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Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: King James I's *Daemonologie*
After his Experience in the North Berwick Witch Trials

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Foreword

The last decade of the sixteenth century in Scotland witnessed a sudden increase in witchcraft prosecution. The trials started in 1590, extended until 1597 and became known as the North Berwick witch trials. For the purpose of this thesis, the focus will be on trial proceedings that took place between 1590 and 1593, since it was these group of trials that inspired King James VI of Scotland to write his treatise on witchcraft, *Daemonologie* (1597).

Chapter I will provide an overview of the context in which the so-called “witch-craze” was born and the numerous changes and slow developments necessary to reach that point. Only a few decades before the North Berwick trials, witchcraft theory revolved around the concept of black and white magic: black magic was also known as “maleficium” and it was allegedly used to hurt others, whereas white magic involved rather innocuous spells (love spells or remedies to find a lost object, for example). However, as Scotland underwent the process of the Reformation (starting from 1560), all magical practices started to be painted from both state and religious authorities as something evil, that had to do with the Devil. Chapter I will also explain the legal basis for the persecution of witches, which was based on the Scottish Witchcraft Act (1563), and the legal process that brought a suspected witch from accusation to burning at the stake. Finally, the last section of Chapter I will focus on a different point of view: that of the sceptics of that time. I have chosen to take into consideration the works of Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot, because their theories were relevant enough to be cited as the opposing side in *Daemonologie*.

The second Chapter is meant to explain the events of the trials of North Berwick, which were rendered unique by the direct involvement of the King: these were not only trials for witchcraft, but also for treason. The witches of North Berwick were believed to have attended meetings with the Devil during which the monarch’s demise was plotted. They also had a more transparent political aspect given by the King’s attack on the Earl of Bothwell, one of his political opponents. Chapter II will specifically focus on five people who were at the centre of the affair, and it will also show how

the use of torture and a specific line of questioning were used to obtain specific answers from the accused. The analysis of trial proceedings against each of the protagonists showed a specific side to the monarch's aims and preoccupations throughout the trials. Connected to the trials was also a contemporary pamphlet called *Newes from Scotland*, which is presented in the last section of the second Chapter. It was probably written while the trials were still taking place. Its aim was mainly propagandistic, as shown by the combination of information from trial examinations and fantastic stories about the witches' powers that are nowhere to be found in official documents.

Chapter III is entirely dedicated to *Daemonologie*: context, sources, contents and hidden meanings. It was written immediately after the North Berwick trials and published in 1597. Its contents are not new, in that the information it provides on witchcraft practices could be found in any other demonological treatise. James draws authority from the Scriptures and from his first-hand experience in examining suspected witches. In many parts of the book, in fact, the monarch seems to draw information from the confessions of witches. The last section of Chapter III goes beyond the analysis of the text that focuses on references to the trials and the accused therein and shows the ulterior aims within the work. James intended to create a legitimisation for himself by painting the image of a monarch attacked by witches (and, therefore, the Devil), who was able to defeat them thanks to the power bestowed upon him by God. Not only did he want to be seen as the protector of the realm, but he also implied that it was his divine right to rule and sit on the throne: the Devil would not have attacked him if he had not been a threat on a divine level.

In conclusion, this thesis is meant to highlight the unique events that took place over the last decade of the sixteenth century in Scotland, and to analyse the only demonological work to have been written by a monarch.

Chapter 1. The Context of the Witch Hunt in Sixteenth-Century Scotland

1.1. Popular Beliefs Surrounding Witchcraft in Sixteenth-Century Scotland

The focus of this thesis is *Daemonologie*, written by King James VI of Scotland and I of England (1566-1625) over the course of the last decade of the sixteenth century and finally published in 1597. It is a treatise on witchcraft written in the form of a dialogue between Philomates (meaning ‘lover of knowledge’) and Epistemon (meaning ‘knowledgeable’), where the two “raison the matter”¹, with Epistemon guiding Philomates into the world of witchcraft. The work was most probably inspired by the King’s first-hand experience during the witch trials of North Berwick.² They are a series of trials that took place in Scotland from 1590 to 1597. By the name of ‘North Berwick’ trials, experts refer to this stretch of time as a whole, indicating a period where nation-wide witch hunts were taking place. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the analysis of events will only take into account the trials which had started in East Lothian in 1590 and culminated in Edinburgh in 1591.³ This is because the trials in this period represent the basis on which *Daemonologie* was born, thanks to the direct involvement of the King. That being said, it is crucial to provide an overview of the wider cultural and sociological context in which the persecution of Scottish witches originated. Scotland proves to have adopted many of the shared continental beliefs when it comes to witchcraft, but, at the same time, also shows peculiarities which set it apart from European witch-theory. The following section will illustrate some of the general beliefs and attributes linked to witches during the second half of the sixteenth century.

The topic of witchcraft is a complex and multifaceted one, which has made it crucial to distinguish between geographical areas, social and religious context. A distinction common to practically all societies that have developed beliefs around witchcraft was the one between white and

¹ King James I, *Daemonologie*, in Tyson, Donald, ed., *The Demonology of King James I: Includes the Original Text of Daemonologie and News from Scotland*, Woodbury: Llewellyn, 2012, p. 55. This is the edition I used throughout.

² Rickard, Jane, *Authorship and Authority: The Writings of King James I and VI*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, p. 98.

³ Normand, Lawrence, Roberts, Gareth, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James’ VI’s Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, p. 2.

black magic.⁴ The former usually entailed rituals aimed to heal a person, find a lost object or create love potions and made consistent use of manipulative sorcery. The term ‘sorcery’, in this context, indicates “the use of words and actions (incantation and the manipulation of objects, substances or livestock) to generate supernatural power”⁵. Black magic, also referred to as malefice, referred to a malicious spell or enchantment. Unlike white magic, malefice may not always demand manipulative sorcery, although “some indication, whether articulate and precise cursing, gnomonic utterance, or scarcely audible mumbling, is usually necessary to establish that the mobilisation of powerful ill will has been attempted”.⁶ As one can probably discern from the names of these practices alone, the perception of the two by the general population was wildly different. White magic was innocuous, designed to be helpful to the seeker; whereas black magic was what one would colloquially refer to as ‘evil’ magic, the use of a supernatural power aimed to harm others. Although this separation of the magical arts into two permeated the concept of witchcraft, it was not long before political power, coupled with religious authorities, declared all forms of magical power outside the context of a Church as demonic.⁷ Given this evolution, it should not be surprising that the reaction of society and the prosecuting authorities to witchcraft was closely connected to a set of shared beliefs characteristic of the time frame taken into consideration. In modern times, what was then considered witchcraft would be called science. Home remedies derived from herbs represented the advancing of scientific knowledge (although a still very limited one), which posed a threat against constituted authority. This was especially true for the dogmatic doctrine of the Church, which did not allow for inquiry or the discovery of something outside of its realm. Therefore, what came to be viewed as a practice to turn to for healing (among other things), was slowly transformed by religion and political power into an

⁴ Larner, Christina, *Enemies of God: The Witch Hunt in Scotland*, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981, p. 8.

⁵ Larner, p. 9.

⁶ Larner, p. 9.

⁷ Larner, p. 9.

irreparable sin, in that it is the work of the Devil.⁸ In fact, the struggle against the Devil was at the very core of the battle against witches.

Descriptions of the Devil are too numerous to count. Nonetheless, as will be explained further down along this section, while people accused of witchcraft could be made to fit into a specific stereotypical appearance and a series of incriminating temperaments, the Devil's figure was ambiguous. To cite an example, Reginald Scot lived between 1538 and 1599 and was one of the most prominent individuals in the field of witchcraft controversy and witch-theory. His work *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) is where he concentrated and coherently organised a personal cosmology, which answers a series of intellectual questions, not necessarily on witchcraft. Nevertheless, his work is often cited in the context of witchcraft studies thanks to the sheer amount of information that it contains.⁹ Scot described Lucifer as “an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in his breech, eies like a bason, fanges like a dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a Niger, and a voice roring like a lion”¹⁰. Scot's description, however, only partly covered what the public perceived as the Devil. Moreover, witchcraft theorists such as Reginald Scot were not the only ones speculating on the physical appearance of Lucifer, which contributed immensely to the confusion and the elevated number of contrasting elucidations. Accounts of devilish sightings most often cited a black-wearing male figure, his appearance being rich with symbolism connected to local fairy folktales (of which Scotland has a long and rich history). It is safe to say that “demonic beliefs and figures were crucial to witchcraft, but the whom and the what are just as complex and abstract as witchcraft itself”.¹¹ Popular accounts told different stories, and it was only during the

⁸ Normand, Roberts, p. 68.

⁹ Anglo, Sydney, “Reginald Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft: Scepticism and Sadduceeism”, in Anglo, Sydney, ed., *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 106.

¹⁰ Miller, Joyce, “Men in Black: Appearances of the Devil in Early Modern Scottish Witchcraft Discourse”, in Goodare, Julian, Martin, Lauren, Miller, Joyce, eds., *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 144.

¹¹ Miller, p. 145.

North Berwick witch-trials that a somewhat unanimous description started to appear through the witches' confessions and in witnesses' statements.¹²

At this point, it is fair to ask: how can the Devil infuse his¹³ powers into humans, making them into dangerous, magic-wielding witches? Many (though not all) witch-believing societies found the answer to this question in the demonic pact. The so-called 'demonic pact' was the fundamental link between the Devil and the witch, it was the bridge between hell, where Lucifer is king and his powers unlimited, and our world. The idea was that the witch would have a private and secret encounter with the Devil, during which she/he would promise her/his undying loyalty to him in exchange for power to be used to harm others and escape personal struggles. This meeting would then end with the performance of sexual acts and/or the infliction of the devil's mark.¹⁴ The notion of an oath to the Devil was particularly relevant in Scotland, where it recalled "a version of the band made by men, individually or collectively, declaring their allegiance to a person or cause in a social or political context. [...] Bands provide an indigenous Scottish model for the Satanic Pact."¹⁵

This bonding ritual between witch and Devil can also be found in King James I's 1597

Daemonologie, where Epistemon explains:

For such of them as are in great misery and poverty, he allures to follow him by promising unto them great riches and worldly commodity. Such as, though rich, yet burn in desperate desire of revenge, he allures them by promises to get their turn satisfied to their heart's contentment. [...] Their minds being prepared beforehand, as I have already spoken, they easily agree unto that demand of his, and soon set another tryst where they may meet again. At which time, before he proceeds any further with them, he first persuades them to addict themselves to his service; which being easily obtained, he then reveals what he is unto them, makes them renounce their God and baptism directly, and gives them his mark upon some secret place of their body, which remains sore unhealed until his next meeting with them, and thereafter ever insensible, howsoever it be nipped or pricked in any way, as is daily proved; to give them a proof thereby, that as in that doing he could hurt and heal them, so all their ill and well doings thereafter must depend upon him. (p. 112.)

Citing this passage directly from the work of James I feels imperative in order to underline the centrality of the concept of the demonic pact within the context of the Scottish witch hunt.

¹² Larner, p. 147.

¹³ Male pronouns are conventionally used to refer to the Devil.

¹⁴ Larner, p. 10.

¹⁵ Normand, Roberts, p. 67.

Although the demonic pact was not found only in Scotland, the weight it carried was an element of differentiation from other countries. What was not different from other witch-believing societies in general, however, was the stereotypical figure of the witch. The witch was mostly a woman. The reason behind this was related to popular beliefs surrounding women's temperaments. Not only were women the weaker sex and therefore far less likely to resist the Devil's temptations, but they were also seen as inherently malicious. Furthermore, witchcraft was the means through which a woman of humble origins could earn a living and obtain power among her peers, who were scared of the woman's supposed ability to cast a maleficent spell.¹⁶ The perception of the female gender as frail and susceptible was not new or surprising. In many cases, such as in King James I's work, the increased risk women ran was traced back to biblical reasons:

Philomathes:

[...] What can be the cause that there are twenty women given to that craft, where there is one man?

Epistemon:

The reason is easy, for as that sex is frailer than man is, so is it easier to be entrapped in these gross snares of the Devil, as was overwell proved to be true by the Serpent's deceiving of Eve at the beginning, which makes him the friendlier with that sex since then. (p. 128.)

Whilst one gender was decisively more targeted than the other, it would be wrong to assume that this was a reflection of an on-going attack by men. On either side of a witchcraft trial, both sexes were involved.¹⁷ The majority of women accused of witchcraft happened to be elderly or middle-aged and came from lower social classes and poor environments. The stereotypical witch was old and ugly, an image that one can easily find in popular witchcraft literature. However, Scotland was not as heavily influenced by these writings as other parts of Europe, meaning that the stereotype did not hold as much power when it came to actual witchcraft accusations. There are some personality traits that can be commonly found amongst women who were suspected to be witches in Scotland: 'spirit, a refusal

¹⁶ Millar, Charlotte-Rose, "Women as Witches: Past, Present and Future", <https://stories.uq.edu.au/shorthand-uq/small-change/women-as-witches/> (accessed 10 February 2024).

¹⁷ Spoto, Stephanie Irene, "Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power", *Pacific Coast Philology*, 45 (2010), p. 55.

to be put down, quarrelsomeness'.¹⁸ This stereotype was undoubtedly harmful and caused the locals to be biased towards women who fit the description.

Nonetheless, the coincidence of someone's appearance with a set of physical and behavioural characteristics could only do so much damage. A woman's reputation was, in fact, what could actually bring accusations of sorcery. Not only was ill reputation sufficient grounds to accuse someone, but, once the trials took place, it was used as evidence of guilt.¹⁹ More often than not, a woman would gain the reputation of witch not by any testimony of precise activities linked to witchcraft, but through a series of misinterpreted interactions and circumstances coloured by superstition.²⁰ The central role of reputation was most commonly found in European witch-believing societies, which showed how the Scottish peasantry could have been influenced by the theorisation of witchcraft and the Devil by ecclesiastical lawyers.²¹

1.2. Scottish Legislation on Witchcraft: The Scottish Witchcraft Act of 1563 and the Role of the Kirk

In order to discuss the North Berwick witch trials, a somewhat comprehensive knowledge of Scottish legislation regarding witchcraft is needed. The Scottish Witchcraft Act, published in 1563, provided the basis on which the accused were tried and convicted. Although fundamental in the last decade of the sixteenth century, this document remains open to interpretation in many of its passages. The many objectives of the Scottish Witchcraft Act that will be illustrated have been extrapolated thanks to its well-established ambiguity, which allows for a wider interpretation. It is clear that a satisfactory analysis and explanation of this document is possible only when contextualised: the setting was Scotland, right after the Reformation, a process by which the Scottish Church became

¹⁸ Larner, p. 89.

¹⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 95.

²⁰ Anglo, p. 114.

