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Witchcraft and witch prosecution in early modern England and Scotland:
King James' *Daemonologie* and Shakespeare's *Weird Sisters*

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>FOREWORD</u>	5
<u>CHAPTER I</u> : Witch beliefs and witch prosecution in early modern England.....	11
I.I. ‘Cunning folk’ and popular magic in England: from the Middle Ages to the Reformation.....	11
I.II. Malevolent witchcraft.....	14
I.III. The history of witch prosecution in Early Modern England.....	23
<u>CHAPTER II</u> : Witch prosecution in early modern Scotland: King James’s <i>Daemonologie</i> and the North Berwick trials in <i>News From Scotland</i>	29
II.I. Witch prosecution in early modern Scotland.....	29
II.II. King James VI and I and the North Berwick witch trials: <i>News From Scotland</i>	32
II.III The Demonology of King James.....	42
<u>CHAPTER III</u> : Witchcraft in William Shakespeare’s <i>Macbeth</i>	63
III.I. The tragedy of <i>Macbeth</i>	63
III.II. Witchcraft and the Weird Sisters.....	81
III.III. Witchcraft and amenorrhoea in Lady Macbeth.....	90
<u>RIASSUNTO</u>	97
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	102

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1: witches presenting wax dolls to the Devil in <i>The History of Witches and Wizards</i> (1720).....	21
Figure 2: a witch feeding her animal familiars in <i>A Rehearsall both Straung and True, of Hainous and Horrible Actes Committed by Elizabeth Stile</i> (1579).....	22
Figure 3: woodcut from the first edition <i>News From Scotland</i>	36
Figure 4: accused witches kneeling before the King in <i>News From Scotland</i>	41
Figure 5: woodcut from <i>News From Scotland</i> depicting the activities of Doctor Fian.....	41
Figure 6: The Weird Sisters painted by Johann Heinrich Füssli, 1783.....	84
Figure 7: Lady Macbeth painted by Johann Heinrich Füssli, 1812.....	92

FOREWORD

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England was still a pre-industrial society, and many of its essential features closely resembled those of the ‘under-developed’ areas of today¹. The gap between rich and poor was wide, the food supply was often precarious and the average life expectation was generally low due to inadequate sanitary conditions and the spread of infectious diseases, such as the bubonic plague. Moreover, contemporary medical techniques often proved to be inadequate, as physicians were usually given a purely academic training according to the principles of humoral physiology set out by Hippocrates and Galen². Indeed, contemporary physicians believed that the illnesses afflicting the human body would generate from a disproportion between the four humours – black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood – and their methods for diagnosis basically consisted in trying to understand which of the four humours was either superfluous or deficient. However, contemporary physicians were not only rather unprepared, but also too expensive for the members of the lower classes. Hence, most of the people who could not afford the high cost of the bills of a medical practitioner often chose to consult the so-called “cunning folk”, who provided remedies based on their accumulated knowledge of the properties of herbs and plants and sometimes accompanied their treatments with a series of prayers and charms, which formed part of their healing rituals. Therefore, when traditional methods failed, the population sought the help of a local sorcerer.

Much of the magical healing performed by the cunning folk reflected the old beliefs in the curative power of the medieval Church³. Indeed, as suggested by Keith Thomas, the distinction between magic and religion throughout the Middle Ages was an impossibly fine one, since the medieval

¹ Thomas, Keith, *Religion and The Decline of Magic*, London: Penguin, 1971, p. 3.

² Thomas, p. 10.

³ Thomas, p. 210.

Church acted as a repository of supernatural power which could be dispensed to the faithful folk to help them face their daily issues⁴. Indeed, people were accustomed to the use of specific ecclesiastical talismans or prayers to protect themselves against the most common contemporary misfortunes, including diseases, fire, death in child-bed and similar dangers, thus making supernatural beliefs and religion closely interconnected.

Hence, if magic formed part of people's daily lives, it seems important to trace the steps that progressively led to the negative perception of witchcraft, its prohibition and condemnation through the political campaign against witch-related activities carried out by King James VI/I.

In the first chapter I attempt to analyse the development of witch-beliefs in early modern England and identify the main differences between the supernatural activities performed by cunning men and women for good purposes and what has been defined as black or malevolent witchcraft. Moreover, I will analyse the impact of the protestant reformation and how it radically transformed the common perception of supernatural activities, as it aimed at reasserting a clear separation between the religious and magical sphere, thus depriving religious rituals of any superfluous element that resembled magic. Furthermore, I will focus on the impact of the new European perspective regarding the matter of witchcraft and the concept of *maleficium*, which stated the necessity of legal prosecution of witch-related activities due to their alleged association with the Devil, and how it affected contemporary theological discourses. Hence, I will also provide a brief overview of the history of witch prosecution in early modern England, to examine how European doctrines influenced the way witches, necromancers and sorcerers were punished and eventually sentenced to death. Finally, this chapter will provide a description of the women typically charged with the crime of witchcraft, as women proved to be the most common victims of witchcraft superstitions, as well as the peculiarities typically attributed to malevolent witches, such as the presence of a so-called

⁴ Thomas, p. 35.

devil's mark on their bodies, their alleged possession of animal familiars and their participation to the nocturnal rituals of Sabbath.

The second chapter concerns the history of witch prosecution in early modern Scotland, where, as suggested by historical evidence, the accused brought to court were once again mostly women who typically displayed disruptive behaviour and inappropriate attitudes that did not conform the contemporary standards of female sexuality. As far as the case of Scotland is concerned, scholars believe that the battle pursued by King James against witchcraft might have played a significant role in the increased number of accusations and executions. Hence, I will devote part of the second chapter to the analysis of the text of *News From Scotland*, which contains the account of the 1590-1591 North Berwick witch trials that saw the direct involvement of King James, as he actively took part to the questioning of the accused witches. Indeed, the monarch's enthusiasm regarding the matter of witchcraft can be traced precisely to the beginning of the North Berwick prosecution, when a group of women was brought to court with the accusation of having attempted to the life of King James precisely by use of black magic. Moreover, the analysis of the content of *News From Scotland* will provide an outlook on the way authorities commonly interrogated the accused of *maleficium* by recurring to the use of torture, thus making the alleged confessions extorted to the witches appear not entirely corresponding to truth or even completely unreliable. Finally, the last part of the chapter will focus on the analysis of King James' *Daemonologie*, a treatise on the matter of black witchcraft, necromancy and demonology published in 1597, which presented a description of the most frequent activities typically attributed to the Devil's servants and aimed at convincing the public of the danger posed by witchcraft, as opposed to the skeptics who did not believe in its existence. As explained in the chapter, King James used the Scriptures and contemporary theological commonplaces regarding black witchcraft to support his argument and invoked the necessity of the harshest forms of punishment for those involved in such unlawful and sinful practices. Moreover, I will argue that King James' massive interest in the matter of witchcraft was

nothing more than a political strategy, as he took advantage of the harsh prosecution of witches to affirm his power as monarch.

Finally, in the last chapter I will attempt to demonstrate that King James' political campaign against witchcraft proved to be influential in contemporary literature, particularly in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Indeed, the Shakespearian tragedy, which appeared after the publication of the King's treatise on the matter of witchcraft, presents the characters of three witches – the Weird Sisters – who prophesize a brilliant future as King of Scotland to the suggestible Macbeth – Thane of Glamis – and thus determine his fall into temptation, as he will carry out the regicide of King Duncan to fulfil the supernatural premonition. Hence, I will argue that, in order to please the monarch, Shakespeare might have operated a transformation of the original sources of the tragedy and converted the Weird Sisters – who had previously been presented as goddesses of destiny – into demonic hags, so as to fit the ideologies presented in *Daemonologie*. Moreover, the chapter will provide a brief analysis of the character of Lady Macbeth and suggest that the fiend-like Queen might be considered as the fourth witch of the play, as the invocation of evil spirits that she performs at the beginning of the tragedy closely resembles the conjuring rituals strictly prohibited by King James' 1604 Statute against witchcraft. Finally, as the nocturnal agitations of Lady Macbeth in the fifth act of the tragedy recall the symptoms typically associated with the stoppage of menstrual flux, the invocation scene will also be analysed in relation to the contemporary medical commonplaces regarding amenorrhea.

Chapter one: witch beliefs and witch prosecution in early modern England

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.

(John 3:19, KJV)

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

(Revelation 21:8, KJV)

I.I. 'Cunning folk' and popular magic in England: from the Middle Ages to the Reformation

Over the last few decades, witchcraft and the witch hunts that took place in Early Modern England have enormously attracted the interest of scholars. Historians and anthropologists have attempted to define the phenomenon of witchcraft, sometimes disagreeing on the very definition of this concept. In a broad sense, it is possible to define witchcraft “a supernatural activity, believed to be the result of a power given by some external force”⁵. However, it seems important to identify two rather different manifestations of this phenomenon and therefore to distinguish black (or malevolent) witchcraft from white witchcraft. The main difference between them can be found in their aim: indeed, while the latter was employed by the cunning folk for good purposes, malevolent witchcraft on the other hand was perceived by contemporaries as anti-social, as this type of magical activity aimed at harming people through the employment of some occult means.⁶

As far as white witchcraft is concerned, it was extremely common for the population of Tudor and Stuart England to consult popular magicians, which usually went under the names of cunning men, cunning women or wise women. Sorcerers of this type, who could be of either sex, appear to have

⁵ MacFarlane, Alan, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: a Regional and Comparative Study*, London: Routledge, 1999, p. 4.

⁶ Thomas, Keith, *Religion and The Decline of Magic*, London: Penguin, 1971, p. 518.

been numerous in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English communities, and evidence suggests that their activities trace back at least as far as the Anglo-Saxons.⁷ They were popular for providing services for a wide range of necessities, with healing and fortune-telling being the most requested. As noted by Keith Thomas, their repertoire consisted of “common-sensical remedies, based on the accumulated experience of nursing and midwifery, combined with inherited lore about the healing properties of plants and minerals. But it also included certain types of ritual healing, in which prayers, charms or spells accompanied the medicine, or even formed the sole means of treatment”⁸. People therefore sought the help of cunning folk to solve daily-life problems, as popular sorcerers offered an essential service to the community that could hardly be found elsewhere, even when it came to their ability to heal. Indeed, since contemporary medicine could sometimes fail to find the suitable cure for a malady, the population of Tudor and Stuart England often consulted popular magicians when sick and sometimes even preferred to rely on ritual healing rather than on the conventional methods offered by physicians. Hence, it seems fundamental to acknowledge their role as healers when, in some cases, physicians themselves actively encouraged the consultation of cunning folk⁹ and, as suggested by Willem de Blécourt, “studying witchcraft and neglecting cunning folk would be comparable to studying medicine without considering doctors”¹⁰.

Apart from healing the sick, the vast repertoire of cunning folk included activities such as crafting protective amulets, making love potions and finding stolen or lost goods. As far as the recovery of stolen and lost goods is concerned, they usually relied on different procedures to help finding the said object or to detect the thief and, when it came to finding the guilty party, the cunning man or woman might perform various rituals:

⁷Bonzol, Judith, "The Death of the Fifth Earl of Derby: Cunning Folk and Medicine in Early Modern England", *Renaissance and Reformation*, 4 (2010), p. 74.

⁸Thomas, p. 210.

⁹Bonzol, p. 85.

¹⁰De Blécourt, Willem, “Witch Doctors, Soothsayers and Priests. On Cunning Folk in European History and Tradition”, *Social History*, 3 (1994), p. 288.

Stick a pair of shears in the rind of a sieve and let two persons set the top of each of their forefingers upon the upper part of the shears holding it with the sieve up from the ground steadily; and ask Peter and Paul whether A, B, or C hath stolen the thing lost; and at the nomination of the guilty person the sieve will turn round.¹¹

A key was placed at a chosen point in the book. The names of possible suspects were then written on separate pieces of paper and inserted one after another in the hollow end of the key. When the paper bearing the name of the thief was put in, the book would 'wag' and fall out of the fingers of those who held it.¹²

Another important activity performed by popular magicians, perhaps the most distinctive, was the healing of patients affected by supernatural illnesses. Indeed, people would often request the service of a cunning woman or man whenever they believed to be affected by any sort of supernatural evil or feared they had been bewitched. In this particular case, the sorcerer would help the victim identify the nature of their evil suffering and provide remedies with the aim of exorcising the spirits that afflicted their body and soul. Sometimes the sorcerer might carry out the cunning practice by using an object personally connected to the patient as part of the healing procedure, such as their urine, their clothing or their hair. Indeed, by washing the clothes of the patient in running water or by burning or burying their personal items, cunning folk would cast the evil spirit away.¹³ Hence, white sorcerers were often asked remedies to break evil spells cast against their patients, and did so by resorting to a vast range of resources that often included not only ritual treatments and benevolent charms, but also "a combination of liturgy and adjurations derived from both Christian and pagan sources"¹⁴. Indeed, they might also suggest the enunciation of Catholic prayers or craft amulets with Latin prayers inscribed thereupon to guarantee the protection of their owners against evil. However, in spite of finding solutions of religious derivation, the remedy itself was not necessarily correlated to religious beliefs, as what the village sorcerer did was simply providing a cure which increased its mystical value precisely by making use of the language of religion.

¹¹Thomas, p. 253.

¹²Thomas, p. 254.

¹³ Bonzol, p. 84.

¹⁴Bonzol, p. 83.

Magic and religion had been, in fact, strictly interconnected in medieval England. As proposed by Keith Thomas' analysis of the relationship between religious and magical beliefs throughout the Middle Ages, the medieval Church "acted as a repository of supernatural power which could be dispensed to the faithful to help them in daily problems"¹⁵, thus making the actual distinction between the two separate realms rather vague. Indeed, people had at their disposal a vast repertoire of religious rituals which contributed to reinforce the belief of the Church as a sort of magical organization that provided solutions for any kind of human necessity:

The liturgical books of the time contained rituals devised to bless houses, cattle, crops, ships, tools, armour, wells and kilns. There were formulae to bless men who were preparing to set off on a journey, to fight a duel, to engage in a battle or to move into a new house. [...] Such rituals usually involved the presence of a priest and the employment of holy water and the sign of the cross. Basic to the whole procedure was the idea of exorcism, the formal conjuring of the devil out of some material object by the pronouncement of prayers and the invocation of God's name.¹⁶

People would therefore pray, wear sacred amulets, go on pilgrimages to visit the shrines of Saints, swallow the host and attend the Mass not only because moved by religious devotion but also with the expectation of obtaining immunity against evil and hoping for their requests to be granted by the sole act of praying. As an immediate consequence, they could hardly tell the difference between a prayer and a spell, as they both seemed to have the same mechanical effectiveness and shared the common feature of influencing the course of events by the intervention of a supernatural help. Moreover, while many theologians maintained a strict attitude towards magic and wished to keep the sphere of superstition as far from religion as possible, what the Church actually did was to mildly tolerate the issue, as long as it reinforced people's faith and brought them even closer to God.

However, the Protestant Reformation brought changes that radically transformed the medieval approach to religion as a source of supernatural power. Indeed, if magic and religion had often been confused throughout the Middle Ages, protestants reasserted a clear separation of the two spheres

¹⁵Thomas, p. 35.

¹⁶Thomas, p. 32.

and made efforts to eliminate from ecclesiastical ceremonies all non-necessary elements which were perceived as a denial of God's authority. Consequently, by abandoning the idea of the mechanical effectiveness of religious rituals, people were now depending completely on God's judgement and mercy, as they were deprived of the possibility of relying on prayers and amulets to protect themselves from evil. They could no longer pray to request help from above, since the bare enunciation of words was now insufficient:

Ecclesiastical blessings, exorcisms, conjurations and hallowings had no effect. [...] Early protestantism thus denied the magic of the *opus operatum*, the claim that the Church had instrumental power and had been endowed by Christ with an active share in his work and office. For a human authority to claim the power to work miracle was a blasphemy – a challenge to God's omnipotence.¹⁷

I.II. Malevolent witchcraft

As previously stated, what made the actual difference between white and black witchcraft was the aim of the magical activity performed, and while cunning men and women provided a useful service to the Early Modern English communities, whoever practiced malevolent witchcraft, on the contrary, usually aimed at harming other people or even causing their death.

The malevolent magical act itself, known as *maleficium*, could be attributed to either male or female, but it was mostly female witches who were prosecuted for black witchcraft. Witches were usually accused of performing a wide range of hostile activities, such as causing death or physical injuries to both people and farm animals and interfering with nature and the weather. The witch was thought to perform her *maleficium* by physical contact, therefore touching the victim, by emanating magical power from her eyes, by pronouncing a curse against someone or, finally, by using physical instruments, such as personal objects belonging to the victim.¹⁸ Moreover, while some of the activities performed by a cunning woman and a black witch might sometimes appear to be similar,

¹⁷ Thomas, p. 59.

¹⁸ Thomas, p. 519.

as allegedly both had the ability to interfere with the course of nature or cast a spell on someone, cunning folk and malevolent witches were commonly thought to belong to two different categories, as the black witch was blamed for her malice. Indeed, if due to these similarities a cunning woman might sometimes be accused of practicing malevolent witchcraft, it was far less common for her to be actually prosecuted for this crime.

It seems fair to say that the most distinctive feature regarding malevolent witchcraft and Renaissance witch-beliefs was the influx of a new European concept that, after being introduced in the late Middle Ages, rapidly spread throughout the continent and affected the common perception of witchcraft in Early Modern England. The new element consisted in the idea of witchcraft as heresy and of the witch as a worshipper of Satan, with whom she supposedly made a pact, handing over her soul to the devil in exchange for supernatural powers. According to this new perspective, which proliferated around Europe after the publication of the Papal Bull *Summis Desiderantes Affectibus* in 1484, the witch was to be legally prosecuted not only for the *maleficium* performed, that is, for her damage to society, but also for her heretical nature, the repudiation of God and the commitment to evil¹⁹. Apart from defining the outcome of witchcraft prosecution in Europe, the new doctrine introduced by the Catholic Church increased the interest in the field of witchcraft and demonology among theologians and intellectuals and led to the publication of treatises and manuals on witches and witch-hunting in the whole continent. The first book devoted to this issue to be published after the Pope's condemnation of witchcraft was Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum*, published in Germany in 1487 by two Dominican inquisitors who aimed at instructing folk on how to identify witches and stressed the necessity to take legal action against them, in particular by suggesting torture as a method to obtain confessions and the punishment of death as the most appropriate remedy against such heretics²⁰. After the successful publication of

¹⁹ Thomas, p. 521.

²⁰ Anglo, Sydney, *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p. 14.

Malleus Maleficarum, more continental writers engaged in the analysis of witchcraft and demonology and treatises on the matter of malevolent witchcraft written by English intellectuals began to make their appearance since the late sixteenth century. Such publications include William Perkins's *Discourse on the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608), a treaty written by a Calvinist theologian to demonstrate the peril of witchcraft and identify its various manifestations, as well as King James's *Daemonologie* (1597), a dissertation on the matter of black magic, necromancy and demonology to advise against witches, the slaves of the Devil, influenced by the King's own experience regarding the North Berwick witch trials in Scotland. Moreover, it seems fundamental to acknowledge the role of Reginald Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) since, unlike most intellectuals and theologians, he analysed the phenomenon of witchcraft to speak in favour of the poor women victims of foolish superstitions who were unjustly persecuted, tortured and executed.

Reginald Scot's analysis of the phenomenon of witchcraft provides substantial information that helps define the attitude towards witches in Early Modern England and understand who the women accused of witchcraft were, what magical powers and activities were attributed to them, what their bargain with the devil consisted of and how they were prosecuted by the court. Moreover, as Scot was moved by beliefs that contrasted with the dominant view of the heretical and evil nature of the witch, it was commonly believed that when King James VI of Scotland published his *Daemonologie* and accessed the English throne he ordered all the copies of the *Discoverie* to be destroyed, although there is no evidence for it²¹. Indeed, Scot excluded the possibility of the existence of black witchcraft as defined by European doctrines and published his work with the manifest intention of defending the victims of witch-hunts.

²¹Almond, Philip C., *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, London: I. B. Tauris, 2011, p. 2.

According to Scot's analysis in the first of the sixteen books of the *Discoverie*, those accused of witchcraft were usually old, poor, physically unattractive and deluded women who hardly ever maintained friendly relationships among the neighbourhood:

One sort of such as are said to bee witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles poore, sullen, superstitious, and papists; or such as knowe no religion: in whose drousie minds the divell hath gotten a fine seat; so as, what mischeefe, mischance, calamitie, or slaughter is brought to passe, they are easilie persuaded the same is doone by themselves; inprinting in their minds an earnest and constant imagination hereof. They are leane and deformed, shewing melancholie in their faces, to the horror of all that see them. They are doting, scolds, mad, divelish; and not much differing from them that are thought to be possessed with spirits; so firme and stedfast in their opinions, as whosoever shall onelie have respect to the constancie of their words uttered, would easilie beleeve they were true indeed. These miserable wretches are so odious unto all their neighbors, and so feared, as few dare offend them, or denie them anie thing they aske: whereby they take upon them yea, and sometimes thinke, that they can doo such things as are beyond the abilitie of humane nature.²²

These deluded women often cursed and imprecated against their neighbours who despised them and refused to help them. However, if the neighbours actually happened to fall sick by chance, as was extremely common at the time, they would often associate the illness to the efficacy of the poor woman's curse, who might somehow convince herself to possess supernatural powers. And so did the ignorant neighbours, who attributed their bad luck to the evil vengeance of the witch:

It falleth out many times, that neither their necessities, nor their expectation is answered or served, in those places where they beg or borrowe; but rather their lewdnesse is by their neighbors reprooved. And further, in tract of time the witch waxeth odious and tedious to hir neighbors; and they againe are despised and despited of hir: so as sometimes she cursseth one, and sometimes another; and that from the maister of the house, his wife, children, cattell, &c. to the little pig that lieth in the stie. Thus in processe of time they have all displeased hir, and she hath wished evill lucke unto them all with cursses and imprecations made in forme. Doubtlesse (at length) some of hir neighbors die, or fall sicke; or some of their children are visited with diseases that vex them strangelie: as apoplexies, epilepsies, convulsions, hot fevers, wormes,&c. Which by ignorant parents are supposed to be the vengeance of witches. The witch on the other side expecting hir neighbours mischances, and seeing things sometimes come to passe according to hir wishes, cursses, and incantations (for Bodin himselfe confesseth, that not above two in a hundred of their witchings or wishings take effect) being called before a Justice, by due examination of the circumstances is driven to see hir imprecations and desires, and hir neighbors harmes and losses to concurre, and as it were to take effect: and so confesseth that she (as a goddes) hath brought such things to passe. herein, not onelie she, but the accuser, and also the Justice are fowhe deceived and abused; as being thorough hir confession and other circumstances persuaded (to the injurie of Gods glorie) that she hath doone, or can doo that which / is proper onelie to God himselfe.²³

Evidence therefore suggests that those prosecuted for practicing malevolent witchcraft were the poor and fragile members of society, mostly women, as women were commonly believed to be

²²Scot, Reginald, *Discovery of Witchcraft*, London: Elliot Stock, 1886, p. 7.

