.<sup>108</sup> They plan to use the brew ". . . to transfer our 'noited flesh into the air . . ." (I, ii) so the concoction is evidently one of the "flying ointments" which the witches rubbed on their skin to produce aerial hallucinations.<sup>109</sup>

The first maleficent act that the witches perform is that of image magic. They have made wax figures of a farmer and his wife and put them on a fire to melt slowly. As the figures melted, the marrow in the bones of the two victims was to melt or liquify.<sup>110</sup> Hecate brags about the previous evil she has done to them, such as lame barnyard creatures, dry cows, and bewitched pigs, because they refused to give her flour, milk, goose-grease and the like. Such deeds were often

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<sup>106</sup>Havelock Ellis (ed.), The Best Plays of the Old Dramatists: Thomas Middleton (London: Vizetelly and Company, 1890), The Witch, I, ii. Note: All references from The Witch are from this text.

<sup>107</sup>Scot, op. cit., V, 93.

<sup>108</sup>Cf. ante, p. 27.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

accredited to witches who did them for such trivial reasons.<sup>111</sup>

Middleton effects an incestuous relationship between Hecate and her son, Firestone, which is not associated with witch beliefs unless one considers such a possibility in connection with the promiscuous sexual activities which concluded the Witches' Sabbath.<sup>112</sup> It is probable that Middleton created the incest arrangement in order to make Hecate seem even more evil than the average witch, for Firestone states his dislike of it several times and even makes the audience aware of his wish for his mother's demise. He is powerless to bring her death about, however, for she has made a pact with the Devil and will not die until "just at twelve a'clock at night come three year" (I, ii), which is the stipulated time for her death.

Sebastian comes to Hecate to implore her help in regaining the lady with whom he is in love, for she is marrying another man. Hecate gives him several snake skins, telling him to "Knit with these charms and retentive knots, neither the man begets nor the woman breeds, no, nor performs the least desires of wedlock . . ." (I, ii). She says, however, that witches "cannot disjoin wedlock; 'tis of Heaven's fastening" (I, ii). This is in accordance with witchcraft tenets, for although witches could work evil, they could not do so if it contradicted God's explicit work. They were often accused of causing discordance in marriages,<sup>113</sup> though the method did not usually employ snake skins; the

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<sup>111</sup>Cf. ante, p. 23.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

more popular device was a strand of hair from the person to be bewitched. Hecate does this not for any personal reason, but for the love of mischief.

In one instance, Middleton uses witchcraft as a vehicle for comedy. While intoxicated, Almachildes stumbles into Hecate's dwelling place. He dines with the witches and Hecate gives him a love charm in the form of a tri-colored ribbon. Almachildes thrusts the ribbon into the bosom of his beloved with the hope that she will return his affection. The comedy ensues when the ribbon has the desired effect, but falls out of her bosom before Almachildes can take advantage of the situation.

In the song of the witches, the fact that Hecate has a cat for a familiar is mentioned. Hecate is going to a Sabbath on the back of Malkin, her familiar, but before he will transport her, he "comes . . . to fetch his dues, a kiss, a coll, a sip of blood . . ." (III, iii). Also before she is transported, Hecate must anoint herself with "flying ointment," for she says, "I will but 'noint, and then I mount." The concept of a witch's familiar has been dealt with fully,<sup>114</sup> but it is worthy of note that the familiar in The Witch is feline rather than canine, as in The Witch of Edmonton. Both types of animals were perfectly acceptable in witch beliefs, but most dramatists of the time seem to have preferred dogs to cats. Although it is not mentioned, there is little doubt that Hecate possessed a witch pap or teat from which Malkin received "a sip

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<sup>114</sup>Cf. ante, p. 19.



of blood."<sup>115</sup>

In the last witch scene of the play, Hecate is asked to provide something from her knowledge of witchcraft which will kill Almachildes within a short time. She and her fellow witches concoct a brew which she says is fatal after five hours. The brew contains many of the standard ingredients, including "the juice of a toad,"<sup>116</sup> and is doubtlessly a poison, for the witches possessed a great knowledge of toxics.

The witch scenes of the play are only slightly interwoven into the central theme of the play and, considered either on their own or as part of the play, they do not possess a great deal of merit. As one critical analysis states,

The witch scenes have little bearing upon the action and are of a nature to make the whole business of witchcraft ridiculous and disgusting rather than terrible. Middleton was too much the realist to believe in it and too little of a poet to use it with Shakespeare's tragic power.<sup>117</sup>

In the 1640 Folio, Ben Jonson's The Sad Shepherd appeared in its fragmented form. The general consensus among critics is that the completion of the play was interrupted by the author's death rather than by Jonson's deliberate abandonment. The three acts which were completed, however, offer the world a beautiful pastoral drama in which appear not only the popular belief in witches and witchcraft, but also the characters of the Robin Hood legend.