²¹ Larner, p. 138.

independent from the Catholic Church of Rome, starting from the year 1560.²² The Scottish Witchcraft Act is a brief document, here reported in its entirety:

Item, Forsamekill [forasmuch] as the Quenis Majestie and thre Estatis in this present Parliament, being informit that the havy and abominabill superstitioun usit be divers of the liegis of this Realme be using of Witchcraftis, Sorsarie and Necromancie, and credence gevin thairto in tymes bygane aganis the Law of God. And for avoyding and away putting of all vane superstitioun in tymes tocum. It is statute [decreed] and ordanit be the Quenis Majestie and thre Estatis foirsaidis that na maner of persoun nor persounis of quhatsumever [whatsoever] estate, degre or conditioun thay be of, tak upone hand in ony tymes heirefter, to use ony maner of Witchcraftis, Sorsarie or Necromancie, nor gif [give] thame selfis furth to have ony sic craft or knowlege thairof, thairthrow [by that means] abusand the pepill. Nor that na persoun seik ony help, response or cosultatioun at ony sic usaris or abusaris foirsaidis of Witchcraftis, Sorsareis or Necromancie, under the pane of deid [death]. Alsweill [To the same extent] to be execute aganis the usar, abusar, as the seikar [seeker] of the response or consultatioun. And this to be put to executioun be the Justice Schireffis, Stewartis, Baillies, Lordis of Regaliteis and Rialteis, thair Deputis, and uthers Ordinar Jugeis competent within this Realme, with all rigour, having powar to execute the samin.²³

This document has a rather complicated and puzzling origin, in that it is not entirely clear by whom or why it was written. Its most probable authors can be identified among the members of the Fifth General Assembly of the Protestant Church (25-31 December 1562).²⁴ The enactment of the Witchcraft Act shifted the prosecution of offences previously handled by church courts (prior to the Reformation) to the authority of both the kirk and secular courts.²⁵ At the time of publication, however, there was no indication that witchcraft was considered especially threatening.²⁶ In fact, it seemed to be categorised alongside the other “‘sin crimes’, [...] such as fornication, adultery, incest and bestiality”.²⁷ Even though witchcraft became an officially prosecutable offence after the year 1563, there was no witch-hunting craze immediately following the publication of the Act.²⁸

The text of the Act itself did not provide a clear explanation of the concept of witchcraft,²⁹ which actually worked in favour of the prosecutors: the ambiguity of its content allowed it to be applicable to a long list of offences.³⁰ What the Act did state, nonetheless, was the death penalty for

²² “The Scottish Reformation, c. 1525-1560” <https://scottishhistorysociety.com/the-scottish-reformation-c-1525-1560/> (accessed 25 March 2024)

²³ Normand, Roberts, p. 89.

²⁴ Goodare, Julian, “The Scottish Witchcraft Act”, *Church History*, 74, 1 (2005), p. 41.

²⁵ Normand, Roberts, p. 89.

²⁶ Larner, p. 68.

²⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 90.

²⁸ Larner, p. 67.

²⁹ Goodare, p. 51.

³⁰ Goodare, p. 66.

any individual who engaged in supernatural practices, made claims of knowledge about such arts or even just sought consultation from those who did.³¹ What appeared perhaps most curious about this Act was the absence of the word ‘witch’. The focus appeared to lie in specific actions associated with witchcraft, more than focusing on giving precise tools to recognise the person who was committing such acts. Particularly, the Act aimed to punish those who “gif [give] thame selfis furth to have ony sic craft or knowlege thair of”.³² Based on the wording of the document and the context in which it was created, it is plausible that charmers were the actual target. Charmers were known to offer healing services, love potions, fortune telling and other similarly innocuous spells.³³ Although the Witchcraft Act formally condemned their activities, there was few or no societal enthusiasm in their prosecution: their incantations were appreciated and peasants did not view them as being in the same category as witches, who, inversely, committed acts of malefice.³⁴ Yet another surprising absentee was the Demonic Pact, as evidence suggests that this concept had not yet reached full maturity, or at least was not prominent enough to be included in the Witchcraft Act.³⁵

The lack of specificity and use of broad terms could also indicate the intention of targeting another group of people with whom the Reformers were greatly concerned: Catholics. After the Reformation, superstition was closely associated with the Catholic faith.³⁶ Indeed the use of the word ‘superstition’ in the Act did not coincide with the modern significance of a ‘credulous readiness to believe’³⁷, but rather indicated the danger of temptation luring individuals away from the path of genuine belief.³⁸

³¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 91.

³² Normand, Roberts, p. 89.

³³ Goodare, p. 54.

³⁴ Goodare, p. 55.

³⁵ Goodare, p. 64.

³⁶ Cowan, Edward J., “Witch Persecution and Folk Belief in Lowland Scotland: The Devil’s Decade”, in Goodare, Julian, Martin, Lauren, Miller, Joyce, eds., *Witchcraft and Belief in Early Modern Scotland*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 71.

³⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 90.

³⁸ Normand, Roberts, p. 90.

The Witchcraft Act was not only an instrument used in the struggle against witchcraft, but it was also meant by the reformed Church as a means to resume control over the social life of the lower classes. With the Reformation came the need to reform its people and their morality. Witchcraft was one among numerous concerns of the Kirk.³⁹ In fact, there was not yet an apparent association between magic and the Devil, or evil in general. Furthermore, in many areas of Lowland Scotland the belief in fairies and other such supernatural elements made it so that the general population did not respond with panic or dismay to the Kirk's declaration of all of magic outside the church as demonic.⁴⁰ Given the public's familiarity with magic through folkloristic tales, the demonisation of all magical things did not happen overnight, it was a process heavily implemented by religious authorities. The Church managed, over the years, to emphasise the image of Satan as a 'personal presence',⁴¹ a presence that would periodically reappear in their preaching especially in times of crisis and panic. An example of this can be seen during the decade of the witch-craze in Scotland.⁴²

As previously stated, the Witchcraft Act implied a shift in the responsibility of persecuting witchcraft cases. They were now handled by secular legal courts and the Privy Council, confining the role of the Kirk to that of interrogators of the accused. As Callum McDonald wrote, the process of the trial and conviction of a witch required the involvement of multiple layers of administration, both secular and religious: "if found guilty of witchcraft the accused was passed to the local bailie court and then officially tried for maleficium under state law. In order for the kirk to proceed and give a case of witchcraft to the local civil court to be tried, the civil court had to obtain a commission of judiciary".⁴³ A commission of judiciary was "a document issued by the Crown, normally under the signet, empowering the recipients to hold a criminal trial for a specific crime. This recipient was often

³⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 72.

⁴⁰ MacDonald, Callum, "Administering State Legislation: the Kirk and Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland", *Constellations*, 7, 2 (2016), p. 9.

⁴¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 75.

⁴² Normand, Roberts, p. 76.

⁴³ McDonald, p. 11.

a private individual.”⁴⁴ The commission was “provided by the secular Privy Council. Therefore, in order for a witch to be prosecuted locally and executed by the local civil authorities, the bailie courts required a general or specific commission from the Privy Council. Without a judicial commission the local courts were not allowed to try and execute witches for they had to be tried in the central court of judiciary in Edinburgh, unless specified through the use of a commission.”⁴⁵

The legislative itinerary did however change over the years. What we read in McDonald’s paper was the result of numerous attempts at the centralisation of justice which occurred in the late sixteenth century.⁴⁶ Before the year 1597, approximately half of Scotland relied on regality courts. It was an intricate, geographically limited system of jurisdictions exercising the same powers as the court of justiciary.⁴⁷ It is important to emphasise the complexity of the system, to show that the theorisation of witchcraft was not the only thing subjected to layers of interpretation by a multitude of voices throughout the years, but also the practical side of witch persecution was not simple and straight-forward.

Throughout changing legal settings and legislative jurisdictions, some elements can be found that are a constant when analysing the persecution of witches. One of these was the involvement of villagers and other ordinary (as in not in a position of power, whether it be religious or secular) people in the trials that sought the conviction of witches. In this section, the itinerary that brought from an accusation to burning at the stake will be explained. Accusations of witchcraft against a person were often brought forward by a neighbour with a grudge. Even more often, though, the names of supposed witches came up during interrogations in previous witchcraft trials.⁴⁸ Once the authorities had collected what they considered reasonable proof, the accused witch would be taken into custody and

⁴⁴ Goodare, Julian, “The Framework for Scottish Witch-Hunting in the 1590s”, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 81, 212, (2002), p. 240.

⁴⁵ McDonald, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Wasser, Michael, “The Privy Council and the Witches: The Curtailment of Witchcraft Prosecutions in Scotland, 1597-1628”, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 21 (2003), p. 32.

⁴⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 87.

⁴⁸ Larner, p. 105.

kept in make-shift prisons. These places, as one would expect, were inadequate and it appears that many managed to escape. At the same time, many would die due to unliveable conditions within these places. The prisoners were also usually guarded by locals compensated to do so.⁴⁹ It was during this time that the witch was interrogated to obtain a confession. Yet not all confessions were good enough for the authorities: in order to qualify for a commission of justiciary approved by the Privy Council, certain keywords were needed. Admitting to contracting the demonic pact was the fundamental part, since it was ‘regarded by the courts as the essence of witchcraft’.⁵⁰ All other acts of sorcery or witchcraft were not essential, but functioned more as arguments that strengthened the claim of a sanctioned demonic pact.⁵¹ Once the witch confessed the renouncement of her baptism and her sworn servitude to the Devil, the burning stake was most often what awaited. The burning of the witch was a public event attended by the extended community and would even call for a couple of days of fasting prior to the day of the condemned’s execution. Numerous ministers from surrounding areas would travel there and offer a sermon to the public. The witch, contrary to popular belief, was not always burned alive. In fact, they were normally garrotted first, and then their lifeless bodies would be set on fire.⁵²

Although burning at the stake was a barbaric way to die, for many of the accused the death sentence came as a release from the hands of the interrogators and, more importantly, their torture instruments. Officially, torture was not legal in Scotland unless previously sanctioned by the Privy Council or Parliament. Nevertheless, official procedure was routinely disregarded and the practice of torture was largely used especially in trials for witchcraft.⁵³ In 1597, things escalated even further when a commission added the right to arrest. While the witch was kept in the previously mentioned pseudo-prisons, numerous kinds of torture would be applied.⁵⁴ By far the most common methods

⁴⁹ Larner, p. 106.

⁵⁰ Larner, p. 107.

⁵¹ Lanrer, p. 107.

⁵² Larner, p. 113.

⁵³ Normand, Roberts, p. 99.

⁵⁴ Wasser, p. 34.

were sleep deprivation and the pricking of the witches' mark. Sleep deprivation famously caused hallucinations and cognitive impairment, consequences of which the general public was apparently familiar with. It is therefore astonishing that the information coming out of the defendants in those conditions was taken as plausible and truthful.⁵⁵ The pricking of the witches' mark relied on "the theory [...] that the Devil consummated the Pact by nipping the witch, and that the permanent mark thus made was insensible to pain and would not bleed".⁵⁶ Virtually everyone who was tried via this method ended up displaying an insensitive spot on their body, and the description of said mark was vague enough to fit the description of several types of skin lesions. The prickers could be clergymen, but, most of the time, they were so by profession and were very well compensated. Other than the shaky (at best) theory behind the mark being proof of the demonic pact, there were also several documented cases of prickers abusing their position: either they would use a device with a retractable needle (thus not causing any pain in the subject and proving their guilt) or they would prick the witch to a near-death state.⁵⁷ The system designed to convict witches was, however fatal, far from efficient. Escape and acquittal were possible at virtually all stages of a trial, as shown in Figure 1⁵⁸.

⁵⁵ Larner, p. 108.

⁵⁶ Larner, p. 110.

⁵⁷ McDonald, SW, "The Devil's Mark and the Witch Prickers of Scotland", *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 90 (1997), pp. 507-510.

⁵⁸ Larner, p. 114.

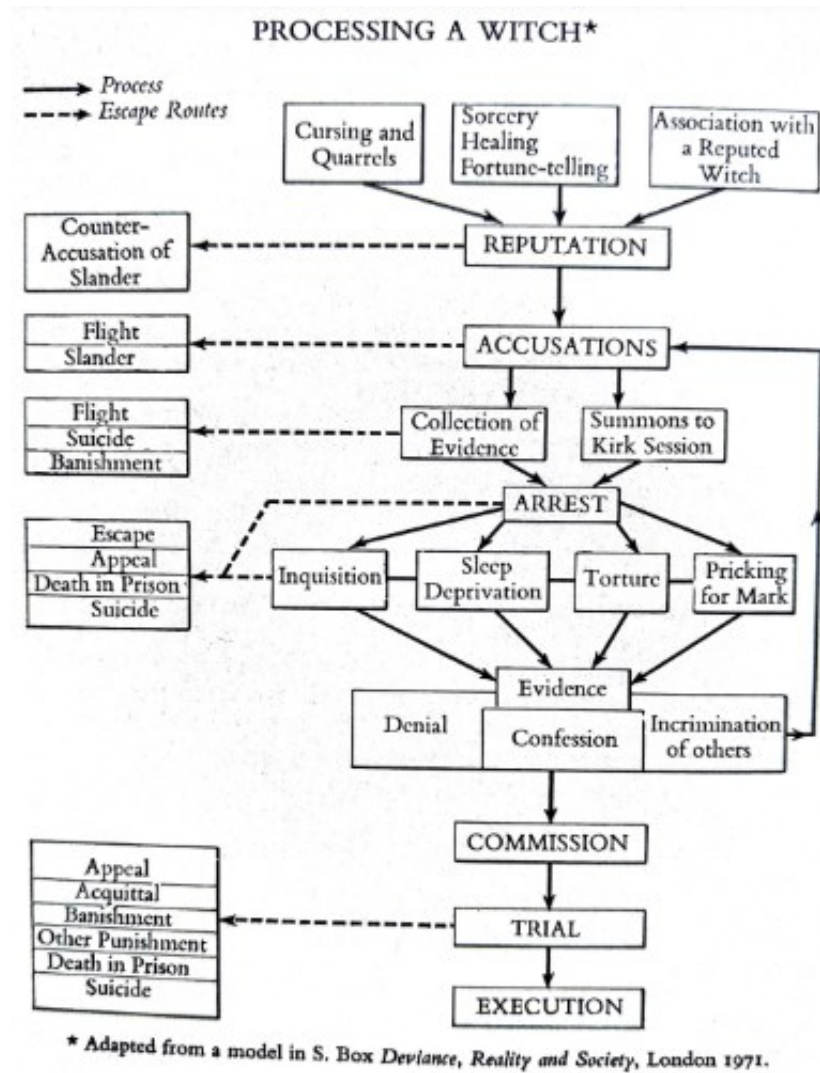


Figure 1

The structure of a witchcraft trial was subjected to changes depending on the geographical area, the persecuting authority and the level of sensationalization of the trial. The document that was supposed to bring order to the process did nothing of the sort: the Scottish Witchcraft Act was instrumental when it came to justifying the persecution, but did not provide a solid basis (meaning methods of proof collection or the types of proof necessary to convict) that could avoid these trials from spiralling into the decade-long witch craze that Scotland ended up seeing. Furthermore, reformists played an important role in the fury and persistence shown when persecuting women believed to have had magical powers. The brutal execution of witches was a means to set an example

of the punishment that awaited any type of deviance from the constituted religious beliefs and its authority.

1.3. The Sceptics of the Sixteenth Century: Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot

In the interest of providing a complete vision of what the sixteenth century had to offer in terms of witchcraft theory, it is fair to also include voices who went against the accepted and widespread opinion of the practice of witchcraft as real and deserving of stern punishment. The two main authors who embodied this spirit of scepticism and reluctance to witch persecutions are Johann Weyer, with *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1583); and Reginald Scot, with *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). Even though neither of these works was actually able to put a halt on witch trials, they were relevant enough to be included in the preface of *Daemonologie*:

The fearful abounding at this time, in this country, of these detestable slaves of the Devil, the witches or enchanters, has moved me (beloved reader) to dispatch in the post, this following treatise of mine,[...] to press thereby, so far as I can, to resolve the doubting hearts of many both that such assaults of Satan are most certainly practiced, and that the instruments thereof merit most severely to be punished, against the damnable opinions of two principally in our age. Whereof, the one called Scot, an Englishman, is not ashamed in public print to deny that there can be such a thing as witchcraft, and so maintains the old error of the Sadducees in denying spirits. The other called Wierus, a German physician, sets out a public apology for all these craftsfolk whereby, procuring for their impunity, he plainly betrays himself to have been one of that profession. (p. 45.)

The King himself, who was at the forefront of the battle against witches, recognised the weight of Weyer's and Scot's work, to the point where he felt it necessary to attack them and disprove them in his own treatise.

