



**UNIVERSIDAD DE OVIEDO**

**PROGRAMA DE DOCTORADO DE FILOLOGÍA INGLESA Y FRANCESA**

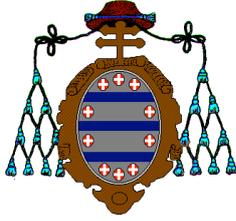
**TESIS DOCTORAL**

**THE DISCOURSE OF WITCHCRAFT IN JACOBEAN DRAMA.  
A CASE STUDY OF ELIZABETH SAWYER**

**María Mariño Faza**

**Oviedo, 2012**





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*To my loved ones*



“A historical criticism that seeks to recover meanings that are in any final or absolute sense authentic, correct, and complete is pursuing an illusion.” (Montrose 1981: 415)



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out to live close to me, so we have shared many journeys to Oviedo but also many afternoon coffees in Gijón. They have all become not only colleges but also friends.

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# INTRODUCTION



## INTRODUCTION

“I began with the desire to speak with the death” (2001: 1), states Stephen Greenblatt when explaining how his search for a new way of understanding literature, of understanding texts began. In my case, everything started with a desire to talk to the supernatural, to those creatures that lured in books and films. First it was the image –the opening of Orson Welles’s adaptation of *Macbeth*– of three women appearing in the middle of the mist; when everything was still black and white. Then, it was their voices, their words and incantations.

*Thunder and lightning. Enter three Witches.*

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.

ALL: Paddock calls anon:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair,

Hover through the fog and filthy the air. (*Macbeth*. I. i. 1-12)

This particular taste for the macabre continued during my years studying at the University of Oviedo, when I devoured any book that came to my hands, from Shakespeare's plays or Gothic literature to Nicola Machiavelli or Charles Baudelaire. Also, the year I spent as an Erasmus student at Dublin City University helped me learn about Celtic myths and traditions and also served to meet many wonderful people from different nationalities who shared my love for literature.

However, it was the PhD course at the University of Oviedo *Demonios, fantasmas, brujas y malvados: "Terror en el teatro isabelino y jacobeo"* which nourished my taste for alternative voices, for the sinister and supernatural and offered the perfect starting point for my thesis. There, the two lecturers María José Álvarez Faedo and Francisco José Borge López, gave us extensive bibliography and introduced us to theatre in the Early Modern period. It was at the end of that year, 2003, that the Post-Jacobean Revengers' Company, formed by all the students taking that course, performed *The Spanish Tragedie* (1615) under the direction of María José Álvarez Faedo. This extra-curricular activity offered us the opportunity

not only to experience the world of theatre but also to better understand plays as performances, as living texts.

By the time I presented my research piece of work, *Witchcraft on stage in Early Stuart England: The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton*, in 2004, I had read on both European and English witchcraft. However, I felt that writing a PhD thesis would require a more extensive reading on the topic. First, I felt it was necessary to improve my knowledge on the critical approach I had used, the New Historicism. Both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism are indebted to previous authors and theoretical approaches. Thus, I started reading on literary criticism from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards and focused particularly on approaches that had influenced them, such as Marxism, Post-Structuralism or Feminism and their most relevant figures such as Louis Althusser (1971), Raymond Williams (1980) or Mary Eagleton (1991). Also, I particularly focused on Michel Foucault (1975), whose ideas on discourse and power, together with Stephen Greenblatt's writings about self-fashioning (1980), seemed particularly relevant for the study of witchcraft in Jacobean England.

Later, I focused on European witchcraft and the work of some of the scholars that have traditionally studied this phenomenon, including Alan Macfarlane (1970) and Keith Thomas (1971) and, then, moved to more recent ones such as Brian Levack (1987) or James Sharpe (1996). Their works were a fundamental basis for my study and referred me to a wide variety of authors and

texts. I have not only read books and articles about witchcraft but also texts of the period, including demonological tracts and pamphlets of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period both from England and also from the rest of the continent.

Luckily, technology has greatly advanced in the last ten years. Many pamphlets and materials which, before, were virtually impossible to get, are now available on the Internet. Books can be ordered online and you can receive them at home within a few days.

However, I still love the feeling of going to a library in London and looking through the bookshelves. My husband's family, Elena and Tim Harrison and their two sons Alex and Leo, live there so in the last few years I have had the opportunity to visit them on numerous occasions. They not only welcomed us but also showed us wonderful spots in the city, including several small bookshops near the British Museum, where I could find many books on witchcraft.

After finishing my PhD courses I have worked as a Secondary school teacher and even opened my own language school but I have never stopped reading books on the subject. In 2007 I attended the 12<sup>th</sup> Culture and Power Conference "The Plots of History" held at the University of Oviedo. At the Plenary Lecture I had the opportunity of listening to Dr Hayden White's "History as the Imaginary in Modernist Politics." Not only his paper but also meeting him, listening to his opinions, encouraged me to continue with my work on witchcraft with even greater enthusiasm.

From my paper “Creating the Myth of the Witch,” offered at the above-mentioned conference in 2007 to my presentation on “Witches and familiars. The discourse of witchcraft in Jacobean England” at the XXIII SEDERI Conference in 2012, I feel I have deepened my knowledge on this wide but fascinating topic. Even though there will always be books to read, tracts and pamphlets to investigate, I feel confident enough to offer my personal view on a subject I have studied for years. And I am doing it in this PhD thesis, which I have structured as follows.



The first chapter will offer a brief overview of the main theoretical approaches to literary criticism from the earliest theories in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries to current approaches. The 20<sup>th</sup> century would become an inflection point in the way literary works were perceived. New Criticism’s emphasis on the canon and the almost obsessive search for the best works of literature would lead to a marginalization of those writings which did not fit the standard. Later, approaches such as Formalism and Structuralism would focus on formal aspects, on the structure of texts.

However, the 1960s would offer a new perspective to the study of literature, adding political and social aspects and including issues such as class, gender and

race. Two decades later, and influenced by the work of all those authors, there would appear two approaches which challenged traditional ideas, New Historicism in the United States and Cultural Materialism in the United Kingdom. I shall offer a brief overview of those approaches, and explain why New Historicist interest in power and its focus on the Early Modern period seemed particularly adequate as the critical perspective from which to approach my analysis.

The influence of Foucauldian theory, which understands discourse not merely as a reflection of society but as actually participating in its formation, will be essential to understand how witchcraft was articulated in English pamphlets and plays of the Jacobean period as a vehicle of power. Also, concepts such as *self-fashioning*, as first discussed by Stephen Greenblatt in his *Renaissance Self-fashioning* (1980), will be used to refer to the process of formation of the “witch,” which is understood as determined by the historical circumstances.

In chapter 2 I shall try to explain the foundations of the discourse of witchcraft and how the image of the witch was shaped from the early ideas in Ancient times throughout the Middle Ages until it became the evil creature feared by all strata of society. The medieval emphasis on Satan as God’s opponent and the struggle between the forces of good and evil led to a demonization of all the subversive elements in society. Like heretics before, the witch was then turned into the “effective agent of diabolical power” (Broedel 2003: 5) and thought to be part of an organised sect whose aim was to destroy all Christianity. The authorities

would use this discourse as a mechanism of control over their subjects. Particular values were emphasised by demonising all the subversive elements in society that threatened the political and social institutions.

I shall also focus on the aspects that triggered the European witch-hunts, including not only religious or economic factors but also social and political ones. It is also important to bear in mind that, although witchcraft was not a unified phenomenon and each area and even each process was different, there were some common features, some recognisable elements that were recurrent in most accusations in Western Europe during the peak of the witch-hunts in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In general, the negative characteristics first ascribed to heretics were later used to describe witches. Attitudes opposed to the natural order were linked to those witches, who started to be regarded as an immediate threat to mankind. Witches were not perceived as isolated figures that had made a pact with the Devil but as an organised group who met in the Sabbat and were part of Satan's army. Frequent accounts of orgies, cannibalism and human sacrifices appeared in the different writings of the period and joined the colourful ideas of traditional folklore in a shared discourse that would spread throughout European countries.

Also, the importance of the authorities in promulgating new laws regarding the crime of witchcraft and the active role of the Inquisitors were essential pre-conditions for the witch-hunts that would take place in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries

in Europe. But other aspects need to be taken into account, including the economic and social changes together with the religious struggles that took place at the beginning of the Early Modern period.

Finally, I shall also analyse how, not only different writings –including demonological tracts such as the famous *Malleus Maleficarum*–, but also sermons, ballads, illustrations, images, etc., would be used to spread the discourse of witchcraft.

Chapter 3 will analyse the specific circumstances of witchcraft in England, focusing on the different legal developments and the religious problems during the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The discourse of witchcraft was already formed during the Elizabethan period but the arrival of the Scottish King James VI of Scotland at the English throne, as James I of England, in 1603 meant new additions to that common set of ideas about witches. Some characteristic elements of the continental discourse entered both elite and popular beliefs but, at the same time, it kept other elements which were typical of English witchcraft, such as the “familiar.”

James I was aware of the power of words and would use them to reinforce his idea of Divine-right monarchy. He presented himself to his new subjects, on the one hand, as God’s representative on earth, the one who could restore order and defeat Satan and his followers, the witches. However, he displayed his ability discovering false cases of witchcraft too. This seemingly contradictory attitude was

also part of his strategy. He was not only the hammer of the witches but, at the same time, the head of the family, the one who protected his subjects and, as God's representative on earth, the one who could discern the truth and uncover false accusations.

I shall study how different writings, including pamphlets, tracts or even theatre plays, offer different insights into witchcraft in Jacobean society. Also, I shall analyse the way discourse will be used not only to reinforce the official ideas on witchcraft but also as a means of articulating royal power and promoting certain attitudes and behaviours.

Chapters 4 and 5 will focus on the figure of Elizabeth Sawyer, a woman convicted of witchcraft in Edmonton in 1621. Since no legal records have survived until our days, I shall analyse the only two remaining sources of information about her case: a pamphlet and a theatre play.

Chapter 4 will concentrate on Henry Goodcole's pamphlet *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer*, written some months after her execution. I shall analyse the role of that type of writings in Jacobean times as a powerful tool to transmit the official discourse of witchcraft and explain how discourse circulated through different strata of society and helped reinforce certain values.

Finally, chapter 5 will study the theatre play staged that same year and written by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford. It will analyse the process of self-fashioning, following Greenblatt's approach, that appears in the

play at three different levels as well as the role of theatre in James I's reign. His interest in the power of words, which would become a powerful tool to convey his message, to spread his ideas not only of witchcraft but also on his Divine-right monarchy to all strata of society.

All those writings were widely circulated in Jacobean society and should be understood as both "evidence and artifacts" (Dolan 1994: 3). They are not only records of particular cases but they should also be regarded as "evidence of the processes of cultural formation and transformation in which they participated" (1994: 3). By including or omitting certain aspects they contributed to the fashioning of their own time.

# **CHAPTER 1**

## **NEW HISTORICISM AND THE TEXTUALITY OF CULTURE**



## 1. NEW HISTORICISM AND THE TEXTUALITY OF CULTURE

Much has been said about New Historicism, an approach which has its roots in the 1960s and from the 1980s onwards has greatly influenced the study of literature. But before starting to discuss what has made it so relevant, the similarities and differences with previous approaches, it is necessary to point out that it has brought about a new way of approaching literary texts in which the historical context becomes an integral part of the text itself. Therefore, it seems necessary to go back to the origins of literary criticism itself, to understand how New Historicism appears, how it is the product of some specific circumstances which gave rise to this new way of approaching texts.

As it will be later explained, for New Historicists history itself becomes a text, something which has to be studied in order to understand the particular conditions in which it appears:

New Historicists –like the cultural materialists– are very much aware that their understanding of historical texts is to an

important extent shaped by the socio-cultural reality that they themselves are part of. If the texts that they study are to a substantial degree co-produced by the social reality of their authors then clearly that must also be the case with their own texts. (Bertens 2007: 182)

Therefore, it is not only relevant to study the time when particular pieces of work are written but it is also important to understand how New Historicism appears, how it is shaped either as a reaction to or a continuation of the approaches before it, to understand the causes that lead to that new way of reading texts.