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<sup>115</sup>Cf. ante, p. 18.

<sup>116</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>117</sup>Parrott and Ball, op. cit., p. 165.

Jonson's witch, Maudlin, the Witch of Papplewicke, is as evil and malicious as possible, considering the pastoral lightness of the play as a whole. Although she is not so well drawn as Elizabeth Sawyer, the Witch of Edmonton, it is clear that "Maudlin and her train represent forces of genuine evil, not comic vice,"<sup>118</sup> for the character is drawn "with vigorous strokes; realism mingles with romance."<sup>119</sup> Jonson was obviously well aware of the witch beliefs of his time; for, throughout the play Maudlin performs feats accredited to witches, but there is no evidence that Jonson possessed any of the then current beliefs about the practioners of the dark art.

Throughout the play, Maudlin seems to delight in shape-shifting, chiefly from herself to Marian, but once to the form of a raven. In Act I, scene vi, when Marian relates the day's hunting expedition to Robin Hood, she tells him of a raven that sat in a tree overlooking the site of the deer slaying:

Mar. Now, ore head sate a Raven!  
On a sere bough! a growne great Bird! and Hoarse!  
Who, all the while the Deere was breaking up,  
So crok'd and cry'd for't, as all the hunts-men,  
(Especially old Scathlocke) thought it ominous!  
Swore it was Mother Maudlin. . . .<sup>120</sup>

Later, Scathlocke, a huntsman, is asked what he thinks of Maudlin and he replies,

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<sup>118</sup>C. G. Thayer, Ben Jonson, Studies in the Plays (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), p. 264.

<sup>119</sup>Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology, p. 304.

<sup>120</sup>C. H. Herford, Percy and Evelyn Simpson (eds.), Ben Jonson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), VII, The Sad Shepherd, I, vi, 42-47. Note: All references from The Sad Shepherd are from this text.

Scat. As of a Witch.  
 They call her a Wise-woman, but I thinke her  
 An arrant Witch.

(I, vi, 61-63)

Jonson undoubtedly employed his marvelous imagination to create the idea of a witch as a shape-shifter, for while there was some belief in a witch's ability to transform others,<sup>121</sup> there is no record of one transforming herself.

In Act I, scene vii, Maudlin appears to Robin Hood and his men in the form of Marian. She speaks and acts in a manner totally incongruous with Marian's nature and causes much consternation among the hunters by ordering the deer, which they had just killed, delivered to "Mother Maudlins." After Maudlin leaves them, the men can do nothing but express their wonder, but Robin Hood determines to find out the cause of such strangeness in his beloved.

"In Act II there is a complete picture of the witch, in which learning, traditional knowledge and poetic feeling are blended."<sup>122</sup> Act II, scene i is the first embodiment of Maudlin in her true form, for she appears as a witch and gives evidence of thoroughly enjoying her role in life. Her opening speech indicates that she glories in mischief, delights in changing shapes, and enjoys creating confusion.

Mau. Have I not left 'em in a brave confusion?  
 Amaz'd their expectation? got their Venison?  
 Troubled their mirth, and meeting? made them doubtfull,  
 And jealous of each other? all distracted?

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<sup>121</sup>Cf. ante, p. 24.

<sup>122</sup>Briggs, op. cit., p. 90.

And, i' the close, uncertaine of themselves?  
 This can . . . [I] doe, . . .  
 Take anie shape upon her! and delude  
 The senses, best acquainted with their Owners!  
 (II, i, 1-8)

Maudlin's delight in mischief is based on true beliefs about witches, for witches were supposedly compelled by the Devil of the Sabbath to create as much mischief as possible, with the penalty for neglect being severe punishment.<sup>123</sup>

Another example of Jonson's knowledge of witchcraft is Maudlin's boast, "I'is pu' the world, or Nature, 'bout their eares" (II, iii, 35). Witches were frequently credited with the ability to command nature's forces to do their bidding as an effort to avenge themselves upon their neighbors or enemies.<sup>124</sup> Maudlin does not use her powers over nature in the play, however, so there is no opportunity to see whether she was as powerful as she claims.

The mythological background of witchcraft is also evident in The Sad Shepherd. The mythological reference is to Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. Maudlin recalls the night she made an embroidered belt for herself while sitting on her mother's freshly-dug grave.