Johann Weyer (1515-1588) was a Lutheran physician at a royal court in the region of the lower Rhine. His notoriety came from his major work on witchcraft, *De Praestigiis Daemonum*. The book was first published in 1563 in Basel; a number of editions followed until 1583, when the final edition appeared. Having started from approximately five hundred pages, it is worth noting that the final version reached almost a thousand pages.⁵⁹ Given its sheer size, it comes as no surprise that it

⁵⁹ Gerulaitis, Leonardas Vytautas, "Doctor Johann Weyer (1515-88) and Witchcraft", *Fifteenth Century Studies*, 31 (2006), p. 75.

was a highly regarded work in the context of witchcraft literature in the early modern period.⁶⁰ The reception of Weyer's work was, whether positive or not, definitely widespread, to the point where, for the following two centuries after its publication, almost every book on witchcraft contained a citation from *De Praestigiis Daemonum*. Johann Weyer became a symbol of scepticism.⁶¹

Although this book was considered to be one of the pillars of witchcraft literature, it is important to point out that its content was not as straightforward as one might assume: the chronology, the contents and their provenance suggested a calculated attack on Catholicism. As we have explained before, the link between witchcraft trials and the Catholic Church was well established.⁶² According to Weyer, not only were their typical ceremonies indicative of demonic inspiration, but the Devil himself was at the very centre of their organisation, making the Roman Catholic Church a front for his deceitful activities.⁶³ It is however likely that attacking the Catholic Church was not Weyer's one and only aim, as suggested by numerous passages in which the reader can discern a tone of empathy towards those who were accused, tortured and killed based solely on accusations of witchcraft.⁶⁴

That being said, *De Praestigiis Daemonum* should not be interpreted as an attack on Catholicism alone and it did actually offer a defence of witches, a defence that was based on the author's assumption that every magical action is a type of *fascinatio*, an illusion perpetrated by the Devil. He would use his powers to trick the gullible and half-witted, for example: the powers of the Devil included super-human speed, with which he was able to replace objects, make them disappear or appear before the eyes of witnesses who did not have the capability of seeing such deception, and therefore attributed it to magic.⁶⁵ Along with the magical properties of objects and their handlers, Weyer also denied the existence of the Demonic Pact, the same Pact that was at the basis of witchcraft

⁶⁰ Hoorens, Vera, "Why did Johann Weyer Write *De Praestigiis Daemonum*?", *Low Countries Historical Review*, 129 (2014), p. 9.

⁶¹ Hoorens, p. 5.

⁶² Hoorens, p. 9.

⁶³ Baxter, Christopher, "Johann Weyer's *De Praestigiis Daemonum*: Unsystematic Psychopathology", in Anglo, Sydney, ed., *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 55.

⁶⁴ Hoorens, p. 21.

⁶⁵ Baxter, p. 59-60.

convictions and represented the irrefutable proof of the witches' corruption by the Devil. The words used to describe this concept highlight his rampant scepticism:

I use the term *Lamia* for a woman who, by virtue of deceptive or imaginary pact...entered into with a demon, supposedly perpetrates all kinds of evil doing, whether by thought or by curse or by glance or by use of some ludicrous object unsuited for the purpose.⁶⁶

Weyer, however, was not entirely consistent while discussing the topic, in that he defined the Pact as the product of a delusional mind, but at the same time took the time to disprove every single action taken towards the making of the Pact as if it was the stipulation of an actual contract.⁶⁷ Notwithstanding this apparent confusion on his part, Weyer was able to clearly state who was to blame for evil deeds: the Devil himself. In fact, the Devil did not need any external help via contracts stipulated with witches, he was powerful enough to operate and cause destruction on his own.

Furthermore, *De Praestigiis* offered a surprisingly familiar explanation as to why the concept of a pact was ridiculous and wrong: the image of the weak and gullible woman enters the scene again. Where witchcraft persecutors saw a weak link through which the Devil could access their world, Weyer saw women who were simply too sick to understand the truth and had hallucinations caused by melancholy. They simply could not have done what persecutors accused them of, and it was not possible for a person in such a condition to provide credible testimony. For the same reason, he was against the merging of witchcraft and heresy (and therefore avoiding witches the same fate as heretics), because these "poor women [...] believe and confess that they have done that which is quite impossible for them to have done".⁶⁸ It is clear that his education as a physician helped him construct his argument. Using this rhetoric, he was able to shift the guilt from defenceless, delusional women to Lucifer.⁶⁹

Adding to the argument supporting a witch's innocence (or rather, her inability to commit acts of sorcery), *De Praestigiis Daemonum* made an important distinction, by which it established three

⁶⁶ Gerulaitis, p. 75.

⁶⁷ Baxter, p. 61.

⁶⁸ Gerulaitis, p. 76.

⁶⁹ Gerulaitis, p. 76.

categories of people: witches, magicians and poisoners. These last two types of people were, according to the author, those who should have really been punished. Interestingly enough, it is hard to find a clear distinction of these types of offenders within the text. The only clear differentiator that one could employ to distinguish a witch from a magician was gender. Magicians used the devil, whereas witches were used by him, taking advantage of their propensity to melancholy and delusion.⁷⁰ This distinction was crucial when it came to punishment, and Weyer seemed divided on the instructions he provided: while he was reluctant to state bluntly the harshness of the punishment for magicians and only referenced instances where they had been burned, he had a much more concise opinion on witch trials.⁷¹ He was against trials initiated solely by witchcraft accusations, since, he believed, these crimes were often imaginary and the result of some type of cognitive-impairing illness.⁷² On top of that, there could be no reliability in a confession obtained through the use of extreme and barbaric torture.⁷³

Although Weyer seems to have given extensive proof towards the need to stop persecuting witches, *De Praestigiis Daemonum* did not have the immediate consequence that the author was perhaps aiming for. It was most definitely, however, one of the tools that paved the way for the final cessation of witchcraft persecutions.⁷⁴

After examining the work of Johann Weyer, Reginald Scot's point of view will be an even more sceptical step forward, with a work that went beyond the defence of witches and demolished the whole concept of witchcraft, magical operations and the Demonic Pact. Of the life of Reginald Scot (1538-1599) not very much is known, and, based on the little information we have, it seems that there was not much to know at all. He was born in Kent in 1538 and established his life there after failing to complete his studies at Hart Hall, Oxford.⁷⁵ Notwithstanding his apparently quiet life, Scot

⁷⁰ Baxter, p. 61.

⁷¹ Baxter, p. 67.

⁷² Hoorens, p. 7.

⁷³ Gerulaitis, p. 76.

⁷⁴ Gerulaitis, p. 71.

⁷⁵ Anglo, p. 106.

is remembered for his effort in disproving the existence of witchcraft itself, an effort which is tidily contained in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. The book was published in 1584 and only one edition appeared while the author was still alive, the second one only having gone to print over half a century later.⁷⁶ Just as in the case of Weyer's work, Scot's book is very often cited and, as a byproduct, taken out of context. Ironically enough, *The Discoverie* became a go-to source of magic charms and rituals utilised by people who practised beneficent magic (such as healing, creating love potions or finding a lost object) because of its extensive analysis and explanations of such activities. What is more, Scot even provided illustrations for the more complicated spells, since, to him, these practices were only superstitious gibberish.⁷⁷ However, upon closer inspection, Scot's work was not just a collection of witch tricks, but it constructed a well-argued reasoning that offered an entirely new outlook on the topic of witchcraft, spirits and the nature of Lucifer.⁷⁸ The position of Reginald Scot on the matter was an unmistakably sceptical one, with him being confident enough in the insignificance of witchcraft practices to actually attempt spells and demonic conjurations, in order to have first-hand experience and observation.⁷⁹

While Weyer sought to prove the innocence of weak, mentally ill women, Scot questioned the entire system on which magic was based:

Witchcraft is in truth a cousening art, wherin the name of God is abused, prophaned and blasphemed, and his power attributed to a vile creature. In estimation of the vulgar people, it is a supernaturall worke, contriued betweene a corporall old woman, and a spirituall diuell. The maner thereof is so secret, mysticall, and strange, that to this daie there hath neuer beene any credible witnes therof. It is incomprehensible to the wise, learned or faithfull; a probable matter to children, fooles, melancholike persons and papists. . . . The effect and end thereof to be sometimes euill, as when thereby man or beast, grasse, trees, or corne, &c; is hurt: sometimes good, as whereby sicke folkes are healed, theeues bewraied, and true men come to their goods, &c. (quoted in Davies, p. 382.)

Even though statements such as this may paint the author of *The Discoverie* as an enlightened empiricist, it would not be correct to assume that it was the only aspect of Scot's character. He was,

⁷⁶ Davies, S.F., "The Reception of Reginald Scot's Discovery of Witchcraft: Witchcraft, Magic and Radical Religion", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 74, 3 (2013), p. 381.

⁷⁷ Davies, p. 394.

⁷⁸ Anglo, p. 106.

⁷⁹ Anglo, p. 109.

in fact, a deeply religious man with an extensive knowledge of the Scriptures which he used to his advantage. According to Scot's theology, since the spirits that one can find in parables and metaphors in the Bible did not have a corporeal form, they were unable to interact with the human world. From this, the next logical conclusion is that the Devil also could not walk amongst men or women.⁸⁰ The concept of the incorporeality of spirits and, subsequently, of the Devil, was at the basis of his life's work. The last part of *The Discoverie* is a section called "A Discourse upon divels and spirits", which clearly states the author's stance on the supernatural and the interactions of the spiritual world with ours: they were simply not possible, for there was no bridge connecting these two dimensions. It is also worth noting that the editions of the book that appeared after Scot's death did not contain this section, even though it represents the foundation of his entire theology and refutation of witchcraft and magic as a whole.⁸¹ The reason behind this is fairly simple: the context of the work is sixteenth century England, meaning a time and place in which Scot's most radical takes were simply not well received. Not only was this book enough to get its author accused of atheism, but it also contradicted one of the most common experiences which were part of the pool of shared beliefs: the encounter with the Devil. Having had some type of physical contact with him was a story common to virtually every person at that time.⁸² Needless to say, Scot's theory of the incorporeality of the Devil made the notion of a Demonic Pact absurd, thus refusing (much like Weyer) to consider it grounds for a death sentence.

Bearing in mind Scot's consideration of the notion of witchcraft, it is clear that he opposed witchcraft trials. While Weyer proposed a distinction between witch, magician and poisoner,⁸³ Scot's view was a bit more straightforward. The accused were either old women who had gained an ill reputation due to a series of unfortunate circumstances and superstition, or they were simply frauds.

⁸⁰ Estes, Leland, "Reginald Scot and His "Discoverie of Witchcraft": Religion and Science in the Opposition to the European Witch Craze", *Church History*, 52 (1983), p. 449.

⁸¹ Anglo, p. 126.

⁸² Estes, p. 455.

⁸³ Distinction proposed by Johann Weyer, quoted in Anglo, p. 114.

These people who played tricks and passed it off as magic made the anger and resentment towards the first category of people even worse. What is more, Scot criticised the process of evidence gathering and the trials, saying that, in a system that presented such a configuration, the accused never even had a chance to redeem themselves.⁸⁴

The efforts of Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot were not enough to stop or, at the very least, limit witch persecutions. There was no immediate positive effect after the publication of either of these works, and that was for a series of reasons, both relating to the context in which these works appeared, but also their content. In the first case, although clearly sceptical and willing to prove the witches' innocence, Weyer's arguments were simply not strong enough in terms of clarity to stand against the beliefs brought forward by persecutors. In Scot's case, one might argue that he ended up at the opposite end of the spectrum compared to Weyer: his refusal to believe in the dealings of all spirits with humans presented an attack not only on magic and witchcraft, but on religion itself, making his entire work too radical to be widely accepted.

⁸⁴ Anglo, p. 114.

Chapter 2. The Trials of North Berwick (1590-1593)

2.1. The North Berwick Witch Trials

The witchcraft trials of North Berwick are responsible for King James I's *Daemonologie*, since it was his direct involvement in the examination and conviction of the accused that made a lasting impression on his person. Although his work is more theoretical than historical, it is still important to know and understand the events of this period to be able to recognise the effects of first-hand experience within *Daemonologie*.

The North Berwick affair began towards the end of 1590 with the first arrests, but the trials themselves did not start until the new year. Although the majority of the accused met their fate over the course of the year 1591, the trials extended until 1593, with the trial against the Earl of Bothwell. The accused came mainly from East Lothian and Edinburgh,⁸⁵ but on the exact number of people who were arrested and convicted there is still much doubt.⁸⁶

The exceptionality of these trials came from the double accusation that the involved were facing: witchcraft and treason or, more specifically, treasonable sorcery. The origin of these allegations was to be found, allegedly, in James's many attempts to retrieve his bride, Anne of Denmark, from her homeland. Having her transfer to Scotland failed once before due to bad weather, rumours of the witches' involvement in the storm were quick to spread when the Scottish party attempted to reach home and had to endure a very rough voyage, with one of the ships even getting lost. Both in Denmark and in Scotland, the blame was placed on witches.⁸⁷ Although it may seem a clear explanation of the trials, other factors were also at play and the difficulty lies in determining exactly how the trials started and how they went from local trials for witchcraft to treason trials that made their way to Edinburgh. The direct involvement of the King was certainly one of the factors

⁸⁵ Normand, Lawrence, Roberts, Gareth, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James' VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000 p. 88.

⁸⁶ Tyson, Donald, *The Demonology of King James I: Includes the Original Text of Daemonologie and News from Scotland*, Woodbury: Llewellyn, 2012, p. 18.

⁸⁷ Lerner, Christina, "James VI and Witchcraft", in G.R. Smith, Alan, ed., *The Reign of James VI and I*, London: Macmillan, 1973, p. 80.

that determined the peculiar nature of these trials, since he had just spent half a year in Denmark, where he came into contact with witchcraft trials and continental demonology.⁸⁸

As in the majority of trials for witchcraft, the original rumour that started the whole affair can now only be found in the few surviving original records of the witches' depositions, which do not, however, take into account the amount of torture that was necessary to extract the information out of a presumed witch-conspirator.⁸⁹ Not only did the interrogators look for proof of treason, but they also worked hard to obtain confessions of standard practices of witchcraft, like the demonic pact.⁹⁰ Such was their objective, because the working theory, which then sparked the accusations, was that these men and women who were now being questioned had met with the Devil himself on multiple occasions to plot the King's demise.⁹¹

Although the North Berwick trials do not lack colourful and fantastic tales of sorcery, they also had a very distinct political aspect. This was not new and in fact resembled a previously seen type of witch trial, that was used to target a specific individual. The Earl of Bothwell was the individual that the King was trying very hard to tie to the North Berwick conspiracy, in that Bothwell represented a possible threat to his rule.⁹²

The entire affair actually started even before the King became involved, when the region of East Lothian started to see witchcraft trials on a more localised level. Whether these trials were a consequence or one of the causes that sparked the more centralised trials in Edinburgh remains to be determined.⁹³ On a local level, the accused were at greater risk of being convicted of their presumed crimes, since the legal process involved the same community who had already deemed them guilty and had brought them before trial.⁹⁴ The protagonists of the North Berwick trials came from different

⁸⁸Larner, p. 81.

⁸⁹Roughead, William, "Scottish Witch Trials: The Witches of North Berwick", *Juridical Review*, 25 (1913), p. 163.

⁹⁰ Tyson, p. 16.

⁹¹Murray, M.A., "The 'Devil' of North Berwick", *The Scottish Historical Review*, 15, 60 (1918), p. 313.

⁹² Larner, pp. 79-80.

⁹³ Normand, Roberts, p. 95.

⁹⁴ Normand, Roberts, p. 102.

communities, but they were all close enough to each other to be within walking distance. This should give a sense of how localised the whole affair initially was.⁹⁵ From these local trials, four names were to emerge and move on to be examined in Edinburgh before the King himself: John Fian, Agnes Sampson, Barbara Napier and Euphame McCalzean. They were the ones accused of acts of treasonable sorcery against the life of the King.⁹⁶ Bothwell was also involved in the trials, but his experience is to be considered distinct from that of the other four.