²³Scot, p. 6.

inferior: ‘Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel’ (Peter 3:7)²⁴. Scot even sought a medical explanation to demonstrate the nature of the witch’s delusions, relying on the Galenic theory of the four types of personality (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic) which could be determined by the amount of four fluids in the body: black bile, yellow bile, phlegm and blood. In particular, the humoral theory suggested that while a healthy human body contained the right proportion of each fluid, an imbalance of such fluids might lead to a varied nature of illnesses. Hence, Scott believed that the interruption of the menstrual flux in older women could be held responsible for their melancholic delusions regarding supernatural powers:

Why should an old witch be thought free from such fantasies, who (as the learned philosophers and physicians saie) upon the stopping of their monethlie melancholicke flux or issue of blood, in their age must needs increase therein, as (through their weaknesse both of bodie and braine), the aptest persons to meete with such melancholicke imaginations: with whome their imaginations remaine, even when their senses are gone.²⁵

In spite of Scot’s hypothesis regarding the relationship between female menstruation and delusional behaviour being medically inaccurate, modern historians and critics have suggested that older women were in fact more likely to be victims of legal prosecution for black witchcraft precisely because of their post-menopausal condition: “in a society that venerated fertility, the shrivelled bodies of post-menopausal women were regarded as poisonous and dangerous”²⁶. Indeed, it has been argued that, as they were no longer able to conceive, old women might be suspected of practicing malevolent witchcraft due to the common belief that they were somehow jealous and therefore willing to inflict pain upon younger and fertile women. However, being sceptical about

²⁴James I and VI, *The Bible, Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 287.

²⁵ Scot, p. 42.

²⁶ Rowlands, Alison, “Not ‘the Usual Suspects’? Male Witches, Witchcraft, and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe”, in Alison Rowlands, ed., *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 2.

the existence of witchcraft, Scott presumed that women either attributed themselves such powers as a result of their melancholic humour or were unjustly accused by their neighbours.

Witchcraft was therefore a female issue, with most of the suspects being women who somehow did not fit the norms of society, either physically or in their personality. Indeed, evidence shows that women were more likely to be prosecuted when displaying a disruptive behaviour, as those who begged, quarrelled with the neighbours or conducted a “lewd and naughty kind of life”²⁷ were more exposed to village gossip and, as a consequence, predominated among the suspects. Kramer and Sprenger’s *Malleus Maleficarum* also suggested women’s weakness, both physical and spiritual, and asserted that women were more likely to be seduced by evil than men:

But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives. [...] Therefore, a wicked woman is by her nature quicker to waver in her faith, and consequently quicker to abjure the faith, which is the root of witchcraft. ²⁸

As far as the supernatural powers of a witch are concerned, Scot devotes the fourth chapter of the first book of the *Discoverie* to an extensive description of all the actions that were commonly attributed to witches, using *Malleus Maleficarum* as his main source of information. According to Kramer and Sprenger, it was possible to distinguish three different types of witches according to their power, with the “hurtfull” witch being the most dangerous one. Indeed, the “hurtfull” witch was believed to be able to kill, raise tempests and thunderstorms, provoke a men’s barrenness or a woman’s miscarriage as well as many other kinds of misfortunes and torments, alter people’s thoughts and make herself invisible by disappearing in the air:

Yet we read In *Malleo Maleficarum* of three sorts of witches; and the same is affirmed by all the writers heereupon, new and old. One sort (they say) can hurt and not helpe, the second can helpe and not hurt, the third can both helpe and hurt. And among the hurtfull witches he saith there is one sort more beastlie than any kind of beasts, saving woolves: for these usuallie devoure and eate yong children and infants of their

²⁷ MacFarlane, p. 158.

²⁸Kramer, Heinrich and Sprenger, James, *Malleus Maleficarum*, translated by Montague Summers, London: Bracken Books, 1996, p. 44.

owne kind. These be they (saith he) that raise haile, tempests, and hurtfull weather; as lightening, thunder, &c. These be they that procure barrennesse in man, woman, and beast. These can throwe children into waters, as they walke with their mothers, and not be seene. These can make horsses kicke, till they cast the riders. These can passe from place to place in the aire invisible. These can so alter the mind of judges, that they can have no power to hurt them. These can procure to themselves and to others, taciturnitie and insensibilitie in their torments. These can bring trembling to the hands, and strike terror into the minds of them that apprehend them. These can manifest unto others, things hidden and lost, and foreshew things to come; and see them as though they were present. These can alter mens minds to inordinate love or hate. These can kill whom they list with lightening and thunder. These can take awaie mans courage, and the power of generation. These can make a woman miscarrie in childbirth, and destroie the child in the mothers wombe, without any sensible meanes either inwardlie or outwardlie applied. These can with their looks kill either man or beast.²⁹

As previously stated, the idea of the heretical nature of the witch and the notion of the pact with the devil in exchange for supernatural powers are fundamental features of European demonology and European witch trials. Scot's third book of *Discoverie* particularly focuses on how witches were thought to meet Satan to bargain their soul, quoting various European sources, including once again *Malleus Maleficarum*. As suggested by Scot, when the bargain took place the novice witch allegedly met the devil in his visible form to become his new disciple, renounce the values of Christian faith and pledge her fidelity to evil:

The order of their bargaine or profession is double; the one solemne and publike; the other secret and private. That which is witches with called solemne or publike, is where witches come together at certeine assemblies, at the times prefixed, and doo not onelie see the divell in visible forme; but confer and talke familiarlie with him. In which conference the divell exhorteth them to observe their fidelitie unto him, promising them long life and prosperitie. Then the witches assembled, commend a new disciple (whom they call a novice) unto him: and if the divell find that yoong witch apt and forward in renunciation of christian faith, in despising anie of the seven sacraments, in treading upon crosses, in spetting at the time of the elevation, in breaking their fast on fasting dales, and fasting on sundaies; then the divell giveth foorth / his hand, and the novice joining hand in hand with him, promiseth to observe and keepe all the divels commandements. This done, the divell beginneth to be more bold with hir, telling hir plainlie, that all this will not serve his turne; and therefore requireth homage at hir hands: yea he also telleth hir, that she must grant him both hir bodie and soule to be tormented in everlasting fire: which she yeeldeth unto. Then he chargeth hir, to procure as manie men, women, and children also, as she can, to enter into this societie. Then he teacheth them to make ointments of the bowels and members of children, whereby they ride in the aire, and accomplish all their desires. So as, if there be anie children unbaptised, or not garded with the signe of the crosse, or orizons; then the witches may and doo catch them from their mothers sides in the night, or out of their cradles, or otherwise kill them with their ceremonies; and after buriall steale them out of their graves, and seeth them in a caldron, untill their flesh be made potable. Of the thickest whereof they make ointments, whereby they ride in the aire; but the thinner potion they put into flaggons, whereof whosoever drinketh, observing certeine ceremonies, immediatlie becommeth a maister or rather a mistresse in that practise and facultie.³⁰

²⁹Scot, p. 7.

³⁰ Scot, p. 31.

Another feature of this nocturnal meeting between the devil and his disciples, known as Sabbath, was the diabolical dance of the witches: “the witches never faile to danse; and in their danse they sing these words; Har har, divell divell, danse here, danse here, plaie here, plaie here. Sabbath, sabbath. And whiles they sing and danse, everie one hath a broome in hir hand”³¹. Later in the third book, Scot harshly criticizes such conceptions, claiming that it would be absurd to believe in the meeting and allegiance between a human and a spiritual being and further suggesting that these nonsense accounts are nothing but the product of extorted confessions or, once again, of delusional thoughts:

That the joining of hands with the divell, the kissing of his bare buttocks, and his scratching and biting of them, are absurd lies; everie one having the gift of reason may plainlie perceive: in so much as it is manifest unto us by the word of God, that a spirit hath no flesh, bones, nor sinewes, whereof hands, buttocks, claws, teeth, and lips doo consist. For admit that the constitution of a divels bodie (as *Tatian* and other affirme) consisteth in spirituall congelations, as of fier and aire; yet it cannot be perceived of mortall creatures. What credible wisse is there brought at anie time, of this their corporall, visible, and incredible bargaine; saving the confession of some person diseased both in bodie and mind, wilfullie made, or injuriouslie constrained?³²



Figure 1: Witches presenting wax dolls to the Devil, in *The History of Witches and Wizards* (1720)

³¹Scot, p. 32.

³²Scot, p. 37.

Another key element of contemporary imagination on the matter of black witchcraft is the presence of the so-called devil's mark on the witch's body. Indeed, people commonly believed that once the witch had sealed her pact with Satan a mark would appear on her body, left by the devil himself "either with his teeth or his claws"³³. Moreover, the mark was supposedly recognisable as "it would not bleed when pricked and was insensible to pain"³⁴. Therefore, it was a common practice to search for the damned spot on the witch's body to prove her evil allegiance, with many suspects being forced to undergo unbearable torture. Finally, another common element of the English trials was the belief in the witch's possession of an animal familiar as a further proof of her association with the devil. Indeed, evidence suggests that witches were believed to possess an animal, which could be a dog or a cat, sometimes even an insect, a toad or a rat, that was thought to be a demon in disguise:

This familiar, who performed useful magical services for his mistress, was supposed to have been given by the Devil himself, or purchased or inherited from another witch. The witch's mark was sometimes thought of as a teat from which the familiar could suck the witch's blood as a form of nourishment. It thus became a common procedure in witch-detection to isolate the suspect and wait for some animal or insect to appear as proof of her guilt.³⁵



Figure 2: a witch feeding her animal familiars, in *A Rehearsall both Straung and True, of Hainous and Horrible Actes Committed by Elizabeth Stile* (1579)

³³Almond, p. 83.

³⁴Thomas, p. 530.

³⁵Thomas, p. 530.

I.III. The history of witch prosecution in Early Modern England

Authorities have long sought to clarify the reasons behind the increased legal prosecution of malevolent witchcraft during the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Moreover, as the history of witch prosecution in Early Modern England partially differs from that of European trials, critics have suggested various interpretations so as to explain the actual difference between the attitude towards witchcraft in England and in the rest of the continent, and, finally, how European doctrines influenced the outcome of English trials.

Most critics agree that it would be incorrect to think of the prosecution of black witchcraft in England as a matter of sporadic episodes of witch-hunts. Indeed, as suggested by Keith Thomas, magical activities had a long history of legal prosecution in England and the Christian Church itself had always battled against magic, excommunicating magicians of all kinds. However, even though witch-beliefs and witch prosecution had certainly existed for a long time, the amount of accusations and trials increased throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, with most of the executions taking place precisely during this span of time. Finally, although the most intense period of witch prosecution seems to correspond with the two-year-long witch-hunting campaign led by Matthew Hopkins from 1645 to 1647, England witnessed many other notable trials, like the Essex Trials in 1582 or the Lancashire Trials in 1612 and 1633³⁶.

As far as the English prosecution throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century is concerned, witchcraft was legally condemned by three Acts of Parliament. The first Act against Conjurations, Witchcraft, Sorcery and Enchantments, which was emanated in 1542 under the kingdom of Henry VIII, declared the practice of any type of magic for any “unlawfull intende or purpose” a felony, and that included the conviction for the conjuration of spirits as well as for the practice of sorcery to recover lost goods:

³⁶Thomas, p. 537.

yf any persone or persones, after the first daye of Maye next comyng, use devise practise or exercise, or cause to be used devysed practised or exercised, any Invocations or conjurations of Sprites wichecraftes enchauntementes or sorceries, to the intent to get or fynde money or treasure, or to waste consume or destroy any persone in his bodie membres or goodes, or to provoke any persone to unlawfull love, or for any other unlawfull intende or purpose, or by occasion or color of suche thinges or any of them, or for despite of Cryste, or for lucre of money, dygge up or pull downe any Crosse or Crosses, or by suche Invocations or conjuracions of Sprites wichecraftes enchauntementes or sorcerie or any of them take upon them to tell or declare where goodes stollen or lost shall become, That then all and every suche Offence and Offences, frome the saide first day of May next comyng, shall be demyde accepted and adjudged Felonye; And that all and every persone and persones offendyng as is abovesaide their Councillors Abettors and Procurers and every of them from the saide first day of Maye shall be demyde accepted and adjudged a Felon and Felones.³⁷

Moreover, such felonies might be punished with the forfeiture of one's goods or by sentencing the felon to death. The first Act was later repealed in 1547 and followed by Queen Elizabeth's Statute against witchcraft in 1563. Critics suggest that, even though the 1563 Act condemned any type of magical activity, it was somehow less rigid, as "witchcraft, enchantment, charming and sorcery were deemed capital felonies only if they actually resulted in the death of a human victim" and as "the gravity of the offence depended upon the degree of the injury suffered by the witch's victims"³⁸. Indeed, if the victim of the magical activity was only injured, the witch would only be charged with a minor amend and, finally, the transgression would be prosecuted as a felony only after a second offence.

It appears that the European doctrine upon the matter of witch prosecution mostly influenced the final Act against witchcraft emanated by King James in 1604. Indeed, while the magical practice and the conjuration of spirits for any purpose were still considered a felony as in the previous statutes, King James demanded for the offence to be prosecuted even in the case of a victim's injury. Moreover, the 1604 Act imposed death penalty for second transgressions and, "for the first time in English history, made it a felony to take up a dead body in whole or part for magical purposes and [...] to consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed or reward any evil and wicked

³⁷ Henry VIII's *Act against Conjurations, Witchcraft, Sorcery and Enchantments*, <http://statutes.org.uk/site/the-statutes/sixteenth-century/1541-33-henry-8-c8-witchcraft/>.

³⁸Thomas, p. 526.

spirit to or for any intent or purpose³⁹". King James' act remained effective until 1736, when conjurations, witchcraft, sorcery and enchantments ceased to be prosecuted by the law.

However, most critics agree that, as previously stated, the influence of European doctrines on the matter of witchcraft, which condemned any type of magical activity whatsoever and held it a heresy, was only partial in England. Indeed, the evidence of English trials suggests that the activities of the cunning folk were, in practice, hardly ever prosecuted. Hence, most trials actually aimed at the prosecution of witches whose magical practice was perceived as harmful, and that is when there was evidence of *maleficium*. As a consequence, it is possible to argue that the main reasons behind the prosecution in England can be found in the fear of *maleficium* itself and in the attempt to prevent vengeful and dangerous acts among the neighbourhood rather than in the fear of the witch's worship of the Devil. This could therefore explain why white magic often escaped any form of punishment. Moreover, the actual accusation might also depend on the sorcerer's popularity, which has very little to do with the European religious campaign against evil:

A wise woman who was popular with her neighbours might escape delation; whereas one who had fallen out with them might find herself accused not just of charming, but even of black witchcraft. Sometimes, moreover, the culprit might be too powerful for the churchwardens to risk denouncing her. [...] Even if a cunning man did fall into the hands of ecclesiastical courts – and thousands must have done so – his ultimate fate still depended considerably upon his relations with the people of his own neighbourhood.⁴⁰

Therefore, if a cunning woman had a good reputation among the neighbourhood and her magical activities were perceived as a useful service to the community, she would be safe and no legal action would be taken against her. The popular fear of hostile acts and *maleficium* might also explain why convictions and executions for black witchcraft increased particularly throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Indeed, while in Medieval England everyone had an enormous variety of counter-magical remedies at their disposal and people put their faith in ecclesiastical magic to prevent a witch's curse, the impact of the Reformation made people less confident about

³⁹Thomas, p. 526.

⁴⁰Thomas, p. 311.

the possibility of escaping *maleficium*. Indeed, if people might previously evoke God's help or request divine protection against evil through charms and amulets in case they had been bewitched, the Protestant separation between the magical and the religious sphere, which rejected the idea of the mechanical efficacy of prayers and condemned the use of magic as a product of evil, increased their sense of vulnerability:

For protestantism forced its adherents into the intolerable position of asserting the reality of witchcraft, yet denying the existence of an effective and legitimate form of protection or cure. The church of England discarded the apparatus of mechanical religious formulae, but it was not prepared to claim that faith alone would protect the godly from witchcraft. Satan, it taught, was an instrument of God's inscrutable judgement, and might well be allowed to try the godly as well to plague the wicked. Certainly it was more unusual for a truly godly man to be bothered by witches, but there was no denying that it could happen. However firm his faith, even the most devout Christian might find himself tried and tested by maleficium and sorcery, no less than by any other misfortune. It was not true that witches had no power against the faithful; they might well be permitted to plague them instantly.⁴¹

As counter-magic was technically banned by the law, people could now only resort to faith to protect themselves, something that did not necessarily work, as salvation solely depended on God's judgement. Hence, if prayer was no longer a solid shield against evil, the legal prosecution of witches and the actual conviction of their alleged crimes offered the most logical solution against the threat of black magic.

However, as suspects might sometimes escape legal prosecution, people often found other practical ways to prevent the risk of *maleficium*. For instance, since witches were commonly believed to carry out their spell by creating a magical connection using objects belonging to the victim, or emanating power from their eyes, contemporaries suggested avoiding any kind of contact with a witch to reduce the risk of being cursed. Hence, this practical remedy might as well explain why, as previously mentioned, most women suspected of practicing malevolent witchcraft were isolated among the community and why neighbours refused to help the begging witch. Furthermore, people might also try, once the *maleficium* had occurred, to "locate the witch and either force her to

⁴¹Thomas, p. 590.

withdraw her power or have her punished”⁴², therefore exposing the suspect to the violent revenge of her own neighbours.

⁴²Macfarlane, p. 103.

Chapter two

Witch prosecution in early modern Scotland: King James's *Daemonologie* and the North Berwick trials in *News From Scotland*

Abstain from all appearance of evil.
(Thessalonians 5:22, KJV)

Woe unto them that call evil good, and good evil; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!
(Isaiah 5:20, KJV)

II.I Witch prosecution in early modern Scotland

As explored in the previous chapter, it is possible to observe how the outcome of witch hunts in early modern societies depended not only on religious ideologies but also on further elements that included social and cultural aspects of the specific territory in which the prosecution occurred.

As far as the prosecution of witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland is concerned, historical evidence suggests that the Scottish witch hunt lasted from about 1550 to 1700 and that, over this span of time, more than a thousand people were executed for witchcraft.⁴³ Moreover, it has been shown that older women belonging to a low social class were often the protagonists of the Scottish witch trials and the victims of most of the executions. Hence, it can easily be argued that the typical female witch brought to court in Early Modern Scotland did not differ much from the stereotype of the old, poor women frequently accused in England. Indeed, while traditional violent crimes in Scotland were still a male monopoly⁴⁴, women were the likeliest subjects to be found in court charged with the crime of witchcraft.

⁴³ Goodare, Julian, "Women and the Witch-Hunt in Scotland", *Social History*, 23 (1998), p. 289.

⁴⁴ Goodare, p. 294.

Historians have proposed different solutions so as to explain why in Scotland, as in England, the accused were mostly female and it has been argued that witch prosecution in Early Modern Scotland could be seen as an attempt to control and restrain female sexuality:

To be socially accepted, women had to keep the dangerous sexual side of their natures under control but keep the nurturing side constantly in view. Since the two were so closely intertwined, this was a difficult balancing act. Any woman who got the balance wrong ran the risk of acquiring a reputation as a deviant of one kind or another. This could easily be a reputation for witchcraft.⁴⁵

Hence, as sexual offences including adultery and fornication were severely punished, any woman whose sexual attitude was considered inappropriate might be accused of having sexual relations with the Devil. Indeed, as it was commonly believed that when a witch sealed the pact she also had sexual intercourse with Satan, she was consequently punished not only for turning away from God, but also for her improper sexual behaviour:

The indictment of a female witch – a standardized document in the court of justiciary – routinely included the accusation that ‘ye have had severall tymes carnall dealling or copulatione with the devill’. [...] The crime of witchcraft, for many women, was broadly equivalent to the crime of fornication with the Devil.

⁴⁶

However, women might acquire the reputation of being a witch very easily and the accusations brought against them in court did not necessarily come from gossip about inappropriate sexual behaviour. In small communities, it was fundamental for a woman to maintain good relationships with her neighbours, as even quarrels or insults might lead to witchcraft accusations. As seen in the previous chapter, women in Early Modern England could be charged with the crime of witchcraft after falling out with their neighbours or when a member of the community happened to die or fall sick by chance after their threats or insults. The situation in Scotland appeared to be very similar, as women’s curses were taken just as seriously. Moreover, critics have underlined that the link made by authorities between a curse or threat and black witchcraft was typical among female suspects, as

⁴⁵Goodare, p. 297.