. . . our Dame Hecat,  
 Made it her gaing-night, over the Kirk-yard,  
 . . . . .  
 While I sate whyrland of my brasen spindle. . . .  
 (II, iii, 42-43, 45)

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<sup>123</sup>Cf. ante, p. 33.

<sup>124</sup>Ibid., pp. 22-23.

The belt which Maudlin made is of no importance to this study, for while "her talisman is a magic belt, [it is] more common in fairy stories than in witch trials . . ." <sup>125</sup> and has no bearing upon the witchcraft aspect of the play. Maudlin's mention of Hecate, however, shows that the goddess of witchcraft still reigned and was still adored. <sup>126</sup>

In keeping with the tradition, Maudlin refers to herself as a "poore Bedes-woman" (II, vi, 10), a combination nurse and midwife, which was a customary occupation for witches during the Renaissance. <sup>127</sup> "The midwife is generally the wise woman, standing as she does at the gates of mystery, and the witch is the wise woman perverted, and using her dreadful powers over birth for evil purposes." <sup>128</sup> Jonson must have been aware of this dual role, for there is no reason for such a reference to Maudlin, as she does not act in her capacity as a "Bedes-woman" at any time in the play.

In Act II, scene vi, Marian goes to Maudlin and demands the return of the venison which Maudlin so cleverly tricked the huntsman into giving to her. Maudlin becomes angry at the thought of losing the deer and begins to mutter curses. She first bewitches the spit upon which the venison was to be roasted and then places a curse upon the cook:

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<sup>125</sup> Briggs, op. cit., p. 89.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. ante, pp. 3-4.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>128</sup> Briggs, op. cit., p. 92.

Mau. The Swilland Dropsie enter in  
 The Lazie Cuke, and swell his skin;  
 And the old Mort-mal on his shin  
 Now prick, and itch, withouten blin.  
 (II, vi, 61-64)

Maudlin's witchcraft is successful, for Tom, the cook, becomes very ill and causes concern among Robin Hood's followers. Alken, the sage of the shepherds, leads the men in an effort to find Maudlin and subdue her. He warns the men that she will be found "sitting in her fourme,/ Or els, at releife, like a Hare" (II, vii, 18-19). Jonson must have employed his artistic imagination at this point, for although witches were reputedly able to change themselves into animals at times,<sup>129</sup> there is no evidence that they ever did so simply as a repose from their normal form, nor is there any mention of such a change of shape in the records of the witch hunts. Quite often, however, witches were hunted much like animals and this thought may have been in Jonson's mind.

"Alken was the stuff of which the witch-finders were made"<sup>130</sup> and the huntsmen who accompanied him were as zealous as the true witch hunters,<sup>131</sup> for one of them says, "Rare sport I sweare! this hunting of the Witch/Will make us" (II, viii, 1-2), and later another proclaims, "Wee'll make this hunting of the Witch, as famous/As any other blast of Venerie" (II, viii, 70-71).

The apex of Alken's part in the play is his description of Maudlin's hovel:

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<sup>129</sup>Cf. ante, p. 24.

<sup>130</sup>Briggs, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>131</sup>Cf. ante, p. 16.

Alk. Within a gloomie dimble, shee doth dwell  
 Downe in a pitt, ore-growne with brakes and briars,  
 Close by the ruines of a shaken Abbey  
 Torne, with an Earth-quake, down unto the ground,  
 'Mongst graves, and grotts, neare an old Charnell house,  
 Where you shall find her sitting in her fourme,  
 As fearfull, and melancholique, as that  
 Shee is about. . . .

(II, viii, 15-23)

He continues by decorating the dimble with cobwebs, cocoons, fogs, and mists, making it sound more evil than Maudlin herself and less desirable than a trip through hell. Briggs suggests such a description had an involved origin:

The witch lives in the ruins of an abbey, very possibly, . . . because the churches were built on spots formerly sacred to pagan gods. The earthquake suggests not only the witch's delight in the overthrow of a Christian church, but also the possibility that some demoniac power had resisted and overthrown the sacred building.<sup>132</sup>

Alken continues by describing the ingredients of Maudlin's brews and one form of witchcraft which she employs:

The venom'd Plants  
 Wherewith shee kill's! where the sad Mandrake growes,  
 Whose grones are deathfull! the dead-numming Nightshade!  
 The stuplifying Hemlock! Adders tongue!  
 And Martagan! the shreikes of lucklesse Owles,  
 Wee heare!

. . . . .