Because of the double nature of the trials, the legal process that the four accused went through was something completely new: there was no systematic approach to the discovery of facts, torture was not only accepted but encouraged by officials and the Monarch himself, though no official records of it survived.⁹⁷ Once someone was accused, they were arrested and interrogated, sometimes their deposition would be taken more than once. They could also be faced with witnesses to their crimes, a process which could occur again during the trial.⁹⁸ Once at trial, their indictment was to be read before them and either denied or confirmed. An assize (a jury) would then be put together under oath. At this point, the previously extorted signed confessions would be read aloud in front of the assize and the accused, who may even have been asked to re-sign it, in an attempt to demonstrate that the information had not been obtained through the use of force or coercion. The following step was for defence and prosecution to directly address the assize, which would then leave the courtroom to reach a verdict.⁹⁹ Though the original accusations they were being tried for came from local communities, the accused in these trials were being dealt with at a centralised level.¹⁰⁰

It was through the examinations and confessions obtained during pre-trial proceedings that the sequence of events that brought to the trials in the first place was somewhat discernible. Of course, however, this means that many elements may be fabrications of the interrogators, or simply desperate

⁹⁵ Tyson, p. 16.

⁹⁶ Normand, Roberts, p. 97.

⁹⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 100.

⁹⁸ Normand, Roberts, p. 127.

⁹⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 101.

¹⁰⁰ Normand, Roberts, p. 100.

confessions through which the accused tried to escape torture.¹⁰¹ An element that seems particularly relevant under these circumstances is the witches' Sabbath, a gathering during which they would unite and, with or without the Devil's presence, practice sorcery and other unspeakable acts (going from grave raiding to kissing the Devil's buttocks as a sign of loyalty).¹⁰² The story that emerged from Scottish witches differed from the continental idea of a Sabbath, in that many of the more sensational elements were missing. In fact, there was no killing of children, no eating of human flesh and no partaking in orgies, which were all classic features in the continental idea of the Sabbath.¹⁰³ Given the alleged conspiracy against the King that motivated the witch meetings in the North Berwick trials, it is understandable how the emphasis was put on discovering locations and attendees, which meant thorough (and sometimes directed) questioning on the part of interrogators.¹⁰⁴ Though many more details were extracted during examinations, the place where the Sabbath took place and the names of other witches present were usually enough to satisfy the questioners.¹⁰⁵

The first meeting relevant to the trials had taken place on Lammas Eve (31 July) at Acheson's Haven, where the witches gathered with the intention of raising a storm to hinder the King's voyage. Agnes Sampson proposed the destruction of the King through a wax image, but of more importance was the role of Barbara Napier (who was later, however, not found guilty of this crime) and Euphame McCalzean, who are depicted not only as participants to the meeting, but also as active accomplices of the Devil. During this gathering, the witches learned a new way to dispose of the King from their master, that is by dripping liquor from a toad.¹⁰⁶

At the centre of attention was, however, a meeting that had taken place on the day of Halloween 1590 at the North Berwick Kirk. The Devil was allegedly present and instructed the

¹⁰¹ Tyson, p. 21.

¹⁰² Paterson, Laura, "The Witches' Sabbath in Scotland", *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities in Scotland*, 142 (2012), p. 371.

¹⁰³ Normand, Roberts, p. 211.

¹⁰⁴ Paterson, p. 375.

¹⁰⁵ Paterson, p. 387.

¹⁰⁶ Normand, Roberts, p. 214.

witches on how to bewitch a wax image representing the King, in order to cause his death. Not only that, but he proceeded to order his followers to dig open four graves and take joints, toes and knees from the corpses to create a powder that was to be used in maleficium.¹⁰⁷ Although the Devil stood in the pulpit of the North Berwick Kirk and called out the names of the participants, he did not dominate the gathering.¹⁰⁸ In fact, an interesting aspect regarding the account of this meeting is the figure of the Devil which emerged from the confession of Agnes Sampson. Apparently, he had failed to provide the wax image with which to harm the King, a mistake that caused the Devil to be reprimanded by his followers, indicating a sense of familiarity. From this seemingly small detail, it is clear that the North Berwick witches were not drawing from the continental idea of an all-powerful, terrifying monster of a Devil, but rather from popular belief and stories.¹⁰⁹

Not only was the witches' description of the Devil coloured by popular belief, but so were other elements of the Sabbath. Although it is reasonable to assume that interrogators took a leading role when it came to questioning, the accused were still partly responsible in providing a lot of details in regards to these gatherings. From an analysis of different confessions and examinations it became apparent that there were culturally significant days on which Sabbaths would take place, such as Candlemas (28 February), Lammas (1 August) and Halloween (31 October).¹¹⁰ This is significant because interrogators did not have anything to gain by forcing the witch to mention a specific day in which the meeting took place, since a confession of any gathering would have been enough to convict even without a precise indication of time.¹¹¹

Regarding the location of the Sabbath, among the many different places where they could have met, there seems to have been a preference for churches and churchyards, as the previously mentioned meeting at North Berwick Kirk underlines. Other often mentioned locations are close to

¹⁰⁷ Tyson, 17.

¹⁰⁸ Paterson, p. 395.

¹⁰⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 215.

¹¹⁰ Paterson, p. 380.

¹¹¹ Paterson, p. 383.

bodies of water, not only to satisfy the need for vicinity when trying to commit acts of supernatural piracy or storm raising, but also because popular stories associate fairies to such places.¹¹²

While the timing and locations of these gatherings may have been somewhat predictable based on local popular tales, the way in which the witches reached these locations was varied and often based on a more conservative conception of demonology. King James I in *Daemonologie*, for example, defined three different means for the witches' travelling:¹¹³

Philomathes:

But by what way say they or think you it possible that they can come to these unlawful conventions?

Epistemon:

There is the thing which I esteem their senses to be deluded in, and though they lie not in confessing of it, because they think it to be true, yet not to be so in substance or effect: for they say that by diverse means they may convene, either to the adoring of their Master, or to the putting into practice any service of his committed unto their charge. One way is natural, which is natural riding, going, or sailing, at what hour their Master comes and advises them; and this way may be easily believed. Another way is somewhat more strange, and yet is it possible to be true: which is, by being carried by the force of the spirit which is their conductor, either above the earth or above the sea, swiftly to the place where they are to meet; [...] And in this transporting, they say to themselves that they are invisible to any other, except among themselves; which may also be possible in my opinion. For if the Devil may form what kind of impressions he pleases in the air, as I have said before, speaking of magic, why may he not far easier thicken and obscure so the air that is next above them by contracting is close together, that the beams of any other man's eyes cannot pierce through the same to see them? But the third way of their coming to their conventions is that wherein I think them deluded: for some of them say that being transformed into the likeness of a little beast or fowl, they will come and pierce through whatsoever house or church, though all ordinary passages be closed, by whatsoever opening the air may enter in at. And some say that their bodies lying still, as in ecstasy, their spirits will be ravished out of their bodies, and carried to such places. And for verifying thereof, will give evident tokens, as well by witnesses that have seen their bodies lying senseless in the meantime, as by naming persons with whom they met, and giving tokens what purpose was amongst them, whom otherwise they could not have known: for this form of journeying, they affirm to use the most when they are transported from one country to another.¹¹⁴

The North Berwick trials are not only relevant on account of the King's role in them, but also because they present unique and unprecedented characteristics. They include the legal proceedings, which in some ways resembled the inquisitorial system; the importance and detail given to the witches' Sabbath and, most importantly, the political aspect of the trial. Accusations of treasonable sorcery were a convenient way to dispose of the King's enemies, as shown by his accusations towards the Earl of Bothwell (which will be later discussed in depth).

¹¹² Paterson, p. 391.

¹¹³ Paterson, p. 407.

¹¹⁴ Tyson, pp. 121-122.

2.2. The Protagonists of the Trials

The number of people who were tried during the North Berwick witch trials is alleged to be in the hundreds. The focus of this section will be on specific people accused of witchcraft who played a fundamental role in the unravelling of events over the course of the years 1590 and 1591.

Geillis Duncan appears to be the first of the accused in the North Berwick trials. Although she was not called to answer before the King, she had a pivotal role in the trials, as she was the one who initially pointed the finger towards other suspected witches such as Agnes Sampson, John Fian, Euphame McCalzean and Barbara Napier.¹¹⁵ Geillis Duncan worked as a maid at the house of deputy-bailiff David Seaton. Suspicions towards her arose when she started displaying incredible healing abilities, a craft which she never before seemed to master. On top of that, Seaton also started to notice how she would sneak out of the house late at night, another clear sign that led to believing her a servant of Satan. Therefore, the deputy-bailiff took it upon himself to question her. No torment was spared, as thumbscrews and a rope tied to her head were used to try and break through Duncan's silence.¹¹⁶ Finally, her interrogator obtained a confession after pricking her and supposedly finding the Devil's mark, when she admitted to entering the Demonic Pact in exchange for her healing abilities.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, Geillis was also said to have taken part in the Sabbath at North Berwick Kirk.¹¹⁸ The few surviving documents indicated her date of arrest in late 1590¹¹⁹ and, notwithstanding her almost immediate confession, she had to wait until December 1591 to be executed.¹²⁰

Agnes Sampson, on the other hand, was at the forefront of the treasonable sorcery trials. Her examinations are among the earliest surviving documents, providing us with proof that her questioning began in early December 1590, before the King was involved.¹²¹ Agnes Sampson was

¹¹⁵ Roughead, p. 165.

¹¹⁶ Tyson, p. 15.

¹¹⁷ Tyson, p. 16.

¹¹⁸ Roughead, p. 167.

¹¹⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 128.

¹²⁰ Normand, Roberts, p. 298.

¹²¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 141.

also known as the Wise Wife of Nether-Keith (a village close to East Lothian), thanks to her midwifery and healing abilities. Her practices were, however, not sudden and miraculous-looking, but rather the result of the use of natural remedies employed in medicine which earned her a reputation as a cunning woman.¹²² Interrogators characterised her as “most remarkable, a woman not of the base and ignorant sort of Witches, but Matronlike, grave and settled in her answers”,¹²³ which meant that an extensive use of torture was necessary to extract confessions of conspiracy and maleficium. She was relentlessly pricked and forced to wear the witches’ bridle (an instrument used to block her from pronouncing enchantments), which rendered her pliable to the questioner’s directed inquiries. It is assumed that during this process she was also questioned on the storm that hindered the King’s passage, given that it was still a topic of conversation some months after the fact. It is probably at this point, which was late December 1590, that the King took a personal interest in her.¹²⁴ It is reported that James VI of Scotland, by his “own special travel [effort]”,¹²⁵ made her confess to the Demonic Pact, to private meetings with the Devil and to her attendance to the Sabbath.¹²⁶ Throughout her examinations Sampson confessed to attending a total of eight conventions,¹²⁷ like the one in Leith where, together with another group of witches from Prestonpans, she raised a storm by ‘baptising’ a cat. Most notably, she confessed her presence to the witch gathering at North Berwick Kirk on Halloween.¹²⁸ Her initial accounts of these meetings were confused and lacked details of attendees, places and times. However, as time went on and she continued to be tortured and interrogated, it is possible to see the formation of a narrative with well-defined, detailed descriptions of each meeting she supposedly attended. This phenomenon is not confined to Sampson, as the development of a story through multiple examinations is common to all of the North Berwick witches.¹²⁹ In the case of

¹²² Tyson, p. 23.

¹²³ Normand, Roberts, p. 207.

¹²⁴ Tyson, p. 24.

¹²⁵ Normand, Roberts, p. 129.

¹²⁶ Normand, Roberts, p. 129.

¹²⁷ Paterson, p. 337.

¹²⁸ Normand, Roberts, p. 210.

¹²⁹ Paterson, p. 337.

Sampson, torture made her confess to a number of different crimes, ranging from healing practices, to love spells and even divination; until it got to a point where even the sovereign was starting to doubt the truthfulness of her statements. Though official documents make no mention of a private conversation between the accused and the Monarch, the contemporary pamphlet *Newes From Scotland*, thanks to which we have much information about these trials, reports as follows:¹³⁰

Taking his Majestie a little aside, she declared unto him the verie wordes which passed between the King's Majestie and his Queene at Upslo in Norway, the first night of mariage, with the answers ech to other; whereat the King's Majestie wondered greatly, and swore by the living God that he believed all the devils in hell could not have discovered the same, acknowledging her words to be most true.¹³¹

The King's focus, while interrogating Sampson, was not only to determine her part in the conspiracy against him, but it was also to establish a connection between her, Barbara Napier and Euphame McCalzean. Agnes does in fact confess to having been asked for help by Barbara Napier (consulting with witches was a crime in and of itself) and she also implicitly incriminates Euphame McCalzean in her last confession, claiming that she was asked to make a wax image of McCalzean's father-in-law.¹³²

Agnes Sampson was found guilty of 53 charges of witchcraft.¹³³ For the most part, the charges include plausible practices of healing and divination.¹³⁴ Being a witch by profession, she was also the one who provided much of the information regarding magical practices used during the sabbaths and what she did not know was filled in by the Monarch's knowledge of continental demonology.¹³⁵ Through a series of examinations, the application of torture and humiliation through the shaving of her head and the pricking of every mark on her body, Agnes Sampson was transformed from a simple cunning woman to the Devil's right hand in the conspiracy against the King. She was executed on 28

¹³⁰ Roughead, p. 168.

¹³¹ Tyson, p. 194.

¹³² Normand, Roberts, p. 210.

¹³³ Roughead, p. 177.

¹³⁴ Tyson, p. 24.

¹³⁵ Tyson, p. 25.

January 1591¹³⁶ after only having been convicted the day before and, even after her death, her name was repeated time and time again in depositions and court documents.¹³⁷

Another protagonist of the North Berwick witchcraft trials was John Fian, also known as Doctor Fian. He was a schoolmaster in Prestonpans who did not seem to know anything about magic, nevertheless his having an education was enough to draw suspicion upon him.¹³⁸ His dittay (“the indictment against an accused person”)¹³⁹ is dated 26 December 1590 and, together with the story contained in *Newes from Scotland*, it is the only source available to reconstruct his story.¹⁴⁰ Because of this, it can be hard to distinguish between what Fian actually confessed to, what the interrogators led him to confess and what is a romanticisation of his story for the purpose of the witchcraft narrative in *Newes from Scotland*.¹⁴¹ What the pamphlet did provide, however, was an account of the many tortures he had to endure. He was, for example, subjected to the use of boots (they “consisted of a pair of horizontal iron plates which tightened around the foot by means of a crank mechanism in order to lacerate the flesh and crush the bones of the foot”),¹⁴² after which he was brought in front of King James, as he appeared ready to confess his crimes. Not only did he confess to attending the witches’ treasonable sabbaths, but he also painted himself as the Devil’s secretary, whose job was to neatly register all the witches that had sworn their oaths to Lucifer.¹⁴³ According to *Newes from Scotland*, the King also had the privilege of witnessing Fian’s powers: it was said that the Doctor had bewitched a young man, his rival in obtaining the love of a woman. He was brought to the Monarch and, as Fian had predicted based on his spell, the young man “fell into a lunacy and madness, and so continued

¹³⁶ Normand, Roberts, p. 103.

¹³⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 132.

¹³⁸ Tyson, p. 27.

¹³⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 203.

¹⁴⁰ Normand, Roberts, p. 105.

¹⁴¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 106.

¹⁴² “The Boot Torture” <https://www.lordsandladies.org/the-boot-torture.htm> (accessed 6 July 2024)

¹⁴³ Roughead, p. 171.

one whole hour together”¹⁴⁴ and when he came back to himself he could not remember anything that had happened. Another interesting anecdote is provided in the pamphlet: Doctor Fian asked the woman’s brother to provide him with “three hairs of his sister's privates” (p. 198) in order to cast a love spell. The boy, however, was stopped by his mother who made him give Fian three hairs from the udder of a heifer. The cow fell madly in love with the Doctor, following him everywhere he went.¹⁴⁵ Though it is sometimes hard to distinguish between fact and fiction, stories such as these were in all likelihood meant to create an aura of sensationalism and show the power with which the King brought these sorcerers to confess, more than tell a believable story.