⁴⁶Goodare, p. 294.

men were less often prosecuted as a consequence of their verbal violence⁴⁷. Therefore, female were more exposed to the danger of a trial depending on their reputation and behaviour in the neighbourhood:

Gossip policed the boundaries of the socially permissible or respectable, and created and sustained reputations. Men generally had access to a wider range of social action to create and protect their reputations including physical violence, recourse to law, and economic or social power and in any case were less dependent than women on sexual behaviour for their reputation. But women trod a difficult line between conforming to their subordinate status in society and possessing enough forcefulness and independence to live successfully in precarious social and economic conditions. Women's vulnerability lay in the difficulty of managing sexual reputation and social assertiveness; losing control of either and gaining a reputation as a sexually scandalous woman or a quarreller or scold could create the conditions in which a charge of witchcraft might emerge.⁴⁸

However, historical accounts have shown that for every seventeen women accused of witchcraft in Scotland, three men were also accused⁴⁹. Hence, if witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland was an attempt to attack women and control their behaviour, historians have questioned the role of accused men to explain why some were prosecuted and to understand what kind of men might be charged with this crime.

The accounts of the trials suggest that most accused men were mainly investigated when the authorities believed they might be in contact with female witches. Usually, a man was in danger when married to a woman accused of black witchcraft and defended his wife rather than collaborating with authorities against her. Hence, the main focus of the accusation was once again placed on the danger of the female witch. Indeed, male witches were commonly believed to be weaker and they were hardly ever accused of having sexual intercourse with Satan:

And there were some things that the male witch did not do. In particular, he refrained from having sex with the Devil. For a man, either the Devil would have had to appear in female form, or else they would have to have had a homosexual relationship. The first of these options was occasionally tried, but it did not catch on, and most male witches' confessions lacked the vital sexual dimension. Some of the men who did confess to a sexual relationship with the Devil were really thinking, like Andrew Man in Rathven, not of the Devil but of the 'quene of Elphen', a popular folkloric figure.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Goodare, p. 297.

⁴⁸ Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts, *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland. James VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000, p. 61-62.

⁴⁹Goodare, p. 304.

⁵⁰Goodare, p. 304.

Finally, scholars agree that the attitude of King James VI/I, who pursued a battle against black witchcraft after being involved in the witch trials of North Berwick in 1590-1591, played a fundamental role in the way witches were prosecuted in early modern Scotland. Indeed, he increased his enthusiasm in the matter of witchcraft and demonology and, as seen in the previous chapter, emanated the Witchcraft Act in 1604. Although King James cannot be held personally accountable for the beginning of the North Berwick hunt, his experience during the questioning of the witches involved found its way into *Demonology*, and that in turn articulated widespread Scottish witchcraft beliefs that would continue to appear in the next century.⁵¹

II.II King James VI and I and the North Berwick witch trials: *News From Scotland*

The singular events regarding the marriage of King James VI/I played an important role in the outcome of witch prosecution in Early Modern Scotland.

James Stuart, the son of Mary, Queen of Scots, and Henry Stewart Lord Darnley, ascended to the Scottish throne when he was just thirteen months old. James often described himself as a cradle king, as he had to carry the burden of being a monarch from an extremely young age.⁵² He was tutored by George Buchanan, an historian and playwright, and by Peter Young, a Calvinist theologian, who appear to have been quite demanding towards young James, but still successfully succeeded in stimulating the King's lifelong passion for learning⁵³. Indeed, James could speak different languages, including Greek and Latin, was passionate about literature and theology and proved a capable writer of poetry, political theory, theological disputation and biblical exegesis.⁵⁴

⁵¹Normand, Roberts, p. 107.

⁵² Croft, Pauline, *King James*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, p. 12.

⁵³Croft, pp. 12-13.

⁵⁴Croft, p. 2.

On July 1567, after Mary had been forced to sign a voluntary demission, James VI was crowned King of Scotland and, although he had been baptised according to the Roman Catholic ritual only seven months earlier, he was given a Protestant coronation.⁵⁵ As the years passed and Queen Elizabeth I had not married and had no children, James progressively became aware of his possibility to also seize the English throne. Indeed, he had already proved himself to be a supporter of Protestantism in Scotland and could therefore be trusted to continue Elizabeth's Protestant legacy⁵⁶. Mary was executed in February 1587 by order of Queen Elizabeth after being found guilty of “compassing and imagining since June 1st matters tending to the death and destruction of the Queen of England”⁵⁷, and James finally ascended to the English throne in 1603 and, for the first time, England, Scotland, Ireland and the principality of Wales were under the same monarch, therefore marking a new beginning for the British Isles.⁵⁸

An important event of James's life that influenced the outcome of the prosecution of witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland was his marriage with Anne, the daughter of Frederick II, King of Denmark. James, who did not seem to show particular interest in the company of women throughout his youth, became concerned about the matter of a royal marriage around his twenty-first birthday, as a result of his councillors' pressure⁵⁹. The couple got married by proxy in August 1589⁶⁰. James was therefore married in name but still not in fact⁶¹ and had to patiently wait for his wife's arrival to Scotland, as the voyage of the Danish fleet was delayed by a violent storm.

⁵⁵ Steward, Alan, *The Cradle King: A Life of James VI and I, the First Monarch of a United Great Britain*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003, pp. 78-79.

⁵⁶ McGrath, Alister, *In the Beginning: The Story of King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, a Culture*, New York: Anchor Books, 2002, p. 298.

⁵⁷Steward, p. 189.

⁵⁸Croft, p. 3.

⁵⁹Normand, Roberts, p. 29.

⁶⁰Steward, p. 245.

⁶¹Normand, Roberts, p. 31.

As the weeks passed, James appeared to be more and more concerned about his own wife's safety, as he was informed that Anne's fleet was still stuck in Norway due to a series of accidents and that, since the Danish sailors believed that the foul weather would continue until Christmas, the Queen's arrival would be delayed until the spring⁶². In October 1589 James took the decision to sail to Denmark to meet his wife. Even the king's voyage to Denmark was hindered by strong contrary winds. However, he finally managed to arrive safely and meet Anne in November 1589. Interestingly, the violent storms that delayed the royal couple's first encounter were later interpreted as a supernatural threat against the King. Indeed, it seems that James had never shown any particular interest in the matter of witchcraft and black magic until a group of women in North Berwick were accused of attempting to kill the royal couple by raising the tempest that delayed Anne's voyage to Scotland and endangered the King's life as he travelled to meet his wife.

Although witchcraft had been condemned by the Scottish law since 1563, it practically remained unprosecuted until 1590, when Scotland witnessed an explosion of witchcraft investigations and trials⁶³. The accounts regarding the 1590-1591 North Berwick prosecution are contained in *News From Scotland*, the first printed work solely about Scottish witchcraft⁶⁴. The pamphlet, published in 1591, was written with the intent of condemning the "vngodly creatures" that "entered into ye detestable Art of witch-craft"⁶⁵ and, although its authorship appears uncertain and some believe it would be more appropriate to speak of more than one author, it has been attributed to James Carmichael, minister of Haddington⁶⁶.

In the North Berwick trials, the examinations of the accused witches were taken in the presence of King James. The King therefore personally took part in the questioning and torturing of the witches

⁶²Steward, pp. 249-250.

⁶³Steward, p. 283.

⁶⁴Normand, Roberts, pp. 291-292.

⁶⁵ James Carmichael, *Newes from Scotland*, <https://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/kjd/kjd11.htm>, p. 7.

⁶⁶Normand, Roberts, p. 290.

and it also has been suggested that the accounts contained in the pamphlet were the impulse that triggered James's lifelong battle against witchcraft and inspired him to write *Demonology*⁶⁷. Hence, the confessions of the witches determined a turning point in James's life and led him to pursue a personal fight against the Devil. This is clearly presented in the text of *News from Scotland*, which shows the definite contrast between James, pictured as a representative of God on earth, and unlawful heretical activities performed by the Devil and the witches. The importance of Divine Providence against the cursed practice of the witches is carefully underlined in the preface:

This strange discourse before recited, may perhaps giue some occasion of doubt to such as shall happen to reade the same, and thereby coniecture that the Kings maiestie would not hazarde himselfe in the presence of such notorious witches, least therby might haue insued great danger to his person and the generall state of the land, which thing in truth might wel haue bene feared. But to answer generally to such, let this suffice: that first it is well knownen that the King is the child & seruant of God, and they but seruants to the deuill, hee is the Lords annointed, and they but the vesselles of Gods wrath: he is a true Christian, and trusteth in God, they worse than Infidels, for they onely trust in the deuill, who daily serue them, till he haue brought them to vtter destruction. [...] And trulie the whole scope of this treatise dooth so plainly laie open the wonderfull prouidence of the Almightye, that if he had not bene defended by his omnipotencie and power, his Highnes had neuer returned alieue in his voiage fro Denmarke, so that there is no doubt but God woulde as well defend him on the land as on the sea, where they pretended their damnable practise.⁶⁸

The North Berwick trials involved a vast group of witches, but the principal accused were four: Agnes Sampson, Doctor Fian, Effie McCalyan and Barbara Napier. While Napier was the only witch that avoided fire, Sampson, Fian and McCalyan were tortured, tried and sentenced to death in 1591.⁶⁹ Moreover, even though the accused were prosecuted for individual crimes, the main accusation brought against them was their allegiance with the devil.⁷⁰ Indeed, as suggested by Stuart Clark, James's idea of witchcraft was mainly based on the European concept of demonic pact and therefore he could be held responsible for introducing these specific notions in the Scottish territory. The King had perhaps acquired such notions in 1589, when the royal couple spent their first six months together in Denmark before heading back to Scotland and when, during their

⁶⁷ Tyson, Donald, *The Demonology of King James I: Includes the Original Text of Daemonologie and News from Scotland*, Woodbury: Llewellyn Publications, 2011, p. 41.

⁶⁸Carmichael, p. 29.

⁶⁹Tyson, p. 204.

⁷⁰ Clark, Stuart, "King James's Daemonologie: Witchcraft and Kingship", in Anglo, Sydney, *The Damned Art: Essays in the Literature of Witchcraft*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2011, p. 158.

permanence at the Danish court, James met Niels Hammingsen, a Danish theologian who had recently published a text on witchcraft.⁷¹



Figure 3: woodcut from the first edition *News From Scotland*, depicting John Fian writing at a table before the Devil, four witches preparing a potion and a sinking ship at sea

According to *News From Scotland*, the North Berwick witch hunt began with the accusations brought against Gilly Duncan, the servant of David Seaton, deputy-bailiff of the town of Tranent, as she was the first to grow the reputation of being a witch. David Seaton suddenly became suspicious of Gilly, who “vsed secretly to be absent and to lye foorth of her Maisters house euery other night” to “help all such as were troubled or greeued with any kinde of sicknes or infirmitie”⁷². Apparently, Gilly Duncan could perform wonders and was therefore object of great admiration in the community. However, as Seaton doubted that Gilly’s abilities to heal were lawful and suspected them to be the product of a pact with the Devil, he started to question Gilly and torture her:

Wherevpon, her Maister began to growe very inquisitiue, and examined her which way and by what meanes she were able to perfourme matters of so great importance: whereat she gaue him no answeare, neuerthesse, her Maister to the intent that he might the better trye and finde out the trueth of the same, did with the helpe of others, torment her with the torture of the Pilliwinckes vpon her fingers, which is a greeuous torture, and binding or wrinching her head with a corde or rope, which is a most cruell torment

⁷¹Clark, p. 157.

⁷²Carmichael, p. 8.

also, yet would she not confess any thing, whereupon they suspecting that she had beene marked by the Diuell (as commonly witches are) made dilligent search about her, and found the enemies marke to be in her fore crag or foreparte of her throate: which being found, she confessed that all her dooings was doone by the wicked allurements and inticements of the Diuell, and that she did them by witchcraft.⁷³

After being subjected to painful tortures and allegedly being found with a Devil's mark on her body, Gilly Duncan confessed to being a witch. Moreover, when she was sent to prison, she named other active witches in the community, including "Agnis Sampson the eldest Witch of them al" and "Doctor Fian, alias Iohn Cunningham, maister of the Schoole of Salt pans in Lowthian"⁷⁴. Agnes Sampson was arrested and brought before the King to be questioned and examined and, as she appeared reluctant to confess any involvement in the witchcraft case, she was tortured and shaven until the Devil's mark was found on her body. Finally, Agnes admitted that she had taken part to a Sabbath on Hallow's Eve in the kirk of North Berwick in Lothian, where the witches gathered to dance, sing, play instruments and meet the Devil "in the habit or likenes of a man"⁷⁵. Interestingly, Agnes Simpson also claimed that, during the nocturnal meeting, Satan began to inveigh against the King of Scotland himself, as he considered James his greatest enemy:

And hauing made his vngodly exhortations, wherein he did greatlie enueighe against the King of Scotland, he receiued their oathes for their good and true seruice towards him, and departed: which doone, they returned to Sea, and so home againe. At which time the witches demaunded of the Diuel why he did beare such hatred to the king, who answered, by reason the King is the greatest enemy he hath in the worlde: all which their confessions and depositions are still extant vpon record.⁷⁶

The crime confessed by Sampson appeared so strange and unbelievable to the King that he first appeared rather skeptical, until the accused was able to tell him the exchange of words that had occurred between him and the Queen during their first night of marriage, leaving James speechless. Agnes also revealed the details of how she had carefully planned the King's death, including the charms and instruments used to carry out the spell to arise the tempest and contrary winds that were supposed to sink the royal ships:

⁷³ Carmichael, p. 9.

⁷⁴Carmichael, pp. 10-11.

⁷⁵Carmichael, p. 14.

⁷⁶Carmichael, pp. 14-15.

And thereupon taking his Maiestie a little aside, she declared vnto him the verye woordes which passed betweene the Kinges Maiestie and his Queene at Vpslo in Norway the first night of their mariage, with their answer each to other: whereat the Kinges Maiestie wondered greatlye, and swore by the liuing God, that he beleued that all the Diuels in hell could not haue discovered the same: acknowledging her woordes to be most true, and therefore gaue the more credit to the rest which is before declared. [...] Moreouer she confessed that at the time when his Maiestie was in Denmarke, she being accompanied with the parties before specially named, tooke a Cat and christened it, and afterwards bound to each parte of that Cat, the cheefest partes of a dead man, and seuerall ioynts of his bodie, and that in the night following the saide Cat was conuied into the midst of the sea by all these witches sayling in the riddles or Cities as is aforesaid, and so left the saide Cat right before the Town of Lieth in Scotland: this doone, there did arise such a tempest in the Sea, as a greater hath not beene scene: which tempest was the cause of the perishing of a Boate or vessell comming ouer from the towne of Brunt Iland to the towne of Lieth, wherein was sundrye Iewelles and riche giftes, which should haue been presented to the now Queen of Scotland, at her Maiesties coming to Lieth. Againe it is confessed, that the said christened Cat was the cause that the Kinges Maiesties Ship at his comming forth of Denmarke, had a contrary winde to the rest of his Ships, then being in his companye, which was most strange and true, as the Kings Maiestie acknowledgeth, for when the rest of the Shippes had a faire and good winde, then was the winde contrarye and altogether against his Maiestie: and further the said witche declared, that his maiestie had neuer come safelye from the Sea, if his faith had not preuailed aboute their ententions.⁷⁷

Therefore, according to this account, the King only survived the attempted murder plotted by the witches thanks to the strength of his faith, an argument that further sustains the pamphlet's intent to underline the importance of the power of God and the King against the evil purposes of Satan and his representatives.

The following accounts in *News from Scotland* concern the examination of Doctor Fian, who had been identified by Gilly Duncan as the “regester”⁷⁸ of the coven, as his role was to record the events taking place during the nocturnal gatherings. Fian was also accused of using sorcery with the aim of bewitching a love rival, and, as he too appeared reluctant to confess, he was brought before King James and subjected to the most painful tortures:

The saide Doctor was taken and imprisoned, and vsed with the accustomed paine, prouided for those offences, inflicted vpon the rest as is aforesaide. First by thraving of his head with a roape, wherat he would confess nothing. Secondly, he was perswaded by faire means to confesse his follies, but that would preuaile as little. Lastly he was put to the most seuer and cruell paine in the world, called the bootes.⁷⁹

As Fian finally revealed the nature of his crimes to the authorities, he signed a confession and was incarcerated. During the time spent in prison, Fian showed different signs of repentance. He

⁷⁷Carmichael, pp. 15-17.

⁷⁸Carmichael, p. 18.

⁷⁹Carmichael, p. 18.

claimed that although the Devil had once again appeared to ask him to continue their allegiance, he had rejected Satan and pledged to lead a Christian life. However, as he afterwards tried to escape, the King suggested that Fian had met once again with the Devil to permanently renounce God. Therefore, the authorities re-examined his body in the attempt to find another Devil's mark and Fian was subjected to further tortures:

His nailes vpon all his fingers were riuen and pulled off with an instrument called in Scottish a *Turkas*, which in England wee call a payre of pincers, and vnder euerie nayle there was thrust in two needels ouer euen up to the heads. At all which tormentes notwithstanding the Doctor neuer shronke anie whit, neither woulde he then confesse it sooner for all the tortures inflicted upon him. Then was hee with all conuenient speed, by commandement, conuaied againe to the torment of the bootes, wherein hee continued a long time, and did abide so many blowes in them, that his legges were crushte and beaten togeather as small as might bee, and the bones and flesh so brused, that the bloud and marrowe spouted forth in great abundance, whereby they were made unseruiceable for euer.⁸⁰

The account of the tortures inflicted upon Fian provides a portrait of the means employed by Scottish authorities to extract the confessions from the accused witches. Although torturing the accused of practicing malevolent witchcraft was common, torture was only legal in Scotland if authorised by the privy council or parliament⁸¹. In the case of the North Berwick trials, as the torture applied to the suspects had not been authorised by a privy council warrant, we may assume that it took place because the King himself participated to the questioning phase and therefore authorized it⁸².

A commonly used and effective way of torturing the accused witches was the boot, consisting of a wooden frame bound around the leg and foot that was used to crush the foot, ankle and shin of the suspect.⁸³ Another instrument frequently employed was the pilliwinks, a device very similar to thumbscrews which was meant to cause pain by pressuring and crushing the ends of the fingers.⁸⁴ Thus the examiners could easily lead even an innocent to confess any crime whatsoever. Moreover,

⁸⁰Carmichael, pp. 27-28.

⁸¹Normand, Roberts, p. 99.

⁸²Normand, Roberts, p. 99.

⁸³Tyson, p. 218.

⁸⁴Tyson, p. 207.

as far as witch trials are concerned, confessions were considered fundamental and far more important than evidence. Indeed, while in theory a confession required corroboration to lead to a guilty verdict, in witchcraft cases a confession alone might have been enough to convict a suspect.⁸⁵ It is necessary to underline that the product of any interrogation that included torture might be considered as not entirely truthful or even completely unreliable. The same Gilly Duncan declared just before her execution that she had lied about some of the people she had accused of practicing malevolent witchcraft⁸⁶. Her recantation of the information she had previously given during the questioning phase might therefore be explained by the fact that the authorities usually placed a considerable amount of pressure on the accused witches to obtain a confession and therefore a conviction. Moreover, in this case, the suspects were not only subjected to torture, but also intimidated by the King's presence. Even Agnes Sampson's confession before his Majesty could generate some doubt, as the report of the trial shows that her examination was just as painful and intimidating. Moreover, her alleged knowledge of the exchange of words between the King and Queen Anne, which left James astonished and convinced him of the suspect's guilt, might be taken as a simple matter of coincidence, as the King's marriage was commonly discussed about by everyone in Scotland at the time.

What emerges from the analysis of *News from Scotland* is that the outcome of the North Berwick trials might have been influenced by James' eagerness to punish those responsible of attempting to kill him, as the witches were not only found guilty of *maleficium*, but also accused of high treason, since they plotted the murder of the King and Queen by witchcraft⁸⁷. Indeed, according to the reports, he took great delight to be present during the examination of the witches⁸⁸, as in the Barbara Napier case, whose trial was overridden by the king's determination to have a guilty

⁸⁵Normand, Roberts, p. 98.

⁸⁶Normand, Roberts, p. 106.

⁸⁷ Murray, M.A, The 'Devil' of North Berwick, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 15 (1918), p. 313.

⁸⁸Normand, Roberts, p. 128.

verdict⁸⁹. With his involvement in the North Berwick prosecution, James embarked on a personal battle against evil and increased his enthusiasm for the matter of witchcraft, which subsequently led to the publication of *Daemonologie* in 1597.



Figure 4: accused witches kneeling before the King in *News From Scotland*



Figure 5: woodcut from *News From Scotland* depicting the activities of Doctor Fian

⁸⁹Normand, Roberts, p. 100.

II.III. The Demonology of King James

Daemonologie, in Forme of a Dialogue, Diuided into three Bookes first appeared in 1597, published by James VI King of Scotland as a treatise on the matter of witchcraft, necromancy and demonology. In spite of being the only demonological treatise written by a renaissance monarch, critics believe that King James's *Daemonologie* is neither particularly original nor profound, as it presents a series of commonplaces regarding familiar witchcraft topics of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries⁹⁰. To expose his arguments, James chose the dialogical form, which was often used to address problematic issues such as witchcraft.⁹¹ His work is presented as a conversation between two men, Philomathes and Epistemon, where the latter clearly represents the alter ego of King James⁹² and has to convince the skeptical Philomates about the existence of witchcraft and the dangers posed by witches and magicians, who need to be held accountable for their crimes and harshly prosecuted.

As stated by the King in the preface, the aim of the treatise is to “resolue the doubting harts of many; both that such assaultes of Sathan are most certainly practized, & that the instrumentes thereof, merits most severely to be punished”⁹³. The preface therefore invokes the necessity to act against the “fearefull aboundinge at his time in this countrie, of these detestable slaues of the Deuill, the Witches or enchaunters” (ii), an issue which inspired the monarch to write *Daemonologie*. Moreover, the claim of the plentiful presence of witches in the country suggest that the work was written by the King on the heels of the North Berwick trials that involved him in 1590-1591.⁹⁴

⁹⁰Normand, Roberts, p. 331.

⁹¹Normand, Roberts, p. 333.

⁹²Tyson, p. 28.