. . . shee sitts reading by the Glow-wormes light,  
 Or rotten wood (o're which the worme hath crept)  
 The banefull scedule of her nocent charmes,  
 And binding Characters, through which shee wounds  
 Her Puppets, the Sigilla of her witch-craft.  
 (II, viii, 42-47 and 57-61)

In listing the various herbs and plants, Jonson again proves his knowledge

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<sup>132</sup>Briggs, op. cit., pp. 91-92.

of witchcraft, for he gives the most prominent and important ingredients of witches' brews.<sup>133</sup> He also speaks of image magic, which was a well-known form of bewitching an enemy,<sup>134</sup> as though he was familiar with the then current beliefs in evil wrought by image magic.

In Act III, Jonson introduces Puck-hairy, Maudlin's personal devil, whose occupation it is to both delude and protect his Dame, while he "intensifies her evil and attempts to insure its success."<sup>135</sup> Puck-hairy, therefore, is a cross between Satan and a familiar, both of which figure prominently in witchcraft.<sup>136</sup> In his introductory speech, Puck-hairy states that Maudlin "growes high in evill" (III, 1, 6) and is "confident in mischief" (III, 1, 9). He feels that she is creating mischief without taking the necessary amount of precaution and that she is therefore unsafe. As it is his duty to protect her, he makes an appearance to fulfill his obligation. Later in the play, Maudlin arrives at the same conclusion, for she asks, "Where is my Puck-hairy?" (III, iv, 61).

Maudlin's query stems from the fact that Robin Hood steals her magic belt and discloses to her his knowledge of the trickery she employed in order to procure the venison. He mocks her prowess as a witch and asks, "Was this the charmed circle?/The Copy that so couzen'd,

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. ante, pp. 25-27.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>135</sup> Thayer, op. cit., p. 252.

<sup>136</sup> Cf. ante, p. 19.



and deceiv'd us?" (III, iv, 50-51). The first question refers to the circle, drawn by Satan, in which a witch swore her allegiance to the devil.<sup>137</sup> The second query refers to Maudlin's shape-shiftings and her attempts to appear as Marian.

The last scene of the play is a dialogue between Maudlin and Puck-hairy. In it, Maudlin complains of the theft of her belt by Robin Hood. Puck-hairy counsels her, telling her that she has graver dangers than the loss of her belt and that she must restrain her malicious activities, at least for the nonce:

You thinke your power's infinite as your malice;  
And would do all your anger prompts you to:  
But you must wait occasions, and obey them. . . .  
(III, v, 7-9)

Thus ends Jonson's The Sad Shepherd. Two authors, Francis Waldron and Alan Porter, have written continuations of the play.<sup>138</sup> Both writers end the play by presenting Maudlin as a reformed witch, but in view of the basically evil nature of Maudlin and the enjoyment she derives from her maliciousness, it hardly seems possible that she would become repentant. A more appropriate ending, perhaps, would be one in which Maudlin and her followers would be rendered impotent as sources of evil, possibly because of the true goodness of Robin Hood and Marian, which is impervious to evil.

In any event, in The Sad Shepherd, "For the last time Jonson remembers his witchcraft, [and] thinks perhaps of the dead king with whom

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<sup>137</sup>Cf. ante, p. 34.

<sup>138</sup>Thayer, op. cit., p. 251.

he had talked as one adept to another."<sup>139</sup> Though the play was left unfinished, the very fact that such an important playwright as Jonson began writing a drama concerning witchcraft lends proof to the argument that witchcraft was an important influence upon the Elizabethan and Jacobean times and shows that its influence was strong enough to be mirrored in the theater.

In 1681, Thomas Shadwell wrote The Lancashire Witches, and Teague O Divelly, The Irish Priest, which was a play based upon the famous witch trials at Lancashire in 1612 and upon the pamphlets about the trial, the best of which was Discoverie of Witches by Thomas Potts.

The Lancashire trials uncovered what is perhaps the best known example of witchcraft in England. Some twenty years before the trial, Elizabeth Southern, known locally as Old Demdike, encountered a devil in the shape of a boy near a stone pit in Pendle Forest. He persuaded her to exchange her soul for worldly goods, thereby making her a witch. A short time later, Old Demdike converted both of her children and two of her grandchildren to witchcraft. "In 1598 Anne Whittle was converted and for some years she shared with Old Demdike the reputation of being the principal witch of the district. She was usually known as Old Chattox . . . ,"<sup>140</sup> and, like Old Demdike, persuaded her daughter to join her in the evil art.