After confessing, John Fian was locked again in his cell for the night, a night during which he claimed to have received a visit by his dark master, whom he repudiated.¹⁴⁶ From episodes such as this, as also from his description of his role within the sabbath and the way in which the Devil first appeared to him, promising riches and happiness, it is possible to see the close and familiar relationship between master and servant, something that was not common to all the witches of North Berwick.¹⁴⁷ After having declared himself reformed and free from his servitude to the Devil, John Fian managed to escape imprisonment and fled back to his hometown of Saltpans, where he was swiftly recaptured.¹⁴⁸ It was theorised that Fian’s escape was aided by Bothwell, who would have benefitted from his disappearance: under torture Fian signed a confession implicating the Earl in the plot against the King.¹⁴⁹ He was again savagely tortured under direct order of the King, but continued to deny everything he had said before, claiming his confession was nothing but a desperate attempt

¹⁴⁴ Carmichael, James, “Newes from Scotland” in Tyson, Donald, ed., *The Demonology of King James I: Includes the Original Text of Daemonologie and News from Scotland*, Woodbury: Llewellyn, 2012, p. 197. This is the edition I used throughout.

¹⁴⁵ Roughead, p. 173.

¹⁴⁶ Roughead, p. 173.

¹⁴⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 206.

¹⁴⁸ Tyson, p. 18.

¹⁴⁹ Murray, p. 320.

to escape torture.¹⁵⁰ He was convicted of treasonable sorcery 26 December 1590, but he was only executed a month later.¹⁵¹

The story of Doctor Fian was not the only one featured in *Newes from Scotland*, but it is curious to see the importance that it was given. In fact, the school teacher did not seem to have any ties to the whole conspiracy affair before confessing so under torture and it is probable that he was merely an easy target, someone who had many ties inside the community and, allegedly, even more ties to the women therein.¹⁵²

These first three accused were all common folk, but the three remaining (Barbara Napier, Euphame McCalzean and the Earl of Bothwell) were all of higher standing. About the life of Barbara Napier not much is known. Her charges differed from the ones we have previously discussed, in that she was only found guilty of consulting with a known witch (Agnes Sampson) by the assize on 8 May 1591, which was an offence punishable by death under the Scottish Witchcraft Act of 1563.¹⁵³ Many attempts were made to incriminate her in the conventions of North Berwick on Halloween and the one in Acheson's Haven on Lammas Eve,¹⁵⁴ and also to use her as a bridge between these treasonable encounters and the Earl of Bothwell,¹⁵⁵ but she was acquitted of these charges because the assize believed that not enough evidence had been brought forward.¹⁵⁶ It is also worth noting that Barbara Napier was able to afford the help of a prolocutor, five of them in fact.¹⁵⁷ Notwithstanding the fact that the jury had found her guilty of consulting with witches, no death sentence was passed, as it was an unprecedented punishment for such an offence.¹⁵⁸ King James did not accept the jury's verdict, especially considering the fact that many of the people who formed said jury were employed by him

¹⁵⁰ Roughead, p. 174.

¹⁵¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 103.

¹⁵² Tyson, p. 27.

¹⁵³ Normand, Roberts, p. 211.

¹⁵⁴ Tyson, p. 19.

¹⁵⁵ Normand, Roberts, p. 211.

¹⁵⁶ Tyson, p. 19.

¹⁵⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 211.

¹⁵⁸ Larner, p. 81.

and therefore were supposed to be loyal to him and his wishes.¹⁵⁹ James then decided to take matters into his own hands and initiated legal proceedings against the members of the assize. This action was quick to change hearts among the people who formed Napier's assize, so much so that her execution was set for 11 May 1591. She avoided the stake on account of her claim to be pregnant, and there is no material proof indicating that she was ever executed.¹⁶⁰

Somewhat similar to the story of Barbara Napier is that of Euphame McCalzean. She too was a member of high society, being the only daughter of Lord Cliftonhall. The charges against her are more varied than those against Barbara Napier, in fact, her indictment depicts her as a full-fledged witch who tried to poison her husband and killed her nephew by marriage.¹⁶¹ Finally, she was also accused and later convicted of treasonable sorcery, since several witnesses placed her at the conventions at North Berwick Kirk, Acheson's Haven and two other sabbaths, during which the intent was to damage the King's plans to marry.¹⁶² Euphame's trial was held 9 June 1591 and her case was defended by six prolocutors (some of which were the same as in Barbara Napier's trial), but to no avail.¹⁶³ She was convicted 12 June 1591 and executed on the 24th,¹⁶⁴ the punishment reserved for her was most severe: she was sent to the stake to be burned alive. None of the other North Berwick witches had to suffer the same fate, as they had already been strangled when they were burned.¹⁶⁵ A document summarising the charges against her has survived, as shown in Figure 2.¹⁶⁶

¹⁵⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 211.

¹⁶⁰ Tyson, p. 19.

¹⁶¹ Roughead, p. 182.

¹⁶² Normand, Roberts, p. 218.

¹⁶³ Roughead, p. 182.

¹⁶⁴ Normand, Roberts, p. 220.

¹⁶⁵ Roughead, p. 183.

¹⁶⁶ "The National Archives" <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/early-modern-witch-trials/witches-accused-of-treason/> (accessed 15 May 2024)

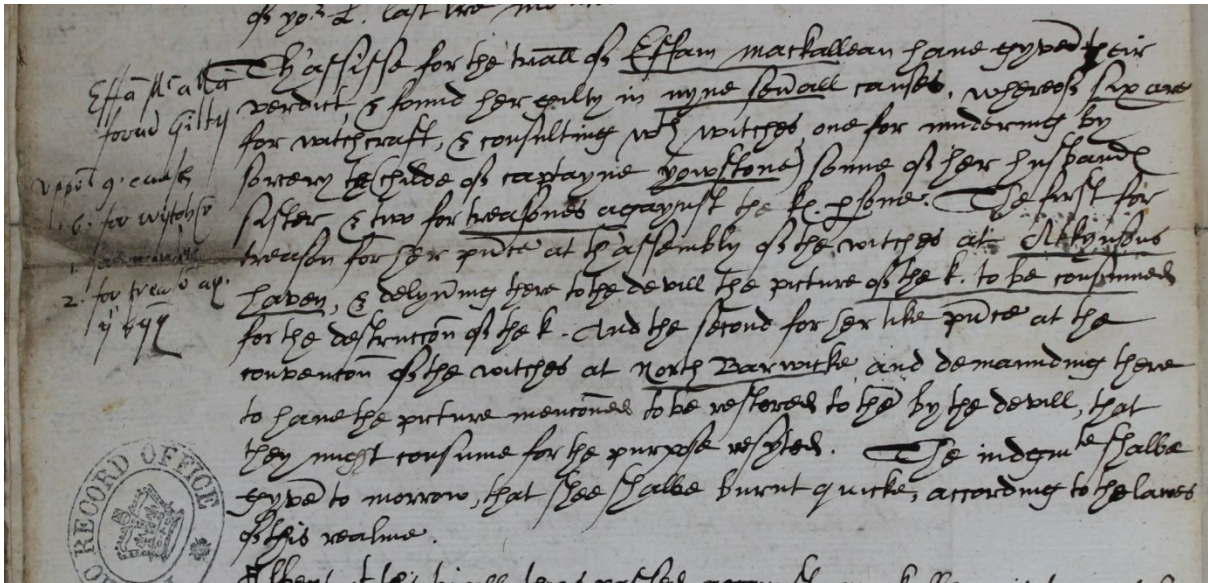


Figure 2

Transcript of Figure 2:

The Assize [a court where witches were tried] for the trial of Effam Mackallean have given their verdict, and found her guilty in nine several causes, whereof six are for witchcraft and consulting with witches, one for murdering by sorcery (the child of Captain Yowstone, son of her husband's sister) and two for treasons against the King's person. The first for treason for her presence at the assembly of the witches at Atkynson's Haven, and delivering there to the devil the picture of the King to be consumed for the destruction of the King. And the second for her like presence at the convention of the witches at North Barwicke, and demanding there to have the picture mentioned to be restored to them by the devil, that they might consume for the purpose recited. The judgment shall be given tomorrow, that she shall be burnt quick, according to the laws of this realm¹⁶⁷

The reasons behind Euphame McCalzean's involvement seem to be mainly political. Her position within Scottish society meant that she was likely acquainted with the Earl of Bothwell. She was believed to be one of his supporters,¹⁶⁸ but no damning evidence to support the theory of them conspiring together was ever presented.¹⁶⁹ However, over the course of her examinations and trial it is clear that there is an attempt to associate her to a very specific stereotype of woman linked to witchcraft: the unruly wife.¹⁷⁰ This was an attitude so grave that her jury, having established her character, had no trouble believing her capable of treason against the King.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁷ "The National Archives" <https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/early-modern-witch-trials/witches-accused-of-treason/> (accessed 15 May 2024)

¹⁶⁸ Roughead, p. 182.

¹⁶⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 220.

¹⁷⁰ Normand, Roberts, p. 218.

¹⁷¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 219.

Francis Stewart, 5th Earl of Bothwell was a distant relative of James VI and a political threat. He was the successor to an illegitimate son of James V of Scotland, who was King James VI's grandfather. The Pope, however, legitimised all the children of James V. Therefore, had James VI died without an heir, Francis Stewart would have had a legitimate claim to the throne.¹⁷² It is clear that the King was convinced of Bothwell's scheming, seeing that he spent the better part of three years trying to implicate him in the North Berwick affair, seriously starting in May 1591. A month later, the King issued a proclamation against Bothwell.¹⁷³ The majority of accusations against Francis Stewart came from Agnes Sampson who, when her words were used to implicate him, was already dead.¹⁷⁴ She had confessed that the bewitched wax image to destroy the King was created under order of the Earl of Bothwell.¹⁷⁵ The four protagonists of North Berwick, however, were not the only ones whose confessions were twisted to involve the Earl. Towards the end of 1590 a certain Richard Graham was arrested. The charges against him were not supported by evidence, in that the few magic tricks that he knew were not nearly at the same level as those attributed to the other accused in the trial. What he was guilty of, was being a courtier of Bothwell.¹⁷⁶ Under threat of torture, Graham was coerced into providing false information that would cause Stewart to be put to trial. It was alleged that Bothwell was not only part of the conspiracy, but that he was the head of the coven of sorcerers who would meet at North Berwick Kirk with treasonable intentions, thus implying that the Devil in everyone else's confessions was actually Bothwell wearing a costume.¹⁷⁷ The Earl was finally tried for treasonable sorcery on 10 August 1593.¹⁷⁸ During his trial, several of Richard Graham's acquaintances and his own brother attested that his testimony had been extorted with the threat (and,

¹⁷² Murray, p. 318.

¹⁷³ Tyson, p. 20.

¹⁷⁴ Normand, Roberts, p. 131.

¹⁷⁵ Murray, p. 318.

¹⁷⁶ Tyson, p. 26.

¹⁷⁷ Tyson, p. 14.

¹⁷⁸ Normand, Roberts, p. 221.

realistically, also the use) of force.¹⁷⁹ Therefore, despite the King's best efforts, Bothwell was acquitted and cast out of Scotland.¹⁸⁰ He died some years later in poverty, in the city of Naples.¹⁸¹

The use of witchcraft trials as a means to dispose of a political enemy was not a novelty, therefore the attempts to implicate Bothwell, however extreme, were not surprising. What was unconventional, however, was the character of the other protagonists of these trials:¹⁸² Geillis Duncan was only a servant who had committed minor infractions, so the fury shown towards her appears out of place. Agnes Sampson, perhaps the most plausible witch of the bunch, had the reputation of a sorcerer, but not the stereotypical posture of one. She had enough experience to know how to handle herself and was not so easily flustered by the questioners' inquiries (that is until torture came into play). John Fian was a schoolmaster with no apparent interest in the magical arts and who, with his last breath, denied everything he had confessed under torture when faced with the inevitability of his death. Finally, Barbara Napier and Euphame McCalzean were women of higher standing in society and with considerable resources, which could not have made it easy for the King to convict them.

2.3. *News from Scotland: a Contemporary Account of Events*

From the time of the North Berwick witch trials not many legal documents have survived, thus making it difficult to reconstruct the events of this period. And even when official records are present, they are often more representative of the way in which the trials were supposed to be perceived, than of the actual facts. It is therefore through secondary channels, such as contemporary pamphlets or even an exchange of letters, that much of the underlying information is to be found.

Newes from Scotland is a pamphlet that was published in London in late 1591, while the North Berwick witch trials were not yet over. It presents a contemporary account of the trials and it is, to

¹⁷⁹ Tyson, p. 27.

¹⁸⁰ Tyson, p. 20.

¹⁸¹ Murray, p. 321.

¹⁸² Murray, p. 313.

this day, a very important source of information regarding the whole affair, though it is coloured by its political aim.¹⁸³ Its most probable author was James Carmichael, Minister of Haddington (1543-1628).¹⁸⁴

The published pamphlet cited a Scottish copy on which the text we read today was supposedly based, but it is not clear in which form this supposed Scottish text can be found or if it was even ever published at a local level. Orthographic and narrative evidence within the text seems to suggest the people of England as its intended audience, further supporting the hypothesis that a Scottish version never came into reality.¹⁸⁵

News from Scotland was written using official records of the trials, in particular using records of examinations that preceded the trials. James Carmichael himself, some years later in a letter, stated to have been present at the witches' examinations, thus seemingly confirming himself as plausible author of the pamphlet and also giving us an insight as to what type of materials went into the composition of the text.¹⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the stories we now find in *Newes* did not go directly from the witches' mouth to Carmichael's pen, but there were layers of mediation in between: the examined, the scribes who had to record confessions in a way that would be acceptable to present in court, the author of the pamphlet and, finally, the English publisher.¹⁸⁷ Of course, however, *Newes from Scotland* had an element of fiction, although its author claimed to "have undertaken to publish this short treatise, which declares the true discourse of all that has happened" (p. 187).

Not only did the pamphlet play on the elite's knowledge of the works on demonology, making its tales more convincing to the public, but it also focused on painting the King's image as grand discoverer and fighter of witches and their evil master.¹⁸⁸ It was meant to show that the Monarch's efforts were what was needed to defeat the coven of witches, given his power not only in his kingdom,

¹⁸³ Normand, Roberts, p. 290.

¹⁸⁴ Normand, Roberts, p. 292.

¹⁸⁵ Larner, p. 84.

¹⁸⁶ Normand, Roberts, p. 294.

¹⁸⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 295.

¹⁸⁸ Paterson, p. 376.

but also on a spiritual level.¹⁸⁹ Another signal of the pamphlet's reverential aspect was the absence of the story and trial of the Earl of Bothwell. Such a direct reference to a political threat would have compromised the narrative of the King as destroyer of witches and Satan by giving a clear signal of the trials' real nature, which was mainly a political one. Instead, the pamphlet focuses on the Devil as the greatest danger, who recruited a great number of witches to destroy the King,¹⁹⁰ as he was "the greatest enemy he hath in the world" (p. 194).

As previously stated, torture was widely used during examinations, in witchcraft trials especially. However, if our research were to be based solely on official documents, torture would not seem to be part of the process. There is in fact no official record of it. This is another aspect that is contrastively interesting about *Newes from Scotland*: while official sources did not even mention this practice, the pamphlet put emphasis on the amount of torture that was necessary to extract a confession from the witches of North Berwick, and even gave a detailed account of the type of instruments used on each victim that was mentioned.¹⁹¹ Writing about brutal torture may seem a way to entice the reader, but it was not actually the only objective. Torture was the weapon through which the witch's will was broken and the supposed truth about their plots to destroy the King discovered, being therefore significant from the point of view of power. Since, especially in the case of Doctor Fian, torture was ordered directly by James, it was easy to see how torture could be a symbol for the King's ability to fight against the dark powers of witchcraft.¹⁹²

The propagandistic nature of *Newes from Scotland* is well established, but that does not necessarily mean that it is worthless from the point of view of historical information. The political aspect is simply a lens through which it can be read. Every element of fiction, however irrelevant for

¹⁸⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 301.