The origins of literary criticism can be traced back to Classical Greece with authors such as Aristotle, who extensively discussed on typology of literary forms in his *Poetica* (ca. 350 BC). Later, the Roman poet Horace established some precepts for composing poetry in his *Ars Poetica* (1<sup>st</sup> century BC), a piece of work which would have a tremendous influence for many centuries. However, in the Middle Ages, these works are to some extent forgotten and the main concern was that of the moral value of literary works. It was not until the Early Modern period<sup>1</sup> when a renewed interest for the classics would call for a unity of form and content and, in the following centuries, the descriptive analysis of literary works appeared.

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<sup>1</sup> In “Renaissance/ Early Modern Studies”, Leah S. Marcus discusses on the differences between both terms and the several uses they have been given and he states that “it is quite common to find *early modern* and *Renaissance* used together in the work of even very recent literary scholars” (Leah 1992: 44). Therefore, in the course of my PhD thesis, I have opted for the term Early Modern.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century there were authors such as Joseph Addison or Samuel Johnson who discussed “texts *without* a sense of historical context” (Colebrook 1997: 3), gathering various authors from different times into particular genres. However, that very same century also gave rise to literary criticism as we understand it today, to a sense of “historical consciousness” (1997: 14) which started to link literature and history and which had “a similar structure to the development of Enlightenment historiography” (1997: 9).

The practice of writing literary histories, along with a strong sense of historical progress in general, emerged, in Europe, in the eighteenth century. While ‘histories’ had been written prior to the eighteenth century, the idea of history as a meaningful, progressive and developing series of changes began to take shape when writers felt that their present was qualitatively and historically different from their past. This sense of *historical difference* or the emergence of historical consciousness is frequently attributed to an Age of Revolution in which the goals of freedom were deemed to be obtainable only through a complete and radical break with the past. (Colebrook 1997: 5)

Thomas Warton’s *History of English Poetry from the Close of the Eleventh to the Commencement of the Eighteenth Century* (1724) was one of the earliest attempts to literary history in English. Literary criticism began to be extensively

practiced, particularly in gentleman's journals such as *The Tattler* or *The Spectator*, where their publishers discussed on various topics. That new practice was clearly marked by their way of understanding their position in history, the importance of literature and literary history and it is "strongly linked to a sense of nationhood and a perception of each nation's own specific history or destiny" (Colebrook 1997: 9).

However, the rationalism of the 18<sup>th</sup> century was substituted by a new way of understanding history in the following century. As Hayden White (1973) argues the past is no longer regarded as erroneous or superstitious but merely as having its own way of understanding the world. Therefore, critics argue that the past can be understood through history, through their own interpretations.

It was in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, particularly after the Romantic period, that literary criticism, as we understand it today, began to establish itself. It was also the time when English studies began to develop. According to Terry Eagleton, it was the failure of religion as an "effective form of ideological control" (1989: 23) that gave rise to the discourse of English literature. Literature was then regarded not only as a way of entertainment but it was also used to instruct. The so-called Liberal Humanism started to confer literature a special status because of its double function not only as a mode of instructing people but also as "the superior interpreter of life" (Bertens 2007: 9).

Matthew Arnold and later T. S. Eliot were some of the key figures in that new way of understanding literature and, like many others, they looked for works of literature that transcended time and place, that represented universal values. It would be Arnold who would offer a new definition to literary criticism as “a disinterested endeavour to learn and propagate the best that is known and thought in the world” (1964: 33).

Literature was given a special status as a way of instructing people, of teaching universal values and, consequently, the following decades were marked by an almost pathological effort on the side of scholars to define the canon, those pieces of work which were worth reading and those which did not fit their standards. The creation of this canon would have an everlasting influence in the study of literature which, the 1920s, would be included as a discipline in English universities. That set of literary works would “dominate virtually all English and American discussions of literature until the 1970s and is still a powerful influence” (Bertens 2007: 16).

Consequently, the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were marked by this search for the best works of literature and in particular the work of the critic F. R. Leavis would be very influential. Also following Eliot’s ideas, I. A. Richards developed the Practical Criticism based on the idea that literature had special characteristics that separated it from other types of writing. He focused on the texts trying to find

their unique meaning and, in fact, he turned “meaning into an intellectual challenge” (Bertens, 2007: 16).

These ideas and the search for meaning quickly spread to the United States and, in the 1930s, a group of scholars started what would be known as the New Criticism. Like their British counterparts they also regarded poems as “storehouses of authentic values and as expressing important truths about the complexities of life that no other medium can convey nearly as effectively” (Bertens, 2007: 22).

New Criticism challenged the principles of traditional criticism and believed that “the best interests of the work were served by treating it as autotelic, by isolating its analysis from extraneous considerations of time, place and function, and focusing on its intrinsic properties as a verbal icon” (Ryan 1996: xiii).

Since those works of literature they included in the canon had the characteristic of transcending time and place, of showing universal truths, both the author and the reader were excluded. Although they shared their interest in form with Formalists in Europe, New Critics were “not interested in form for its own sake, but in form as contributing to a text’s meaning” (Bertens 2007: 23) and developed the *close reading* of texts.

Opposed to the historical scholarship practised in universities, the New Criticism treated poems as aesthetic objects rather than historical documents and examined the interactions of their

verbal features and the ensuing complications of meaning rather than the historical intentions and circumstances of their authors.

(Culler 2000: 122)

Unlike New Critics, who were primarily concerned with meaning, Formalists showed an interest in the formal aspects of literature. This Russian approach, which started to develop in the late 1910s and early 1920s, originally focused on poetry and tried to find the “specific formal characteristics which make literature distinct from other kinds of writing” (Brannigan 1998: 14), what they called the *literariness*. And they did that in a systematic way, transforming the study of literature with their particular method in which only form was relevant and author and context were somehow left aside.

Those scholars developed a formal method and drew their attention to the devices used, the style and the form of texts trying to find what made literature *defamiliarizing*, looking for the *différence*. While New Critics looked for specific meaning in particular texts, Formalists wanted to find general rules to define literature

Although this Russian approach to the study of literature appeared at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was not until it arrived in France, after the Second World War, when relevant figures such as Roman Jakobson started to develop their work in the United States, that it began to attract international attention.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, there also appeared another approach to literary criticism known as Phenomenology. Founded by Edmund Husserl and spread through the work of Martin Heidegger, amongst others, it was also concerned with hermeneutics and focused on finding the hidden meaning within texts.

Phenomenology was clearly influenced by its own time, a moment of cultural crisis which they believed it could “only be averted through a textual study of tradition” (Colebrook 1997: 33). Philosophers such as Edmund Husserl sought to “develop a new method which would lend absolute certainty to a disintegrating civilization” (Eagleton 1989: 54). In order to do that, they not only tried to find in the past the meanings that their present lacked but they also described experience, the consciousness. Texts were studied without taking into consideration what was outside them. They were “the pure embodiment of the author’s consciousness: all of its stylistic and semantic aspects are grasped as organic parts of a complex totality, of which the unifying essence is the author’s mind” (1989: 59).

However, Phenomenology did not aim at biographical analysis but it rather focused on how the author experienced the world. Later authors, such as Martin Heidegger would talk about language containing the truth of the world.

The text was seen as a vehicle or expression which harboured a depth or meaning which was neither immediately apparent nor adequately presented. The task of interpretation was ongoing and itself marked by its own moment of historical specificity.

Texts were seen as coherent only in terms of historical understanding. (Colebrook 1997: 33)

Therefore, it can be understood as a revision of traditional Historicism in the sense that it reveals “the character of an epoch” (Colebrook 1997: 32). However, in a later development some critics, such as E. D. Hirsch Jr, would argue that “literary meaning is absolute and immutable, wholly resistant to historical change” (Eagleton 1989: 67). Following the hermeneutic tradition they understood literary works as an organic unit and authors such as Hans- Georg Gadamer would talk about how:

the meaning of a literary work is never exhausted by the intentions of its author; as the work passes from one cultural or historical context to another, new meanings may be culled from it which were perhaps never anticipated by its author or contemporary audience. (Eagleton 1989: 71)

One of the latest developments of hermeneutics was the German Reception Theory which focused on “the reader’s progressive movement through a text, analysing how readers produce meaning” (Culler 2000: 123). They analysed the process of reading and the role of the reader, which “is always a dynamic one, a complex movement and unfolding through time” (Eagleton 1989: 77).

However, particularly from the 1950s onwards, there appeared a new approach which was perceived as a development from previous studies and based mainly on the work of two main figures, Ferdinand de Saussure and Roman Jakobson. It spread to many different fields, from anthropology and history to psychoanalysis or literary and cultural theories and unlike Phenomenology, which was focused on describing experience, it was interested in identifying “the underlying structures that make it possible” (Culler 2000: 124).

The earliest representative of this new approach was the Prague School of Linguistics, which represented “a kind of transition from Formalism to modern Structuralism” (Eagleton 1989: 99). Their work on defamiliarization and their focus on the structural unit of texts were crucial aspects to understand this approach. But it was Roman Jakobson who contributed to its spread in the United States, where he had moved in 1941, and who offered a new definition of literariness. Literature focused “on its own *form*, its focus is on the *message* rather than on the sender, the addressee, or any other possible target. It is in other words oriented towards the *code* –the code of literature– that it employs” (Bertens 2007: 45).

As with previous approaches, Jakobson was mainly describing literature as poetry, a kind of text clearly different from the rest and which “distinguishes itself from other texts because we can see it as a message that is primarily oriented

towards itself –its own form– and not towards the outside world or its potential readers” (2007: 50).

On the other hand, French Structuralism was not concerned with form but with structure that, according to them, “makes meaning possible” (Bertens 2007: 55). Following the work of the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure,<sup>2</sup> a distinction is made between *langue* and *parole*. He did not want to find the underlying grammar rules, like Grammarians were doing at the time; he was interested in analysing how language, what he called *langue*, worked.

Words were defined as signs that were composed of a signifier and a signified and language was understood as a system of signs where “no individual unit of language could have meaning without being defined against all the other units in language” (Colebrook 1997: 222).

Structuralism tried to “master and codify structures” (Culler 2000: 125), to describe a “complete and coherent signifying system” (2000: 125); it tried to offer an exhaustive description of the structures of language while also describing “the various relations between the elements within those structures” (Bertens 2007: 76).

However, the same scholars who first ascribed to Structuralism soon separated from it. They were no longer concerned with describing the system but wanted to “emphasize instead a critique of knowledge, totality, and the subject” (Culler 2000: 125).

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<sup>2</sup> *Course in General Linguistics* (1916) was Saussure’s posthumous work. Edited by Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye, the book included his writings and lectures at the University of Geneva.

It was in the 1960s when major changes took place, changes that would challenge the way of understanding literary criticism and which would lead to new approaches to the study of literature. As Hans Bertens (2007) suggests, it was at that time when the political dimension of literary criticism became more evident, when the focus shifted to issues of class, gender and race.

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and thanks to the writings of Marx and Heggels there had appeared a new type of criticism that focused on the “capitalist modes of production and our alienation within that given system” (Bertens 2007: 82).

On a simple level Marxism fractures the idea that history is singular and universal by positing that all history is rife with class struggle, in which the interests of the dominant economic group are represented as the interests of society in general while the interests of the proletariat, those who sell their labour for wages, are not represented, or are represented as those of a particular minority. (Brannigan 1998: 23)

Economy was understood as a key factor since it determined not only the modes of economic production but also “the ruling mode of cultural production” (Brannigan 1998: 24). Louis Althusser (1971) developed this idea and talked about ideology and the cultural mechanisms that kept people alienated. He described how power was achieved by controlling the means of representation, by controlling the way ideology is represented. Louis Althusser’s ideas would greatly

influence both British and American critics who were “especially interested in issues of class and social exploitation and are specifically attentive to the cultural mechanisms –and their literary versions– that keep people unaware of their exploited status” (Bertens 2007: 113).

He would later ascribe to many of the Post-structuralist’s precepts and work further from this new approach, although always from a Marxist perspective, and as it would be later seen, he would also influence both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism.

In the 1960s England, there were two main but completely opposed dominant literary traditions. On the one hand, humanist criticism whose main representative was, as it has been previously mentioned, F. R. Leavis and his idea that “literature’s primary function was to examine and reveal the intricacies of human nature, and that the trained literary critic could classify literature according to how complex was the portrait of mortality, feeling and life” (Brannigan 1998: 36-37).