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<sup>139</sup> John Palmer, Ben Jonson (New York: The Viking Press, 1934), p. 319.

<sup>140</sup> Christina Hole, Witchcraft in England (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), pp. 90-91.

A quarrel between the two families sprang from each of the principal witches' daughters accusing the other of stealing some missing goods. Witches who belonged to neither family but were members of the coven sided with one family or the other, splitting the coven into two rival factions.

There was . . . a deadly feud between the two families, and both having been long exercised in supernatural practices and devoted body and soul to the Demon, fearful was the mischief they wrought in their angry struggles for supremacy in wickedness. Moreover there were the usual quarrels over petty pilferings among county-folk in ignorant hamlets.<sup>141</sup>

With two powerful witch covens warring in the area, the residents of Lancashire lived in fear, and the witches maintained a reign of terror until the authorities finally took action in 1612.

Old Demdike's granddaughter, Alison Device, was the first witch to be apprehended by the authorities. She was examined because she and her unnamed familiar, a black dog, were accused of employing witchcraft to lame a pedlar who refused to sell her some pins. She not only admitted her guilt but also implicated her grandmother, Old Chattox, and Old Chattox's daughter, Anne Redfearn. They, in turn, were arrested and committed for trial. Old Demdike never saw the courtroom, however, as she died in prison.

A kind of demonstration was made, directly after this, by the witches (male and female) of the neighbourhood. A number of them met at Malking Tower, Demdike's house, on Good Friday, 1612. The conspiracy there was said to have intended to do three things: (i) to name Alison Device's familiar, which they could not do, she being in prison; (ii) to free the prisoners by killing the jailer

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<sup>141</sup> Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft, p. 133.

at Lancaster and blowing up the castle where the prison was; and (iii) at the request of one of their number to lend her their power for the destruction of another enemy of her own. The whole affair caused some stir; further arrests were made, and new evidence procured.<sup>142</sup>

At the cessation of the arrests, nineteen prisoners were in custody. Of these, ten were condemned to die, one was sentenced to a year's imprisonment and the others were acquitted. Those who received death sentences were not burned at the stake, as is generally thought, but were hanged. Witches were not burned in England unless they were convicted of treason against the State.

There are two things worthy of note concerning the Lancashire trials. One is that Alison Device confessed her guilt with tears streaming down her cheeks. Admittedly, she had not been a witch for over a year and she had not done many evil acts, but the belief was that no witch could weep.<sup>143</sup> The other interesting fact is that a great deal of the evidence presented against the witches at the trial was given by nine-year-old Jannet Device, Old Demdike's granddaughter. She calmly testified against her mother and her brother, then went on to provide evidence against the entire coven, giving the court all the facts and details she possibly could. The lack of family loyalty seems to have been an inherent quality, however, for, as Summers notes, the entire coven

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<sup>142</sup>Williams, op. cit., p. 212.

<sup>143</sup>Cf. ante, p. 21.

. . . involved one another in the most hateful sorceries, and in spite of many grotesque, but not necessarily untrue, details the tale they told was foul and horrible to a degree. All the bestial malice, crass stupidity, empty revenge, and besotted superstition of the remote countryside are there compounded.<sup>144</sup>

Some of the witches of Lancashire managed to escape before the Law could arrest them. One theory as to what became of them is Christina Hole's:

We hear no more of those who escaped, but probably they returned to their homes when the excitement had died down and continued to practise magic in secret. Probably also they handed on their knowledge to the next generation. In so remote and uncultivated a district it is unlikely that the old tradition would have been allowed to die out because of one serious setback. . . .<sup>145</sup>

This theory is logical, for several years later, in 1633-1634, there was a recrudescence of the former witch scandals. Seventeen people were tried and condemned on the accusations of young Edmund Robinson, who would have seizures and nervous convulsions, claiming to be bewitched. King James I, who was traveling through that area of England became interested enough to interview Robinson personally. King James caught Robinson changing some of the details of his story. After further questioning, the entire thing was proved to be a hoax, and all seventeen persons were reprieved by the King. It is interesting to note that one of those accused was Jannet Device.

The second Lancashire scandal was brought to public attention by Thomas Heywood and Richard Broome, who wrote and produced their play,

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<sup>144</sup>Summers, The Geography of Witchcraft, p. 135.

<sup>145</sup>Hole, op. cit., p. 114.

The Late Lancashire Witches, in 1634, while the case was still under consideration. As one critic notes, ". . . the supreme object of . . . the play . . . must have been to intensify public feeling against witches and to confound sceptics . . . ,"<sup>146</sup> for the play was too hurriedly written to be good drama.