⁹³ James I and VI, *Daemonologie, In Forme of a Dialogue, Divided into three Bookes*, Edinburgh: Robert Walde-Grave, 1597, p. iii (This is the edition I use throughout).

⁹⁴Normand, Gareth, p. 327.

Since the aim of James's treatise is to convince the public about the reality and danger of the practice of witchcraft and to invoke the necessity of a harsh punishment for such crimes, *Daemonologie* has juridical intents and aligns its author with both theologians and inquisitors.⁹⁵ The dialogue therefore instructs its readers on various aspects regarding the unlawful practice of witchcraft through the descriptions of instruments used by the Devil's servants, such as magical circles and conjuration techniques, the analysis of demonological terms and of the most effective remedies to contrast witches and the malevolent purposes of Satan.

Daemonologie is presented in the preface in strong opposition to the "damnable opinions" (iii) of those who fail to recognize the problems posed by *maleficium* as well as the existence of witches, such as Reginald Scot, the author of *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, who according to James "is not ashamed in publike print to deny that ther can be such a thing as Witch-craft" (iii). However, it has been noted that, despite his stigmatisation of Scot's work, James actually took most of his treatise's demonological information precisely from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, which included the translations of important continental writings such as *Malleus Maleficarum* and Bodin's *Demonomanie*.⁹⁶ Moreover, although scholars have addressed the difficulty of tracing all the sources of *Daemonologie*, partly because of the shortness of the treatise, another main source of the treatise is the Bible.⁹⁷ Indeed, the dialogue is disseminated with citations of passages from the Scripture which Philomates quotes to prove the unlawful nature of witchcraft.

Daemonologie is divided into three books. The first book includes the general description of magic and witchcraft and the main differences between these two practices. The second book places a higher focus on black witchcraft, analyses the nature of the pact between the Devil and the witch and explores the wicked actions performed by the latter. Finally, the third book mainly concerns

⁹⁵Normand, Roberts, p. 332.

⁹⁶Normand, Roberts, p. 330.

⁹⁷Normand, Roberts, p. 329.

aspects of demonology, such as demonic possession, and proposes a distinction between the main types of evil spirits.

The dialogue begins with Philomathes exposing his doubts about the existence of witches and asking for Epistemon's opinion on the matter. Epistemon agrees to expose his arguments to support the reality of witchcraft and claims that the evidence to show that "Witchcraft, and Witches haue been, and are" (2) can be found in the Scriptures, in daily experience and in the confessions of the witches themselves. Philomathes, however, appears rather skeptical about the biblical evidence produced by Epistemon at the beginning of the treatise. Indeed, in the first chapter of Book One, Philomathes tells Epistemon that if he intends to use the famous biblical example of Saul's Phytoness, the Witch of Endor, as a proof of the existence of witchcraft, his argument will be weak. Philomathes believes that the Witch of Endor, the woman who supposedly summoned the spirit of Samuel as requested by Saul in the Old Testament, did not actually conjure the spirit of the prophet and that Saul was only tricked, since the summoning of a holy spirit is not only unlikely to have happened but, most importantly, "prophane and againste all Theologie" (3). However, Epistemon will use the Scripture to convince Philomathes that not only did Saul witness an actual apparition of a spirit, but also that the spirit conjured by the witch was that of the Devil in the likeness of a Saint. Furthermore, he proceeds to quote more passages of the Scripture where the practice of witchcraft is clearly mentioned and condemned and states that, since the law of God "speakes nothing in vain" (5), there can be no doubt that witchcraft is real:

As to the next, that it was not the spirit of *Samuel*, I grant: In the proving whereof ye neede not to insist, since all Christians of whatso-ever Religion agrees vpon that, and none but either mere ignorants, or Necromancers or Witches doubteth thereof. And that the Diuel is permitted at som-times to put himself in the liknes of the Saintes, it is plaine in the Scriptures, where it is said that Sathan can trans-forme himselfe into an Angell of light. [...] But to proue this my first proposition, that there can be such a thing as witch-craft, & witches, there are manie mo places in the Scriptures then this (as I said before). As first in the law of God, it is plainely prohibited. But certaine it is, that the Law of God speakes nothing in vaine, neither doth it lay curses, or inioyne punishmentes vpon shaddowes, condemning that to be il, which is not in essence or being as we call it. Secondlie it is plaine, where wicked Pharaohs wise-men imitated ane number of *Moses* miracles, to harden the tyrants heart there by. Thirdly, said not *Samuell* to *Saull* that *disobedience is as the sinne of Witch-craft*? To compare to a thing that were not, it were too absurd. Fourthlie, was not *Simon Magnus*, a man of that craft? And fiftlie, what was she that had the spirit of *Phyton*? Beside innumerable other places that were irkeson to recite (4-5)

After attempting to prove the existence of witchcraft through the use of the Scripture, Epistemon explains how the Devil manages to tempt those who recur to the practice of magic and seal a pact with him. According to Epistemon, people may be tempted due to their curiosity and desire for knowledge, to their thirst for revenge or, finally, due to their greedy desire for material goods and adds that the desire for material possessions and the vengeful intents are peculiar of witches:

PHI. [...] and how manie are the meanes, whereby the Devill allures persones in anie of these snares?

EPI. Even by these three passionnes that are within our selues: Curiositie in great ingines: thirst of revenge, for some tortes deeply apprehended: or greedie appetite of geare, caused through great pouerty. As to the first of these, Curiosity, it is onelie the inticement of Magiciens, or Necromanciers: and the other two are the allures of the Sorcerers, or Witches, for that olde and craftie Serpent, being a spirite, hee easilie spyies our affections, and so conformes himselfe thereto, to decaue vs to our wracke (7-8)

Epistemon furthermore suggests that the curious magicians who bind themselves to the Devil are but “miserable wretches” (11) who will eventually find out that their knowledge “is nothing increased except in knowing evil, and the horrors of hell for punishment thereof, as Adam’s was by the eating of the forbidden tree” (11). Moreover, his description of the magician willing to serve the Devil in exchange for knowledge is remarkably similar to the story of Faust, which was popular in Europe during the sixteenth century and provided an influential narrative of a magician’s career who corrupted his soul because moved by curiosity⁹⁸.

Since the purpose of *Daemonologie* is not only to assert the reality of witchcraft but also to prove its unlawful nature, Epistemon devotes part of the discussion to explain why people must not recur to the practice of magic. Indeed, Philomates first fails to understand why the use of charms should be prohibited and considered sinful when both men and women have always practiced this art publicly. As explained by Epistemon, magical practices are to be considered unlawful since they represent a sin against God: “as none can be schollers in a schole, & not be subject to the master thereof: so none can studie and put in practize [...] the cirkles and art of Magie without committing a horrible defection from God” (15). Epistemon also provides the example of the difference

⁹⁸Normand, Roberts, p. 343.

between the science of astronomy and astrology. Epistemon concludes that, although both are mainly based on the observation of planets and stars, there is a consistent difference between them. Indeed, while the science of astronomy is described as “not onelie lawful, but most necessarie and commendable” (13), the other derives from the consultation and preaching of celestial bodies to foretell the future, a practice that should be avoided and condemned:

The second part is to truste so much to their influences, as thereby to fore-tell what common-wales shall flourish or decay: what, persones shall be fortunate or vnfortunate: what ide shall winne in anie battell: What man shall obtaine victorie at singular combate: What way, and of what age shall men die: What horse shall winne at matche-running; and diuerse such like incredible things, wherein *Cardanus*, *Cornelius Agrippa*, and diuerse others haue more curioslie then profitably written at large. Of this roote last spoken of, spring innumerable branches; such as the knowledge by the natiuities, the *Cheiromancie*, *Geomantie*, *Hydromantie*, *Arithmantie*, *Physiognomie*: & a thousand others: which were much practised, & holden in great reuerence by the *Gentles* of olde. And this last part of *Astrologie* whereof I haue spokenk, which is the root of their branches, was called by them *pars fortunae*. This parte now is vtterlie vnlawful to be trusted in, or practized amongst christians, as leaning to no ground of natural reason: & it is this part which I called before the deuils schole (13-14)

The sixth chapter of Book One of *Daemonologie* provides a description of the contract between the sorcerer or witch and the Devil, which is presented as a mutual agreement where the latter commits himself to perform certain actions for the witch who has given her soul in return. As part of the contract, that is signed with the blood of the magician or witch and leaves a mark on the body, the Devil will oblige himself to appear when summoned “either in the likenes of a dog, a Catte, an Ape or such-like other beast” (19). At times, the Devil can even take possession of a dead body, an action that pertains to the practice of necromancy, another unlawful practice that makes use of carcasses for divination purposes. According to Epistemon, even necromancy is a sin and has to be condemned just like the practice of witchcraft, an argument that corresponds to the King’s own idea of punishment for such crimes. Indeed, as seen in the previous chapter, while the Elizabethan law on witchcraft was more lenient towards necromancers, King James’s 1604 statute strictly prohibited taking a dead corpse, or parts of it, for magical purposes and introduced death penalty for necromancy-related offences.

In the second book of *Daemonologie*, James turns from the male world of magicians to the female world of witches, their evil practices and conventions⁹⁹. The book begins with an attack against the authors that spread disinformation on such matters: “that fielde is likewise verie large: and although in the mouthes and pennes of manie, yet fewe knowes the trueth” (27). Indeed, as seen in the Preface of the treatise, James strongly criticized those who denied the realities concerning witchcraft and targeted Reginald Scot specifically. While Epistemon supports James’s argument in the dialogue, Philomates first supports the ideas of the sceptics and shares Scot’s view of witchcraft as the product of the fanciful imagination of melancholic women. For this reason, he believes that confessions should not be taken seriously and that, if people actually had the power to bewitch others, no one on earth would be left alive to escape the menace of witches:

Secondlie, where ye would oppone the dailie practique, & confession of so manie, that is thought likewise to be but verie melancholicque imaginations of simple rauing creatures. Thirdly, if Witches had such power of Witching of folkes to death (as they say they haue), there had bene none left alieue long sence in the world but they: at the least, no good or godlie person of whatsoeuer estate, coulde haue escaped their deuilrie (28)

To contrast Scot’s view on witchcraft as a product of melancholy, Epistemon suggests that the symptoms of melancholic humour do not correspond with the attitude displayed by witches. Indeed, he objects that while the melancholic subject usually appears depressed, solitary and maniac, witches on the contrary tend to lead merry lives, indulge in all kinds of earthly pleasures and constantly seek company. Finally he states that the unreliable confession provided by a melancholic can be distinguished by the truthful confession of a witch, since melancholic subjects tend to continuously contradict themselves and seem rather inconsistent as according to their sickness:

For as the humor of Melancholie in the selfe is blacke, heauie and terrene, so are the symptomes thereof, in any persons that are subject therevnto, leannes, palenes, desire of solitude: and if they come to the highest degree therof, mere folie and *Manie*: where as by the contrarie, a great number of them that euer haue bene convict or confessors of Witchcraft, as may be presently scene by manie that haue at his time confessed: they are by contrarie, I say, some of them rich and worldly-wise, some of them fatte or corpulent in their bodies, and most part of them altogether giuen ouer to the pleasures of the flesh, continual haunting of companie, and all kind of merrines, both lawfull and vnlawfull, which are thinges contrary to the symptomes of Melancholie, whereof I spake, and further experience daylie proues how loath they are to confesse without torture, which witnesseth their guiltines, where by the contrary, the Melancholicques neuer spares to bewray themselues, by their continuall discourses, feeding therby their humor in that which they thinke no crime (30)

⁹⁹Normand and Roberts, p. 345.

The fourth and fifth chapter of book two are devoted to the description of the actions that are typically attributed to witches and the kinds of power given them by Satan. As far as the abilities of witches are concerned, Epistemon maintains that while sometimes the Devil might delude their senses and make them believe they have certain powers that are in fact nothing but illusions, they are actually able to perform certain actions through the help of their master. As to the actions that witches are truly capable of, Epistemon claims they are able to transport themselves and fly “carried by the force of the Spirite which is their conductor, either about the earth or about the Sea swiftly, to the place where they are to meet” (38). Moreover, whenever they fly from one place to another, “they are invisible to any other, except among themselves” (39), a thing that, according to Epistemon, is made possible by the fact that Satan may “thicken & obscure so the air that is next about them” (39) and therefore make it difficult for anyone to see them.

To bewitch other people and carry out their evil purposes, they are carefully taught by the Devil how to make wax figures, use stones and prepare potions:

To some others at these times hee teacheth, how to make Pictures of waxe or clay: That by the roasting thereof, the persones; that they beare the name of, may be continually melted or dried away by continually sickness. To some hee giues such stones or poulders, as will helpe to cure or cast on diseases: And to some he teacheth kinds of vncouth poisons, which Mediciners vnderstandes not (44)

As to the *maleficia* that witches can perform towards other people, they are able to cause either love or conflict among men and women, make people physically or mentally sick and cause evil spirits to haunt houses or people:

They can make men or women to love or hate other, which may be verie possible to the Devil to effectuate, seeing he being a subtil spirite, knowes well enough how to perswade the corrupted affection of them whom God will permit him so to deale with. They can lay the sickness of one vpon another, which likewise is verie possible vnto him [...]. They can be-witch and take the life of men or women, by roasting of the Pictures, as I spake before, which likewise is verie possible to their Master to performe [...]. They can make folkes to become phreneticque or Maniacque, which likewise is verie possible to their master to do, sence they are but naturall sicknesses: and so he may lay on these kinds aswell as any others. They can make spirites either to follow or trouble persones, or haunt certaine houses, and affraie oftentimes the inhabitantes: as hath bene knownen to be done by our Witches at this time. And likewise they can make some to be possessed with spirites, & so to become verie Daemoniacques: and this last sorte is verie possible likewise to the Devil their Master to do, since he may easilie send his owne angells to trouble in what forme he pleases, any whom God wil permit him so to vse (45-47)

Interestingly, Epistemon also mentions their ability to raise tempests and storms:

They can rayse stormes and temptestes in the aire, either vpon Sea or land, though not vniuersally, but in such a particular place and prescribed boundes, as God will permitte them so to trouble: Which likewise is verie easie to be discerned from anie other naturall tempestes that are meteores, in respect of the suddaine and violent raising thereof, together with the short induring of the same. And this is likewise verie possible to heir master do do, he hauing such affinitie with the aire as being a spirite, and hauing such power of the forming and moouing thereof, as ye haue heard me alreadie declare: For in the Scripture, that stile of *Prince of the aire* is giuen vnto him (46-47)

The description of the manipulation of weather phenomena might be considered a reference to the trials in North Berwick, as the witches involved in the prosecution were accused of attempting to the king's and queen's lives by the raising of storms that were supposed to sink the ships of the royal couple. Critics indeed support the existence of a link between the text of *Daemonologie* and *News from Scotland's* account of the North Berwick prosecution, since many of the actions attributed to witches in the dialogue recall the examinations and confessions of the accused of the 1590-1591 trials. Indeed, it would almost be surprising if, when writing *Daemonologie*, the King had not drawn on his own experience of the examination and trial of witches¹⁰⁰. References to the North Berwick prosecution are disseminated throughout the dialogue and it might be argued that another element that the two texts have in common is that both *Daemonologie* and *News from Scotland* present the very same definite opposition of God and the King – his representative on earth – against Satan. Indeed, the Preface underlines the difference between God's and Satan's ends and maintains the same contrast between the forces of good and the forces of evil:

But one thing I will pray thee to obserue in all these places, where I reason vpon the deuils power, which is the diferent ends & scopes, that God as the first cause and the Devill as his instrument and second cause shootes at in all these actiones of the Deuil, (as Gods hang-man). For where the deuilles intention in them is euer to perish, either in the soule or the body, or both of them, that he is so permitted to deale with: God, by the contrarie, drawes euer out of that euill glorie to himselfe, either by the wracke of the wicked in his justice, or /by the tryall of the patient, and amentment of the faithful, being wakened vp with that rod of correction (vi-vii)

Therefore, while Satan craves the annihilation of body and soul, God works in the name of justice, sustains the faithful and wrecks the purposes of the representatives of evil. Similarly, the text of *News from Scotland*, as seen earlier, portrays the witches as slaves of the Devil whose aim is utter destruction and magnifies the power of the Almighty against Satan, as He successfully contrasted

¹⁰⁰Normand, Roberts, p. 328.

the murder plotted by the witches to defend King James, a true Christian. The relationship between God and Satan built in *Daemonologie*, however, presents not only the difference in their purposes, but also the Devil's and the witches' attempt to imitate the Almighty's actions: indeed, James's work insists on the idea of witchcraft being the very opposite of God's revealed religion and a godly society, both of which the Satan and witches ape and mimic in their unlawful practices¹⁰¹. As suggested by Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts, witches often imitate and parody Christian life in their actions and activities: indeed, both the godly and the witches gather in churches and, just as God has his faith and sacraments, so does the Devil, who sets up a false worship that substitutes true religion¹⁰². Furthermore, they note that the King's determination to prove that the magical practices of witches are an attempt to ape religion is the same displayed by other protestant demonologists, such as Hemmingsen and Daneau, who claim that the witches' actions tend to mock the two remaining sacraments of the protestant church: the eucharist and baptism¹⁰³.

Finally, the contrast between good and evil in *Daemonologie* clearly states Satan's limited amount of power against the Almighty's omnipotence: after the fall and the loss of grace, the Devil wanders through the world as God's hangman, since he can only misbehave and deceive people into the art of witchcraft as much as God will permit him to. This argument applies to Epistemon's attempt to explain why God allows Satan and witches to afflict people through *maleficium*. Epistemon's explanation proves that it is the Almighty's own will to let people be either tempted or troubled by the Devil and malevolent witchcraft, as God intends to punish the wicked for their sins, awake the faith of the weak or, finally, test the patience of the most faithful ones, as he did with Job:

PHI. But will God permit these wicked instrumentes by the power of the Deuill their master, to trouble by anie of these meanes, anie that beleuees in him?

EPI. No doubt, for there are three kinde of folkes whom God will permit so to be tempted or troubled; the wicked for their horrible sinnes, to punish them in the like measure; The godlie that are sleeping in anie

¹⁰¹Normand, Roberts, p. 339.

¹⁰²Normand, Roberts, p. 340.

¹⁰³Normand, Roberts, p. 345.

great sinnes or infirmities and weakenesse in faith, to waken them vp the faster by such vncouth forme: and euen some of the beste, that their patience may bee tryed before the world, as IOBS was. For why may not God vse anie kinde of extraordinarie punishment, when it pleases him; as well as the ordinarie roddes of sicknesse or other aduersities (47)

The fifth chapter of the second book of the treatise provides further information on the matter of witchcraft concerning the possible remedies against *maleficium* and the most suitable punishment to adopt against witches. As far as the remedies against a spell are concerned, Epistemon claims it is utterly unlawful to recur to counter-magic to cure the effects of *maleficium*. Hence, people should not seek the help of another witch to find a remedy against a spell, but rather solve the problem “onely by earnest prayer to God, by amendement of their liues” (48), since “by the Deuils meanes, *can never the Deuill be casten out*, as Christ sayeth” (49). Epistemon further adds that the right punishment for a witch consists in her execution and adds that her death is nothing but “a salutarie sacrifice for the patient” (49), who would therefore be cured by the supernatural sickness affecting him. As suggested by Donald Tyson, Epistemon’s support of the execution of a witch to cure *maleficium* is one of the most evil instructions given by James in his book¹⁰⁴. Indeed, he believes that the violent attitude displayed by James in the text might have generated a reaction of collective hysteria and have therefore increased the number of people accusing one another of practicing black witchcraft: “anyone believing in witchcraft who had the misfortune to fall sick from some lingering disease or infirmity would begin to look with suspicion at his neighbours, in the expectation that the death of one of them would cure the sickness”¹⁰⁵. Furthermore, Tyson maintains that the same incitement to violence towards witches can be found in the sixth chapter of book two, when Philomates asks whether witches do have any power against the magistrates that prosecute them. Indeed, Epistemon’s answer gives voice to James’s belief in the urgency to diligently punish those guilty of witchcraft related crimes, as he replies that the more harshly they prosecute a witch, the

¹⁰⁴Tyson, p. 134.

¹⁰⁵Tyson, p. 134.

more they will be protected by God against the Devil's menaces. On the contrary, their reluctance to convict a guilty witch will be punished by the Almighty:

PHI. But what is their power against the Magistrates?

EPI. Lesse or greater, according as he deales with them. For he be slouthfull towards them, God is verie able to make them instrumentes to waken & punish his sloth. But if he be the contrarie, he according to the iust law of God, and allowable law of all Nationes, will be diligent in examining and punishing of them: God will not permit their master to trouble or hinder so good woorke.

PHI. But fra they be once in handes and firmance, haute they anie further power in their craft?

EPI. This is according to the forme of their detention. If they be but apprehended and detained by anie priuate person, vpon other priuate respectes, their power no doubt either in escaping, or in doing hurte, is no lesse nor euer it was before. But if on the other parte, their apprehending and detention be by the lawfull Magistrate, vpon the iust respectes of their guiltinesse in that craft, their power is then no greater then before that euer they medled with their master. For where God beginnes iustlie to strike by his lawfull Liutenentes, it is not in the Deuilles power to defraude or bereaue him of office, or effect of his powerfull and reuenging Scepter (50-51)

Therefore, when witches are punished appropriately, they have no power whatsoever either to escape or to hurt those that prosecute them and the magistrates themselves become God's allies in the battle against Satan. As regards this passage, Tyson concludes that Epistemon is once again articulating James's personal eagerness to execute witches, instigating violence against suspects and justifying his attitude by claiming the Almighty himself desires them to be heavily punished:

This is another calculated statement by James. His assertion is that the more aggressively anyone seeks to locate and prosecute those believed to be witches, the more God will defend that person's health and security against magic. As a consequence of this belief, it was inevitable that neurotic and hysterical members of society – those most likely to see witches around every corner – would be the most active in making accusations against their neighbours, as a way of ensuring their own security against witchcraft. [...] According to his opinion, by vigorously pursuing the prosecution of witches he was not only performing the will of God but also ensuring his own security against any spells that might have worked against him.¹⁰⁶

Another question posed by Philomates regarding the imprisonment of witches concerns their Master's behaviour during the period of incarceration. Indeed, he asks Epistemon whether Satan ever visits them in prison and, if he does, what form he takes to appear to them and whether it is possible for anyone that happens to be present to see the Devil during his visit to the witch. According to Epistemon, whether the Devil will actually visit imprisoned witches depends on their own behaviour: if they deny any allegation against them, he might as well pay a visit to persuade

¹⁰⁶Tyson, pp. 140-141.

them with more false hopes. However, if the witch repents and confesses her crimes, God will not allow Satan to bother her any longer with his presence. As to the shape taken by Satan to visit them, Epistemon concludes that he might appear in different forms and that at times he can even be seen by other people present:

PHI. But will neuer their master come to visite them, fra they be once apprehended and put in furance?