On the other hand, there was Raymond Williams, one of the main representatives of Marxist literary and cultural studies at the time. As Brannigan suggests, one of the most important differences between Leavis and Williams’ way of understanding literature is that this later one believes “literature represented the social and cultural values of certain sections of people, and not, as in humanist criticism, the great universal truths of human nature” (Brannigan 1998: 37).

Raymond Williams used an anthropological concept of culture and expanded the field of study for literary criticism. He argued that “we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make them subject to quite special and distinct laws” (1980: 27).

He is considered the founding father of Cultural Materialism, a term which he first coined in 1977 in his *Marxism and Literature* and which Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield would adopt to name their new approach, and introduced a new type of critical analysis “in which culture both reflected and acted upon the society of which it is a part” (Brannigan 1998: 39).

But apart from this focus on political readings, the 1960s also witnessed a shift to issues of gender with the emergence of the Women’s movement, which had its origins in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Women’s Rights and Women’s Suffrage movements. The main representatives of this first period were Virginia Woolf, who Mary Eagleton refers to as the “founding mother of the contemporary debate” (Eagleton, 1991: 1) and the French Simone de Beauvoir. Woolf was the first one to state that “gender identity is socially constructed and can be challenged and transformed” (1991: 207). But it would be in Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) where she would talk about the creation of the women as the other.

Institutions have exerted their power to consciously exclude women from higher and formal education for centuries. Women “could not occupy the same cultural space as men” (Stimpson 1992: 256) and that is the reason why feminist

struggled for a reform of the educational system. The problem was not women's biology but the way society treated them, how they were perceived in terms of family, work, education, culture, religion, etc.

While Marxism was concerned with economic and social factors, Women's movement "rejected the narrowly economic focus of much classical Marxism thought, a focus which was clearly incapable of explaining the particular conditions of women as an oppressed social group, or of contributing significantly to their transformation" (Eagleton 1989: 148).

The feminist movements of the 1960s changed their focus from the "emphasis on social, political and economic reform" (Eagleton 1991: 206) to that of sexual difference. One fine example was Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), where the author talked about "the widespread negative stereotyping of women in literature and film" (Bertens 2007: 95) and how sex and power were clearly related.

From focusing on women as writers, Feminists then analysed the representation of women in literature and the gender roles they are assigned. Gender "has to do not with how females (and males) really are, but with the way that a given culture or subculture sees them, how they are culturally *constructed*" (Bertens 2007: 98).

By the mid-1970s, Feminism was already established in the academic community and incorporated aspects from other approaches such as Marxism or Post-Structuralism. It soon became clear that rather than a unified feminist theory

there was a diversity of approaches. A fact that, according to Mary Eagleton, could be “accounted for, partly by the facility with which feminism has interacted with other critical discourses, both influencing and being influenced by them” (1991: 3) but it also reflects “the ongoing nature of the debate” (1991: 3) which is still present nowadays in the widespread practice of Feminist criticism.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning the appearance in the 1960s of a type of criticism which focused on race. Similarly to what Feminist critics had done, they wanted to demonstrate “the pervasive presence of racial prejudice in Western writing” (Bertens 2007: 113).

In the 1960s, when Structuralism was still present in the academic sphere, there appeared a new approach called Post-Structuralism, which both challenged and continued some of the precepts of Structuralism. It was understood as “the product of that blend of euphoria and disillusionment, liberation and dissipation, carnival and catastrophe, which was 1968. Unable to break the structures of state power, Post-Structuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structure of language” (Eagleton 1989:142).

Both approaches shared the same “anti-humanist perspective” (Bertens 2007: 120) and believed that “language is the key to our understanding of ourselves and the world” (2007: 120). However, Post-Structuralism also challenged many of the Structuralist assumptions and methods, recognising “the impossibility

of describing a complete or coherent signifying system, since systems are always changing” (Culler 2000: 125).

For them, Structuralism has been unable to answer some relevant issues; it did not “enquire into the material conditions” (Eagleton 1989: 112) of the making of literature or into how “the product was actually consumed” (1989: 112). There is also the problem of historical changes because “reality was not reflected by language but *produced* by it” (1989: 108). Therefore, a broad range of theoretical discourses appeared within the Post-Structuralist approach in which “there is a critique of notions of objective knowledge and of a subject able to know himself or herself” (Culler 2000: 126).

Post-Structuralism also tried to leave behind the “scientific aspirations” (Selden 1993: 131) of Structuralism and overcame some of the problems that had arisen. One of those problems was the concept of author. It would be the French critic Roland Barthes who, in his “The Death of the Author” (1977) would reject “the traditional view that the author is the origin of the text, the source of its meaning, and the only authority for its interpretation” (Selden 1993: 131-132). The focus, then, shifted to the reader and concepts such as text or authorship were revised.

All literary texts are woven out of other literary texts, not in the conventional sense that they bear the traces of ‘influence’ but in the more radical sense that every word, phrase or segment is a

reworking of other writings which precede or surround the individual work. There is no such thing as literary 'originality', no such thing as the 'first' literary work: all literature is 'intertextual'. A specific piece of writing thus has no clearly defined boundaries. (Eagleton 1989: 138)

Another major change would arrive with the work of Jacques Lacan and his many followers, who helped introduce psychoanalysis into literary criticism. Applying psychoanalytic terminology to the study of language, Lacan "restates Freud's theories in the language of Saussure" (Selden 1993:139) and explained "why we would internalize discourses that effectively imprison us" (Bertens 2007:169) as well as the "relationship that readers enter into with the texts they read" (2007: 169).

However, one of the most relevant developments was made by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida. He developed the theory of Deconstruction, "a critique of the hierarchical oppositions that have structured Western thought" (Culler 2000: 126). Derrida showed how these oppositions were simply a construction and 'brings to light the tension between the central and the marginal in the text' (Bertens 2007: 128). For Deconstruction, meaning was achieved through difference: "whatever the effect of binary oppositions they always have their origin in difference. To analyse and dismantle them [...] means to 'decentre'

the privileged term, to show that both terms only exist because of difference” (Bertens 2007: 130).

Deconstruction offered a new perspective to meaning, which was then less stable and full of contradictions. The focus shifted from the texts, which could “generate an infinite flow of meaning” (Bertens 2007: 138) and the author, to the reader.

Finally, it is also worth mentioning Michel Foucault, whose work has had a great impact in many different fields and approaches. His work was extensive and complex and it frequently included many contradictions and changes of opinion. It is not the aim of this PhD thesis to analyse in depth his theories, however, his undeniable importance for the development of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism makes it relevant to at least point out some of his main ideas.

One of the key aspects of Foucault’s work was his radical criticism of “traditional” Historicism. He did “not presuppose the coherence or unity of historical periods” (Colebrook 1997: 31) but rather, he studied them as a series of discontinuities. In his *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), Foucault explained:

There was a time when archaeology, as a discipline devoted to silent monuments, inert traces, objects without context, and things left by the past, aspired to the condition of history, and attained meaning only through the restitution of a historical discourse; it might be said, to play on words a little, that in our

time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument. (Foucault 2008: 8)

Foucault challenged hermeneutic approaches pointing out that texts did not offer a view into the past and denying the possibility of a “*total history*” (2008: 8). Echoing Friedrich Nietzsche, he pointed out that “we cannot speak of any absolute truth or of objective knowledge of history” (Selden 1993: 160). He discussed the relationship between text and meaning, between discourse and power.

The idea of hermeneutics, in which the text is in some way conceived as containing or revealing a meaning, would be set aside in favour of considering a text within a network –not just of other texts, but of institutional and disciplinary boundaries. A text would not be referred to some prior historical context; it is already part of a discursive formation. (Colebrook 1997: 35)

Not only did he reject the traditional relation between text and history but he also described the relationship between discourse and power. For him, discourse was “the governing and ordering medium of every institution” (Eagleton 1983: 129). In *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* John Brannigan extensively discusses on Foucault’s ideas of discourse and power as well as Foucault’s relation with other approaches.

Foucault's recognition that the structures of knowledge, information and decision-making in modern Western society are predicated on claims to power echoes Nietzsche's argument that all claims to truth are in reality claims to power. This is obviously similar to the arguments made by Marx, Benjamin and Althusser [...] that 'the truth' was simply a version of events preferred, indeed imposed, by the dominant or ruling group in society. (Brannigan 1998: 42)

Foucault also challenged the idea of history as a continuity, as a "meaningful process" (Colebrook 1997: 37) and, in his discursive practice, showed how "literature can work in a social formation, as opposed to simply reflecting it" (1997: 40). For him, discourse is rooted in social institutions, which will use it as a mechanism of control. This idea was later developed in two other works, which have a direct link to the position taken by the New Historicism and Cultural Materialism.

First, in *Discipline and Punish* (1975) Foucault would further explain his ideas on power, how "the incarceration produces physical limits between reason and madness" (Colebrook 1997: 44). Using Bentham's panopticon,<sup>3</sup> he explained how boundaries were created, how "a real subjection is born mechanically from a

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<sup>3</sup> Jeremy Bentham described in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century a prison where the surveillance is permanent and "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (Foucault 1979: 15).

fictitious relation” (Foucault 1979: 16). He explained that modern Western world had internalized the dominant discourses and “for all practical purposes police ourselves” (Bertens 2007: 169), became the subjects of our own subjection.

He who is subject to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. (Foucault 1979: 16)

Foucauldian criticism focused on “the role of literary and other texts in the circulation and maintenance of social power” (Bertens 2007: 169). Later, in volume 1 of *The History of Sexuality* (1978), he denied the possibility of resistance to power, one of his most controversial ideas which has been widely criticised. Although Foucault argues that “power always brings about resistance it is by no means clear how we should interpret this. We also find him arguing, for instance, that resistance is the means by which power further strengthens itself” (Bertens 2007: 153).

Other authors, such as Frank Lentricchia in his “Foucault’s Legacy: A New Historicism?” criticised Foucault’s “conception of a power that is elusively and literally undefinable” (1988: 235). Despite the many controversies his work

created, the undeniable importance that his theories have had on later approaches cannot be denied.

As we have seen, Post-Structuralism covered many different areas of knowledge and included scholars from many different traditions, who would influence later approaches. However, it is also worth mentioning that, from the 1960s to the 1980s, Postmodernism writing appeared in the literary sphere and, as a consequence, there would also follow a “Postmodern criticism that responds to this mode of writing accepts its premises and links it to Post-Structuralist theory” (Bertens 2007: 145).

In the 1980s, a new generation of scholars who were formed in the 1960s and 1970s appeared in the United States. They were clearly influenced by the many different approaches that had originated in the previous decades, including Post-Structuralism, Marxism or Feminism amongst others, and characterised by the political dimension they gave to both literature and literary criticism. As Catherine Belsey suggests, the work of this new wave of critics revealed the flaws of some previous, more conservative approaches to the study of literature, which they harshly criticised: “the conservatism of traditional English lies primarily in two main areas: first, its promotion of the author-subject as the individual origin of meaning, insight, and truth; and second, its claim that this truth is universal, transcultural and ahistorical” (1989: 82).



As I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, analysing the historical context is very important for New Historicism, not only for studying texts but also for understanding the origins of this approach. Most of the authors, schools and theories mentioned before are relevant to explain the appearance of this approach in the 1980s, either as a rejection or a continuation of their perspectives.

The origin of New Historicism can be marked by the publication in 1980 of Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* and Louis Montrose's "Eliza, Queene of Sheperdes". However, it is important to bear in mind that New Historicism was not something radically new. As John Brannigan points out, some authors, such as Stephen Orgel or E. M. W. Tillyard, had already described similar concepts<sup>4</sup> before and, despite its many theoretical differences, had previously followed similar methods. In fact, the very term New Historicism had already been used by other authors, such as Roy Harvey Pearce in his *Historicism Once More* (1969) or Wesley Morris's *Towards a New Historicism* (1972). Nevertheless, it is Stephen Greenblatt who is credited for its spread after an article he published in the journal *Genre* in 1982.

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<sup>4</sup> In his *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism*, John Brannigan explains how Stephen Orgel's *The Illusion of Power* (1975) and even the earliest work of E. M. W. Tillyard in his *the Elizabethan World Picture* (1943) "contains some of the same theoretical assumptions as the work of Greenblatt and Montrose" (1998: 57).