Thomas Shadwell, who wrote his play, The Lancashire Witches, several years after the first trial, had a more objective view and a better handling of the subject than did Heywood and Broome. Shadwell admits in the preface that he employed research rather than imagination in writing his witch scenes.

For the Magical part, I had no hopes of equalling Shakespear in fancy, who created his Witchcraft for the most part out of his own imagination (in which faculty no man ever excell'd him) and therefore I resolv'd to take mine from Authority. And to that end, there is not one action in the Play, nay scarce a word concerning it, but is borrow'd from some antient, or Modern Witchmonger, Which you will find in the notes, wherein I have presented you a great part of the Doctrine of Witchcraft, believe it who will. For my part, I am somewhat costive of belief. The evidences I have represented are natural, viz. slight, and frivolous, such as poor old Women were wont to be hang'd upon.<sup>147</sup>

Two notable critics take issue with Shadwell's statements in the preface, however. Summers, despite Shadwell's protestation of a "somewhat costive belief," feels that he believed in witchcraft. ". . . I think he was sensible enough to recognize the truth which lies at the core of the

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<sup>146</sup> Davies, op. cit., p. 114.

<sup>147</sup> Thomas Shadwell, The Complete Works of Thomas Shadwell, ed., Montague Summers (London: The Fortune Press, 1927), IV, The Lancashire Witches and Teague O Divelly, the Irish Priest, preface. Note: All references from The Lancashire Witches and Teague O Divelly, the Irish Priest are from this text.

matter in spite of the grotesqueness of the formulae and spells doting hags and warlocks are wont to employ."<sup>148</sup> Also, Briggs feels that even though Shadwell gave a great deal of credit to other authors for his knowledge of witchcraft, he did not give enough.

. . . in his notes [Shadwell] gives copious authorities for every attribute and activity of his witches, not perhaps allowing enough credit to Ben Jonson, Scot, and Heywood, to whom he seems to owe most of his material. The play, perhaps because of its double treatment is not so good as the earlier ones. It is interesting because it comes at the end of a fashion. Witchcraft, used at first half playfully, taken seriously in the middle of the century, became by the end a subject for pantomime.<sup>149</sup>

In Act I, there is the first mention of witchcraft, for Sir Timothy and Thomas Shacklehead enter the stage somewhat frightened and bewildered by the disappearance of a hare in an open field and the consequent appearance of Old Demdike in the same place. Sir Edward, however, is not at all convinced of their story and is sceptical of witchcraft; this astounds the two men and their fellow believer, Sir Jeffery, who is a professional witch-finder.

Sir Jeff. . . . mercy upon me! are you so profane to deny Witches?

Smerk. Heaven defend! will you deny the existence of Witches? 'Tis very Atheistical.

Sir Edw. Incurrible ignorance! 'tis such as you are Atheistical, that would equal the Devils power with that of Heaven it self. I see such simple Parsons cannot endure to hear the Devil dishonour'd.

Sir Jeff. No Witches? why I have hang'd above Fourscore. . . .  
(1)

Sir Jeffery is reminiscent of Matthew Hopkins,<sup>150</sup> for he is not interested

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<sup>148</sup>Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology, p. 303.

<sup>149</sup>Briggs, op. cit., pp. 106-107.

<sup>150</sup>Cf. ante, p. 16.

in being fair or just; he merely wants to condemn as many suspects as possible. He requests that two of the men capture Old Demdike so that he can display his witch-finding talents. He says,

. . . you shall see my skill; wee'll search her, I warrant she has biggs or teats a handful long about her parts that shall be nameless; then wee'll have her watched eight and forty hours, and prickt with Needles, to keep her from sleeping, and make her confess, Gad shee'll confess any thing in the world then; and if not, after all, wee'll tie her Thumbs and great Toes together, and fling her into your great Pond. Let me alone with her, I warrant ye. . . . (I)

All of Sir Jeffery's methods were well known<sup>151</sup> and most were employed by Matthew Hopkins, so Shadwell undoubtedly patterned the witch-finder of the play on an actual professional.

Old Demdike is not an innocent old woman, however, for in her first speech, she reveals plans for a Sabbat to be held that night in Sir Edward's cellar, probably because the witches knew that they were relatively safe in the cellar of a sceptic. Her first act of evil also shows her to be no neophyte, for she and her sisters raise a storm for no reason other than pure mischief. Shadwell is very accurate in his details<sup>152</sup> and has the witches raise a storm.

Dicken. Here is some Sea Sand I have Gotten,  
Which thus into the Air I Throw.