¹⁹⁰ Normand, Roberts, p. 306.

¹⁹¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 302.

¹⁹² Fischlin, Daniel, "Counterfeiting God: James VI (I) and the Politics of "Daemonologie" (1597)", *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 26, 1 (1996), pp. 17-18.

factual accuracy, deepens our understanding of the élite's ideas about witchcraft and their impact on the persecution of people accused of witchcraft.

Chapter 3. King James I and his *Daemonologie*

3.1. *Daemonologie*: Context and Sources

Daemonologie could seem a treatise on witchcraft like the ones that had appeared before, but the fact that it was written by a monarch meant that it was supposed to be read on multiple different levels: a more immediate one, concerning the practices of witches and the powers of the Devil against people; and also another level through which James exposed his idea of ideal kingship. This section will focus on the first dimension, by analysing the context in which the work was created and the sources used to defend the King's arguments in his treatise.

Daemonologie was published in Edinburgh in 1597. It is a treatise on witchcraft divided into three books, for a total of approximately eighty pages.¹⁹³ Along with the published version of the treatise, we also have two manuscripts, supposedly written between 1590 and 1591 and modified in the years before publishing: MS Bodley 165 only contains fragments of the work, whereas MS Folger 185 is a scribal copy of the work with corrections hand-written by the King; which makes this manuscript extremely useful in providing insight into the work's development before being published.¹⁹⁴ *Daemonologie* was one of the few works of its kind that was written in Scots and later anglicised before publishing. A few years later, it was also translated into French, Dutch and Latin. Its impact, however, did not rely on its contents or original language, but on its author: King James VI of Scotland.¹⁹⁵ James' education was outstanding. He was able to master a number of disciplines, amongst which were the principles of rhetoric (a skill that he used extensively throughout his reign). He also believed in the threat the Devil posed and lived in fear of the potential effects of witchcraft. Although the fact that he wrote a demonological treatise might lead us to think that this belief was especially present in him, it is important to realise that, at that time, it was common throughout all

¹⁹³ Clark, Stuart, "King James's *Daemonologie*: Witchcraft and Kingship", in Anglo, Sydney, ed., *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, p. 156.

¹⁹⁴ Rickard, Jane, *Authorship and Authority: the Writings of King James I and VI*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007, p. 100.

¹⁹⁵ Clark, p. 156.

ranks of society.¹⁹⁶ What was significant in this context, as a matter of fact, was not the fact that he created a work on witchcraft, but the fact that he focused on two main aspects: the demonic pact and the sabbath.¹⁹⁷ It is reasonable to assume that he had acquired these notions during his stay at the Danish court, where he had remained for months before coming back to Scotland with his new bride and applying his new-found knowledge on witchcraft to the persecution of local suspected sorcerers.¹⁹⁸

His declared aim was to disprove those who doubted the existence of witchcraft and the threat of witches, however, as we will see, *Daemonologie* represents much more than a defence against the sceptics of its time.¹⁹⁹ The identity of the sceptics in question is clearly stated in the preface of the work, and they are Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot. Although the specificity of its targets might point towards a direct attack on these two people in particular, an author justifying the creation of his work by citing those who oppose his views was a typical feature of works on demonology.²⁰⁰ Additionally, if his intention was indeed to insert himself in the international debate on witchcraft, his treatise would have been written in Latin, but it was instead written in Scots. This suggests that his aim was more localised, and he wanted to focus on people around him who might have doubted the reality of the supposed conspiracies to kill the King operated by the North Berwick witches and guided by the Devil himself.²⁰¹ The choice of Scots might have seemed like one that would allow him to reach the general reading-public, but that was not the case. He also used a number of Latin phrases throughout his work, which would have required a certain level of education in order to be understood and pointed to the fact that the most probable target audience for *Daemonologie* was the nobility of

¹⁹⁶ Maxwell-Stuart, P.G., “A Royal Witch Theorist: James VI’s *Daemonologie*”, in Machielsen, Jan, ed., *The Science of Demons: Early Modern Authors Facing Witchcraft and the Devil*, London: Routledge, 2020, p. 165.

¹⁹⁷ Clark, p. 157.

¹⁹⁸ Larner, Christina, “James VI and Witchcraft”, in Smith, Alan G.R., ed., *The Reign of James VI and I*, London: Macmillan, 1973, p. 80.

¹⁹⁹ Clark, 156.

²⁰⁰ Normand, Lawrence, Roberts, Gareth, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James’ VI’s Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, p. 332.

²⁰¹ Maxwell-Stuart, p. 168.

Scotland.²⁰² The subsequent anglicisation of the work widened its horizons, most probably to include the nobility of England given James' ascent to their throne just a few years later.

Daemonologie was written in the form of a dialogue between Philomates ('lover of knowledge') and Epistemon ('knowledgeable'). Epistemon is the master, the one who is knowledgeable about witchcraft and everything that surrounds it, while Philomates represents the one who needs to be educated, and also serves the purpose of presenting the main counterpoints to the demonological theory of the time, so that his master could disprove the opposing arguments.²⁰³ Just as Epistemon instructs Philomates, so James wished to instruct his readers. In addition to its didactic function, the dialogue form was also often used in matters that could be considered controversial, like witchcraft in this case. If the function of the two speakers was not yet clear enough, a fragment of the manuscript of *Daemonologie* MS Bodley 165 shows how the names of the two speakers were almost an afterthought on the part of the monarch, with the back and forth of doubt and information simply being indicated by 'Q[uestion]' and 'A[nswer]'.²⁰⁴ The dialogue also served another purpose: it allowed James to paint himself (through the figure of Epistemon) as a fundamental source of knowledge, whose protection and wisdom his subjects needed. Not only did it provide an insight as to how the King saw himself and his role within the realm, but it also showed how he wanted to be regarded. Philomates is, in fact, the representation of an ideal listener, of how graciously such lessons are supposed to be received.²⁰⁵ The exchanges between master and student, however, also seemed to reveal a contradiction within the monarch's idea of kingship: the careful elaboration of the text revealed the very precise way in which the King wanted to be perceived. As we will later see in more detail, this attempt to shape his subjects' perception of him and subsequently obtain their support did not seem to agree with his idea of being God's anointed and needing the approval of no one, because

²⁰² Maxwell-Stuart, p. 169.

²⁰³ Clark, p. 157.

²⁰⁴ Normand, Roberts, p. 333.

²⁰⁵ Rickard, p. 105.

his rule of the Kingdom was bestowed upon him by a higher power.²⁰⁶ Based on an analysis of MS Folger 185, in fact, it is evident that the King was not unshakably confident of his power, and tried to create an airtight justification of his rule and his worthiness as a monarch. This is shown by the numerous corrections, revisions and even changing of the materials prior to the publication of his work. The fact that most of these changes involved minor speech improvements showed just how much he concerned himself with form and expression, which had to be perfectly calibrated given the importance and potential impact of their royal author. Other changes were also made, suggesting that the King had come into contact with additional information (either from further readings or from his experience examining the witches of North Berwick).²⁰⁷ While incorporating knowledge from his personal experience, however, he also made sure to use it in a way that would allow all readers to be included in the conversation, and not just those who were acquainted with the trials that had taken place shortly before. Furthermore, MS Folger 185 shows proof that the text underwent a process of anglicisation, which was probably due to the King wanting to make the work accessible to an even wider audience and thus affirming himself once again as an accomplished and relevant author.²⁰⁸

The materials that form *Daemonologie* were expected: they were part of a shared set of beliefs and theories that could be found in any work on demonology and they were used to reach conclusions that could be considered conventional. For example, Epistemon's explanations of the different types of spirits, the powers of witches and differences therein came from demonological commonplaces.²⁰⁹ These conventional materials, however, were put to use in a very personal manner because, unlike other authors who had drawn the same conclusions as James, the author of *Daemonologie* was simultaneously reflecting on his own experience in these matters.²¹⁰ The sources for the King's work were once again, for the most part, typical for a treatise on witchcraft. They included the works of

²⁰⁶ Rickard, p. 106.

²⁰⁷ Rickard, p. 101.

²⁰⁸ Rickard, p. 102.

²⁰⁹ Clark, p. 169.

²¹⁰ Maxwell-Stuart, p. 167.

contemporary authors, ancient authorities, the Scriptures and also some material from the North Berwick witch trials.²¹¹ The author whose views were perhaps the closest to the King's was Jean Bodin (1529-1596). His work *De la Démonomanie des Sorciers* (1580) is even cited in the Preface of *Daemonologie* as a great source of materials on the practices of witchcraft (although not as complete as King James').²¹² Another plausible influence came from Lambert Daneau (c. 1530-1590), a French Calvinist theologian who, in his work *A Dialogue of Witches, in Foretime Named Lot-tellers and Now Commonly Called Sorcerers* (1575), referred to witches as being traitors to the power of God, a concept that James later applied to the accused of the North Berwick trials.²¹³ Interestingly enough, an additional contemporary author from whom he drew information was Reginald Scot, the same Reginald Scot whose opinions he was actively trying to disprove.²¹⁴ Other literary references included the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1487) by Heinrich Kramer (1430-1505) and the works of Cornelius Agrippa (1486-1535).²¹⁵ Of course, parts of *Daemonologie* were connected to James' personal experiences during the trials, especially in regards to the apparitions of the Devil to his servants and the meetings the supposed witches would attend. Contrary to what one might think, however, the examinations of people accused of witchcraft were not at the centre of the work, nor were they used as ultimate proof of the existence of these dark arts. This function was reserved for the Bible, which was presented as the utmost authority when it came to confirming the threat that witchcraft posed.²¹⁶ At the beginning of each of the three Books that form *Daemonologie*, the Scriptures are cited as an infallible source which, even when challenged by Philomates, still remain undefeated.²¹⁷

²¹¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 334.

²¹² Geller, Allegra, "Daemonologie and Divine Right: The Politics of Witchcraft in Late Sixteenth-Century Scotland", Master's Thesis, University of Texas, 2013, p. 52.

²¹³ Geller, pp. 56-57.

²¹⁴ Normand, Roberts, p. 330.

²¹⁵ Geller, p. 59

²¹⁶ Normand, Roberts, p. 329.

²¹⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 335.

The context in which *Daemonologie* was born was simultaneously very common and completely new. If we were to consider its subject or its sources there would not be anything worth noting, because it was common to virtually every other work on demonology. However, the fact that it was written not only by a monarch, but one who had had personal experiences in dealing with such matters makes *Daemonologie* one of a kind and opens up a number of possibilities when it comes to its interpretation. As we will see, in fact, this work can be read from different points of views, depending on what we suppose its principal aim should be.

3.2. The Contents of *Daemonologie* and its References to the North Berwick Witch Trials

As previously stated, *Daemonologie* is divided into three books. The first two books consist of seven chapters, while the third one only has six. Each chapter is introduced by an *Argument* that has the function of briefly explaining what the chapter discusses. The contents of each book will be concisely illustrated, focusing on precise passages to be considered relevant based on the fact that they represent the different features of the book that have been discussed earlier or in light of their references to the trials of North Berwick.

Book I is used to explain what entices a person to enter a pact with the Devil, with emphasis on the distinction between magicians (who use the Devil) and witches (who are used by him); it discusses the differences between astrology and astronomy and, finally, declares all magic unlawful and prescribes the death penalty for magicians. One of the most important passages in the entire book can be found in the first chapter, where Epistemon sets out to prove the existence of witchcraft by citing 1 Samuel 28, the biblical story of the visits of King Saul to a woman who is believed to be a necromancer in Endor. Supposedly, she raises the spirit of Samuel, who foretells the King's future.²¹⁸ Philomates and Epistemon reason on the different interpretations that this episode could be given and what is perhaps most interesting is Philomates' take on this passage: he insists on Saul's altered state

²¹⁸ Damsma, Alinda, "Another Royal Encounter of the Woman of Endor: 1 Samuel 28 as a Proof Text in King James VI's *Daemonologie*", *Hebrew Studies*, 62 (2021), p. 162.

of mind which is clearly mentioned and, combined with the fact that he is in another room while the necromancer is supposedly creating her spell, Epistemon states that the apparition Saul sees of the spirit of Samuel is all an illusion. This conclusion is based on the argument that God would never allow the spirit of Samuel to be raised by a necromancer, a corrupted woman serving the Devil and, most importantly, he would not suffer his prophets to be deceived by Satan. And it cannot be Satan either, because it was made impossible for him by God to predict future outcomes.²¹⁹ Philomates' opinion is not so relevant in terms of the contents themselves, but rather where they come from: the works of the sceptic Reginald Scot. The author uses his opponent's exact view and explanation of a typical witchcraft argument in order to prove his point, which goes to show how circular the nature of witchcraft proof and/or refutation was. Different authors constantly draw information from the works of one another, either to reinforce their theory by drawing authority from a multitude of voices before them who stated the same, or, as in the case of James, to create contrast between an opposing statement and the righteousness of their own.²²⁰ Once doubt is inserted into the conversation, Epistemon's response is quick to arrive: he agrees on the interpretation of the story that puts King Saul in another room at the time the conjuration is taking place, a detail that is not part of the orthodox interpretation of the passage, but that is part of Scot's theory.²²¹ What Epistemon does, however, is give his own explanation as to why, which is that witches do not allow any person to witness their practices take place. He then concludes by explaining how the woman of Endor does in fact raise a spirit, but it is not that of Samuel. It is an 'unclean spirit',²²² the work of the Devil who, while he cannot deceive men of God, can deceive people who have disobeyed the Lord and sought answers in the dark arts. The Devil's foretelling of King Saul's destiny, moreover, is nothing but a supposition based on his knowledge. Even a brief analysis of this passage can show the care James takes in

²¹⁹ Damsma, p. 165.

²²⁰ Rickard, p. 107.

²²¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 336.

²²² King James I, *Daemonologie*, in Tyson, Donald, ed., *The Demonology of King James I: Includes the Original Text of Daemonologie and News from Scotland*, Woodbury: Llewellyn, 2012, p. 57. This is the edition I used throughout.

dissecting the story and, piece by piece, re-assembling it to fit his own narrative and theories about witchcraft.

Apart from scriptural evidence of witchcraft, another focal point of the first book of *Daemonologie* also includes the difference between a magician and a witch. The clear differentiation is not as strongly highlighted by other contemporary authors, but King James seems to have been very keen on the distinction. The reason behind this can supposedly be found in the North Berwick affair, particularly in the proceedings taken against the Earl of Bothwell and his servant Richard Graham.²²³ Bothwell represented a political threat to James, in that he had a legitimate claim to the throne.²²⁴ Graham was manipulated to try and implicate the Earl in the North Berwick conspiracy and he was painted as a magician ready to use his magic spells to serve the Earl.²²⁵ The position of the servant recalls the role given to magicians in *Daemonologie*: magicians are described as figures who also often acquire a higher standing within court thanks to their magic practices: “Upon custom we see that diverse Christian princes and magistrates, severe punishers of witches, will not only overlook magicians living within their dominions, but even sometimes delight to see them prove some of their practices” (p. 99). This is probably in reference to Graham, although court proceedings involving him showed that, even if he were in fact a magician, he was not skilled enough and did not possess the knowledge that would have made him a threat to the realm.²²⁶ The author of *Daemonologie*, however, is also possibly referring to the Earl of Bothwell himself, and not just his servant: during the North Berwick trials, the King’s efforts to implicate Bothwell revolved around the fact that he was a political threat, which translated to the Earl being accused not only of taking part in the conspiracy against the King, but of being its leader. Therefore, the magicians who are the “maisters and commanders” (p. 68) that James writes about in his treatise can be interpreted as the Earl of Bothwell. Further evidence

²²³ Maxwell-Stuart, p. 170.

²²⁴ Murray, M.A., “The 'Devil' of North Berwick”, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 15, 60 (1918), p. 318.

²²⁵ Tyson, Donald, *The Demonology of King James I: Includes the Original Text of Daemonologie and News from Scotland*, Woodbury: Llewellyn, 2012, p. 26.