As Louis Montrose explains, the appearance of New Historicism in the 1980s is the consequence of some specific conditions which had been forged in the previous decades. First,

there has been taking place, for some time, and opening of the profession of English to scholars whose gender, ethnicity, religious or class origins, political allegiances, or sexual preferences (or some combination of these) complicate their participation in the cultural and ideological traditions enshrined in the canonical works they study and teach. (Montrose 1989: 393)

Secondly, Montrose points out how that new generation of scholars and their “values were formed while they were students during the experimental and politically turbulent 1960s” (1989: 393). And finally, he emphasises the undeniable importance of the previous theories and approaches, which became the ferment that “challenged the assumptions and procedures of normative discourses in several academic disciplines” (1989: 393).

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the predominant view on culture in the United States had been that of the New Criticism and its canon, which had become a milestone in the study of literature. However, in the 1960s, there appear several scholars who start to challenge those traditional approaches and procedures. Class, gender and race start to be introduced in literary studies and

there is an open debate on different aspects which had been taken for granted before, such as what can be regarded as a text, its boundaries or even the concept of authorship.

The reaction against New Historicism is soon felt in American institutions and among many scholars who oppose those changes in the “traditional” curriculum. As Aram Veesser explains, traditionalists “predictably rushed to their guns” (1989: ix) as soon as they perceive their status quo is threatened.

However, New Historicism is not only attacked by those more traditional scholars. Although, as Catherine Gallagher points out “much historicist work can be said to possess a remarkable continuity with certain cultural assumptions of the New Left” (1989: 43), it is also attacked by them since they “distrust the culturalism and textualism that New Historicism seems to nourish” (Veesser 1989: x).

Despite the opposition, New Historicism was soon perceived as common practice, as an identifiable and differentiated form of literary criticism. As Brannigan points out, by the years 1983, “there was a recognisable practice to which various literary critics, art critics, historians and anthropologists were contributing essays and books, and which Greenblatt had named ‘new historicism’. [...] They shared some common theoretical assumptions which made them identifiable loosely as a group” (1998: 71).

Identifying New Historicism as a group, as a cohesive approach, is not an easy task. Unlike other previous critical practices, they feel they do not need a systematic theory. As Claire Colebrook points out, this refusal has its origins in Post-Structuralist ideas.

This reluctance to theorise is not accidental to New Historicism practice; such reticence stems from both a calculated rejection of a unified theory of meaning and New historicist's debt to theorists, like Certeau and Foucault, whose work in many ways problematised the primacy and possibility of any general philosophical discourse. (Colebrook 1997: 24)

In an attempt to answer their many critiques, Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, in their introduction to *Practicing New Historicism* (2001), explain that it is in the basis of their approach, in their lack of uniformity, that lay the reasons for their resistance to formulate a unified theory.

[We] remain deeply sceptical of the notion that we should formulate an abstract system and then apply it to literary works. We doubt that it is possible to construct such a system independent of our own time and place and of the particular object by which we are interested, and we doubt too that any powerful work we might do would begin with such an attempt. (Gallagher 2001: 2)

New Historicists acknowledge their own subjectivity when studying a particular period or a particular text. As Stephen Greenblatt explains, it all started with a fascination with the Renaissance that “seems to be powerfully linked to the present both analogically and causally” (1990: 58).

Our analyses necessarily proceed from our own historically, socially, and institutionally shaped vantage points and that the pasts we reconstruct are, at the same time, the textual constructs of critics who are, ourselves, historical subjects. (Montrose 1989: 415)

Their refusal to theorisation has been constantly criticised but even nowadays, almost thirty years after its appearance, New Historicists stand firm against their detractors. Indeed, some scholars even suggest that this lack of systematisation is “their greatest strength and the secret of their rampant appeal” (Ryan 1996: x).

In fact, New Historicism is not understood as a “close-knit school in which one might be enrolled or from which one might be expelled” (Gallagher 2001: 2) but rather it is “best viewed as occupying distinct positions or options on the same critical continuum” (Ryan, 1996: x-xi). Therefore, rather than following a systematic theory, they share some similar principles and “common assumptions”

(Brannigan 1998: 65). As Catherine Gallagher points out, they share “the fascination with the particular, the wide ranging curiosity, the refusal of universal aesthetic norms, and the resistance to formulating an overarching theoretical program” (2001: 6).

Many authors have tried to summarise the common theoretical assumptions that New Historicists follow but it is important to bear in mind that, as John Brannigan explains, “many of its practitioners were not always comfortable with the label ‘New Historicism’” (1998: 71) and that “its variety and relative indeterminacy ought to caution us about regarding the New Historicism as a uniform, coherent body of criticism” (1998: 71).

Kiernan Ryan states that it is impossible to clearly distinguish “a single, unifying theory or consistent critical method” (1996: x). The term New Historicism rather applies to “a flexible repertoire of strategies and techniques” (1996: x) which each critic adapts to their own method. Therefore, I shall try to explain some of those characteristics and shared ideas they apply to their critical practice

First of all, it is important to remember that New Historicism appears in the United States in the 1980s as a reaction to New Criticism, which had been the predominant approach since the 1940s. As a direct consequence of the opening of higher education to people of different backgrounds who felt that “the traditional humanist curriculum seems less representative” (Greenblatt 1996: 3), the canon

and the idea that some literary work are better than others, that some authors are more worthy of attention than others starts to be challenged.

In the previous decades, there had been a marginalisation of certain authors and texts that the literary standards perceived as “inadequate, not *literature*” (Belsey 1989: 83). Leah S. Marcus suggests that the changes the canon undergoes and the inclusion of new types of texts “precipitates a rereading and reevaluation of canonical figures and an increasing erosion of modes of interpretation based on elitist assumptions about literate and its superiority to more workaday forms of writing” (1992: 48).

Feminists had already pointed out how literature written by women had been consciously removed from the academic curriculum and were trying to “rescue, in annotated editions, the poems, diaries, domestic treatises, and religious writings of Renaissance women largely ignored by the previous generations of scholars” (Kerrigan 1994: 68).

New Historicists understand that traditional boundaries need to be revised, or even broken. For them, literature is “something constructed and reconstructed, the product of shifting conceptual entitlements and limits” (Greenblatt 1996: 5). The political dimension of texts is highlighted and they are always analysed “with reference to the dominant discourse or discourses of a given period” (Bertens 2007: 190).

New Historicism turns literary criticism into a truly interdisciplinary practice and understands it “as the project of reading literature in relation to history, society and politics” (Brannigan 1998: 73). However, this recurrent focus on the political aspects has been criticised by those who oppose New Historicist practice since they believe the literary qualities of the text are being neglected. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt answer to these allegations in *Practicing New Historicism*.

Our project has never been about diminishing or belittling the power of artistic representations, even those with the most problematic entailments, but we never believe that our appreciation of this power necessitates either ignoring the cultural matrix out of which the representations emerge or uncritically endorsing the fantasies that the representation articulate. (Gallagher 2001: 9)

Following Post-Structuralist theories, they highlight the “instability of literary texts” (Marcus 1992: 51) and rethink the idea of the author, of that individual genius. The role of the author is “not completely negated, but it is a role that the author is at best only partially in command of. The Author’s role is to a large extent determined by historical circumstances” (Bertens 2007: 176).

Also, echoing the Postmodernist concept of the death of the author, the field of study broadens to include “nonauthorial writings” (Marcus 1992: 46). The

aim is “to dethrone and demystify the privileged literary work” (Ryan 1996: xiii) and as a consequence the field of study opens to include

a vast array of writings whose form and apparent function disqualified it as serious literature –pamphlets, romances, ballads, even popular drama, and, at the other end of the cultural spectrum, ephemeral forms like the court masque which was disparaged by its learned authors as the mere illusion of a night.  
(Marcus 1992: 47)

It is not only this inclusion of new types of texts or the disappearance of the distinction between “high” and “lower” literary works but also “the drastic broadening of the field that results from the consideration of whole cultures as texts” (Gallagher 2001: 6). New Historicism “turns history itself into a text” (Ryan 1996: xiii); an idea which owes much to the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, who suggests that “there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture” (1973: 5).

Our ideas, our values, our acts, even our emotions, are like our nervous system itself, cultural products –products manufactured, indeed, out of tendencies, capacities and dispositions with which we were born, but manufactured nonetheless [...] It is no

different with men; they, too, every last one of them, are cultural artifacts. (Geertz 1973: 8)

Therefore, to understand human beings, they must be studied in their particular circumstances, in their specific contexts. Before, literature was believed to transcend its own time and place, to be universal. However, New Historicism challenges this notion and argues that it is a vehicle for power “directly involved in history” (Bertens 2007: 177) that

instead of transcending its own time and place, as traditional Anglo-American criticism had argued (and was still arguing), the literary text is a time-and place- bound verbal construction that is always in one way or another political. (Berten 2007: 177)

New Historicism not only challenges the concept of text but also the division between text and culture, as well as text and history. As Louis Montrose explains, their practice exhibits “a reciprocal concern with the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (1989: 20). Literary texts are treated “as inseparable from other texts and forms, and inseparable from the social and political contexts in which they are embedded” (Brannigan 1998: 68).

This can be seen as a return to history but from a quite different perspective to that of the traditional Historicism. As John Brannigan explains, New

Historicists refuse the 19<sup>th</sup> century's view on history, which understands it as “the objective description of a knowable past or as the empathetic recreation of that past” (1998: 29); but they also refuse more recent theories, which see the past “in terms of epochal trends and orders” (1998: 31). New Historicists accuse Post-Structuralist Marxists such as Fredric Jameson and Post-Modern theorists such as Jean-Francois Lyotard of “having failed to consider the specific historical circumstances of textual production” (Colebrook 1997: 225). For New Historicism the past is understood as

consisting of very diverse configurations of beliefs, values and trends, often coming into conflict and contradiction with each other [...] [They] question and examine the assumptions behind their own interests in the past, and ground their practices of historical interpretation in explanations of political pressures in the present. (Brannigan 1998: 31)

Now, texts are believed to be “directly involved in history” (Bertens 2007: 177) and their relation to ideology and discourse<sup>5</sup> makes them “a vehicle for power” (2007: 177). This particular concept, which was first developed by Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* will become one of the pillars for New Historicism critical practice.

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<sup>5</sup> As John Brannigan points out discourse is understood as “all sign systems and generators of meaning” (1998: 62).

In that work, Greenblatt, who uses the term “poetics of culture”<sup>6</sup> (1984: 5) to describe his practice, talks about the process of self-fashioning<sup>7</sup> in sixteenth-century England, about “how a particular period or culture fashions itself, manufactures itself” (Brannigan 1998: 33).

One of the central assumptions and arguments of New historicist analyses is that identities are fictions which are formulated and adapted through narratives and performances, and that they are formulated and adapted in response to and as a way of interacting with the prevailing historical conditions. (Brannigan 1998: 61)

He wants to study the role of human autonomy in the construction of identity but, as Jonathan Dollimore points out, he later changes the emphasis “on cultural institutions –family, religion and the State” (2003: 4), stressing how humans are not free. Self-fashioning is understood as a product of power where “representation itself becomes a powerful political act” (Colebrook 1997: 199). Here again, we perceive the influence of Foucault’s ideas and that “connection

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<sup>6</sup> Although Stephen Greenblatt introduces the term “cultural poetics” in his first work *Renaissance Self-Fashioning* (1980), he later uses “New Historicism” to refer to the approach, and in fact, it will be this later one which will be used to name it. However, from the late 1980s onwards Greenblatt seems “to prefer the term ‘cultural poetics’ to describe his work rather than ‘New Historicism’” (Brannigan 1998: 83).

<sup>7</sup> This term owes much to Post-Structuralism which states that “the self is always a construction, that our identity is never given, but always the product of an interaction between the way we want to represent ourselves –through the stories we tell (or the incidents we suppress) and our actual presentations- and the power relations we are part of” (Bertens, 2007: 179).

between power and the formation of subjectivity” (Colebrook 1997: 204). For New Historicists, all texts reflect

relations of power, but actively participates in the consolidation and/ or construction of discourses and ideologies, not only at the individual level –that of the subject– but also on the level of the group or even that of the national state. (Bertens 2007: 177)

Opposite to hermeneutic interpretations, “the critic focuses on the material effects and circumstances produced by the text and in which the text is produced” (Colebrook 1997: 28). They concentrate on “a description of the discursive and material domains in which the text is situated” (1997: 28). As Kieran Ryan suggests, Greenblatt “exchanges the stress on the historicity of texts for a concern with the textuality of culture” (1996: xiv) and understands literature as “only one element of the whole cultural configuration whose distinctive rhetoric it undertakes to read” (1996: xiv).