Harg. Here's Sage, that under ground was rotten,  
Which thus a-round me I bestow.

Spencer. Sticks on the Bank a-cross are laid.

Harg. The hole by our nayls is almost made.  
Hogs Bristles boyl within the Pot.

Demd. The Hollow flint Stone I have Got,

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. ante, pp. 17-22.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., pp. 22-23.



Which I over my Shoulder throw,  
 Into the west to make winds blow.  
 Now water here, and urine put,  
 And with your Stocks stir it about.  
 Now dip your brooms, and toss them high,  
 To bring the Rain down from the Sky.  
 Not yet a Storme? Come let us wound  
 The Air with every dreadful sound,  
 And with live vipers beat the ground.

(I)

Having succeeded in raising a storm, Old Demdike urges her fellow witches to reconvene between midnight and one o'clock and they disperse to do their individual evil deeds.

When the witches meet that night in Sir Edward's cellar, the Devil joins them in the form of a goat. Old Demdike greets him with "Lo here our little Master's come. Let each of us salute his Bum" (II), which is followed by the stage direction "All kiss the Devil's Arse" (II). This is in keeping with the beliefs of the time, for witches were required to pay homage in such a manner at the beginning of a Sabbat.<sup>153</sup>

Shadwell has the Devil ask, "What have ye done for my delight? Relate the service of the night" (II), which is another ritual of the Sabbat.<sup>154</sup> Old Demdike tells that she murdered a child, secured parts of a murderer's body for her brews, sunk a ship, and kicked down a steeple. Her three cronies narrate similar deeds, all of which please the Devil, and they all join in a witches' dance to end the Sabbat.<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup>Cf. ante, p. 32.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33.

<sup>155</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

A constable is sent to serve a warrant of arrest to Old Demdike from Sir Jeffery, who is determined to prove that she is a witch. The constable, however, tells Sir Jeffery,

Sir, I went to her House (and please your Worship) and lookt in at her Window, and she was feeding three great Toads, and they daunc'd and leapt about her, and she suckled a great black Cat well nigh as big as a Spaniel; I went into the House, and she vanisht, and there was nothing but the Cat in the middle, who spit and star'd at me, and I was frightened away.

(III)

When the others hear this report, they suddenly remember things that were done to them for which they blame the witches. For example, the constable blames Mother Hargrave for the strange actions of his cow because he denied her some "Gos--good." Sir Jeffery replies, "Put her into the Warrant too: 'Tis enough, a little thing will serve for evidence against a Witch" (III). In this way, Shadwell shows the trivialities for which witches were captured and condemned.

Later in the play, the comic character, Clod, accuses the witch, Mal Spencer, of being a witch. She denies the accusation, of course, but Clod persists saying, ". . . I believe mine Eyne, by the Mass I saw you in Sir Yedards Cellar last neeght with your Haggs, thou art a rank Witch, uds flesh I'll not come nere thee" (III). She becomes angry with him and changes him into a horse, which she rides to a Sabbat. The transformation of a human being into an animal was believed to be in the powers of a witch,<sup>156</sup> and Shadwell, as usual, is in keeping with tenets of witchcraft.

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<sup>156</sup> Cf. ante, p. 24.

The second Sabbat in the play involves the induction of a new witch, Madge, who is promised happiness, wealth, and revenge in exchange for her soul.<sup>157</sup> Old Demdike gives her a familiar,<sup>158</sup> saying, "Here take this Imp, and let him suck, he'll do what ere thou bidst him, call him Puck-Hairy" (III). Madge also signs a contract or pact in her blood,<sup>159</sup> for they greet the Devil, who appears as a human being, saying, "Peace, here's our Master, him salute, and kiss the Toe of his Cloven-Foot. Now our new Sister we present, the Contract too, sign it with Blood" (III). Shadwell follows the ritual of exact initiation of witches in the induction of Madge:<sup>160</sup>

Dev. First, Heaven you must renounce.

Madge. I do.

Dev. Your Baptism thus, I wash out too.

The new Name Maudlin you must take,  
And all your Gossips must forsake,  
And I these new ones for you make.

Demd. A piece of your Garment now present

Madg. Here, take it Master, I'm content.

Demd. Within this Circle I make here,  
Truth to our Master you must swear.

Madg. I do.

Dev. You must each month some murdered Children pay,  
Besides your yearly tribute at your day.

Madg. I will.

Dev. Some Secret part I with my mark must sign,  
A lasting Token, that you are wholly mine.

Madg. Oh!