²²⁶ Tyson, p. 26.

of the supposed hierarchy that places magicians on a higher level, with more power than witches (since one was a commander, the other a mere servant) is to be found in the devil's mark, or lack thereof. Magicians were in fact not subjected to the practice of pricking, because the mark the devil would leave on them was said to be invisible.²²⁷ The other accused at the trial (though not all, and it is difficult to speak for everyone due to the lack of surviving records), most notably Agnes Sampson, were pricked in search of the mark, which was apparently found and confirmed their corrupted soul. The witches of North Berwick were therefore believed to be servants of the Devil or, in this case, the servants of one of his commanders embodied by the Earl of Bothwell.

References to the North Berwick trials were not only used in a way that would convince the public of the King's theories, but we can also find instances in which they provide information on different matters. In the first book, an example of this can be found in the sixth chapter, although it is not technically something that came directly from trial examinations or depositions. It is related to a story that can only be found in the pamphlet *Newes from Scotland*, that is the story of Agnes Sampson taking the monarch to the side while he was examining her and repeating the words the King and his consort had said to each other on their wedding night. The King writes that the Devil could help those faithful to him by "reveal[ing] to them the secrets of any persons" (p. 91). With no record of such a thing in surviving trial documents, it is probable that this episode was created as part of the propagandistic nature of the pamphlet. Nevertheless, the importance of the story is not its truthfulness, but the role it plays in giving the King credibility when it comes to theorising witchcraft.

Moving on to the second book of *Daemonologie*, the focus is moved from magicians to witches. Out of the three volumes, this second one seems to contain the most material drawn from examinations and depositions at the North Berwick witch trials.²²⁸ The very first chapter confirms so according to MS Folger 185: this chapter offers a defence against the argument of witches being melancholics, mentally ill people. Melancholy is often used as a counterargument against accusations

²²⁷ Tyson, p. 97.

²²⁸ Normand, Roberts, p. 328.

of witchcraft, but it does not exclude the existence of magical practices entirely. As in Weyer's theory, magicians are still a real threat that needs to be punished, whereas witches are victims of their contorted imagination. This distinction would have spared the life of simple folk accused of being sorcerers, however, the King's treatise allows no such distinction.²²⁹ His experience in the trials enabled him confirm the existence of people accused of being witches who were "rich and worldly wise, some of them fat or corpulent in their bodies, and most part of them altogether given over to the pleasures of the flesh, continual haunting of company, and all kinds of merriness, both lawful and unlawful, which are things directly contrary to the symptoms of melancholie" (p. 107). And, next to this remark, the Folger manuscript has the initials 'E M', 'R G' and 'B N' (Euphame MacCalzean, Richard Graham and Barbara Napier).²³⁰

The second chapter of book 2 proceeds with an explanation of the etymology of the word sorcery and, more importantly, it explains the process by which someone allegedly becomes involved with the Devil. Before providing a description of the Devil's meetings with his aspiring servants, James also points out that "it is to be noted now, that that old and crafty Enemy of ours assails none, though touched with any of these two extremes, except he first find an entrance ready for him, either by the great ignorance of the person he deals with, joined with an evil life, or else by their carelessness and contempt of God" (p. 112). This can have a double meaning: firstly, a reassurance that God would not allow a true, faithful man of God to be deceived and taken advantage of by the Devil and, secondly, it can be in reference to the central role of reputation and it would confirm that people of ill fame were, in fact, the ones the Devil chooses to become his servants. Once Satan finds someone who is already corrupted, the demonic pact is sanctioned and the witch receives his/her mark. As a concept, the pact came from continental witchcraft theory (to which the monarch had been exposed), but the contents in the treatise suggest an additional source of information. That would be the

²²⁹ Normand, Roberts, p. 345.

²³⁰ Normand, Roberts, p. 328.

confession of Agnes Sampson of December 1590, which then appeared as item 33 of her indictment:²³¹

(33) Item, file and convict that the first time she began to serve the Devil was after the death of her husband, and that he appeared to her in likeness of a man, who commanded her to acknowledge him as her master and to renounce Christ. Whereunto she granted, being moved by poverty and his promises that she and her bairns should be made rich, and should give her power to be revenged of her enemies. And after that he appointed time and place for their night meeting. And that time, in sign that she was become his servant, he marked her in the right knee, which mark she believed to have been a hurt received by her from one of her bairns that was lying in the bed with her; which hurt was not hail for half a year.²³²

Similarly, *Daemonologie* book 2 chapter 2 states:

And finding them in utter despair [...], he prepares the way by feeding them craftily in their humor, and filling them further and further with despair, until he finds the time proper to reveal himself unto them. At which time, either upon their walking solitary in the fields, or else lying brooding in their bed, but always without the company of any other, he either by a voice or in likeness of a man, inquires of them what troubles them; and promises them a sudden and certain way of remedy upon condition on the other part that they follow his advice, and do such things as he will require of them. Their minds being prepared beforehand, as I have already spoken, they easily agree unto that demand of his, and soon set another tryst where they may meet again. At which time, before he proceeds any further with them, he first persuades them to addict themselves to his service; which being easily obtained, he then reveals what he is unto them, makes them renounce their God and baptism directly, and gives them his mark upon some secret place of their body, which remains sore unhealed until his next meeting with them, and thereafter ever insensible, howsoever it be nipped or pricked in any way, as is daily proved; to give them a proof thereby, that as in that doing he could hurt and heal them, so all their ill and well doings thereafter must depend upon him. (p. 112)

After establishing their mode of initiation, the third chapter describes the witches' activities, the form of their conventions and how they worship their master (which will be discussed in depth in the following section). An interesting detail of this chapter would seem to be the statement that not everything the witches confessed to is to be taken as true. Epistemon explains that, although witches do not believe it to be a lie, their master clouds their senses and they can therefore not recall the truth. This is relevant when considering the procedures accused witches would have to endure during the examination process. There does not seem to be a point in official documents where doubt was cast on a confession. If anything, examiners subjected the accused to barbaric tortures to obtain even more information to be used as proof against them. This was true for major acts of sorcery (the sanctioning of the demonic pact or attending a sabbath), but also for more technical details, like how they would

²³¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 346.

²³² Normand, Roberts, p. 237.

get to their meeting. This is something that is discussed in the fourth chapter of the second book, where the materials appear to be recalling Doctor Fian's indictment. He was a schoolmaster in Prestonpans,²³³ who was accused of being part of the North Berwick conspiracy and attending the witches' sabbaths.²³⁴ Under intense torture, he stated that witches could travel to their meetings in spirit only, without the need to move their body. The same is said in *Daemonologie*.²³⁵

The following chapter discusses other abilities given to witches by the Devil and also briefly touches on the gender-based bias against women that permeated the witch hunt. This issue does not take up much space in *Daemonologie*, with Epistemon simply stating that witches are more often women than men because of the frailty of women. The dialogue then swiftly moves on to discuss the innumerable abilities of witches, with a list that resembles very closely the confessions of the witches of North Berwick:

To some others at these times he teaches how to make pictures of wax or clay, that by the roasting thereof, the persons that they bear the name of may be continually melted or dried away by continual sickness. To some he gives such stones or powders as will help to cure or cast on diseases. And to some he teaches kinds of uncouth poisons, which mediciners understand not (for he is far more cunning than man in the knowledge of all the occult properties of nature). (p. 128)

The roasting of wax or pictures as a means to harm a person was a common theme among the meetings that the North Berwick witches had admitted to under torture. It is actually surprising that this dialogue is not more focused on this practice, since, during the trials, it was portrayed as a direct attack against the King's person. The second sentence may be a reference to Euphame MacCalzean, who was accused of dwelling in such practices.²³⁶ The last one, although somewhat vague, could refer to Agnes Sampson and the many potions and natural remedies that she had knowledge of and that went from being simple, plant-based cures to being viewed as the Devil's work through her hands. Chapter five also mentions that:

²³³ Tyson, p. 27.

²³⁴ Roughead, William, "Scottish Witch Trials: the Witches of North Berwick", *Juridical Review*, 25 (1913), p. 171.

²³⁵ Normand, Roberts, p. 329.

²³⁶ Maxwell-Stuart, p. 175.

They can raise storms and tempests in the air, either upon sea or land, though not universally, but in such a particular place and prescribed bounds, as God will permit them so to trouble: which likewise is very easy to be discerned from any other natural tempests that are meteors, in respect of the sudden and violent raising thereof, together with the short enduring of the same. (p. 131)

The witches' power to raise a storm could not be missing from *Daemonologie*, since it is what started the whole North Berwick affair. Even though this belief was not limited to sixteenth-century Scotland and was therefore part of the wider catalogue of witchcraft theory, this brief passage probably wants to validate the King's experience and justify his using the storm that hindered his passage as an excuse to start witchcraft trials that stretched out for three years.²³⁷

Close to the recurrent themes of the trials is also the sixth chapter, with its analysis of the kinds of people who are more likely to be targeted by witches, the many shapes in which the Devil could appear and, most notably, the powers of a witch against her judge and examiners. This last point was not new in and of itself, nor was the monarch's conclusion that a good and conscientious magistrate would be protected from the witches' powers (which also diminish once she is arrested),²³⁸ because God would not allow them "to trouble or hinder so good a work" (p. 138). This theory would not only confirm James (or any other person who adopted it) as a powerful witch-hunter protected by God, but it would also serve as an explanation as to why these supposed powerful witches, who were accused of raising storms and meeting with the Devil himself, would not show any signs of their power during their imprisonment and trial. If that was not the case, one would assume that they were expected to flee prison or attack their captors and examiners. Once their weakened state is rendered clear by Epistemon, Philomates raises an interesting point:

Philomates: But will never their Master come to visit them, after they be once apprehended and put in confinement?

Epistemon:

That is according to the estate that these miserable wretches are in. For if they be obstinate in still denying, he will not spare, when he finds time to speak with them, either if he find them in any comfort, to fill them more and more with the vain hope of some manner of relief; or else if he find them in a deep despair, by all means to augment the same, and to persuade them by some extraordinary means to put themselves down, which very

²³⁷ Normand, Roberts, p. 88.

²³⁸ Normand, Roberts, p. 346.

commonly they do. But if they be penitent and confess, God will not permit him to trouble them any more with his presence and allurements. (p. 139)

An apparition by the Devil in prison recalls the story told in *Newes from Scotland*, where it was alleged that John Fian had that same experience.²³⁹ He confessed to it, while also saying that he had refused Satan and was freed from his sinful servitude to him. Notwithstanding his apparent change of heart, he was put to death. This passage from *Daemonologie* might help provide some insight (or a justification) as to why Fian was not spared. Epistemon, in fact, affirms that the Devil would not appear to someone who really confessed and repented. The very fact that Fian admitted to seeing his master was enough to confirm his guilt. Philomates and Epistemon also discuss the apparitions of the Devil in the last chapter of the second book. As opposed to the ones before, this seventh chapter is more theoretical and does not have any apparent references to the trials of North Berwick or James' experience personally fighting witchcraft. The author talks about people who are not witches being able to see the Devil, which is something very rare at that time, he says, but a lot more common before the Reformation. He argues that Catholicism caused people to commit a series of errors, which concealed the many apparitions of Satan. Now that they are freed from their past mistakes by the process of the Reformation, God protects them from such things happening.

The third book of *Daemonologie* continues on a more theoretical level. This is the book of spirits and does not have close connections to the trials of North Berwick. Five out of the six chapters of this book are concerned with different kinds of spirits, which are divided into those that haunt places, those that trouble people by following them, those that cause the possession of people and, finally, fairies.²⁴⁰ This last category of spirits is particularly relevant in Scotland, since (as we have seen in Chapter I) popular Scottish belief was filled with stories of fairies, with their monarchs and their own court.²⁴¹ Even before James introduced aspects of continental witchcraft theory into the country, stories of fairy encounters and pacts made with them were a very common theme during

²³⁹ Tyson, p. 298.

²⁴⁰ Maxwell-Stuart, p. 173.

²⁴¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 348.

witchcraft trials. These stories were not pervasive in the North Berwick trials, nevertheless the monarch felt it necessary to include them in his work, labelling such beliefs as part of the activities of witches and illusions created by the Devil himself.²⁴² Once Epistemon establishes all apparitions and dealings with spirits as evil, he and Philomates move on to the punishment of witches in the sixth and final chapter of the last book of *Daemonologie*. The master declares the death penalty necessary for this crime (which was the common conclusion), but on the basis of idolatry and not maleficium.²⁴³ The focus is therefore on the Devil, and his power to gather servants who adore him and serve him faithfully, servants who are then put to death for their misguided loyalties. The death penalty includes not just witches, but people who consult them for help as well, which was important for James to clarify given his history: during the North Berwick trials, he pushed to get the death penalty for Barbara Napier, who was only found guilty of consulting witches. Although death as a punishment for witchcraft was anything but revolutionary, it is interesting to see the way the author-King justified it in his book: letting a witch live would be treason against God, a sin comparable to witchcraft itself. Following this idea, the monarch had no choice but to condemn all those people during the trials. We can see how a seemingly banal conclusion (that witches were to be put to death) could be explained in a way that would also serve as a justification for the actions the King took during the witch-craze in Scotland. This need to justify his course of action goes beyond convictions and even regards trial proceedings. On the collection of evidence, the King states in his treatise:

Philomates:

And what may a number then of guilty persons' confessions work against one that is accused?

Epistemon:

The assize must serve for interpreter of our law in that respect. But in my opinion, since in a matter of treason against the prince, children or wives or never so defamed persons may of our law serve for sufficient witnesses and proofs, I think surely that by a far greater reason, such witnesses may be sufficient in matters of high treason against God. For who but witches can be proofs, and so witnesses, of the doings of witches? (p. 181)

²⁴² Maxwell-Stuart, p. 173.

²⁴³ Normand, Roberts, p. 349.

Once again, the conclusion that the confession of a witch is enough to incriminate another was not something new and it was, in fact, even supported in the *Malleus Maleficarum*. However, the reasons he gives for this reflect the situation in which he found himself not long before, where he believed his life to be threatened by the conspiracy of a group of witches. He does the same when writing about the use of torture, which Epistemon states was not only allowed, but encouraged (an opinion also found in Bodin's work).²⁴⁴ James draws on established witchcraft theory to justify his own actions during the trials.

The three books that form *Daemonologie* offer a comprehensive guide to the dangers of witchcraft. Although the materials are not original in any way and do not offer the reader any information that he could not find in another book on witchcraft, the way in which the materials are presented is highly personal.²⁴⁵ Not only is the King-author instructing his subjects by giving them information, but he is also painting himself as a survivor of the witches' conspiracy and their enemy, the one who is able to defeat them. Another side to this could be interpreted as the King also trying to justify his actions: he is confirming that, during the trials he was involved in, he acted in accordance with witchcraft theory and the word of the Scriptures.

3.3. Ulterior Aims within *Daemonologie*

Daemonologie remains relevant to this day for a number of reasons, and not all of them are connected to witchcraft theory or its ties to the North Berwick trials. In fact, its royal author intended, with this treatise, to create a legitimisation for himself²⁴⁶ by taking advantage of his peculiar experience in the witch trials and the air of sensationalism surrounding witchcraft theory during the decade of the witch-craze in Scotland.

²⁴⁴ Geller, p. 58.

²⁴⁵ Maxwell-Stuart, p. 174.

²⁴⁶ Clark, p. 174.