New Historicists believe that “each period has its own specific and pervasive mode of power” (Brannigan 1998: 63). Therefore, texts are studied to find those characteristic modes of power. In order to do that, they frequently move “from one anecdote to another, one site of power struggle to another, and finding the same ‘essential mode of power’” (1998: 65), which is

at once localized in particular institutions –the court, the church, the colonial administration, the patriarchal family- and diffused in ideological structures of meaning, characteristic modes of expression, recurrent narrative patterns. (Greenblatt 1984: 6)

As Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt explain, New Historicism practice is characterised by that “commitment to particularity” (2001: 19). It is precisely that focus on the particular, on the anecdote, that makes New Historicism practice so different from other approaches to the study of literature.

The traditionally important economic and political agents and events have been displaced or supplemented by people and phenomena that once seemed wholly insignificant, indeed outside of history: women, criminals, the insane, sexual practices and discourses, fairs, festivals, plays of all kinds. Just as in the sixties, the effort in the eighties has been to question and destabilize the distinction between sign systems and things, the representation and the represented, history and text. (Gallagher 1989: 43)

Their fascination with seemingly marginal writings, with “unresolved conflict and contradiction [rather] than in integration” (Greenblatt 1990: 59) has been quite controversial. New Historicism’s detractors criticise that commitment to particularity, which they perceive as

a symptom of leftist disillusionment, an evasion to the challenges posed by feminism and the women's movement, and a head-in-the-sand attitude to the movement's own historical identity as, for example, the purveyor of a history of the early British Empire (Shakespeare and all) which has remained incurious about the doings of the American empire of the present day. (Simpson 2001: 1)

However, New Historicists believe boundaries need to be challenged because “any general homogenisation of symbolic networks [...] would miss the multiple uses, resistances and positions which characterise any culture” (Colebrook 1997: 205). New Historicists believe they have to construct “meaningful exchanges between texts of diverse forms and orientations, in order to get closer to the linguistic, cultural and social fabric of the past” (Brannigan 1998: 34).

Stephen Greenblatt, like many other scholars following the New historicist approach, focuses on the Tudor and Stuart period to exemplify their theories<sup>8</sup> and he explains that “the literalization and institutionalization of the place of art makes the Renaissance theatre particularly useful for an analysis of the cultural circulation of social energy” (2001:13).

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<sup>8</sup> Although New Historicism is first associated with the study of literature in the Early Modern times, by the 1990s it is used to discuss works from different periods and it has successfully mixed with other approaches such as Feminism or Post-colonial studies.

Their critical practice now focuses on the concept of social energy, which is explained through metaphors of circulation, negotiation and exchange, on “the way in which social forces produce such boundaries between reality and text, or history and culture” (Colebrook 1997: 24). It studies how those boundaries are created and how they become dynamic. Greenblatt first talks about this process of dynamic circulation where “other representations and images are taken up, transferred cross domains (or ‘negotiated’) and recirculated in an expanding and contradictory network of signs” (1997: 205).

This whole process of circulation, of negotiation and exchange is directly linked to their idea of how ideology is constructed. Ideology is “produced everywhere and all the time in the social order, but some institutions –by definition, those that usually corroborate the prevailing power arrangements– are vastly more powerful than others” (Sinfield 1992: 64).

Following both Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser, New Historicism understands ideology “as actively constituted through social struggle, and both show how at another level dominant ideologies sustain and keep social divisions in place” (Selden 1993: 163). Through the study of different types of writing, New Historicists try to find “the point where a new discourse becomes dominant, or when a new social practice enters into public representation” (Brannigan 1998: 47). Also, following the work of Raymond Williams and Antonio Gramsci, they

revise the concept of cultural hegemony, analysing the role of cultural production in that construction of hegemonic discourses.

However, as Claire Colebrook explains, in his latest works Stephen Greenblatt “moved away from the Foucaultian emphasis on power towards the notion of wonder” (1997: 214) and resonance, towards “the contradictory and contestatory forms of representation” (1997: 218).

Hence, when people, in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, spread the news that there was a witch around, the message was taken seriously because it was profusely repeated, and it was through that continuous circulation that the discourse of witchcraft was established, since,

Stories are circulated, exchanged, reproduced and re-circulated.

It is this process of circulation which produces resonance. A story will gain in resonance with increasing circulation. A sign or symbol is not meaningful in itself; it only becomes meaningful through social circulation. (Colebrook 1997: 215)

Greenblatt follows Derrida and other theorists in viewing meaning as an effect “of both difference and repeatability” (Colebrook 1997: 230) and studies what makes a text resonant. As a result, stories “as much as weapons, can become the physical facts which enable acts of power to take place. Stories circulate and

enable a culture to represent itself as legitimate, moral, valuable and authoritative” (1997: 215).

Despite the changes of emphasis in some of their analyses, there is one last and relevant assumption which characterises New historicist practice and which still remains controversial, that of the relation between power and subversion. According to New Historicists “power can only define itself in relation to subversion, to what is alien or other, and at the heart of power is therefore the production and subsequent containment of subversion” (Brannigan 1998: 64).

New Historicism is indebted to Post-Structuralism, and Foucault in particular, for their view on power and how it “has worked to suppress or marginalize rival stories and discourses” (Bertens 2001: 180). New Historicists think resistance is almost impossible and add that, in fact, “power *needs* subversion and actively produces it” (Bertens 2007: 181). In “Invisible Bullets”(1988), Stephen Greenblatt explains how subversion is contained:

The subversiveness that is genuine and radical –sufficiently disturbing so that to be suspected of it could lead to imprisonment and torture– is at the same time contained by the power it would appear to threaten. Indeed the subversiveness is the very product of that power and furthers its end. (Greenblatt 2001: 30)

As it has been mentioned, New Historicism has been harshly criticised by many scholars but it is particularly this idea of subversion which has been more frequently attacked. Araam Veaser explains that some of the objections first made to New Historicism have been answered but argues that “the charge of quietism, based on New Historicism alleged strong-containment position and its demonstrations that all subversive moves were doomed to be contained by and perverted to serve the uses of Power, remains [...] very much alive” (1994: 7).

To this charge, Stephen Greenblatt explains in his “Resonance and Wonder” (1990), that New Historicism “does not posit historical processes as unalterable and inexorable, but it does tend to discover limits or constraints upon individual intervention” (Greenblatt 1990: 55).

Before finishing this introductory chapter on the methodology I will be using for my PhD thesis, I would like to discuss on Cultural Materialism, an approach that is frequently mentioned together with New Historicism, and which shares with it many common assumptions and perspectives.

Cultural Materialism appears in the United Kingdom in the mid-1980s, almost at the same time as New Historicism, and its name is adopted from Raymond Williams’s work. As Jonathan Dollimore explains, its practice “grows from an eclectic body of work in Britain in the Post-war period which can be broadly characterised as cultural analysis” (2003: 2). They draw some of their

assumptions not only from Williams but also from many other approaches and theorists. As Jonathan Dollimore explains, it is

The convergence of history, sociology and English in cultural studies, some of the major developments in feminism, as well as continental Marxist-Structuralist and Post-Structuralist theory, especially that of Althusser, Macherey, Gramsci and Foucault.  
(Dollimore 2003: 3)

Both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism share many common characteristics but at the same time they differ in some key concepts. Probably, the most obvious similarity is that they are “by no means a unified theory identifiable with any single theorist or position” (Colebrook 1997: 139). They both feed from common sources within the Marxist tradition and rely on many Post-Structuralist theorists such as Louis Althusser and Michel Foucault; but while Cultural Materialism focuses on authors such as Walter Benjamin or Macherey, New Historicism is “more clearly identified with the Derridean Yale School” (1997: 139). As Brannigan further explains, they both “seek to examine the existence of an ideological system by reading its material practices, customs and rituals” (1998: 28). The relation between literature and history is emphasised, pointing out that texts cannot be separated from their contexts.

However, they can also be distinguished by the different conclusions they draw. While New Historicists regard cultures “as regimes of constraint, designed to absorb resistance or ultimately turn it to their own account” (Ryan 1996: xv), Cultural Materialists focus on “signs of genuine dissidence” (Bertens 2007: 190).

The dominant culture is always under pressure from alternative views and beliefs. So while cultural materialist analyses of literary texts bring to light how these texts are (inevitably conservative) instruments of a dominant socio-cultural order, they also demonstrate how the apparent coherence of that order is threatened from the inside by inner contradictions and by tensions that it seeks to hide. (Bertens 2007: 186)

Following Walter Benjamin ideas, they do not only describe processes and forces but also attempt “to activate the dissidence and subversion which the Cultural Materialism believes lies dormant in any textual manifestation of ideology” (Brannigan 1998: 28). This is perhaps the most obvious difference between both approaches. Cultural Materialism “seeks actively and explicitly to use that literature of yesterday to change the world today” (Ryan 1996: xv).

However, as Kieran Ryan suggests, there are conflicts and continuities<sup>9</sup> in both New Historicism and Cultural Materialism, which makes it impossible to

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<sup>9</sup> In *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism: A Reader* (1996), Kiernan Ryan explains, New Historicism and Cultural Materialism cannot be understood as opposed approaches since, as it has

perceive them as “starkly opposed British and American persuasions” (1996: xi). Both approaches are influenced by different theories and critical approaches but they are not constrained by them since “individual critics may adopt different positions on the spectrum at different times” (1996: xi).



As I have tried to explain, New Historicism appears in the 1980s as a new approach to the study of literature. Most of its assumptions owe much to previous schools and theorists, from Post-Structuralism –with the work of Michel Foucault or Jacques Derrida–, Marxism and figures such as Louis Althusser or Raymond Williams, to Clifford Geertz’s anthropological theories, Feminist or Post-colonial studies.

New Historicists, whose most important figures include Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose or Catherine Gallagher amongst others, have developed a new way of approaching literature which has separated itself from traditional conceptions. From an interdisciplinary perspective, they have tried to break down the traditional boundaries between concepts such as text, author or history and have highlighted their relationship with power and ideology.

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been explained, they share some common ideas, such as their emphasis on the political dimension of literature and its link to history. However, they are also divided in several aspects, particularly, in their view on dissidence and their interest in reading the past as a way of promoting change in the present.

And, although New Historicism has been greatly criticised, particularly in its origins in the 1980s, authors such as Kiernan Ryan point out that this approach has not faded away in time but quite the opposite, its “assumptions and procedures have been so completely absorbed into mainstream critical practice” (Ryan 1996: ix).



Since I shall study the articulation of the discourse of witchcraft in Western Europe and, specifically, in England, in the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, New Historicism seems the most adequate choice. It is not only that this approach had extensively studied the Early Modern period but it is also particularly appealing for its inclusion of a wide variety of writings when analysis the forces at work in this period.

The case of Elizabeth Sawyer would be analysed through the only two remaining writings – Henry Goodcole’s pamphlet and a subsequent theatre play, *The Witch of Edmonton*. These texts, which were not traditionally regarded as adequate for studying the phenomenon of witchcraft, become a useful tool for New Historicism. Pamphlets and drama were used by the institutions to spread

the official discourse of witchcraft as part of the strategies of power in Jacobean England.

Stephen Greenblatt's focus on self-fashioning would also be crucial for understanding how the category "witch" was applied to particular individuals by their communities but also interiorised by those same individuals, who would act according to that particular role.

The link between the discourse and power, as explained by Michel Foucault or Louis Althusser, would also be relevant to understand how both ecclesiastical and lay authorities used witchcraft as means of reinforcing their position and transmitting particular values.



## CHAPTER 2

# THE DISCOURSE OF WITCHCRAFT IN WESTERN EUROPE



## 2. THE DISCOURSE OF WITCHCRAFT IN WESTERN EUROPE

Witchcraft and magic have been differently perceived in different times and places throughout the history of Western Europe. From regarding them as a common practice in the natural world to understanding them as a dangerous threat to mankind and later on, despise those beliefs as simple superstition of illiterate people. New Age beliefs have meant a return to what they believe to be the ancient knowledge of pagan religions. Also, from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present times, the interest in these topics has witnessed a surprising increase with studies from many different approaches and perspectives, including History, Anthropology or Feminism, amongst others.

Analysing the figure of the witch and what that threat of witchcraft meant for their contemporaries is not a simple task. First, we must bear in mind that it must be framed in its precise political, economic and social context.