Demd. Now do your Homage.

Dev. Curse Heaven, Plague Mankind, go forth and be a Witch.  
(III)

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<sup>157</sup> Cf. ante, p. 33.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., pp. 33-35.

The induction is followed by the singing and dancing of all the members of the coven, but the festivities are abandoned and the witches vanish with the appearance of a hunter.

Throughout the play, the priest, Tegue O Divelly, is portrayed as a comic religiosity, which, in conjunction with Smerk, being a satire of the characteristics of Anglican clerics, served to delay the publication of the play and ban it from the stage. During the entire play, Tegue recites recipes for combatting all the powers of witchcraft, but he is proven to be ineffective, and little or no attention is paid to him. The height of satire is reached when Tegue copulates with Mother Dickenson, the witch, whom he mistakes in the dark for one of the ladies of the house.

The witches are eventually captured and are kept in a stable under strong guard. The witches transform themselves into the shapes of cats, and when four of the men go into the stable, the cats fight and scratch them. One of the servants worries about the power of the witches, but Sir Timothy reassures him, saying, ". . . they can do no hurt--when they are taken the Devil leaves 'em--" (V); this, too, was a common belief.<sup>161</sup>

When the witches next appear, they have been searched by a woman, who reports, ". . . they have all great Biggs and Teates in many parts, except Mother Madge, and hers are but small ones" (V). This, of course,

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<sup>161</sup> Cf. ante, p. 20.

is traditional in witch lore, and is incontrovertible proof of guilt.<sup>162</sup>

Thus, the witches were condemned and hanged for their evil deeds. As Summers notes, Shadwell's

. . . witches become farcical, yet farcical in a grimly unpleasant way, for we are spared none of the loathsome details of the Sabbat. . . . Indeed we feel that these witches are very real in spite of their materialism. They present a clear picture of one side of the diabolic cult, however crude and crass.<sup>163</sup>

In conclusion, it is notable that the plays discussed range throughout the two periods of English literature which teemed with popular writings upon witchcraft. The first period was from about 1580 to 1628 and the second was from 1643 to about 1700.<sup>164</sup> References to witches and witchcraft permeate the sixteenth and seventeenth century literature, but not so much as could be expected considering the persistent recurrence of the witch trials.

Many magical and semi-magical customs have only trifling mention in the drama, but portents, prodigies and omens were used in almost every serious play. . . . omens and premonitions were part of the very temper of the times; . . . even if the dramatic writers had not believed in omens they would still have found them an almost indispensable way of preparing the spectator for what was to come.<sup>165</sup>

The dramatists, irrespective of their own beliefs, made use of prevalent superstitions and beliefs to sway the audience by evoking responses from the most primitive parts of man's nature. Wright says,

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<sup>162</sup>Cf. ante, p. 18.

<sup>163</sup>Summers, The History of Witchcraft and Demonology, pp. 297-298.

<sup>164</sup>Briggs, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>165</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

Witches, . . . brought upon the stage from the nethermost depths, or . . . from a contemporary witch-hunt, . . . were an ingredient certain to thrill a public who believed implicitly in their machinations. A dramatic prescription which produced an orgy of horrors, relieved with incongruous clownery, delighted the audiences in the popular theatres throughout the period.<sup>166</sup>

Wright, however, cries out against the basing of dramas on contemporary witch trials, for he feels that it presents a distorted picture which deludes the audiences.<sup>167</sup>

Nevertheless, the general run of Elizabethans and Jacobean loved dramas which employed external means to bring about highly effective situations.<sup>168</sup> They were thoroughly delighted to see a devil suddenly appear, a witch vanish, or a trio of hags stir a caldron of brew, and they cannot be condemned for such an attitude, for human nature is attracted to the unexplained and the unexplainable, particularly in the drama, where one identifies with a character. Thus it is that people of all ages and all cultures find the dark art of witchcraft a fascinating and exciting subject, for there is too much substantiated evidence in favor of the existence of witches for a flat denial to be issued. It seems that perhaps the best explanation of witchcraft is that it has been considered incarnate evil working towards the destruction of mankind; fortunately there is enough good to withstand the evil attacks and prevent the manifestation of calamity.

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<sup>166</sup>Louis B. Wright, Middle-Class Culture in Elizabethan England (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1955), p. 621.

<sup>167</sup>Wilhelm Creizenach, The English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare, trans. Cécile Hugon (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1916), p. 115.

<sup>168</sup>Elmer Edgar Stoll, Art and Artifice, A Study in Dramatic Contrast and Illusion (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1933), p. 90.

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