EPI. 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 findes time to speake with them, either if he finde them in anie comfort, to fill them more and more with the vaine hope of some meanes of reliefe: or else if hee finde them in a deepe despaire, by all meanes to augment the same, and to perswade them by some extraordinarie meanes to put themselues downe, which verie commonlie they doe. But if they be penitent and confesse, God will not permit him to trouble them anie more with his presence and alurements.

PHI. It is not good vsing his counsell I see then. But I woulde earnestlie know when he appearres to them in Prison, what formes vses he then to take?

EPI. Diuers formes, euen as he vses to do at other times vnto them. For as I told you, speking of Magie, he appears to that kinde of craftes-men ordinarily in an forme, according as they agree vpon it amongst themselues: Or if they be but prentises, according to the qualitie of their circles or conjurations: Yet to these capped creatures, he appears as he pleases, and as he findes meetest for their humors. For euen at their publik conuentiones, he appears to diuers of them in diuers formes, as we haue found in the difference of their confessiones in that point: For he deluding them with vaine impressiones in the aire, makes himselfe to seeme more terrible to the grosser sorte, that they maie thereby be moued to feare and reuerence him the more: And les monstrous and vncouthlike againe to the craftier sorte, least otherwaies they might sturre and skunner at his vglinesse. [...]

PHI. But I would speere one worde further yet, concerning his appearing to them in prison, which is this. May any other that chancs to be present at that time in the prison, see him as well as they.

EPI. Some-times they will, and some-times not, as it pleases God (51-53)

As regards the possibility of Satan visiting the imprisoned witch, James had firsthand experience in the subject, as he personally witnessed the examination of Doctor Fian who, as mentioned in *News From Scotland*, allegedly met the Devil during the time he spent in prison prior to his execution. Interestingly, the account of the North Berwick trials suggests that it had been King James himself who suggested that Fian had possibly been visited by the Devil to sign another pact after his initial act of repentance:

Wherevpon the kinges maiestie perceiuing his stubbourne wilfulnesse, conceiued and imagined that in the time of his absence hee had entered into new conference and league with the deuill his master, and that hee had beene agayne newly marked, for the which hee was narrowly searched¹⁰⁷

The issue of the trial and right punishment of witchcraft by magistrates continues in the final chapter of *Daemonologie*. As to the matter of the punishment to adopt, which had already been

¹⁰⁷Carmichael, p. 27.

identified with death, Epistemon concludes that a witch should die by fire. He further adds that anyone should be held accountable for witchcraft related crimes without making any kind of exception based on sex, age or social rank. However, it would be possible for a magistrate to avoid the conviction of children, “for they are not capable of reason as to practice such thinges” (78). Finally, Epistemon explains that punishment should be applied not only to those who put the unlawful act of witchcraft into practice, but also to those who put their trust in witches and sorcerers and consult them: “speaking of *Magie*, the consulters, trusters in, ouer-lookers, interteiners, or stirrers vp of these craftes-folkes, are equallie guiltie with themselues that are the practisers” (78).

James’s emphasis on the necessity to convict the guilty party without making particular distinctions based on the sex of the accused may suggest that the link between women and witchcraft was not a pressing concern of the King¹⁰⁸. In the fifth chapter of book two, when asked by Philomates to explain why “there are twentie women giuen to that craft, where there is one man” (43), Epistemon provides a very basic explanation so as to justify the predominance of women dedicated to witchcraft by claiming that women are more easily deceived, as the Bible testifies: “for as that sexe is frailer than man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snarers of the Deuill, as was ouer well proued to be true, by the Serpents deceiuing of *Eve* at the beginning” (44). Epistemon’s answer sounds rather familiar to the way Kramer and Sprenger justified the abundance of women witches in *Malleus Maleficarum*. Indeed, as stated in the previous chapter, they asserted women’s physical and spiritual weakness as well as their likeliness to be seduced by evil¹⁰⁹. However, although James adopts the same sort of conventional anti-feminism typical of demonologists and offers familiar arguments regarding the alleged frailty of the female sex, it has been suggested that the misogynistic view adopted by the King is not particularly aggressive.¹¹⁰ Hence, Epistemon’s claim

¹⁰⁸Normand, Roberts, p. 345.

¹⁰⁹ Kramer, Heinrich and Sprenger, James, *Malleus Maleficarum*, translated by Montague Summers, London: Bracken Books, 1996, p. 44.

¹¹⁰Normand, Roberts, p. 345.

regarding the need to punish witchcraft without distinction indicates King James's eagerness to prosecute and convict any possible suspect to contrast the damned art of the Devil by all possible means.

The third and final book of *Daemonologie* concerns evil spirits and presents a division of the four principal kinds of such supernatural manifestations and a description of how they can trouble human beings. Although he divides spirits into four different categories, in the first chapter of the final book Epistemon suggests that "they are in effect, but all one kinde of spirites, who for abusing the more of mankinde, takes on these sundrie shapes, and vses diverse formes of out-ward actiones, as if some were of nature better than other" (57). Hence, he believes that although they might perform different actions, such as haunting places or possessing people, and appear in different forms, they should be considered as the same type of devilish manifestation whose aim is to afflict mankind.

The first kind of evil spirits mentioned in book three are those that haunt places. Epistemon explains that such spirits have been given different names according to the actions they perform and the form they take. For instance, "if they were spirites that haunted some houses, by appearing in diuers and horrible formes, and making greate dinne" (57) they would usually be identified as *lemures* or *spectra*. However, if they appeared "in the likenesse of anie defunct to some friends" (57), they would receive the name of *umbrae mortuorum*, shades of the dead. Among the reasons why spirits should haunt a place in particular, Epistemon claims that when they trouble a certain house "it is a sure token either of grosse ignorance, or of some grosse and slenderous sinnes amongst the inhabitantes thereof" (58) and that, as a result of the sins of the inhabitants, God might allow an evil spirit to trouble them as a form of punishment. When Philomates asks for the most effective remedy to banish an evil spirit from a haunted house, Epistemon replies that there are only two possible remedies to get rid of the spirit: "the one is ardent prayer to God, both of these persones that are

troubled with them, and of that Church whereof they are. The other is the purging of themselves by amendement of life from such sinnes, as haue procured that extraordinarie plague” (60). Hence, the methods proposed by Epistemon to banish a spirit are the very same remedies against *maleficium* mentioned in book two, as both problems find their solution solely in prayer and correction of one’s sins. According to Normand and Roberts, the impact of the Reformation is observable in these passages, as it had deprived people of traditional religious remedies against supernatural afflictions and left them with the sole options of patience and prayer¹¹¹.

The following kinds of spirits analysed by Epistemon are those that “outwardlie troubles and followes some persones or else inwardlie possesses them” (62). Just like the inhabitants of a haunted place, those troubled or possessed by a spirit are either being tested in their patience by God or punished “as being guiltie of greeuous offences” (62). Among such troubling spirits, Epistemon includes *incubi* and *succubi*, which are referred to as more monstrous due to their ability to have sexual intercourse with the person they haunt. Indeed, the *incubus* was commonly believed to be a sexual spirit that took the form of a male human, while *succubus* took the form of a female and, as suggested by many demonologists at the time, the gender of the spirit could change according to the person with whom they had sexual intercourse¹¹². In the third chapter of book three, Epistemon gives a precise account of the actions performed by *incubi* and *succubi* and describes how the sexual abuse could take place:

By two meanes this greate kinde of abuse might possibly be performed: The one, when the Deuill onelie as a spirite, and stealing out the sperme of a dead bodie, abuses them that way, they not graithlie seeing anie shape or feeling anie thing, but that which he so conuayes in that part: As we reade of a Monasterie of Nunnes which were burnt for their being that way abused. The other meane is when he borrowes a dead bodie and so visiblie, and as it seemes vnto them naturallie as a man converses with them. But it is to be noted, that in whatsoeuer way he vseth it, that sperme seemes intollerably cold to the person abused (67)

Hence, *incubi* and *succubi* can either steal the semen of a dead corpse and rape a woman or possess a dead corpse to abuse people. Moreover, as regards the possibility for a woman to become

¹¹¹Normand and Roberts, p. 347.

¹¹²Tyson, p. 166.

pregnant after the intercourse, Epistemon explains that, although the semen of a dead body cannot generate life, it might be possible for the Devil to make a women's belly swell after the abuse and that "when the time of her deliuary should come to make her thoil with great doloures, like vnto that naturall course, and then subillie to slippe in the Mid-wiues handes, stockes, stones, or some monstrous barne brought from some other place" (68).

The next topic discussed by Epistemon and Philomates is demonic possession. Philomates shows a certain curiosity regarding the nature of possession and wants to know how it can be possible to discern between a case of demonic possession and a case of mania. Furthermore, he wonders how the possessed can actually be cured according to the remedies provided by the Catholic church, which they considered to be heretical. As regards the possibility to tell the difference between a possessed and a maniac, Epistemon explains that there are many symptoms which can be considered peculiar to demonic possessions and therefore make the distinction easier. However, among the peculiar symptoms displayed by the possessed, Epistemon excludes the "diuers vaine signes that the *Papistes* attributes vnto it: Such as the raging at holie water, their fleeing a back from the Croce, their not abiding the hearing of God named, and innumerable such like vaine thinges" (70). Hence, the true symptoms of demonic possessions, according to Epistemon, include the incredible and inexplicable physical strength and state of agitation of the possessed as well as the possessed's ability to speak different languages he had never heard before, with a peculiar hollow voice that seems to be generated from the person's breast rather than coming out of the mouth.

But to come to these three symptomes then, whereof I spake, I account the one of them to be the incredible strength of the possessed creature, which will farre exceede the strength of six of the wightest and wodest of any other men that are not so troubled. The next is the boldning vp of so far of the patients breast and bellie, with such an vnnatural sturring and vehement agitation with them: and such an ironie hardnes of his sinnowes so stiffelie bended out, that it were not possible to prick out as it were the skinne of anie other person so far: so mightely works the Deuil in all the members and senses of his body, he being locallie within the same, suppose of his Soule and affectiones thereof, hee haue no more power than of any other mans. The last is the speaking of sundrie languages, which the patient is knowen by them that were acquainte with him neuer to have learned, and that with an vncouth and hollowe voice, and al the time of his speaking, a greater motion being in his breast than in his mouth (70-71)

As regards the description of the main features of demonic possession, it seems important to underline that King James believed he had personally witnessed a similar case during the examination of Doctor Fian during the North Berwick trials. Indeed, as seen in *News from Scotland*, Fian confessed having bewitched a love rival so that “once in xxiiii howres he fell into a lunacie and madnes, and so continued one whole hour together”¹¹³. To prove Doctor Fian’s alleged ability, the King had the gentleman bewitched by Fian brought before him during the examination and saw the man falling into a peculiar state of madness which shocked all the people present, as he appeared so strong that his fits could hardly be controlled. The description of the episode in *News From Scotland* thus resembles *Daemonologie*’s description of demonic possession:

And being in his Maiesties chamber, suddenly he gaue a great scritch and fell into a madnes, sometimes bending himselfe, and sometimes capring so directly vp, that his head did touch the seeling of the Chamber, to the great admiration of his Maiestie and others then present: so that all the Gentlemen in the Chamber were not able to holde him, vntill they called in more helpe, who together bound him hand and foot: and suffering the said gentleman to lye still vntil his fvrye was past, he within an hower came againe to himselfe; when being demaunded of the Kinges Maiestie what he saw or did all that while, he answered that he had been in a sound sleepe.¹¹⁴

However, as suggested by Tyson, it is possible that Doctor Fian was already aware of the gentleman’s bizarre mental state and fits and that he perhaps claimed to have caused his lunacy through witchcraft just to avoid further torture¹¹⁵.

As to the possibility of the Papists to succeed in casting an evil spirit out of someone’s body, Epistemon states that most demonic possessions are often counterfeited and made up by the Papists themselves. Moreover, he claims that their false miracles and alleged successful exorcisms are often just temporary remedies. However, when the evil spirit is cast out permanently, the efficacy of the remedy does not depend on the Catholic priest’s own virtue but rather on the virtue of Jesus Christ. Indeed, Epistemon believes that if a Papist follows the exact rules regarding exorcism prescribed by Jesus, he may perhaps successfully cast the spirit out of the afflicted’s body:

¹¹³Carmichael, p. 20.

¹¹⁴Carmichael, pp. 20-21.

¹¹⁵Tyson, p. 172.

And as to your next demande, it is first to be doubted if the *Papistes* or anie not professing the onelie true Religion, can relieue anie of that trouble. And next, in-case they can, vpon what respectes it is possible vnto them. As to the former, vpon two reasons, it is grounded: first, that it is knowen so manie of them to bee counterfeite, which wyle the Clergie inuentes for confirming of their rotten Religion [...]. As to the other part of the argument, in-case they can, which rather (with reuerence of the learned thinking otherwise) I am induced to beleue, by reason of the faithfull report that men sound of religion haue made according to their sight thereof, I think if so be, I say these may be the respectes, whereupon the *Papistes* may haue that power. CHRIST gaue a commission and power to his Apostles to cast out Deuilles, which they accordingly thereunto put in execution: The rules he had them obserue in that action was fasting and praier: & the action it selfe was to be done in his name. This power of theirs proceeded not then of anie vertue in them, but onely in him who directed them. As was clearly proued by *Iudas* his having as greate power in that commission, as anie of the reste. [...] It is no wonder, then, these respects of this action being considered, that it may be possible to the *Papiste*, though erring in sundrie points of Religion to accomplish this, if they vse the right forme prescribed by CHRIST herein (71-73)

Finally, the discourse concerning the different kinds of spirits is concluded with the description of the fourth type of supernatural manifestation commonly known as fairies. According to Epistemon, the existence of fairies is an illusion, as “the Devil illuded the senses of sundry simple creatures, in making them beleue that they saw and harde such thinges as were nothing so indeed” (74). Hence, when Philomates replies that, as a matter of fact, many witches have been condemned to death after claiming they had witnessed the apparition of such spirits and “saw a faire Queene, who being now lighter, gaue them a stone that had sundrie vertues” (74), Epistemon replies that no such thing as fairies exist and that the witches’ confessions concerning fairies are the result of their imagination being deluded by Satan.

Once Epistemon has satisfied all of Philomates’s doubts around the matters of witchcraft and demonology, the dialogue between the two characters ends with the latter taking his leave and expressing his hope for God to permanently purge the country from such evil practices. However, one further question remains unanswered, since it still appears rather unclear why James took the doings of witches so personally so as to attend their examination, actively participate in their questionings and dedicate a whole treatise to the subject. Critics have advanced different theories so as to understand the true reason behind his massive interest in witchcraft. As suggested by Tyson, the King’s involvement could have possibly been moved by fear rather than by righteous indignation towards the forces of evil, as he believes that by taking on an aggressive role in the

matter of witchcraft prosecution and becoming the leader of the battle against the Devil, James could make sure he was protected from the menaces of evil magic, since witches had already attempted to his own life¹¹⁶. However, others have argued that his interest and involvement were part of a much more complex political scheme to affirm his power as monarch through the use of violence against witches. As suggested by Daniel Fischlin, the image of God created in *Daemonologie* is that of an entity who feeds upon the evil he himself produces and feeds upon the prohibition he places upon that very same evil¹¹⁷. Hence, he believes in the existence of an analogy between God and the figure of the absolute monarch, since the absolute monarch has an interest in constructing the same threats which are prohibited by his power:

The threat, as in the case of witchcraft, becomes an artificial construct, a political ruse, that empowers. James's construction of the demonic in *Daemonologie* thus serves the covert political purpose of affirming his own absolute power – or its material basis in illusion. [...] Without their magical abilities to prophesy, to encounter the Devil, or even to overhear nuptial conversations, James's own magical ability to assert his absolute power, a form of power always under threat of contestation because of its totalizing tendencies, would be diminished.¹¹⁸

Thus, as the political form of absolute monarchy might be contested, James reinforces his own status by assuming the role of witch prosecutor and by leading the fight against the forces of evil and claiming that the representatives of the devil are plaguing the whole country. As a direct consequence of the alleged threats posed by Satan, witches and necromancers, the monarch can therefore claim his duty to punish such heretics appropriately and to do whatever it took to strike them. Indeed, as seen in the book two of *Daemonologie*, James clearly states that all of those who practice the unlawful art of witchcraft should be burnt to death and that the magistrates who fail to severely punish witches are committing a sin against God.

Furthermore, Fischlin suggests that one of the instruments used by King James to affirm his rights as divine monarch in *Daemonologie* is to construct the image of God and assert his power and

¹¹⁶ Tyson, p. 141.

¹¹⁷ Fischlin, Daniel, "Counterfeiting God": James VI (I) and the Politics of "Daemonologie" (1597), *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 26 (1996), p. 12.

¹¹⁸ Fischlin, pp. 12, 21.

ontological presence by negative proof¹¹⁹. Indeed, in his treatise James claims that those who deny the power of the Devil are consequently denying the power of God, and that by considering the falsehood and deception of Satan it is possible to witness the truth and grace of the Almighty. Since the monarch is also implicated in this inversion, Fischlin believes that if witches did not exist, they would certainly be created just to reinforce the belief in God and, by extension, the divine right of the King¹²⁰.

To assert his own power, the King assumed the role of witch prosecutor and claimed his duty to punish the slaves of the Devil; rather than showing genuine interest sparked by fear, James simply took advantage of the strict prosecution of witches to determine his own political survival prior to his ascension to the English throne in 1603¹²¹.

¹¹⁹ Fischlin, p. 9.

¹²⁰ Fischlin, p. 9.

¹²¹ Fischlin, p. 21.

Chapter three: witchcraft in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

(Genesis 3:4-5, KJV)

III. I. The Tragedy of Macbeth

William Shakespeare's tragedy *Macbeth* was performed for the first time at Hampton Court in 1606, while its first printed version appeared in the First Folio in 1623.¹²² Many scholars agree that Shakespeare composed *Macbeth* to compliment King James after his accession to the English throne, as it has been suggested that the play clearly reflects the Scottish monarch's interest in the matter of witchcraft as well as his supposed descent from one of the play's characters¹²³. Indeed, James believed he descended from Banquo, Thane of Lochaber.¹²⁴

Shakespeare's principal source of information for the plot of *Macbeth* were the *Chronicles*, written by Raphael Holinshed and published in 1577, which collected the histories of pre and post-conquest England, Scotland and Ireland.¹²⁵ Essentially, the Shakespearean tragedy focuses on the effects of the political ambition of Macbeth, Thane of Glamis. After being prophesized a bright future as King of Scotland by three witches, the Scottish nobleman recurs to brutality to fulfil the Weird Sisters' prediction and, under the influence of his ambitious wife, murders King Duncan as well as each potential enemy that stands on his way to success. Hence, it has been described as a study of intrigue and treachery that examines the psychopathic deviancy of a murderer's mind¹²⁶.

¹²² Shamas, Laura, *We Three: The Mythology of Shakespeare's Weird Sisters*, New York: Peter Lang, 2007, p. 8.

¹²³Braunmuller, A.R., Introduction, in *William Shakespeare, Macbeth*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 8.

¹²⁴Braunmuller p. 2.

¹²⁵Braunmuller, p. 13.

¹²⁶McGuinness, Frank, 'Madness and Magic: Shakespeare's "Macbeth"', *Irish University Review*, 45 (2015), p. 76.

The tragedy's opening scene introduces the characters of the Weird Sisters – the witches whose prophecies will stimulate Macbeth's desire for power – and anticipates the atmosphere of evil and supernatural which pervades the whole play. In Act I Scene I, the three witches are gathered in an unspecified open space among thunder and lightning to discuss the time and place of their next meeting, when they shall utter the prophecies that will determine the future of Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH: When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

SECOND WITCH: When the hurly-burly's done,
When the battle's lost and won.

THIRD WITCH: That will be ere the set of sun.

FIRST WITCH: Where the place?

SECOND WITCH: Upon the heath.

THIRD WITCH: There to meet with Macbeth.

FIRST WITCH: I come, Graymalkin.

SECOND WITCH: Paddock calls.

THIRD WITCH: Anon

ALL: Fair is foul, and foul is fair,

Hover through the fog and filthy air. (1.1.1-13)¹²⁷

The most striking feature of the very first exchange between the Weird Sisters is the language used, which distinguishes them from all the other characters of the play, as they communicate through a fragmented speech full of rhymes, repetitions and alliterations that make their sentences sound incantatory and ritualistic¹²⁸. As the witches vanish, the second scene introduces the ongoing conflict in Scotland, as King Duncan is facing the political turmoil caused by the Norwegian invaders and the rebellion of Macdonald. In the second scene of Act I, the King receives a report of the battle where Macbeth, together with Banquo, valiantly defeated the rebels. Hence, the audience's first view of Macbeth is that of an impressive soldier, a legendary general and a loyal thane¹²⁹, as opposed to the villain Macdonald. When Duncan is later informed about the treason of the Thane of Cawdor, he instantly decides to have him executed and to appoint Macbeth with the

¹²⁷Shakespeare, William, *Macbeth*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997, p. 102 (This is the edition I use throughout).