Integral to any genuinely new-historicist project, however, must be a realization and acknowledgement that our analyses

necessarily proceed from our own historically socially, and institutionally shaped vantage points and that the pasts we reconstruct are, at the same time, the textual constructs of critics who are, ourselves, historical subjects. (Montrose 1981: 415)

Approaching such a complex topic is, therefore, not easy. It is important to understand how witchcraft was perceived in different periods. Thus, I shall first offer a short overview on the study of witches to later focus on how the discourse of witchcraft was articulated from pagan beliefs throughout the Middle Ages until the period of the major witch-hunts in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Until almost the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century witchcraft was not studied as a cultural phenomenon but it was perceived as a real threat. Although there were some authors who regarded witchcraft cases with scepticism, it would not be until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival of the Enlightenment, that the “traditional” ideas on the witch started to be challenged. The new Era of Reason brought about new conceptions and what once was generally believed to be true turned into superstition.

Just as legislation against witchcraft was being repealed and trials stopped in the eighteenth century, and when scepticism about witchcraft had turned into ridicule –at least among the politer classes– a few scholars undertook to describe the history of the phenomenon of the persecutions. (Kors 2001: 24)

By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, witch-hunts are generally regarded as “the result of the ignorance, bigotry, and general stupidity of people in the past, and more specifically, the clergy and judges who were seen as the most active proponents of witch-hunting” (Kors 2001: 5). However, that century also brought about a new perspective regarding witchcraft. Authors such as Jules Michelet (1862) and later on Margaret Murray (1921) and Gerald B. Gardner (1959) “laid the foundations of the currently fashionable view of witchcraft as a coherent, pre-Christian religion” (2001: 8). Despite lacking any theoretical basis, this theory has remained up to our days.

This idea, which is of central importance to modern Wiccans and pagans, has been largely discredited among academic historians, and any claims the witchcraft of the period of the witch-hunts might have to the status of an organised and structured religion remain completely unsubstantiated. (Sharpe 2001: 8)

By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, academics such as George Lyman Kitteridge “restored the subject to the standards of professional historiography” (Kors 2001: 25) and in the following decades, witchcraft continued to be studied from a historical perspective, particularly with the work of C. L’Estrange Ewen

(1929) or G. L. Kittredge (1929) in the 1930s. It is also worth mentioning E. E. Evans Pritchard (1937) whose pioneering work in witchcraft from a more cultural perspective would influence later scholars.

It is in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when new perspectives to the study of witchcraft are adopted. The Women's Movement, which had gained importance from the 1960s, started to study the witch-hunts from a gender perspective, analysing how being a woman was a relevant factor when studying the witch-hunts. Later, in the 1970s, the work of two scholars, Keith Thomas (1971) and Alan Macfarlane (1970) created "a major shift in scholarly interpretations of witchcraft as a historical phenomenon" (Sharpe 2001: 9). Their "model of the use of anthropological methods for the social history of pre-modern Europe" (Kors 2001: 26) would be followed by scholars in different countries, including the Spanish Julio Caro Baroja (1961), the French Robert Mandrou (1979) and the British Barbara Rosen (1969).

As James Sharpe points out, from the 1990s onwards, there is a revival of interest that led to new perspectives on the study of witchcraft. The idea that English witchcraft is different from that of continental Europe is challenged, and there starts to develop the idea that there are only variations from a common concept. In addition, witchcraft starts to be studied from very different perspectives and approaches. However, this critic also adds that, in the last decades, there have appeared numerous theories which have tried to explain the

whole phenomenon in a simplistic or unusual way. Many of them came from “non-specialist writers who formed their interpretations [...] on an imperfect grasp of the subject” (2001: 5) and include some extravagant explanations of the witch-hunts, which resulted from “the effects of ergot poisoning following the eating of mouldy rye bread by the peasantry, from taking hallucinogenic drugs, or from the psychological impact of the arrival of syphilis as an epidemic disease” (2001: 5).

However, more serious academic researchers agree that there is “no monocausal explanation for those phenomena” (Sharpe 2001: 6) and argue that it must be seen as a mixture of various factors. Nowadays, the study of witchcraft is usually multidisciplinary. It includes different approaches and types of writings – from court records and demonological tracts to pamphlets and theatre plays– and it focuses on different aspects which had been previously neglected, such as political, intellectual, theological and genre issues.

The study of witchcraft does not only include different disciplines but it is also studied worldwide. As Alan Charles Kors and Edward Peters state, although “recent scholarship has been written originally in English and some of it translated into English, there is considerable activity and a growing literature, especially in German, French, Dutch, Italian, and Spanish” (2001: 27). This indicates the extent to which the study of witchcraft has become relevant within the academic world

and opens the field to various approaches and perspectives which will help to widen our knowledge of this fascinating phenomenon.



In this chapter I shall explain the foundations of the discourse of witchcraft and how it was shaped from early ideas of magic and used as a means of control, a means of power, through the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, when the witchcraft prosecutions began. Thanks to the different intellectual writings and legal developments, but also taking into account political, social and economic factors, I shall analyse how witchcraft became a discourse used by the authorities as a “dominant way of controlling and preserving social relations of exploitation” (Selden 1993: 164). However, it is also important to remember that the past cannot be regarded as a unified continuum, as “a single dominating system of explanation and belief” (Brannigan 1998: 31) but that it rather consists of “very diverse configurations of beliefs, values and trends, often coming into conflict and contradiction with each other” (1998: 31).

One of the first problems when studying witchcraft is that the way in which it “has so frequently been regarded as a metaphor for backwardness creates a massive barrier to the proper understanding of the phenomenon” (Sharpe 2001: 4). It is important not to forget that the magical mentality of the period was quite

different from the present one. Nowadays we live in a world where science can account for almost everything but for many centuries, religion and magic were the only means to explain some events. As Kors and Peters explain, to understand the phenomenon of European witchcraft “we must begin by appreciating the Europeans’ sense of the ontology of a world with demons and witches in it and the character of the participants (both accusers and accused) involved” (2001: 2). It is then important to remember that, until the 18<sup>th</sup> century when the witch-hunts had already finished, people lived in a world where the distinction between magic, religion and science was quite blurred.

It is hard for modern scholars –focusing with determined scepticism upon the melodrama of witches pursued to death for imaginary crimes– to acknowledge that witchcraft, as one form of superstitious practice, is an accepted and prosaic part of life for large segments of populace, even in “developed” countries.  
(Rosen 1991: ix)

Terminology such as “witch,” “magician,” “sorcerer,” “necromancer,” etc., was common to all European countries but it had different connotations depending on the place and it also changed over the centuries to include more characteristics. As Marion Gibson suggests:

the definition of witchcraft and of what it is to be a witch would thus depend in part on stereotypes rather than individual 'realities'. Stereotypes are defined here as agreed patterns used by communities and members of those communities to identify individual events or people as connected with the impossible crime of witchcraft. (Gibson 1999: 5)

Despite all the problems when defining different terms related to magic and, particularly, witches, Barbara Rosen explains they all share two common aspects: "they had the power to do things 'above nature', and the will to do harm by this power" (1991: 3) and it is precisely this definition which would be shared by the vast majority of the population, both literate and illiterate. If we understand culture, all its beliefs and values, as a construction, we can perceive how the discourse of witchcraft was shaped for many centuries and used as "a vehicle for power" (Bertens 2007: 177). Through a careful study of all the writings of different periods we will be able to catch a glimpse on the mentalities of each period and understand how the figure of the witch was adapted to fit the needs of each epoch.



The foundations of witchcraft can be traced back to ancient times when the components of a systematic theory of witchcraft were not established yet. Many

authors, including Julio Caro Baroja (1961), have stressed the importance of looking into the magical mentality that existed amongst all different strata of society to understand how the superstitious beliefs did not disappear with the arrival of Christianity, but survived and even mixed with those new religious ideas.

In that sense, there have survived many texts from those early periods, both from Biblical and classical sources that contributed to what Brian Levack calls the “cumulative concept of witchcraft” (1997: 29), i.e. the common ideas shared by the vast majority of people in Western Europe that were the product of additions from Ancient times to the peak of witchcraft persecutions. As Kors and Peters explain, all those ideas and terminology regarding different types of magic were present in Greek, Latin and Hebrew culture and “were all transformed by the Christianization of the Roman world and the later experience of early Europe” (2001: 41).

Probably, the best-known references in the Bible to witches are the verse in Exodus 22: 18 “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live” and the description of the witch of Endor in the first book of Samuel; passages which were frequently quoted by later scholars. There were also references to witchcraft in Greek and Roman works, such as the enchantress Circe in Homer’s *Odyssey* (8<sup>th</sup> century BC) and Horace’s description of the witch Canidia (1<sup>th</sup> century BC).<sup>10</sup> There even survived

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<sup>10</sup> Brian Levack suggests that “in depicting Canidia, Horace contributes to the creation of the classical witch-figure, which Ovid and Seneca had already helped to form. That image was enduring, and it influenced Early Modern depictions of the witch, especially during the period of the Renaissance, when works of classical authors had great authority and influence” (2008: 22).

what are considered common practices of harmful magic in the form of curse tablets from Roman times.

I adjure you, demon, whoever you are, and I demand of you from this hour, from this day, from this moment that you torture and kill the horse of the Greens and Whites, and that you kill and smash their drivers Clarus, Felix, Primulus and Romanus, and leave not a breath in their bodies. I adjure you demon, by him who has turned you loose in these times, the god of the sea and the air. (Levack 2008: 14)

Christianity quickly spread throughout the European continent and by the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century it was the dominant religion in the Empire. The Church, supported by the different rulers and institutions in western European countries, “worked to suppress or marginalize rival stories and discourses” (Bertens 2007: 177). Religion was used as a powerful tool to unify the different areas under one common ideology, that of Christianity. This was achieved by means of identifying “all of those pagan deities which they could not fully co-opt into their own value system with demons” (Scarre 2001: 12) and turning the previous pagan religions into evil practices as opposed to the true and only Christian faith.

El derecho sancionó la identificación entre paganismo y demonolatría. Así, en una “lista de supersticiones”

confeccionada por el Concilio de Leptinnes en el 744 se prohibía ofrecer sacrificios a los santos, prueba de la persistente confusión por parte del pueblo entre los santos de nuevo cuño y las viejas divinidades. En el mismo concilio se aprobó una fórmula bautismal en la que se pedía al catecúmeno “renunciar a todas las obras del demonio y a todas sus palabras, así como a Thor, Odín, Saxnot y a todos los seres malignos que se les parecen.” (Russell 1998: 66)

Christian rulers, and the Church in general, represented themselves as opposed to previous evil practices, to pagan religions which they then turned into superstition. However, as Kors and Peters suggest, in order to do that they needed a more coherent and systematic ontology. Then, Christian thinkers appropriated the previous Latin terminology to describe those beliefs and practices and emphasised the distinction between the *religio* to refer to Christianity and *maleficia*, *magia* and *superstitio*, which carried negative connotations. That combination of “late antique condemnations of sorcery and of unnatural religious practices remained a powerful model for later formulations of religious dissent” (2001: 42).

Another aspect which should be taken into account when trying to explain how magic and witchcraft evolved, and eventually became associated with evil practices, is the development of the figure of the Devil, which in the Old Testament only appeared as a blurred image and did not have much prominence.

However, in the New Testament, he was given a new status and, in fact, “throughout the Middle Ages the Devil was usually referred to as Satan, a name meaning ‘the adversary’ which appears in the Bible” (Levack 1995: 29). He was given more prominence and transformed into the enemy of God, the enemy of all Christendom.

The extensive work of Christian theologians helped to spread those new ideas in Europe. Probably, one of the most relevant figures was St. Augustine, a bishop who lived in North Africa in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and whose writings would have a lasting influence in the following centuries. His extensive work “described the powers of the Devil on earth, identified him as the source of all magic, and condemned the practice of magic as idolatry, paganism, and heresy” (Levack 2008: 5). He also made reference to the fact that “a human being could make a pact with the Devil” (Levack 1995: 35), an idea which would not be widely accepted in most European countries until the 9<sup>th</sup> century.