After much discussion about the aims of this book, its multifaceted nature becomes clear. In order to further analyse *Daemonologie* it is also relevant to see how this work was regarded after its publishing, specifically after James' ascent to the English throne in 1603. Among other things, this treatise also meant to escalate witchcraft persecutions in both Scotland and England.²⁴⁷ However, there were signs that the King let the impetus of the North Berwick trials dictate the measure of his efforts in creating a lasting impact in witch persecution: to counteract the effects of his previous efforts, in the same year that *Daemonologie* was published, he revoked the standing commissions in an effort to slow down the rate of trials and convictions. This only partially worked, as witchcraft ideology already pervaded the administrative, legal and religious layers who were in charge of persecuting accused sorcerers.²⁴⁸ This did not mean, however, that James had been reformed. He was still very much concerned with witchcraft and even ordered a new edition of his treatise to be published.²⁴⁹ Soon after he sat on the throne of England, he managed to introduce a new statute against witches, which was different from the previous one in one fundamental aspect: the Elizabethan statute of 1568 punished the effects of the crime of witchcraft (murder was punished by death, but, for example, bewitching someone without killing them would only cause the supposed witch to be imprisoned for a year), whereas James' statute focused on the practice of witchcraft. Since to be able to practise these dark arts one would have to have consulted and conspired with the Devil, any act of witchcraft was made punishable by death on the grounds of idolatry. The death penalty also included people on whom the Devil's mark was allegedly found.²⁵⁰ Notwithstanding these new and strengthened witchcraft laws, the persecution of witches under James' rule in England was not comparable to what had happened in Scotland in the previous decade; there was no witch-craze immediately following his arrival in England.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ Tyson, p. 6.

²⁴⁸ Larner, p. 86.

²⁴⁹ Tyson, p. 106.

²⁵⁰ Tyson, p. 7.

²⁵¹ Tyson, p. 10.

Although he may have reconsidered his stances on the urgency of persecuting witchcraft, other aspects of *Daemonologie* remained close to his ideas throughout his entire reign, both before ascending to the English throne and after. These aspects were political in nature and had to do with the work as an expression of ideal kingship according to James.²⁵² He believed that the right to the throne was given to him by God and was a supporter of the theory of royal absolutism: “a political theory that places kings above the law, and holds that kings have the right to enact laws without the approval of their representative assemblies”.²⁵³ A similar philosophy could also be found in Bodin’s work, a figure from whom it was known that James drew inspiration. Bodin called for the need for an absolute monarch, someone who would have enough power to re-establish order over chaos.²⁵⁴ This was precisely what James wanted for himself and thus proceeded to create a campaign of self-legitimation as God’s chosen one to rule through the persecution of the North Berwick witches and the subsequent writing of *Daemonologie*. His personal presence at the trials painted him as a discoverer of witches, his work painted him as a demonological expert and the resulting image that was apparent to his subjects was that of a figure who would be able to protect and instruct them.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, the fact that the witches’ attacks were directed at him was further proof of his godliness, it proved that his power was enough to provoke an attack from the Devil.²⁵⁶ The real threat of witchcraft, however, was mainly a political one: witchcraft theory had the King and his subject believing that Satan’s servants were able to create illusions that would shape the reality of the beholder and that was a power destined for the absolute monarch only. The power of determination was supposed to be a prerogative of James, he had to be the one who could shed light on what was real and what was an illusion created by the Devil.²⁵⁷ These dark illusions are a recurrent theme

²⁵² Clark, p. 174.

²⁵³ Geller, p. 11.

²⁵⁴ Geller, p. 53.

²⁵⁵ Rickard, p. 103.

²⁵⁶ Rickard, p. 104.

²⁵⁷ Fischlin, Daniel, “Counterfeiting God”: James VI (I) and the Politics of “*Dæmonologie*” (1597)”, *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 26, 1 (1996), pp. 189-190.

throughout *Daemonologie*, they highlight the Devil's power to persuade and deceive one's senses, especially through the use of deceitful language.²⁵⁸ It is interesting to see, however, how the King is doing the same thing in his treatise. He uses carefully crafted language to create a narrative that would shape the mind of his subjects and convince them of his reality, of his ideas.²⁵⁹

Self-legitimising narratives and the power of determination were not the only tools through which the monarch intended to construct his image: he also employed the use of opposing concepts and parallels, which was a common feature of defences of political order in the sixteenth and seventeenth century.²⁶⁰ *Daemonologie* highlights the witches' practices and the Devil's powers as a mockery of religious practices. They are the ones who supposedly want to overthrow this order, but at the same time they mimic it.²⁶¹ Though the Devil is supposed to be the absolute opposite of God, his impersonation and imitation of religious elements creates a powerful illusion and results in the Devil having his servants worship him in a way that is strikingly similar to that of a good Christian worshipping God.²⁶² Examples of this are to be found in the third chapter of the second book of *Daemonologie*, where Epistemon explains:

To the effect that they may perform such services of their false master as he employs them in, the Devil as God's ape counterfeits in his servants this service and form of adoration, that God prescribed and made his servants to practice. For as the servants of God publicly convene for serving of him, so makes him them in great numbers to convene (though publicly they dare not) for his service. As none convenes to the adoration and worshipping of God except they be marked with his seal, the sacrament of baptism, so none serves Satan and convenes to the adoring of him that are not marked with that mark, whereof I already spoke. As the minister sent by God teaches plainly at the time of their public conventions how to serve him in spirit and truth, so that unclean spirit, in his own person teaches his disciples at the time of their convening how to work all kinds of mischief; and craves accounting of all their horrible and detestable proceeding past, for advancement of his service. Yea, that he may the more vilely counterfeit and scorn God, he often times makes his slaves to convene in these very places which are destined and ordained for the convening of the servants of God (I mean by churches). (pp. 117-118)

²⁵⁸ Rickard, p. 108.

²⁵⁹ Rickard, p. 109.

²⁶⁰ Clark, p. 174.

²⁶¹ Normand, Roberts, p. 339.

²⁶² Normand, Roberts, p. 340.

Parallels are created, for example, between the sacrament of baptism and the devil's mark impressed on witches, or how the Devil instructs those faithful to him on evil practices and the way ministers guide Christians. Even their place of worship is the same, because the sabbath would allegedly take place near or behind churches, most notably the church of North Berwick.²⁶³ The creation of these parallels is needed in order to affirm the very power of God and, by extension, that of the Monarch. James, in fact, relies on the argument that:²⁶⁴

Doubtlessly, who denies the power of the Devil would likewise deny the power of God, if they could for shame. For since the Devil is the very contrary opposite to God, there can be no better way to know God, than by the contrary: as by the one's power (though a creature), to admire the power of the great Creator; by the falsehood of the one, to consider the truth of the other; by the injustice of the one, to consider the justice of the other; and by the cruelty of the one, to consider the mercifulness of the other. And so forth in all the rest of the essence of God, and qualities of the Devil. (p. 144)

The very fact that witches were considered a threat and that he believed the Devil to be personally interested in destroying him was proof of his power and of his importance not only as a Monarch, but as a semi-divine figure protected by God and capable of destroying Satan.

After examining many different aspects and meanings that could be attributed to *Daemonologie*, it becomes clear that the King-author was only partially concerned with the supposed witches who had planned an attack on his person, and was focused on his own political aims. Although well-masked through the use of Scriptures and personal references from his experience, the political and self-legitimising aspect of the treatise cannot be denied. It is reasonable to assume that the monarch did not doubt that these hidden meanings would be understood, but he communicated his ideas in a way that would provide immediate justification and clarification through the use of the dialogue between learned and sceptical. Witchcraft, although still central in the mental world of James, was probably less important in and of itself and more important as a means to communicate a higher, holier message: that of the godliness of its discoverer.

²⁶³ Normand, Roberts, p. 340.

²⁶⁴ Fischlin, p. 9.

Italian Summary

Questa tesi ha l'obiettivo di illustrare i processi alle streghe di North Berwick (1590-1593), nonché di analizzare l'opera *Daemonologie*, scritta da Re Giacomo VI di Scozia e pubblicata nel 1597.

Il primo capitolo offre una panoramica del contesto nel quale questi processi sono nati, un contesto che vede sviluppi da un punto di vista culturale, religioso e legislativo. Prima dei processi alle streghe di North Berwick, non c'erano segnali di una particolare preoccupazione verso la minaccia della stregoneria, né da parte della popolazione né da quella delle autorità. Le teorie riguardanti la stregoneria si basavano su una distinzione chiave, ovvero quella tra magia nera e magia bianca: la prima era anche conosciuta come "maleficio" e si pensava fosse un tipo di magia volto a danneggiare (nel senso di far ammalare, o addirittura uccidere) altre persone; mentre le pratiche di magia bianca erano innocue, con dei rituali che servivano a creare pozioni d'amore o ritrovare oggetti smarriti. Tuttavia, questa distinzione ha finito per estinguersi con la riforma religiosa della Scozia (un processo che parte dal 1560), quando le autorità religiose hanno cominciato a sentire il bisogno di assumere il controllo delle pratiche e dell'immaginario della popolazione. Tutte le forme di magia, anche quelle più innocue, hanno dunque cominciato ad essere considerate come demoniache. Si sospettava, infatti, che gli individui accusati di praticare stregoneria avessero stretto un patto con il Demonio per ottenere i propri poteri. Il patto con il demonio sarà uno dei fili conduttori dei processi di North Berwick, ma negli anni precedenti, anche se presente nell'immaginario della popolazione e delle autorità, non era centrale. La base legale per la persecuzione delle streghe era data dallo Scottish Witchcraft Act (1563), un documento molto breve che non presentava effettivamente una chiara definizione di cosa fosse la stregoneria, o di che tipo di persona potesse essere considerata una strega. La sua pubblicazione non causò un aumento nelle persecuzioni per stregoneria, e infatti altri documenti legali di quel periodo mostrano come questa non venisse percepita come un'urgenza, ma considerata al livello di altri "peccati criminosi" (come adulterio o incesto). Questa potrebbe essere

una possibile spiegazione per la mancata specificità dei contenuti del testo di legge, un aspetto che ha poi peraltro facilitato le persecuzioni di fine secolo: non essendoci una chiara definizione, è stato possibile collegare a questa legge tutta una serie di azioni considerate come stregoneria. Il processo legale che portava la persona sospettata di stregoneria dall'accusa alla condanna subì dei cambiamenti significativi nel corso del sedicesimo secolo: lo Scottish Witchcraft Act comportò uno spostamento di responsabilità di persecuzione dalle autorità religiose a quelle secolari. Si basava su un intricato sistema di corti e, nonostante fosse una prerogativa delle corti secolari, la Chiesa giocava comunque un ruolo nell'imprigionamento e negli interrogatori degli accusati. Nonostante quello contro le streghe potesse sembrare un fronte unito, ci sono stati anche personaggi che hanno dato voce ad un approccio scettico verso i processi alle streghe. Johann Weyer e Reginald Scot sono due esempi di questo punto di vista: la loro rilevanza sta nel fatto che i loro lavori vengono citati anche in *Daemonologie*, come esempi di studiosi che ignoravano il pericolo posto dalle streghe.

Nel 1590 i processi di Nord Berwick hanno inizio. Se per alcuni aspetti questi processi rispecchiano caratteristiche tipiche della persecuzione delle streghe, per altri sono unici nel loro genere. Questi processi, infatti erano non solo per stregoneria, ma anche per tradimento. La loro origine, infatti, deriva dalle vicende del Re e i suoi tentativi di portare la nuova moglie dalla Danimarca alla Scozia. L'attraversata del sovrano fu infatti minacciata da una tempesta, che è stata attribuita ad un gruppo di streghe che, lavorando con il Demonio, cospiravano contro il sovrano. Non si hanno dei documenti ufficiali che permettano di affermare accuratamente la quantità di persone che sono state condannate in questi anni, ma sono sopravvissuti documenti riguardanti individui che sembravano aver avuto un ruolo centrale in questo complotto contro il sovrano: Geillis Duncan, Agnes Sampson, John Fian, Barbara Napier e Euphame McCalzean. La storia di queste persone è inoltre rilevante poiché (ad eccezione di Geillis Duncan) il loro processo ha visto il diretto coinvolgimento del Re, con fonti che affermano come avesse diretto interrogatori contro di loro. Nonostante un'insistenza da parte del sovrano su aspetti come incontri col Demonio e pratiche di magia nera, da questi processi traspare anche un tema più esplicitamente politico. Un'altra delle figure

al centro della vicenda di North Berwick, infatti, era il Conte di Bothwell, un rivale politico di Giacomo che avrebbe potuto avanzare una pretesa al trono. Nel corso dei tre anni dei processi, più volte il Re cercò di implicare esplicitamente Bothwell nei casi di stregoneria usando torture e ricatti sugli accusati. Nonostante il sovrano fosse riuscito a portare Bothwell a processo per stregoneria e tradimento, il potere e l'influenza del Conte fecero sì che non venisse condannato. A sottolineare l'aspetto politico dei processi ci fu anche un breve libretto che esponeva gli eventi. Tuttavia, questo libretto non consisteva soltanto di materiali presi da interrogatori e documenti ufficiali, bensì anche di storie (con tutta probabilità frutto della fantasia dell'autore) che raccontavano i poteri di queste streghe, e come il coraggioso e potente sovrano fosse in grado di scovarle e sconfiggerle. Nonostante sia chiaramente un testo di natura propagandistica, la sua importanza sta anche nel fatto che è l'unica fonte ad aver registrato non soltanto le confessioni delle streghe, ma anche le torture a cui queste erano sottoposte. Nei documenti ufficiali, infatti, questo aspetto non appare.

Il terzo capitolo è interamente dedicato all'analisi di *Daemonologie*: il contesto in cui è nata l'opera, le sue fonti e i suoi significati nascosti. *Daemonologie* è un trattato demonologico diviso in tre libri, fu pubblicato nel 1597 dopo una serie di revisioni e probabilmente fu compilato subito dopo la conclusione dei processi di North Berwick. Il trattato è scritto nella forma di un dialogo tra Epistemon (il saggio) e Philomates (amante della conoscenza), un maestro e il suo allievo. Le fonti per l'opera sono tipiche per un trattato demonologico, e includono autorità antiche, autorità contemporanee al sovrano e, infine, la Bibbia. Nonostante la diretta esperienza di Re Giacomo nei processi, è comunque la Bibbia ad essere usata come autorità suprema e non la sua diretta testimonianza. Si possono comunque individuare vari passaggi dell'opera con chiari riferimenti ai diversi protagonisti dei processi. A livello di contenuto non presenta nulla di sensazionale, nulla di nuovo. La sua unicità, infatti, non è data dai contenuti in sé, ma dall'uso personale che viene fatto di questi. L'autore di *Daemonologie* non era soltanto qualcuno con esperienza diretta, ma era un sovrano con esperienza diretta. Questo ha comportato una stratificazione di significati che danno all'opera più di una possibilità di interpretazione. C'è sicuramente una dimensione più diretta, più immediata,

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attraverso la quale il Re intende confutare gli scettici e istruire i sudditi sui pericoli della stregoneria e i possibili ingegni del Demonio per raggiungere i propri scopi. Questa è anche la dimensione che vede l'utilizzo di informazioni prese dai processi per sottolineare, in modo velato, il valore di cacciatore di streghe che il sovrano voleva assumere. Se l'opera si limitasse a questa dimensione, tuttavia, avrebbe perso d'importanza man mano che l'impeto della caccia alle streghe andava spegnendosi. Rimane invece un lavoro importante, mostrato dal fatto che Re Giacomo ordinò la pubblicazione di una nuova edizione poco dopo essere asceso al trono inglese (1603). La ragione recondita si trova nella dimensione più profonda di *Daemonologie*, una dimensione che espone le idee del Re in quanto a sovranità ideale. Giacomo credeva nel diritto divino dei sovrani di regnare, una visione da lui espressa tramite la rappresentazione di se stesso come vittima di attacchi da streghe guidate dal Demonio. Il fatto che l'attacco fosse diretto verso di lui lo poneva su un piano divino, un piano in cui il suo potere di sovrano conferitogli da Dio era talmente potente da rappresentare una minaccia per il Diavolo.

I processi di North Berwick furono unici nel loro genere non solo per la doppia accusa di stregoneria e tradimento contro il Re, ma anche per il coinvolgimento diretto del sovrano. Ancora più interessante è come il Re abbia incoraggiato la persecuzione delle streghe, nell'ottica della creazione di una propria legittimazione a sovrano prescelto da Dio.

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