¹²⁸Willbern, David, 'Phantasmagoric "Macbeth"', *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (1986), p. 542.

¹²⁹Favila, Marina, "Mortal Thoughts and Magical Thinking in *Macbeth*", *Modern Philology*, 99 (2001), p. 5.

traitor's former title, as a sign of gratitude to reward his valour and loyalty proven on the battlefield. It is striking indeed that Macbeth inherits precisely the title of the treacherous Thane of Cawdor, as the outcome of the tragedy will prove this to be an omen¹³⁰, since Macbeth himself will turn out to be a "most disloyal traitor" (1.2.52) just like the Thane from whom he received the title.

In the third scene of Act I, the witches gather on the battlefield to meet Macbeth. Interestingly, the first words spoken by Macbeth to Banquo in the play, "So foul and fair a day I have not seen" (1.3.36), recall precisely the words previously uttered by the witches "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (1.1.13). Indeed, it has been noted that the way Shakespeare first connects the characters of the Weird Sisters to the protagonist is not by a direct dramatic confrontation but rather by means of verbal echo¹³¹. Therefore, the same paradoxical statement uttered by both Macbeth and the witches displays a close and mysterious connection between the Thane and the Sisters well before the actual temptation of the former.¹³²

When the witches first appear to Macbeth after the battle, it is Banquo who first notices the presence of the Sisters and comments on their peculiar physical appearance. He appears to be puzzled by their strange looks, so much that he can hardly tell whether they are actual women because of their beards, and immediately perceives their connection with the supernatural.

BANQUO: How far is't called to Forres? What are these,
So withered and so wild in their attire,
That look not like th'inhabitants o'th'earth,
And yet are on't? – Live you, or are you aught
That man may question? You seem to understand me,
By each at once her choppy finger laying
Upon her skinny lips; you should be women,
And yet your beards forbid me to interpret
That you are so. (1.3.37-45)

¹³⁰McGuinness, p. 70.

¹³¹Kranz, David L., "The Sounds of Supernatural Soliciting in *Macbeth*", *Studies in Philology*, 100 (2003), p. 346.

¹³²Kranz, p. 346.

However, the witches first pay no attention to Banquo and address directly Macbeth, uttering the three prophecies that will determine the protagonist's fall into temptation:

FIRST WITCH: All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Glamis.

SECOND WITCH: All hail Macbeth, hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor.

THIRD WITCH: All hail Macbeth, that shalt be king hereafter. (1.3.46-48)

Although the audience may not be entirely surprised by the prophecies of the Sisters, being aware that Macbeth, Thane of Glamis, has also been appointed Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan, the protagonist appears to be rather confused by the witches' mysterious sentences: "Good sir, why do you start and seem to fear | Things that sound so fair?" (1.3.49-50). Hence, while Macbeth is still spellbound and keeps silent, Banquo decides to question them even further. Indeed, he enquires about their nature and decides to ask them about his future and to make predictions as they did for Macbeth. Moreover, unlike Macbeth, he does not seem to be particularly upset by the presence of the witches: "Speak then to me, who neither beg nor fear | Your favor nor your hate" (1-3.58-59). The Weird Sisters finally address Banquo and greet him with three enigmatic prophecies:

FIRST WITCH: Hail.

SECOND WITCH: Hail.

THIRD WITCH: Hail.

FIRST WITCH: Lesser than Macbeth, and greater.

SECOND WITCH: Not so happy, yet much happier.

THIRD WITCH: Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none.

So all hail Macbeth and Banquo.

FIRST WITCH: Banquo and Macbeth, all hail. (1.3.60-67)

An interesting feature of the prophecies addressed to Banquo is represented by the double nature of the language used the witches. As previously seen, days can be both foul and fair and battles are both lost and won. Now the Weird Sisters speak again in antonyms with Banquo, who is "Lesser than Macbeth, and greater" (1.3.63) and "Not so happy, yet much happier" (1.3.64)¹³³. Moreover, it

¹³³Favila, p. 10.

seems important to note that the last prophecy of the witches automatically predicts the death of Macbeth's family line, as only Banquo "shalt get kings" (1.3.65) in the future.¹³⁴

It is only after the brief exchange between Banquo and the Weird Sisters that Macbeth finally breaks his silence. He addresses the supernatural women, begs them to tell him more and to clarify the meaning of the first three predictions. Indeed, yet unaware of having been appointed Thane of Cawdor by Duncan, he logically objects that becoming both Thane of Cawdor and King of Scotland seems a rather unrealistic prospect for his future. As the witches ignore his request and vanish into the air, Macbeth and Banquo ponder on their bizarre meeting with the hags: "Were such things here as we do speak about? | Or have we eaten on the insane root, | That takes the reason prisoner?" (1.3.81-83). However, as Macbeth and Banquo try to make sense of the Sister's sentences, the first prophecy is made true by the arrival of Ross and Angus, who have been sent by King Duncan to congratulate both on their success on the battlefield and to reward the brave Macbeth with the title of Cawdor. As both are faced with the truth of the witches' words, Macbeth first appears rather sceptical about being appointed Thane of Cawdor: "The Thane of Cawdor lives. Why do you dress me | In borrowed robes?" (1.3.106-107). However, he is soon told by Angus about the death sentence pending on the Thane of Cawdor's head, who has confessed his treason against Duncan. After receiving the new title, Macbeth asks Banquo whether he does hope for his children to become future Kings: "Do you not hope your children shall be kings | When those that gave the Thane of Cawdor to me | Promised no less to them?" (1.3.117-119). Hence, Macbeth fails to acknowledge King Duncan as the source of his reward, as if he had been appointed Thane of Cawdor by the Sisters themselves. On the contrary, Banquo appears rather suspicious about the witches' activities.

BANQUO: That trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides Thane of Cawdor. But 'tis strange,

¹³⁴Favila, p. 10.

And oftentimes, to win us to our harm,
The instruments of darkness tell us truths;
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence. (1.3.119-125)

However, Macbeth pays very little attention to Banquo's observations and, although the latter has advised the protagonist to be careful when putting his trust in the instruments of darkness, the Thane of Glamis and Cawdor is already lost in his thoughts of future greatness. Indeed, it appears that the Weird Sisters have succeeded in tempting him, as they have inspired Macbeth to consider the possibility of murdering Duncan to fulfil the third prophecy: "why do I yield to that suggestion, | Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair | And make my seated heart knock at my ribs | Against the use of nature?" (1.3.133-136).

Although Macbeth will temporarily decline the idea of regicide, claiming "If chance will have me king, why chance may crown me | Without my stir" (1.3.142-143), the first prophecy made true deeply affects his psyche, which appears to be torn between the thirst for power, which consequently inspires the desire to murder the King, and the repulsion caused by the terrifying image of the murder itself. Moreover, it is perhaps the instantaneous fulfilment of the first prophecy that will ultimately betray Macbeth, as he barely has time to process the Sister's prediction before he becomes, indeed, Thane of Cawdor¹³⁵. Therefore, the ways Banquo and Macbeth respond to the supernatural soliciting of the witches greatly. Indeed, although both are introduced by the Weird Sisters to a child's world where any wish can become true, Banquo will stand back, being more rational and more adult than Macbeth, who, on the contrary, is instantly rapt within it¹³⁶.

Critics have investigated the role of the Weird Sisters in the play as they have questioned whether the connection established by Shakespeare between them and Macbeth is significant enough to lead the protagonist to commit the murder of Duncan in Act II. It has frequently been suggested that the

¹³⁵Favila, p. 8.

¹³⁶Favila, p. 6.

connection between them appears rather shadowy, since what the Thane actually gets from the Sisters is slight and enigmatic information.¹³⁷ Hence, many critics believe that Macbeth's corruption comes from himself and not from the witches, as he voluntarily puts himself in harmony with the forces of evil that tempt him.¹³⁸ Thus, as the witches merely present to the soldier Macbeth a glittering prize of glory and power, there is no actual supernatural constraint¹³⁹. However, although Macbeth exercises his free will and voluntarily decides to murder Duncan, the psychological impact of the prophecies upon his vulnerable mind is undeniable, just as the negative influence that the ambitious Lady Macbeth has on her husband.

In the fifth scene of act I, Lady Macbeth reads a letter from Macbeth which informs her of his strange meeting with the Weird Sisters. Most importantly, she finds out that he has been appointed Thane of Cawdor right after having been prophesized the very same thing by the hags.

LADY MACBETH [*Reads*]: 'They met me in the day of success, and I have learned by the perfectest report they have more in them than mortal knowledge. When I burned in desire to question them further, they made themselves air, into which they vanished. Whiles I stood rapt in the wonder of it, came missives from the king who all-hailed me Thane of Cawdor, by which title before these weird sisters saluted me and referred me to the coming on of time, with "Hail, king that shalt be." This have I thought good to deliver thee, my dearest partner of greatness, that thou mightst not lose the dues of rejoicing by being ignorant of what greatness is promised thee. Lay it to thy heart and farewell'. (1.5.1-12)

It seems fair to argue that the effect of the letter from her husband on Lady Macbeth is similar to the effect that the witches' prophetic hails play upon Macbeth. Indeed, just as the supernatural predictions enchant Macbeth and arouse his desire for greatness, the account of such prophecies inspires Lady Macbeth to infuse her husband's heart with courage and cruelty so as to take the easiest – although foulest – way to success. Lady Macbeth's therefore meditates on how she might convince her husband to commit the cruellest of all acts. Shakespeare presents a woman without charity, who has forgotten about the knowledge of good and has apparently renounced her God, as

¹³⁷Tonge, Mildred, 'Black Magic and Miracles in Macbeth', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 31 (1932), p. 236

¹³⁸Tonge, p. 246.

¹³⁹Doak, H. M., "'Supernatural Soliciting" in Shakespeare', *The Sewanee Review*, 15 (1907), p. 323.

she voluntarily ignores both the ethical and the religious aspects of murder¹⁴⁰. Indeed, in all her depravity, she seems determined to erase her husband's inclination to human compassion, which, according to her, is the only thing that keeps the couple distant from the bright future they have been promised by the witches.

In the following passage, Lady Macbeth decides to fully commit herself to evil by relying on the help of the "spirits | that tend on mortal thoughts" (1.5.38-39). In what appears to be a conjuration ritual, she asks the supernatural spirits to deprive her completely of her womanhood by blocking her menstrual flux and by transforming her breast milk into something bitter. Hence, her invocation is meant to fully remove every trace of weakness and bounty from her heart, which would consequently erase any possible feeling of guilt. The same attitude is displayed by Lady Macbeth when reunited with her husband at their castle in Inverness, as the Thane comes home after the battle and informs her about King Duncan's upcoming visit. Interestingly, Lady Macbeth immediately greets her husband with the same titles pronounced by the Weird Sisters: "Great Glamis, worthy Cawdor, | Greater than both by the all-hail hereafter" (1.5.52-53). Moreover, she suggests to take advantage of Duncan's arrival to carry out the homicide right away: "He that's coming | Must be provided for" (1.5.64-65). Hence, King Duncan arrives at Inverness, happily greeting Lady Macbeth as "Fair and noble hostess" (1.6.25) and expressing full trust in the couple who is planning his death. In the seventh scene of Act I, the lords gather to celebrate the Scottish victory with a banquet. However, Shakespeare leaves aside the banquet scene to focus on a tormented Macbeth who in the meantime, is contemplating the pros and cons of regicide.

After considering the negative consequences of murdering Duncan, a righteous and praiseworthy monarch that would hence be betrayed by the very person who is supposed to serve and protect him, Macbeth informs his wife that they "will proceed no further in this business" (1.7.31).

¹⁴⁰Klein, Joan Larsen, "Lady Macbeth: 'Infirm of Purpose'" in *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, eds. Carol Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1980, p. 242.

However, being extremely resolute to carry out the bloody deed, Lady Macbeth does not tolerate any ambiguity or hesitation, and therefore begins to taunt the Thane for his lack of soldierly resolve¹⁴¹.

LADY MACBETH: Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour,
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting I dare not wait upon I would,
Like the poor cat i'th' adage? (1.7.39-45)

Although it is Macbeth himself who originally contemplated the idea of murdering Duncan, for one short moment the Thane seems to understand that charity should motivate human action rather than cruelty, as he can still perceive goodness.¹⁴² However, being aware of her husband's desire for kingship, Lady Macbeth begins to undermine the Thane's virtues and masculinity so as to convince him to fully commit to evil the same way she has: "When you durst do it, then you were a man" (1.7.49).

Most critics agree that one of the organizing themes of the tragedy of *Macbeth* is precisely the theme of manliness and that Macbeth's development as a character might be described in terms of a progressive disjunction between the manly and the human, since the more he is driven to pursue Lady Macbeth's idea of masculinity, the less human he becomes¹⁴³. Macbeth's progressive detachment from his humanity begins in the fifth scene of Act I, when Lady Macbeth comments on her husband's inclination to kindness and compassion: "yet do I fear thy nature, | It is too full of the milk of human kindness, | To catch the nearest way" (1.5.14-16). Indeed, according to Lady Macbeth, greatness must necessarily be divorced from goodness¹⁴⁴. Hence, she subtly suggests that

¹⁴¹McGuinness, p. 75.

¹⁴²Klein, p. 243.

¹⁴³ Ramsey, Jarold, 'The Perversion of Manliness in Macbeth', *Studies in English Literature*, 13 (1973), pp. 286-287.

¹⁴⁴ Ramsey, p. 287.

all his previous military successes and honors will be meaningless unless he will seize the chance to become king by murdering Duncan and implies that even his sexuality will be questioned if he refuses to commit to the bloody deed: “From this time, | Such I account thy love” (1.3.38-39)¹⁴⁵. The most striking image used by Lady Macbeth to persuade her husband is that of the cruel mother brutally murdering her suckling infant. Indeed, through this single violent image, she implies that she would be more masculine in her symbolic act than Macbeth will ever be¹⁴⁶.

LADY MACBETH: I have given suck and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn
As you have done to this. (1.7.54-59)

To achieve her purpose, Lady Macbeth transforms a moment of loving union and nurturance into a catastrophic moment of death and disruption that tears apart the bond between mother and child.¹⁴⁷ Hence, she spurs her husband not to be effeminate and implies that true masculinity has nothing to do with possessing gentle virtues¹⁴⁸, as she seems to associate manhood solely with courage, violence and cruelty. After having successfully infused his heart with the courage necessary to perform the bloody business, Macbeth's corruption is complete: “I am settled and bend up | Each corporal agent to this terrible feat” (1.7.79-80). Right before the regicide, Macbeth is struck by the vision of a dagger, the handle placed towards his hand, which leads him to the crime scene. Although Macbeth's definition of it as “fatal vision” (2.1.36) clearly hints at the upcoming murder of King Duncan, the dagger will also prove fatal to Macbeth, as the audience will witness the progressive degradation of his character right after the homicide. Moreover, the Thane establishes a

¹⁴⁵ Ramsey, p. 288.

¹⁴⁶ Ramsey, p. 289.

¹⁴⁷Willbern, p. 526.

¹⁴⁸ Ramsey, p. 289.

link between the murder of Duncan and witchcraft, claiming that the bloody deed is celebrated by “Pale Hecate” (2.1.52), goddess of sorcery.

In spite of being the turning point of the tragedy, Shakespeare did not stage the regicide of Duncan. However, although we do not witness the death of the righteous King of Scotland, his homicide still remains horribly imaginable and, as with the image of Lady Macbeth's fantasized murder of the suckling child, the audience is presented with yet another moment of cruelty and violence that, though unseen, is still able to trigger sensations of horror and disgust¹⁴⁹. Once the murder is completed, Macbeth joins his wife to inform her that he has “done the deed” (2.2.14). However, he already begins to be tormented by the cruelty of his own actions. Firstly, he is puzzled by his inability to say “Amen” after having assassinated Duncan, as if uttering the Christian formula could have delivered him of his sins. Secondly, he is tormented by voices that suggest that he shall never find peace: “Methought I heard a voice cry, ‘Sleep no more: | Macbeth does murder sleep”” (2.2.38-39). However, the Thane’s torments are rapidly dismissed by his wife, who claims that Macbeth should not unbend his “noble strength to think | So brain-sickly of things” (2.2.48-49). Hence, Lady Macbeth is once again forcing her husband to respond with firmness and further undermines his masculinity as she finds out that Macbeth has mistakenly brought the murder weapons to their chamber. Labelling the Thane “infirm of purpose” (2.2.55), too weak to carry out a murder properly, she steps ahead to take control of the situation and brings the daggers back to the crime scene. Moreover, as Macbeth appears to be tormented by the image of Duncan’s blood, Lady Macbeth blames her husband once again for his lack of courage: “My hands are of your colour, but I shame | To wear a heart so white” (2.2.67-68). However, in spite of the apparent strength displayed by Lady Macbeth, holding the bloody murder weapons will prove detrimental to her psyche, as the image of dirty hands will later trigger her sense of guilt and ultimately lead her to insanity.

¹⁴⁹Willbern, p. 520.

The morning after the regicide, Macduff, Thane of Fife, discovers Duncan's corpse in his chamber and in utter despair calls for murder and treason, comparing the death of the righteous King to Judgement Day: "Up, up, and see | The great doom's image. Malcom, Banquo, | As from your graves rise up and walk like spirites | To countenance this horror." (2.3.71-74). Macbeth and his wife will successfully deceive most of the people present of their innocence, as both pretend to be devastated by the great loss: "Had I but died an hour before this chance, | I had lived a blessed time, for from this instant, | There's nothing serious in morality" (2.3.84-86). Moreover, the couple first gets away with the murder of King Duncan as the former monarch's own guards are found "all badged with blood" (2.3.95), as previously staged by Lady Macbeth, and are therefore suspected to be responsible of the murder. Hence, in a counterfeited rush of violent fury, Macbeth kills the guards in yet another staged moment of despair. Finally, Malcom and Donalbain flee to England and Ireland respectively, fearing that the treacherous plot that killed their father might continue its course, and are consequently believed to be involved in the regicide. In the final scene of Act II, Ross and Macduff discuss the fate of Macbeth, who has gone to Scone to be invested King since, after the escape of Duncan's sons, the sovereignty of Scotland falls upon him.

Although the royal couple may have succeeded in their intent of fulfilling the third prophecy of the Weird Sisters and seemingly escaped any responsibility for the murder of Duncan, Banquo grows more and more suspicious of Macbeth's success and, in the first scene of Act III, displays his concern regarding the possible methods employed to achieve kingship. Indeed, he suspects that Macbeth may have played foully against Duncan, inspired by the witches' promise of future greatness. However, he appears to be reassured in the knowledge that, if the Weird Sisters' prophecies uttered to him will become true as they did with Macbeth, the foul King of Scotland will not be able to keep the title for his posterity, as a royal offspring has only been promised by the hags to Banquo himself.

As Banquo is suspicious about Macbeth, so is Macbeth about Banquo. Indeed, after the murder of Duncan, Macbeth's paranoia and Lady Macbeth's remorse grow to the point where the couple will be confined in a hell of their own making and lose both security and rationality.¹⁵⁰ Hence, the audience gradually witnesses Macbeth's developing insanity, which automatically affects every decision made by the protagonist and increases his mistrust towards the people surrounding him, including Banquo. In particular, Macbeth seems to envy Banquo's future royal succession prophesized by the witches.

MACBETH: Then prophet-like,
They hailed him father to a line of kings.
Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown
And put a barren sceptre in my gripe,
Thence to be wrenched with an unlineal hand,
No son of mine succeeding. If't be so,
For Banquo's issue have I filed my mind;
For them, the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo kings. (3.1.60-71)

Macbeth's consideration regarding the barren scepter and fruitless crown placed upon his head, which seem to hint at the fact that the couple does not have a royal offspring, appears rather interesting, since critics have long questioned whether the Macbeths had any children. As far as the status of the couple is concerned, most critics tend to dismiss the possibility of Lady Macbeth and Macbeth as parents. However, as suggested by Rosenberg, Shakespeare presents a loving couple that unequivocally tells the audience that they have had a child¹⁵¹. Rosenberg's argument is mainly based on the fact that Lady Macbeth herself claims that she has given suck to an infant and therefore knows "How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me" (1.7.55). However, it seems important to acknowledge that, besides Lady Macbeth's statement regarding her experience of breastfeeding a baby, there appears to be no other evidence in the play to support the claim that the couple has a living child.

¹⁵⁰McGuinness, p. 76.

¹⁵¹ Rosenberg, Marvin, 'Lady Macbeth's Indispensable Child', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 26 (1974), p. 14.

Moreover, historical sources suggest that, while Lady Macbeth might have had at least one child, Macbeth was not the father. Indeed, it appears that Lady Macbeth had a son named Lulach by an earlier marriage to Gillecomgain¹⁵², that might therefore explain why she claims to have given suck to an infant. Finally, another passage needs to be taken into account to support the claim of the royal couple being childless. Later in Act Four, when Macduff is informed by Ross that Macbeth has had his whole family killed in Fife, Macduff mourns his significant loss and claims that the tyrant has no children:

MACDUFF: He has no children. All my pretty ones?
Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?
What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
At one fell swoop? (4.3.218-221)

Thus, Macduff seems to confirm the childless state of the royal couple, as his comment might refer either to the fact that a proper revenge on Macbeth's children would be impossible because he has none of his own, or to the fact that if Macbeth had children he would have never committed such an atrocity¹⁵³. Indeed, the tyrant cannot understand the bond between child and parent, since "he that has no children knows not what love is"¹⁵⁴. Interestingly, it has also been suggested that Macbeth's reaction to childlessness could explain his change into a sanguinary tyrant¹⁵⁵. Indeed, critics have noted that Macbeth only becomes an actual tyrant when he starts pondering how he has basically killed Duncan for nothing¹⁵⁶, since he has been denied a royal offspring and therefore only Banquo's future line of kings will benefit from the regicide, as prophesized by the witches. Therefore,

¹⁵² Clayton, Tom, 'Who "Has No Children" in Macbeth?' in Harold Bloom ed., *Bloom's Modern Critical Interpretations: Macbeth*, New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2010, p. 93.