The Church growing conviction that magic dependence on spirits as a legitimate form of power and authority had morphed into open demon worship and that the tacit mutually hitherto existed between human and spirit had turned into something deeply sinister, an actual pact –unspoken or overt– according to which the practitioner, in return for the spirit’s help, would abandon God altogether and substitute Satan for Him.  
(Maxwell-Stuart 2011: 20)

That new addition meant a turning point since it identified practitioners of magic with the Devil's agents. Through the idea of a pact, where they renounced God, witches and sorcerers were demonized and became Satan's servants, part of his army, the enemy that had to be defeated.

Presiding over a host of subordinate demons he not only tempted Christ himself in the desert but became the powerful opponent of Christianity itself, enticing men to withdraw from Christ and to reject his teaching. A titanic struggle thus arose between the Kingdom of Christ on the one hand and the Kingdom of Satan on the other, a conflict that most believed would continue until the Second Coming. (Levack 1997: 30)

Augustine's position, together with that of other theologians was used in the writing of the *Canon Episcopi* which constituted "a guide to ecclesiastical discipline early in the tenth century" (Levack 2008: 33) and would later be used as the basis for the Canon Law.<sup>11</sup> Although those writings were still not presented in a systematic way they offered an insight into "the clerical and lay attitudes toward diabolism, early ideas of heresy and witchcraft, and the occult" (Kors 2001: 59).

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<sup>11</sup> As James Russell points out the relevance the *Canon Episcopi* had in medieval legislation was due to a mistake in its dating. It was believed to be written around the 4<sup>th</sup> century but in reality, it only dated back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century.

Generally these thinkers relied on the works of Augustine and later thinkers for understanding their own world. Before 1300, chroniclers, ecclesiastical lawyers, moralists, and high prelates could record episodes of –and old patristic texts and laws concerning- a number of activities collectively labelled *sortilegium* –magic- without regarding their occurrence as anything other than singular episodic, one more manifestation of Satan’s usually unsuccessful attempts to tempt mankind from orthodox belief and practice. (Kors 2001: 59)

Scholasticism was developed on the basis of Aristotle’s theories and it would be thanks to the extensive work of St. Thomas Aquinas that a systematic ontology started to be established in Europe. In his writings he offered not only “a convincing and, indeed, irrefutable rationale and method for approaching systematically the problems of diabolism, heresy, and now diabolical sorcery” (Kors 2001: 112) but he also “gave to both demons and witches a logically consistent place within the Christian schema” (2001: 6).

The ideas presented in intellectual writings joined many of the popular ideas regarding magic that had originated in folklore and old pagan traditions<sup>12</sup> and would eventually become one of the bases for the formation of the discourse

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<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey Burton Russell explains some of those elements: “El segundo ingrediente de la brujería consistió en elementos tomados de la religión y el folklore paganos; por ejemplo, los demonios femeninos chupadores de sangre que ejercían la doble función de seducir a hombres dormidos y matar a niños. Muchas acusaciones de orgía, incesto, infanticidio y canibalismo salieron de viejas descripciones de las bacanales romanas” (1984: 338).

of witchcraft. As Brian Levack explains, “the scholastic tendency to attribute all activity that could not be explained by natural means to the supernatural realm encouraged a belief in witchcraft and demonic magic” (2008: 36). St. Thomas Aquinas’ work and that of later scholars reinforced the idea of the fight between forces of good and evil and offered a “discussion on the role of demons in the world and the practice of magic” (2008: 36). In fact, it is then when the idea of the pact, which would be transformed into a basic element in the conviction of witchcraft, was articulated.

Not only did the pact provide the basis of the legal definition of the crime of witchcraft in many jurisdictions but it also served as the main link between the practice of harmful magic and the alleged worship of the Devil. (Levack 1995: 35)

Other element in the formation of demonic witchcraft was its identification with heresy. From the beginning of Christianity, the Church had opposed the old beliefs, ancient rites and superstitions of the previous centuries but, in the Middle Ages, one of their worst fears was that of heterodoxy, which challenged the official discourse. The different heresies denied “the Church’s claim to have been constituted by God” (Maxwell-Stuart 2011: 8) and did not accept it as the “only legitimate source of true and valid teaching on matters of faith and morals” (2011: 8). Therefore, the Church persecuted all dissident ideas which questioned their

“legitimacy of authority” (2011: 8) and made “serious efforts to bring doctrinal uniformity” (2011: 8) in the European continent.

As Michel Foucault explained, the authorities usually exercise their control according to different modes, and one of them is “that of binary division and branding (mad/ sane; dangerous/ harmless; normal/ abnormal)” (1979: 14). Heretics were understood as servants of the Devil and, hence, they opposed the Church and the power institutions, the established order of things. Therefore, the Church started a violent and systematic persecution of all those dissident ideas on the belief that “everything that was not of God and His Church must come under the rule of the Devil” (Rosen 1991: 11). In fact, the first burning for heresy took place in Orleans in 1022 and since then, a whole series of damnable acts started to be attributed to heretics, from orgies to cannibalism, as a way of emphasising their evil nature.

All of these dances are practiced still with much more liberty and more shamelessly at the Sabbath: for the wisest and the most moderate believe never to fail, in committing incest every night with their fathers, brothers and others closer, even in the presence of their husbands [...] This odious and accursed coupling comes after the dancing and the feasts. Coupling so abominable that it is a horror to tell of the particularities, to good girls and other Christian people as it makes them suffer. (Lancre 1612: 190)

This description of the witches' Sabbat, which appears in Pierre de Lancre's *Description of the Inconstancy of Bad Angels and Demons* (1612), clearly exemplifies this opposition between positive and negative attitudes, in this particular case, the anti-natural sexual behaviour of the witches and that of the good Christian, which is continuously emphasised by the authorities.

The socio-economic problems that affected most Europeans were another element which contributed to the general climate of instability. In fact, the beginning of witch-hunts corresponds to the transition between the feudal system in the Middle Ages "to capitalism, the relativity and instability of modern social formations" (Colebrook 1997: 61). In those times of insecurity, hunger and illness, the Church wanted to deal with that "increase in superstition and unofficial belief" (Rosen 1991: 10) which threatened to destabilize the feudal hierarchy in those socially turbulent years and reinforce their power and authority. Pope Gregory IX (1227-1241) was the first to appoint "special investigators ('inquisitors') whose task was to detect and then deal with heretics in whatever way seemed appropriate to the individual case which came before them" (Maxwell-Stuart 2011: 9).

Later pontiffs would follow this trait and several Papal Bulls would be issued during the following centuries encouraging Inquisitors to take harsher action against heretics, such as the 1252 Bull *Ad extirpanda* where Innocent IV allowed the confiscation of property, torture and execution of those accused of

heresy. Gradually, both the processes themselves and the subsequent writings helped unify the stereotype of heretics, which started to share common characteristics in different parts of the continent.

The conviction that all heresy stemmed from demonic inspiration led to a certain uniformity in the accusations levelled against all those branded as heretics, whether Knights Templar, Cathars, Waldensians, Fraticelli or Reformists.  
(Scarre 2001: 16)

Those Inquisitors of Heretic Depravity were not only in charge of finding and putting to trial heretics. Soon, Inquisitors began to write an extensive bulk of specialist literature where they not only offered detailed descriptions of different heresies and ways of discovering them but also “began to include discussions of sorcery in the manuals of procedure” (Kors 2001: 120). From the writings of Bernard Gui in 1324 to the jurist Ugolino Zanchini in 1340, a growing interest in sorcery and witchcraft can be perceived.

In those writings, there start to appear some comments on the crime of witchcraft and many authors start to question whether witches should be included in a similar category to that of heretics. In 1356, Nicolau Eymeric would write one of the most influential handbooks for inquisitors, the *Directorium inquisitorium*. There, the gradual shift from heresy to witchcraft can be clearly perceived. The 42

questions of his manual try to establish “whether magicians and diviners are to be considered heretics or as those suspected of heresy and whether they are to be subjected to the judgement of the inquisitor of heretics” (Eymeryc 1376: 122). Also, Johannes Nider’s *Formicarius*, written in the 1430s, described “the new sect of heretics, known as *malefici* or witches, who combined the performance of harmful magic with ceremonies at which they allegedly rejected their Christian faith and performed various horrific acts” (1435: 52).

Institutions such as the Theology Faculty of the University of Paris also condemned sorcery in 1398. Their public statement would have enormous influence in all Western Europe and would spread to most countries. The text explains:

Not only those who use such figments and sorceries to find hidden treasure or learn and know things secret and occult, but also all professed Christians in possession of reason who voluntarily operate and employ such things in such manner are to be held superstitious in the Christian religion, are to be deemed idolaters, are to be deemed invokers of demons and strongly suspect in the faith. (Kors 2001: 129)

Throughout the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the concern for the Devil and his influence upon mankind grew significantly. As Barbary Rosen suggests, “in times of social disturbance (the shaking of the established order of things), there is always such an

increase in superstition and unofficial belief” (Rosen 1991: 10). Satan became “the Great Devourer, the archenemy against whose numerous and awesome powers man was utterly helpless without a suffering God’s alert and loving aid through the ministry of the church” (Kors 2001: 9). In that sense, religious authorities would use this discourse as a means of subjugation. By placing the Church as the only one able to counteract Satan’s attacks, they ensure their prominent position in society. Following Louis Althusser’s theories (1971), it can be seen how ideology is, in that sense, used to keep the position of the authorities in society and maintain social divisions in place.

However, it was not only the Devil who should be feared but also all his followers, who seemed to have grown in number and constitute a bigger threat than ever. The Church “had always been suspicious of magic and divination but, from at least the fourteenth century onwards, magic and divination of all kinds began to be irretrievably tainted with heresy” (Maxwell-Stuart 2011: 8). There is a gradual identification of witches as Satan’s agents and the accusations first used against heretics started to be made against witches.

The papacy, the investigative institutions of the church – particularly bishops and the inquisitors of heretical depravity– and the local preachers, confessors, and theologians, all drawing upon an increasingly common body of theory and experience, reflected in their writings the slow

process by which isolated cases of sorcery, “witchcraft,” and possession came to be conceived as being similar reflections of a systematic assault on humans by Satan and his followers, the demons, diabolical sorcerers, and, later, witches. (Kors 2001: 112)

The scholastic theology was not merely used to offer a descriptive representation of political order. Through their emphasis on some aspects and their exclusion of others, they performed “an effective part in producing the culture they describe” (1997: 205). In fact, it was “the writings and practices of Inquisitors” (Scarre 2001: 17) which helped to form the concept of demonic witchcraft and to articulate “the transformation of the ideas of diabolical sorcery and heresy into witchcraft” (Kors 2001:149). First heretics and later all practitioners of magic started to be regarded as part of Satan’s army who aimed to destroy mankind.

The Inquisition began to synthesise the various pronouncements concerning witchcraft which had been issued over the last two hundred years; it studied the inquisitorial reports of trials which had already taken place, searched the classics and the Scriptures for precedent. The feudal organisation credited to the heretics was taken over wholesale, with all its ugly tales of sodomy, bestiality and child-eating. (Rosen 1991: 11)

There was a radicalisation of the ideas about witchcraft, mainly due to the harder actions taken against heretics. Witches are now described as “secret, nocturnal, sexually promiscuous Devil-worshipper” (Levack, 1995: 41) and this identification of witches as the devil’s agents and their positioning as heretics meant that all the accusations once made against them were now used to describe witches, who were now believed to be “members of a new and dangerous sect of heretics who used magic to destroy human and animal life and who threatened the entire moral order” (Levack 2008: 2).

Fundamental to this new model of witchcraft, which was propagated through an increasing number of specialized pamphlets and treatises, was the key notion that witches acted as a group. They engaged collectively in a broad and dangerous conspiracy orchestrated by the devil and directed ultimately against the institutions of church and state. (Zika 2009: 1)

Texts are, then, understood as having an active role in the formation of the discourse of witchcraft. They are directly involved in its historical moment and are used by the authorities to emphasise, as it has already been mentioned, the immediate threat represented by witches.

The idea of organised groups of people trying to attempt against the institutions was probably one of the worst fears on behalf of the authorities, both lay and ecclesiastical. The discourse of witchcraft started to emphasise that aspect, particularly in the idea of the Sabbat, the secret meetings where witches were thought to gather periodically. Those people were perceived as rebels, as part of the Devil's army whose aim was to destroy both divine and earthly order.

Although the belief in the Sabbat would not be fully fixed until the 15<sup>th</sup> century, many texts increasingly started to include descriptions of a series of damnable acts performed at those meetings. These descriptions, which appear in various types of writings, help us understand which were the commonest learned ideas about witchcraft and how they had developed.