¹⁵³ Clayton, p. 89.

¹⁵⁴ Clayton, p. 89.

¹⁵⁵ Holland, Normand, 'Freud on Shakespeare', *PMLA*, 75 (1960), p. 170.

¹⁵⁶ Rosenberg, p. 17.

almost Herod-like, he carries on his war against other people's children¹⁵⁷, as it appears that he cannot have any on his own.

Thus, as Macbeth cannot stand the idea of having deposed the gracious Duncan through murder and damned his soul just to have Banquo's children inherit his title, he is resolved to have him and his son Fleance killed and hires three murderers to get rid of both. Lady Macbeth is unable to control his homicidal ecstasy, as Macbeth further insists on the impossibility of living in fear and insecurity, with the constant menace of enemies conspiring at their backs: "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!" (3.2.36). Thus, Lady Macbeth loses her role of accomplice, since her husband is no longer in need of a partner of greatness to direct him, infuse bravery in his heart and scold him if necessary. Moreover, in the banquet scene in act III, she even loses her faltering role of hostess due to her husband's uncontrollable behaviour¹⁵⁸. Once Macbeth is informed by the murderers that Fleance has escaped and only Banquo has been killed, he forgets to give the initial welcoming toast to the lords attending the banquet and bursts in terror at the vision of the ghost of Banquo occupying his own seat at the table. Hence, Macbeth ruins the whole feast, haunted by the image of Banquo's ghost accusing his conscience, making any attempt of Lady Macbeth to restrain his fits unsuccessful. Interestingly, even Lady Macbeth's old tactic of questioning his manhood while mocking his visions is no longer effective.

LADY MACBETH: *[To Macbeth]* Are you a man?

MACBETH: Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appal the devil.

LADY MACBETH: O proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear;
This is the air-drawn dagger which you said
Led you to Duncan. (3.4.58-63)

Finally, by the end of Act III, Macbeth plans to visit the Weird Sisters to question them further. Hence, while in Act I the hags seek Macbeth out to speak to him prophetic words, in the third Act it

¹⁵⁷ Rosenberg, p. 18.

¹⁵⁸Klein, p. 248.

is Macbeth himself that purposely decides to resort to the witches' supernatural knowledge, though fully aware that in going to them he is committing something evil¹⁵⁹: "And betimes I will — to the weird sisters. | More shall they speak. For now I am bent to know | By the worst means, the worst" (3.4.133-135).

In the second meeting in Act IV, the Sisters perform a black magic ritual for the King and, to satisfy his demand, they present to him four different apparitions regarding his future. The first apparition, an armoured head, prompts Macbeth to beware Macduff, the Thane of Fife. Hence, as Macduff had already aroused Macbeth's paranoid suspicion after having denied his presence during the banquet, the King greets the first apparition with satisfaction, as the spirits seem to have confirmed his doubt: "Whate'er thou art, for thy good caution, thanks; | Thou hast harped my fear aright" (4.1.72-73). The second apparition, the image of a child covered in blood, spurs him to be brave and resolute, "for none of woman born | Shall ever harm Macbeth" (4.1.79-80). The following apparition, a crowned Child holding a tree in his hand, tells the King to pay no attention to those who conspire against him, for "Macbeth shall never vanquished be until | Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill | Shall come against him" (4.1.91-93). Macbeth therefore appears to be quite reassured by the content of the first three apparitions. Indeed, using his logic to interpret the images presented by the spirits, he seems rather confident that no living human will ever overcome him and, since he believes it to be impossible for an entire wood to eradicate its roots to physically move to Dunsinane to assault him, he interprets this as a good omen of future success: "That will never be: | Who can impress the forest, bid the tree | Unfix his earthbound root? Sweet bodements, good" (4.1.93-95). However, although he has already been advised by the hags to listen to the spirits' prophecies without directly questioning them, Macbeth is eager to ask further information regarding Banquo's offspring, which still torments him: "Tell me, if your art | Can tell so much, shall Banquo's issue ever | Reign in this kingdom?" (4.1.100-102). Hence, the spirits satisfy the King's

¹⁵⁹Tonge, p. 238.

demand and grant him one more apparition, a show of eight kings followed by the ghost of Banquo. However, this very image frightens and upsets Macbeth, who interprets the line of kings as a corroboration of his greatest fear: “Horrible sight! Now I see ‘tis true, | For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me, | And points at them for his” (4.1.121-123). As the fourth and last apparition vanishes, the witches disappear. Moreover, right after his second encounter with the hags, the King is informed that Macduff has fled to England. Hence, following the spirits’ advice to beware Macduff, he decides to have his wife – Lady Macduff – his babies, and all the “unfortunate souls | That trace him in his line” (4.1.151-152) sentenced to death.

In the third scene of act four, Macduff is informed by Ross about the murder of his wife, children and servants. As Macduff appears to be devastated by the news, Malcom suggests to overcome the “deadly grief” (4.3.217) and transform the pain into hatred to “Dispute it like a man” (4.3.222). Macduff’s reply, “I shall do so; | But I must also feel it as a man” (4.3.223-224) is particularly significant, as Macduff’s own idea of manliness seems to differ from the one promoted by Lady Macbeth. Indeed, although Macduff is a brave man and valorous soldier, ready to brandish his sword against the “fiend of Scotland” (4.3.236) to avenge the murder of his entire family, he is not ashamed to show his human feelings of despair and to mourn the loss of his wife and children: “I cannot but remember such things were | That were most precious to me” (4.3.225-226).

The final act of the tragedy begins with Lady Macbeth’s famous sleepwalking scene. In the presence of a servant and a physician, she is caught in a nocturnal agitation, which expresses her helplessness and sense of guilt regarding both her and her husband’s misconduct:

LADY MACBETH: Out, damned spot! Out I say! One, two. Why then ‘tis time to do’t. Hell is murky. Fie, my lord, fie, a soldier, and afeard? What need we fear? Who knows it, when none can call our power to account? Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (5.1.30-34)

Hence, the sleepwalking words uttered by Lady Macbeth are filled with allusions to the couple’s crimes, as she regrets being involved in the homicide of the righteous Duncan, whose blood is

tormenting her dreams. Ironically, although the Queen had appeared so confident about the regicide and utterly free of remorse in Act II, she is now unable to erase the traces of murder from her mind, as the imagined sight of blood on her hands combined with its odour become intolerable: “Here’s the smell of the blood still; all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand” (5.1.42-43). Lady Macbeth's mental state has therefore deteriorated murder after murder. As Macbeth's reckless behaviour and homicidal frenzy has spoilt their bright future as royals, she is now left alone, without hope, cut off from grace and existing solely in the present memory of past horrors¹⁶⁰. Finally, the doctor's comment regarding Lady Macbeth's mental state suggest that, as unnatural deeds – such as regicide – may afflict the mind and cause unnatural troubles, the Queen might need spiritual guidance rather than medical opinion: “unnatural deeds | Do breed unnatural troubles; infected minds | To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets. | More needs she the divine than the physician” (5.1.61-66).

As Lady Macbeth's condition has grown worse, so has Macbeth's. Moreover, having completely devoted himself to supernatural predictions and black magic, the King's reaction to the suicide of his wife in the fifth scene of Act V reveals complete indifference: “She should have died hereafter” (5.5.16).

By the end of Act V, Macbeth's plans are exposed as futile, as he will not be able to prevent the unstoppable advance of Macduff, Prince Malcolm and the English army¹⁶¹. Indeed, the tyrant will ultimately be defeated when the same prophecies which Macbeth mistakenly interpreted as good auspices of his own invincibility turn against him. Hence, although the King fully put his trust in the words of the Sisters and confidently believed that trees could not move, he does indeed witness Birnam Wood approaching, as the English soldiers strategically cut branches and boughs to conceal themselves while marching towards Dunsinane. Ultimately, Macbeth's logical interpretation of the

¹⁶⁰Klein, p. 251.

¹⁶¹McGuinness, 78.

supernatural predictions of the hags betrays him once more when, being too secure in the knowledge that no living human born of woman shall ever harm him, he is slain to death by Macduff, who is, to Macbeth's surprise, born by Caesarean section: "Despair thy charm, | And let the angel whom thou still hast served | Tell thee, Macduff was from his mother's womb | Ultimately ripped" (5.8.13-16).

III.II. Witchcraft and the Weird Sisters

Critics believe that William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was meant to honour King James and reflect his political ideologies¹⁶². As seen in the previous chapter, King James was very straightforward about his opposition to witchcraft-related activities, as he regarded such practices to be a product of a pact with Satan, and presented his views against witches, sorcerers and necromancers in *Daemonologie*, published in 1579.

Shakespeare's main reference for the plot of the tragedy, the *Chronicles* published by Holinshed in 1577, presents a description of the Weird Sisters which clearly differs from that of the hags presented in *Macbeth*. Indeed, Holinshed did not identify the Sisters as proper witches and rather described them as creatures similar to goddesses or nymphs to whom he attributed the ability to make prophecies¹⁶³. Unlike witches, who were commonly identified as mortal women with supposed supernatural powers, goddesses and nymphs were typically worshipped and perceived as deities¹⁶⁴. Furthermore, it is believed that another source might have inspired Shakespeare's creation of the characters of the supernatural hags. Indeed, critics suggest that Shakespeare had possibly read Matthew Gwinn's poem *Tres Sybillae*, published in 1605, which makes reference to

¹⁶²Shamas, p. 18.

¹⁶³Shamas, p. 11.

¹⁶⁴Shamas, p. 13.

the Weird Sisters and to the prophecies they uttered to Macbeth and Banquo¹⁶⁵. However, Gwinn did not present the Weird Sisters as evil witches associated with the Devil, but rather as mythological figures. Indeed, in mythology, Sybil is the name attributed to a priestess responsible for making known the oracles of Apollo¹⁶⁶. Therefore, as the Weird Sisters had never been portrayed as proper witches before the writing of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare might have operated a transformation of the original sources to convert the image of prophetic goddesses of destiny into demonic creatures in order to reflect the theories presented in King James' treatise about witchcraft. In particular, the third scene in Act I provides plenty of details that recall the King's views expressed in *Daemonologie*.

FIRST WITCH: Where hast thou been, sister?

SECOND WITCH: Killing swine.

THIRD WITCH: Sister, where thou?

FIRST WITCH: A sailor's wife had chestnuts in her lap
And munched, and munched, and munched. 'Give me',
quoth I.

'Aroint thee, witch', the rump-fed runnion cries.
Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o'th'Tiger:
But in a sieve I'll thither sail,
And like a rat without a tail,
I'll do, I'll do, I'll do.

SECOND WITCH: I'll give thee a wind.

FIRST WITCH: Thou'rt kind.

THIRD WITCH: And I another. (1.3.1-12)

In this scene, the Sisters gather on the battlefield before meeting Macbeth and Banquo and discuss their recent activities. The Second Witch claims she has been killing swine, as witches were commonly believed to torment animals with occult diseases or even to be able to cause their death¹⁶⁷. The First Witch replies with a story about her recent meeting with a sailor's wife who refused to share some chestnuts and appears to be determined to get back at her by performing a

¹⁶⁵Shamas, p. 13.

¹⁶⁶Shamas, p. 13.

¹⁶⁷Thomas, p. 56.

black magic ritual that will punish the sailor himself. The sisters' revenge recalls the text of *Daemonologie*, which stated that witches possessed the ability to raise storms and tempests, both upon land and at sea. Moreover, the hags' plan also recalls the North Berwick trials, as the accused witches allegedly attempted to the life of King James and Queen Anne precisely by raising storms against their ships. James' treatise also affirmed that, unlike magicians – who made a pact with the Devil to practice sorcery mostly due to curiosity – witches were typically enticed by their desire for revenge.

The vengeance of the First Witch goes even further, as she is also planning to drain the sailor. According to Garber, these lines reveal the transgressive power of the Sisters and appear sexually invasive, as they seem to hint at the physical state of a man exhausted by the excessive sexual demands made upon him.¹⁶⁸ Hence, the first sister appears to fit the stereotype of the women typically accused of practicing black witchcraft in early modern England and Scotland, as they usually aroused suspicion in their neighbourhoods whenever they displayed disruptive behaviour as well as inappropriate sexual conduct.

FIRST WITCH: I myself have all the other,
And the very ports they blow,
All the quarters that they know
I'th'shipman's card.
I'll drain him dry as hay:
Sleep shall neither night nor day
Hang upon his penthouse lid;
He shall live a man forbid.
Weary sennights nine times nine,
Shall he dwindle, peak and pine.
Though his bark cannot be lost,
Yet it shall be tempest-tossed.
Look what I have.

SECOND WITCH: Show me, show me.

FIRST WITCH: Here I have a pilot's thumb,
Wrecked as homeward he did come.

THIRD WITCH: A drum, a drum;
Macbeth doth come. (1.3.13-27)

¹⁶⁸ Garber, Marjorie, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Casualties*, London: Routledge, 1987, p. 111.

Furthermore, the First Witch claims to have with her a pilot's thumb. The use of body parts was particularly common among necromancers; necromancy-related practices were both condemned in *Daemonologie* and heavily punished by King James's 1604 Statute against witchcraft. Moreover, as suggested by Garry Wills, the Weird Sisters possibly agreed to gather in the battlefield earlier than their arranged time for meeting Macbeth precisely to look for body parts, the most vital ingredients for their black magic rituals¹⁶⁹. Indeed, battlefields were like magnets for witches, as they provided plenty of dead corpses outside consecrated ground¹⁷⁰.



Figure 6: The Weird Sisters painted by Johann Heinrich Füssli, 1783

As stated in the first chapter, a frequent feature of Early Modern witch trials was the common belief in the witch's possession of an animal familiar, supposedly a demon in disguise, which served as a

¹⁶⁹ Wills, Garry, *Witches and Jesuits: Shakespeare's Macbeth*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 38.

¹⁷⁰ Wills, p. 38.

further proof of the pact sealed with the Devil. Hence, it seems important to note that Shakespeare's hags have their own familiars, a cat and a toad, which summon the witches in the very first scene.

FIRST WITCH: I come, Graymalkin.

SECOND WITCH: Paddock calls.

THIRD WITCH: Anon. (1.1.9-11)

As previously seen, the demons that served as the witch's animal companions were usually mice, dogs, cats and toads and witches would often use such familiars to perform their magic on human beings. Indeed, as stated in *News From Scotland*, Agnes Sampson allegedly confessed using a cat to perform the ritual that was supposed to cause the death of King James: "she [...] tooke a Cat and christened it, and afterward bound to eache parte of that Cat, the cheefest partes of a dead man, and seuerall ioynts of his bodie"¹⁷¹. As far as toads are concerned, they were often featured in popular legends and were also believed to possess curative properties, as they were used to treat a variety of diseases and ailments such as plague, abscesses, nosebleeds, sprains, smallpox and the King's Evil¹⁷². However, the association of toads with the demonic was just as popular, as the Scripture provided reference to unclean spirits that took the appearance of frogs: "And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet" (Revelations 16:13).

As the Weird Sisters meet Macbeth and Banquo, the witches utter three prophecies to each to reveal their future either as King of Scotland or as father of a line of kings. However, the very ability to make prophecies was strongly condemned in James' treatise. Indeed, in the first book of *Daemonologie*, he wrote that "in the Prophet *Ieremie* it is plainelie forbidden, to beleue or hearken vnto them that Prophecies and fore-speakes"¹⁷³. Hence, as James considered the Bible to be "an

¹⁷¹ Carmichael, pp. 16-17.

¹⁷² Parish, Helen, "'Paltie Vermin, Cats, Mise, Toads, and Weasils': Witches, Familiars, and Human-Animal Interactions in the English Witch Trials", <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/10/2/134/htm> (accessed 14 April 2022)

¹⁷³ James I and VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 14.

infallible ground to all true Christians”¹⁷⁴, he used the Scriptures to attack those who resorted to sorcery to see into the future.

Therefore hearken not ye to your prophets, nor to your diviners, nor to your dreamers, nor to your enchanters, nor to your sorcerers, which speak unto you, saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: For they prophesy a lie unto you, to remove you far from your land; and that I should drive you out, and ye should perish (Jeremiah 27:9-10)¹⁷⁵

After revealing their premonitions, the hags seem to disappear into air:

BANQUO: The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them. Whither are they vanished?
MACBETH: Into the air, and what seemed corporal,
Melted, as breath into the wind. Would they had stayed. (1.3.77-80)

Thus, Shakespeare’s hags possess the same ability of vanishing and transporting themselves from one place to another by making themselves invisible as described in the fourth chapter of the second book of *Daemonologie*. Indeed, as stated in James’ treatise, witches could be “carried by the force of the Spirite which is their conductor, either above the earth or aboue the earth or aboue the Sea swiftlie, to the place where they are to meet”¹⁷⁶ through the help of their Master and, in order to make them invisible, the Devil might “thicken & obscure so the air, that is next about them by contracting it strait together, that the beames of any other mans eyes, cannot pearce thorow the same to see them”¹⁷⁷.

In the fifth scene of Act III, the tragedy presents a dialogue between the hags and their mistress Hecate, who scolds the Sisters due to their involvement with Macbeth. As far as the Hecate scenes are concerned, it seems important to note that some critics have expressed doubts regarding the authorship of such passages, as it has been noted they may have not been written by Shakespeare himself but rather added later by Thomas Middleton, author of the play *The Witch*¹⁷⁸. Indeed, critics

¹⁷⁴James I and VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 14.

¹⁷⁵ *The Bible, Authorized King James Version with Apocrypha*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 859.

¹⁷⁶ James I and VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 38.

¹⁷⁷ James I and VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 39.

¹⁷⁸ Muir, Kenneth, Introduction, in *Macbeth*, ed. Kenneth Muir, London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2001, p. xxxii.

have argued that the Hecate scenes in *Macbeth* were presumably written by Middleton since two songs from *The Witch* were sung in the third and fourth act of the Shakespearian play; such scenes may have been added by Middleton to introduce his songs¹⁷⁹. However, these two songs are not always performed as part of the tragedy of *Macbeth* and no incontrovertible evidence has been presented to confirm the authorship of the scenes regarding Hecate¹⁸⁰.

In popular religion, Hecate was commonly considered the goddess of witchcraft and sorcery, who roamed the earth at night in the company of howling dogs and ghosts¹⁸¹. Hence, as witches were typically believed to respond to Satan after having sealed a pact with him, the witches in *Macbeth* do not operate by themselves but respond to Hecate, the ‘close contriver of all harms’ (3.5.7). The dialogue reveals Hecate’s anger towards the Weird Sisters and presents the hags’ vulnerability when confronted with their mistress:

FIRST WITCH: Why how now, Hecate, you look angerly?

HECATE: Have I not reason, beldams, as you are
Saucy and over-bold? How did you dare
To trade and traffic with Macbeth
In riddles and affairs of death?
And I the mistress of your charms,
The close contriver of all harms,
Was never called to bear my part
Or show the glory of our art?
And which is worse, all you have donne
Hath been but for a wayward son,
Spiteful and wrathful, who, as others do,
Loves for his own ends, not for you. (3.5.1-13)

Hence, Hecate chastises the hags for her scarce involvement in the deeds regarding Macbeth. In particular, she appears to be disappointed by the Sisters as they seem to be wasting their time on a wayward son who only takes advantage of them because of their ability to make prophecies. As regards this passage, critics have noted the witches are presented as the perverse mothers of

¹⁷⁹ Muir, p. xxxii.

¹⁸⁰ Shamas, p. 9.

¹⁸¹ Shamas, p. 34.

Macbeth, since – as any mother would – they do not lie to him and attempt to guide him by advising about his future¹⁸². However, there appears to be no reciprocity in their relationship with the King of Scotland, who, according to Hecate, is ungrateful¹⁸³.

The hags are expected to make amends for their behaviour and are instructed by Hecate to raise the ‘artificial spirites’ (3.5.27) that will provide the final prophecies to Macbeth. Thus, in the first scene of Act IV, the Weird Sisters perform a magical ritual and prepare a ‘hell-broth’ (4.1.19) in a cauldron to conjure the spirits that will show the King of Scotland four different apparitions regarding his future. As stated in *Daemonologie*, witches were commonly instructed by Satan on how to prepare potions “which are composed of thinges naturall”¹⁸⁴. Indeed, the ingredients thrown in the cauldron by the hags mainly consist of parts deriving from animal carcasses.

SECOND WITCH: Fillet of a fenny snake,
In the cauldron boil and bake:
Eye of newt, and toe and frog,
Wool of bat, and tongue of dog,
Adder’s fork, and blind-worm’s sting,
Lizard’s leg, and howlet’s wing,
For a charm of powerful trouble,
Like a hell-broth, boil and bubble. (4.1.12-19)

Among the ingredients used by the witches to prepare the potion, the liver of a blaspheming Jew, the nose of a Turk, the lips of a Tartar and the fingers of a birth-strangled baby delivered by a prostitute provide another reference to the practice of necromancy, the use of corpses or body parts to perform black magic rituals. Moreover, the use of toad’s venom might be considered a reference to the trials of North Berwick, since, according to *News From Scotland*, Agnes Sampson allegedly claimed she collected the venom of a black toad in order to perform a black magic ritual:

She confessed that she tooke a blacke Toade, and did hang the same vp by the heeles, three daies, and collected and gathered the venome as it dropped and fell from it in an Oister shell, and kept the same

¹⁸²Shamas, p. 56.

¹⁸³Shamas, p. 56.

¹⁸⁴James I and VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 44.

venome close couered, vntill she should obtaine any parte or peece of foule linnen cloth, that had appertained to the Kings Maiestie.¹⁸⁵

Just as seeing into the future was condemned in *Daemonologie*, so were conjuring rituals. Indeed, as seen in the previous chapter, James openly condemned this practice when mentioning the biblical episode of the summoning of the spirit of Samuel performed by the Witch of Endor. Moreover, in the fifth chapter of book one, the King carefully described the main passages performed by sorcerers to conjure a spirit, which also included the drawing of a magical circle:

Awaies as I may, I shall shortlie satisfie you, in that kinde of conjurations, which are contained in such bookes, which I call the Deuilles Schoole. There are foure principall partes; the persons of the conjurers; the action of the conjurations, the wordes and the rites vsed to that effect; and the Spirites that are conjured. [...] Then laying this ground, as I haue said, these conjurations must haue few or mo in number of the persones conjurers (alwaies passing the singuler number) according to the qualitie of the circle, and forme of apparition. [...] There ar likewise certaine seasons, dayes, and houres, that they obserue in this purpose: These things being all readie, and prepared, circles are made triangular, quadrangular, round, double or single, according to the forme of apparition that they craue¹⁸⁶.

As the Sisters do not seem to draw the magical circle required for conjuring a spirit, it has been suggested that the hags delineate their own circle through their dance and the repetition of their charm ‘Double, double toil and trouble | Fire burn, and cauldron bubble’, instead of tracing actual marks on the ground¹⁸⁷.

As the Weird Sisters receive Macbeth’s visit in the following passage, he commands the hags to satisfy his demands by any means, being fully aware that the methods employed by the witches to provide supernatural knowledge are anything but lawful. Macbeth’s peculiar request provides another reference to the witches’ alleged ability to control and manipulate the weather. Moreover, the association between the hags’ power to untie the winds and churches as their target suggests that the activities performed by the Sisters collide and compete with Christianity and therefore hint at their association with the Devil¹⁸⁸.

¹⁸⁵Carmichael, p. 16.

¹⁸⁶James I and VI, pp. 16-17.

¹⁸⁷Shamas, p. 61.

¹⁸⁸Shamas, p. 66.

However, not all forms of supernatural in *Macbeth* derive from a bargain with Satan. Indeed, the third scene in Act IV makes reference to a kind of magical healing procedure that was commonly practiced in England since the time of Edward the Confessor: the cure by royal touch¹⁸⁹. As described by Malcom, the monarch would touch the patients on the face to cure them from the King's Evil, the name attributed to scrofula or strums, the tubercular inflammation of the lymph glands of the neck¹⁹⁰. Moreover, as part of the healing ritual, the King would recite a passage from the Gospel of Mark and hang a gold coin strung from a white ribbon around the necks of the patients¹⁹¹. Hence, the tragedy presents a clear opposition between the good forms of supernatural, such as the healing by royal touch, that derive from God, and the evil supernatural practices performed by the Weird Sisters, that, on the contrary, derive from a pact with the Devil¹⁹². Indeed, the forms of unlawful magic to which 'Devilish Macbeth' (4.3.117) recurs through the help of the Weird Sisters contrast with the 'most miraculous work' (4.3.149) performed by the King of England, who, unlike the foul King of Scotland, possesses a 'heavenly gift' (4.3.159).

III.III. Witchcraft and amenorrhoea in Lady Macbeth

Despite the fact that the critical views of Lady Macbeth often tend to simply dismiss her as the wife who taunts her husband by verbal assiduity¹⁹³, the Queen of Scotland appears to be an extremely complex character.

To fulfil the prophecies of the Weird Sisters, Lady Macbeth intrepidly conjures evil spirits to become transformed into a 'fiend-like queen' (5.93.36). However, she hides her own involvement

¹⁸⁹Thomas, p. 228.

¹⁹⁰Thomas, p. 227.

¹⁹¹Thomas, p. 227.

¹⁹²Shamas, p. 22.

¹⁹³Veatch Sadler, Lynn, 'The Three Guises of Lady Macbeth', *CLA Journal*, 19 (1975), p 10.

with supernatural forces from Macbeth and assumes the mask of practicality and tongue-lashing¹⁹⁴. Indeed, she repeatedly mocks her husband's lack of courage in confronting deeds that ordinary men would not hesitate to carry out, trying to make something unnatural such as murder seem completely natural.¹⁹⁵ She therefore appears to be bolder and way more imaginative than Macbeth, as, after receiving his letter, she allows her imaginative powers to take her way further into the nature of evil than her husband ever goes¹⁹⁶: "Thy letters have transported me beyond | This ignorant present, and I feel now | The future in the instant" (1.5.53-56). At the same time, she becomes a mother to her own husband either by admonishing Macbeth whenever he fails to follow a prescribed task or by dismissing his fears as childish¹⁹⁷: "The sleeping and the dead | Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood | That fears a painted devil" (2.2.56-58).

As previously stated, in order to achieve the future greatness that her husband has been promised by the hags, Lady Macbeth conjures the spirits that tend on mortal thoughts and asks them to fill her with cruelty to eliminate any possible trace of remorse. The language of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy, which invokes the help of hellish forces, clearly displays both a physiological and a biological dimension, as the Queen of Scotland aims at achieving a change in her personality to be transformed into a murderer by blocking the "compunctious visitings of Nature" (1.5.43).¹⁹⁸ Indeed, to achieve an unfeminine psychology capable of murdering the righteous King of Scotland, she voluntarily decides to get rid of her menstrual flux, the most natural and unavoidable trait that reminds her of her sexuality¹⁹⁹. Hence, Lady Macbeth asks the murdering ministers of hell to corrupt not only her primary but also her secondary feminine organs, as she further wishes for a

¹⁹⁴Veach Sadler, p. 14.

¹⁹⁵Veach Sadler, p. 15.

¹⁹⁶Veach Sadler, p. 17.

¹⁹⁷Veach Sadler, p. 15.

¹⁹⁸ La Belle, Jenijoy, "'A Strange Infirmity': Lady Macbeth's Amenorrhea", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 31 (1980), p. 381.

¹⁹⁹ La Belle, p. 382.

venomous liquid to fill her breasts²⁰⁰. In a way, through this conjuring ritual, she becomes akin to the Weird Sisters, not so much predicting the future as preparing herself to become an instrument to bring it about²⁰¹.



Figure 7: Lady Macbeth painted by Johann Heinrich Füssli, 1812

Critics have long debated whether it would be possible to consider Lady Macbeth as the fourth witch of the tragedy. Some have argued that she only entertained witch fantasies, which later come back to haunt her and lead her to insanity and that she proves to be nothing more than fiend-like²⁰². However, it seems fair to argue that the conjuration ritual itself, which solicits the help of supernatural forces, along with the desire to be unsexed, closely resemble the activities usually performed by witches. Indeed, although she never officially receives the epithet of witch throughout the play, she would have certainly been accused of committing the crime of practicing black witchcraft in Jacobean England according to the 1604 Statute, which considered the conjuring of

²⁰⁰La Belle, p. 382.

²⁰¹La Belle, p. 384.

²⁰²Levin, Joanna, 'Lady Macbeth and the Daemonologie of Hysteria', *ELH*, 69 (2002), p. 39.

evil spirits a capital offence²⁰³. Moreover, it has been suggested that Shakespeare possibly associated Lady Macbeth with an animal familiar. Indeed, just before her invocation to the spirits, Lady Macbeth hears the caw of a raven, an animal typically associated with black magic: “The raven himself is hoarse | That croaks the fatal entrance of Duncan | Under my battlements” (1.5.37-39).²⁰⁴

Finally, Lady Macbeth’s request to be unsexed and deprived of menstruation might be interpreted as an attempt to be transformed precisely into the stereotypical image of the early modern witch, a post-menopausal wayward woman, an uncontrolled wife, unable to bear children²⁰⁵. Indeed, the link between post-menopausal women and the practice of unlawful witchcraft is further emphasized by Banquo’s comment regarding the Weird Sisters’ physical appearance, as the supernatural hags in *Macbeth* are presented as old, physically repulsive hags that have beards: ‘you should be women, | And yet your beards forbid me to interpret | That you are so’ (1.3.43-45). Hence, the Weird Sisters possess physical traits that reveal them to be unsexed, as their beards are believed to be an outward sign of their defeminization that has been associated with the symptomatic consequences of catamenial retention and stoppage of menstrual flux²⁰⁶. However, the unsexing scene appears to be rather problematic, as it aligns Lady Macbeth not only with post-menopausal witches but also with amenorrhoeal women. Indeed, although Lady Macbeth might fit the stereotype of the post-menopausal witch, it seems important to note that her age remains unspecified throughout the tragedy and therefore it would be impossible to determine whether she had actually entered the menopause stage.

²⁰³Levin, p. 39.

²⁰⁴Wills, p. 81.

²⁰⁵Braunmuller, p. 34.

²⁰⁶La Belle, p. 384.

According to contemporary medical treatises, menstrual blood was supposed to nourish the infant, and it was believed that the same menstrual blood would be transformed after pregnancy into breast milk.²⁰⁷

And all will grant it for a truth, that the childe, while it is in the matrice [womb] is nourished with this bloud; and it is as true, that being out of the womb, it is still nourished with the same; for that milke is nothing but the menstruous bloud made white in the breasts; and I am sure womans milke is not thought to bee venomous, but of a nutritive quality, answerable to the tender nature of an infant.²⁰⁸

Hence, as Lady Macbeth has precisely asked for a cessation of her monthly flux and for a venomous liquid to fill her breasts, she is not only expressing a desire to renounce her femininity to be filled with masculine cruelty, but also preparing herself to become sterile. Moreover, contemporary medicine further associated amenorrhoea – the ceasing of menstruation – with a series of symptoms that included melancholy, delusional thoughts, sorrow and anxiety²⁰⁹.

The blood of their monthly disease [i.e. unease, discomfort] being stopped from his course, through the ordinary passages and by the matrix dooth redound and beate backe again by the heart... Then the same blood, not finding any passage, troubleth the braine in such sorte, that... it causeth many of them to have idle fancies and fond conceits, and tormenteth them with diverse imaginations of horrible specters, and fearefull sights... with which being so afflicted, some of them doe seeke to throwe and caste themselves into wells or pittes, and others to destroy themselves by hanging, or some such miserable end.²¹⁰

Thus, the physical condition of amenorrhea was commonly associated to the surfacing of depression and delusional thoughts just as Reginald Scot assumed that the women accused of witchcraft only entertained witch fantasies due to the ceasing of their monthly flux but did not actually possess supernatural powers.

After the murder of King Duncan, Lady Macbeth's mental state progressively deteriorates, and, although her condition can partially be attributed to her remorse regarding the regicide, the death of Banquo and the death of Lady Macduff and her babies, she appears to develop the very symptoms commonly associated with amenorrhoea. Indeed, the first scene of Act V portrays a deranged,

²⁰⁷ La Belle, p. 383.

²⁰⁸ La Belle, p. 383.

²⁰⁹ La Belle, p. 383.

²¹⁰ Braunmuller, pp. 33-34.

anxious, sleepwalking woman who is obsessed with the delusional image of blood on her hands and washes them repeatedly.

GENTLEWOMAN: Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her night-gown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed, yet all this while in a most fast sleep.

DOCTOR: A great perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep and do the effects of watching. (5.1.3-9)

Hence, it is possible to conclude that Lady Macbeth displays both the physical symptoms associated with amenorrhea and the basic characteristics to be considered a witch. However, if her invocation to the hellish spirits that were supposed to unsex her proved to be successful, it is nothing more than a curse perversely directed at the conjurer herself²¹¹, as it only renders Lady Macbeth mentally unstable and sterile, having permanently renounced the possibility of giving birth by corrupting her womb.

²¹¹La Belle, p. 384.

RIASSUNTO

Questo elaborato nasce con l'obiettivo di analizzare l'evoluzione del fenomeno della stregoneria in Inghilterra e Scozia durante il Rinascimento e di comprendere le dinamiche che hanno contribuito alla persecuzione delle streghe attraverso la battaglia intrapresa da re Giacomo VI/I.

Il primo capitolo della tesi si concentra principalmente sulla definizione del concetto di stregoneria e sulla distinzione tra le attività di magia bianca intraprese dal *cunning folk* e di magia nera, comunemente percepita come dannosa e potenzialmente letale. Per quanto concerne le manifestazioni di magia bianca, la popolazione inglese nel periodo Tudor e Stuart era ampiamente avvezza a consultare *cunning men* o *cunning women* i quali, sfruttando le conoscenze accumulate in ambito medico, erano spesso in grado di fornire una serie di rimedi naturali spesso accompagnati dall'uso di amuleti o dall'enunciazione di formule, preghiere ed incantesimi al fine di garantire l'efficacia del trattamento. Inoltre, un'altra abilità comunemente attribuita al *cunning folk* era quella di curare la popolazione colpita dal malocchio o vittima di afflizioni soprannaturali. Le attività inerenti alla magia bianca intraprese dal *cunning folk* a scopo benefico venivano dunque comunemente distinte dall'attività di magia nera, o *maleficium*, inteso come azione in grado di procurare danno, sia che esso risultasse da presunte capacità "psichiche", come il malocchio, sia che venisse eseguita attraverso il ricorso di formule pronunciate o attraverso manipolazioni di oggetti appartenuti alla vittima²¹².

Un notevole cambiamento che influenzò gradualmente la comune percezione delle attività collegate alla stregoneria nell'Inghilterra e Scozia rinascimentali si registrò a partire dall'emanazione della bolla pontificia *Summis Desiderantes Affectibus* nell'anno 1484, secondo cui qualsiasi attività pertinente alla magia e alla stregoneria doveva essere necessariamente condannata per la sua natura

²¹² <https://www.treccani.it/vocabolario/maleficio/>

eretica e in quanto frutto di un patto con il demonio. Questa nuova dottrina europea introdotta dalla chiesa cattolica ebbe modo di suscitare l'interesse di teologi ed intellettuali inglesi, che pubblicarono trattati riguardo la natura malefica delle arti magiche, e degli scettici, tra cui Reginald Scot, il quale, nel *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), si espresse a favore delle povere donne torturate e condannate a morte in quanto vittime di folli superstizioni. Infatti furono principalmente le donne ad essere perseguitate dalle accuse di stregoneria dato che, secondo le teorie di Kramer e Sprenger espresse nel *Malleus Maleficarum*, sarebbero state più soggette alla corruzione fisica e spirituale a causa della loro naturale debolezza.

Il primo capitolo si concentra, inoltre, sull'evoluzione delle leggi a condanna della stregoneria promulgate in Inghilterra. Come suggerito da Keith Thomas, nonostante le attività connesse alla magia e alla stregoneria fossero da tempo soggette alla scomunica da parte della chiesa cattolica, la maggior parte dei procedimenti giudiziari e delle condanne a morte avvenne tra il sedicesimo e diciassettesimo secolo. In particolare, nonostante gli statuti promulgati da Enrico VIII nel 1542 e da Elisabetta I nel 1563 identificassero già la stregoneria come crimine penalmente perseguibile, il vero cambiamento avvenne a partire dal 1604, con l'adozione di nuove misure da parte di re Giacomo, le quali prevedevano l'adozione di pene più severe nei casi di negromanzia e di condanna a morte anche nei casi di recidiva.

Il secondo capitolo si concentra sull'evoluzione del fenomeno della stregoneria nella Scozia rinascimentale e sull'impatto dei processi nel North Berwick tra avvenuti il 1590 e il 1591, i quali videro il diretto coinvolgimento di re Giacomo. Anche in Scozia, dove la caccia alle streghe si protrasse tra il 1550 e il 1700, la maggior parte delle accuse erano rivolte principalmente a soggetti di sesso femminile, spesso di età avanzata. In particolare, le singolari vicende legate al matrimonio di re Giacomo con Anna di Danimarca giocarono un ruolo fondamentale nell'aumento delle accuse per crimini di stregoneria. Di fatto, quando Giacomo sposò formalmente Anna nel 1589, la coppia dovette attendere mesi prima di poter celebrare ufficialmente le nozze a causa di continui ritardi

dovuti a condizioni meteorologiche avverse e violenti tempeste che ritardarono il viaggio della flotta di Anna diretta in Scozia. Inoltre, se precedentemente alle nozze il sovrano non manifestò mai particolare interesse nei confronti del soprannaturale, egli venne direttamente coinvolto nelle vicende del North Berwick quando un gruppo di donne fu accusato di aver attentato alla vita di Giacomo e Anna precisamente attraverso l'uso della magia, in questo caso impiegata nel tentativo di affondare le flotte regali.

Il capitolo, dunque, analizza i resoconti dei processi nel North Berwick presentati nel testo *News From Scotland*, pubblicato nel 1591 e attribuito a James Carmichael, il quale riporta gli interrogatori dei principali accusati, ai quali il sovrano partecipò attivamente, e i metodi di tortura impiegati al fine di estorcere le confessioni. In seguito al diretto coinvolgimento nei processi del North Berwick, che si conclusero con le condanne a morte di tre dei quattro principali accusati, nel 1597 re Giacomo pubblicò *Daemonologie*, un trattato di stregoneria, negromanzia e demonologia che invoca la necessità di riconoscere l'esistenza di streghe e stregoni e di adottare le forme di punizione più severe possibili nei confronti dei servitori di Satana.

Il secondo capitolo presenta quindi un'analisi del contenuto di *Daemonologie*, il cui testo viene esposto dall'autore sotto forma di dialogo tra due personaggi maschili, Philomates e Epistemon, dove quest'ultimo rappresenta chiaramente un alter ego del sovrano, il quale tenta di convincere lo scettico Philomates della minaccia del soprannaturale. Il trattato si divide in tre libri: il primo fornisce delle delucidazioni basiche sui concetti di magia e stregoneria, il secondo si focalizza sulla natura eretica della stregoneria e sui metodi da adottare per identificare una strega, il terzo, infine, analizza il fenomeno della possessione demoniaca e identifica i principali tipi di spiriti maligni. Il secondo libro di *Daemonologie* presenta inoltre un'accurata descrizione delle attività maligne generalmente attribuite alle streghe, tra cui la loro affiliazione con un animale demoniaco — solitamente gatti, topi o rospi — l'uso di carcasse umane da impiegare nei riti di negromanzia, la capacità di manipolare il tempo atmosferico e di creare pozioni ed amuleti impiegati al fine di

tormentare o causare la morte di esseri umani e bestiame. Infine, nel terzo libro del *Daemonologie*, re Giacomo suggerisce la pena capitale come unico metodo efficace per contrastare le attività demoniache e, più precisamente, sottolinea la necessità di condannare a morte qualsiasi accusato, a prescindere da età e sesso, al fine di estirpare la piaga della stregoneria.

Considerando il grande coinvolgimento nei processi del North Berwick e l'enfasi con cui re Giacomo condannò qualsiasi attività collegata al soprannaturale, il capitolo suggerisce infine che il grande interesse dimostrato dal sovrano nei confronti della stregoneria potrebbe essere giustificato non da un effettivo timore nei confronti del maligno quanto piuttosto da un'accurata strategia di propaganda politica che garantì al sovrano scozzese l'ascesa al trono di Inghilterra a seguito della morte di Elisabetta I, assumendo il ruolo di cacciatore di streghe e diffondendo terrore nei confronti di qualsiasi manifestazione del soprannaturale.

Il terzo ed ultimo capitolo dell'elaborato si concentra infine su un'analisi del *Macbeth*, tragedia di William Shakespeare, al fine di analizzare l'impatto delle ideologie sulla stregoneria promosse da Giacomo I in ambito letterario. Infatti, come suggerito dalla critica, la tragedia potrebbe essere considerata come un omaggio nei confronti del nuovo sovrano inglese, dato che Shakespeare avrebbe modificato le fonti originarie — le *Chronicles* di Raphael Holinshed — al fine di trasformare i personaggi delle Weird Sisters — le sorelle fatali — da divinità in grado di profetizzare il futuro a streghe associate al demoniaco. Di fatto, analizzando il testo della tragedia, è possibile notare come molte delle azioni svolte dalle streghe richiamino effettivamente il testo di *Daemonologie* e i resoconti dei processi del North Berwick. Dunque, le streghe shakespeariane sono in grado di creare pozioni utilizzando carcasse umane ed animali, così come previsto dai riti di negromanzia ampiamente condannati da Giacomo, possiedono la capacità di modificare le condizioni meteorologiche e scatenare tempeste, proprio come le streghe scozzesi condannate a morte per aver attentato alla vita del monarca e sono affiliate ad un animale demoniaco, rispettivamente un gatto ed un rospo.

Infine, l'ultima parte del terzo capitolo è dedicata all'analisi del personaggio di Lady Macbeth, l'ambiziosa moglie del protagonista e principale istigatrice dell'omicidio di Re Duncan. Lady Macbeth potrebbe essere considerata come la quarta strega della tragedia, dal momento che il rituale di evocazione degli spiriti dell'oltretomba nella quinta scena del primo atto eseguito dalla diabolica regina al fine di realizzare la profezia delle Sorelle Fatali risulta simile alle attività di magia nera comunemente attribuite alle streghe. Infatti, nonostante Lady Macbeth non riceva mai l'epiteto di strega nella tragedia shakespeariana, la sola evocazione di spiriti maligni avrebbe comportato necessariamente un'accusa di stregoneria, essendo essa proibita e penalmente perseguibile secondo lo statuto emanato da Giacomo I nel 1604.

Infine, l'ultimo capitolo suggerisce le affinità tra il personaggio di Lady Macbeth e le donne soggette ad amenorrea. Infatti, la regina di Scozia, oltre a possedere le caratteristiche basiche per poter essere considerata una strega, presenta la stessa sintomatologia delle donne prive di ciclo mestruale, dal momento che durante il rituale demoniaco sarà proprio la stessa Lady Macbeth a chiedere agli spiriti dell'oltretomba di essere privata delle mestruazioni, segno della sua femminilità. Secondo le teorie mediche diffuse in epoca rinascimentale, la mancanza di mestruazioni avrebbe potuto comportare nei soggetti di sesso femminile una serie di sintomi che includevano la comparsa di depressione, ansia ed allucinazioni. Di fatto, in seguito all'omicidio di Re Duncan, le condizioni di salute mentale di Lady Macbeth peggioreranno al punto tale da rendere la regina ossessionata dall'immagine illusoria delle mani sporche di sangue, tanto da portarla alla pazzia, così come testimoniato dalla prima scena del quinto atto.

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