This was the belief that those witches who made pacts with the Devil also worshipped him collectively and engaged in a number of blasphemous, amoral and obscene rites [...] it served as an essential precondition of the great witch-hunt.  
(Levack, 1995: 39)

Official collections of Canon Law had been issued since 1234 by Pope Gregory I so “the problem of inquisitors and sorcery now became a matter for the law schools, and the problem had to be made legally precise” (Kors 2001: 113). Both the Church and the state realised they needed to legislate on that matter and

re-establish order, reinforcing their position of power in both political and religious matters. As Brian Levack suggests the changes in the legal procedures that took place from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century were a crucial pre-condition for the extensive witch-hunts that occurred in the Early Modern period. In most European countries there was a change to inquisitorial systems in which it was the judge who investigated each case and gathered evidences. Both “the secular and ecclesiastical courts of Continental Europe adopted a new, inquisitorial system of criminal procedure that made it far easier for witchcraft cases to be initiated and prosecuted” (1995: 69).

Although large witch-hunts did not take place until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, “maleficent sorcery, as a secular offence, was subject to legal proceedings throughout the medieval period and, as in any crime of violence, the penalty was generally in proportion to the severity of the harm the defendant was believed to have caused” (Scarre 2001: 18). However, one of the most relevant changes in the legislation would take place in 1468 when witchcraft was declared a *crimen exceptum*.

Witchcraft became the most serious crime imaginable, combining assorted felonies, such as murder and the destruction of property, with the spiritual crimes of heresy and fornication. Only a definition of the crime in this full sense was capable of inspiring the determined, sometimes

frenzied campaigns to identify, prosecute, and execute witches that took place throughout Europe during the early modern period, especially between 1580 and 1630. (Levack 2008: 2)

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century “witchcraft as diabolical sorcery had been fully assimilated to heresy and pronounced against the public record by the highest and most powerful ecclesiastical and lay authorities” (Kors 2001: 152). All these changes in the legal procedures together with a series of Papal Bulls and the actual prosecutions carried out by the Inquisition, contributed to the gradual homogenisation of the discourse of witchcraft.

The papal Inquisition had developed gradually from the twelfth century, and was directed primarily at the suppression of heresy. In pursuit of this objective, it adopted special legal procedures including the withholding of the identity of the witnesses from the accused, the admission of evidence from those not normally thought fit to testify, the refusal to allow the accused legal representation, and torture. (Scarre 2001: 17)

The development of legal procedures “facilitated prosecution and conviction of those who were suspected of this crime” (Levack 1995: 67). Most of

the witchcraft cases were formally tried, but the process not only aimed at the confession and execution of the convicted witch but they also wanted to obtain information about their accomplices.

One feature of the ecclesiastical and judicial thought of the fourteenth century had been the idea that sorcery, like heresy, must be collaborative, that the individual sorcerer, of course, should be apprehended and punished, but the sorcerer (increasingly assumed to be a member of a sect of sorcerers) also ought to be forced to reveal other members of the group.  
(Kors 2001: 150)

This new conception of the crime of witchcraft meant that “many of the normal limitations on torture were suspended or circumvented” (Rosen 1991: 13). In most European countries, both ecclesiastical and secular courts “acquired the right to torture persons accused of witchcraft, thus making it relatively easy to obtain confessions and the names of the witches’ alleged accomplices” (Levack 1995: 69). Torture was used to obtain confessions mainly “when the testimony of eye-witnesses could not be produced” (Levack 2008: 117). It was regulated by “a number of rules regarding the intensity and duration of the torture, but in their eagerness to obtain convictions many judicial officials often violated those rules on the grounds that witchcraft was an exceptional crime that had to be prosecuted at all costs” (2008: 117). Authorities allowed the use of a wide range of instruments

of torture, such as “the strappado, the heated chair, vices for the arms and legs, thumbscrews and other painful devices” (Scarre 2001: 32) to uncover the truth as well as punish the accused.

Many of these especially brutal tortures were used originally or exclusively in witchcraft cases, not simply because witchcraft was the most heinous of all crimes and the most necessary, therefore, to prosecute successfully, but also because many judges feared that witches might employ sorcery to help them withstand pain. (Levack 1995: 81)

The extensive use of torture meant that many of the accused confessed to crimes they did not commit and “when they were tortured to find the names of their alleged accomplices, many other innocent persons were convicted and executed” (Levack 2008: 117). In that sense, each sentence contributed to spreading the concept of witchcraft and constituted a new precedent for future inquisitorial processes.

La identificación de la hechicería con la brujería resultaba cómoda desde el punto de vista burocrático y jurídico. Más aún, el número de condenas aumentó rápidamente porque los procedimientos inquisitoriales estaban organizados de tal manera que resultara fácil probar la culpabilidad y difícil

defender la inocencia. Así, se instruyó a los inquisidores acerca de qué era lo que debían buscar, y así, mediante interrogatorios, amenazas y torturas, al final siempre se hallaban indicios de brujería tanto si los había realmente como si no. (Russell 1998: 88- 89)

The Inquisitor's function was, in that sense, to find those subversive elements of society and brand them, according to the official discourse, into the category "witch." Their function was to contain any deviant behaviours, which were harshly punished and quickly removed from society. Therefore, once the accused were found guilty, they could be sentenced to "imprisonment flogging, fines or exile" (Scarre 2001: 34) but also death which usually meant being executed at the stake. Only in the case of England witches were hanged. Jean Bodin recommended that witches "for the gravity of their offences, should be slowly roasted alive over a fire of green wood" (Scarre 2001: 33) but in most of the cases they "were granted the mercy of strangulation before the fire was well alight" (2001: 33).

As it has been explained, the importance of the new legislation regarding witchcraft was crucial in the extensive prosecutions that would take place in the Early Modern period together with the growing awareness on behalf of the Church that witchcraft was "a clearly recognizable part of Satan's concerted attack on all mankind" (Kors 2001: 176).

It was the vision of a recognisable, well-organised, and maleficent witch sect, numerically strong, highly mobile and capable of prolonged cover activity, dedicated to securing the overthrow of Christendom, which obsessed the Inquisition and secular judiciary. (Scarre 2001: 19)

The beginning of the Early Modern period meant a gradual change from medieval ideas to a new way of understanding man and the world. Those new perceptions were embodied in the ideas of Neoplatonism. When Constantinople fell to the Turks in 1453, some previously unknown writings appeared, amongst them those of Hermes Trismegistus. In 1463, Marsilio Ficino, who had founded Plato's Academy in Florence, translated those texts. That *Corpus Hermeticum*, as it would be called, "embodied an essentially mystical view of the world, which was conceived of as a place full of magical powers and hidden meanings, part of a universe whose secrets could be unlocked by only a chosen few" (Sharpe 1997: 38).

La impresión profunda que causó este "corpus" en el mundo del humanismo se explica por el hecho de que parecía transmitir, aun estando impregnado de ideas mágicas, la pretendida sabiduría de los misterios antiguos en el estilo del Nuevo Testamento, es decir, con un espíritu cristiano. (Roob 2006: 22)

As James Sharpe explains, Neoplatonism included different and sometimes contradictory elements so it should be “best described as a way of thinking rather than as a rigidly defined belief system” (1997: 38). However, it had an enormous appeal and quickly spread throughout Europe. Although it did not have a direct effect in the witchcraft prosecutions that would take place in the following centuries, it “encouraged an interest in magic and the occult, or at the very least helped foster the acceptance of the reality of the world of spirits” (1997: 38).

By the 15<sup>th</sup> century a long series of Papal Bulls, Inquisitor’s manuals, demonological tracts and intellectual studies joined the colourful superstitions of popular culture in forming a cohesive discourse of witchcraft. As Brian Levack suggests, “both the development and the transmission of learned notions of witchcraft occurred as a result of the interaction between the judicial process on the one hand and the literary tradition on the other” (1995: 52).

One of the cases that best exemplifies this idea is that of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, written in 1486 by two German theologians and Dominican inquisitors, Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger. They wrote their treatise to “make authorities aware of the threat posed by witchcraft and to provide a manual for inquisitors who would try them” (Levack 2008: 57) and included in their introduction the Papal Bull *Summis desiderantes affectibus*. Issued by Pope Innocent VIII some years earlier, in 1484, it had granted them permission to

“exercise their office of inquisition and to proceed to the correction, imprisonment, and punishment” (1484: 121) of witches in some territories in Germany where they had encountered some jurisdictional problems with “certain of the clergy and of the laity of those parts” (1484: 120). Although this bull did not make any particular changes in the definition of witchcraft from previous ones, it helps us understand that “ecclesiastical courts had no monopoly of jurisdiction over the crime of witchcraft” (Levack 2008: 119) even before extensive witch-hunts started.

The *Malleus Maleficarum* was a systematic writing where the reader was presented with the theological basis for the existence of witchcraft. As Hans Peter Broedel explains, at the time the definition of witchcraft was “ultimately grounded in traditional beliefs and practices, neither of which had an inherent theological component” (2003: 4). Therefore, those beliefs needed to be made compatible with the current theological views.

In a universe where God and the devil had to such an extent abandoned their traditional roles, learned theologians had plenty of space in which to carve out the new category of witchcraft. In the *Malleus*, the witch becomes the effective agent of diabolic power, a living, breathing, devil on earth in respect to those around her. On the other hand, the witch’s power was to some extent balanced by the power of the Church, which could deploy divine power in the form of

sacraments and sacramental for the protection of the faithful.

While God and the devil retreated into mechanical passivity the efforts of their human followers became increasingly important. (Broedel 2003: 5)

The *Malleus Maleficarum* meant somehow an end to the moderate positions in the Catholic Church because it not only reasserted the existence of witches but it also accused those who denied their existence of heresy.

There are wizards and sorcerers who by the power of the devil can produce real and extraordinary effects, and these effects are not imaginary [...] Very many other doctors advance the same opinion, and it would be the height of folly for any man to contradict all these, and he could not be held to be clear of the guilt of heresy. For any man who gravely errs in an exposition of Holy Scripture is rightly considered to be a heretic. And whoever thinks otherwise concerning these matters which touch the faith that the Holy Roman Church holds is a heretic. (Kramer 1486: 4)

The *Malleus Maleficarum* would become “an agreed-upon starting point for the discourse of witchcraft, a position graphically illustrated by the collections of demonological texts that began to be produced in the 1580s” (Broedel 2003: 8) following a similar model. Both Catholics and Protestants would cite it and it

served to “sum up the entire history of recent witch beliefs and to present Christian Europe with a complete, persuasive, massively documented, and apparently authorized description of the witches in its midst” (Kors 2001: 180).

By the beginning of the Early Modern period, the discourse of witchcraft was almost fully formed, as it could be perceived in its description in many demonological tracts and Inquisitors manuals; but it was the *Malleus Maleficarum* the one which “assumed a major role in making the cumulative concept of witchcraft available to a large audience” (Levack 1995: 54). It not only offered the reader with the theological basis for the existence of witches but it also explained the procedures to detect and punish them.

One of the main factors which contributed to the rapid success it enjoyed was “the ready availability of their text” (Broedel 2003: 7) thanks to the invention of the printing press some decades earlier. There were many editions of the book which, by the 1510s, “could be found in many libraries and judicial reference collections throughout Europe” (2003: 7).

The availability of printed treatises on witchcraft no doubt played a part in stimulating the interest of literate people in the subject and in rapidly developing a coherent intellectual approach to dealing with a problem which was believed to exist throughout Western Europe. (Scarre 2001: 20)

Its publication and quick spread throughout Europe created “a certain uniformity of discourse in subsequent witchcraft debate” (Broedel 2003: 7) and would be “constantly cited in support of those beliefs by Catholics and Protestants” (Kors 2001: 180). Not only did the press help to quickly spread the ideas on witchcraft but it also

allowed for the learned and common traditions of witchcraft and sorcery to intersect, and to an extent to cross-fertilise, with factual trial accounts and purely imaginative works of fiction providing positive reinforcement for one another and combining to frame the context for future accusations of the crime. (Scarre 2001: 21)

The printed word was used as an instrument of power since it participated in the discursive formation of witchcraft. The witch belief of “theologians, philosophers, lawyers, and secular magistrates found a progressively larger and more receptive audience” (Kors 2001: 15) and institutions would use those different types of writings to spread their ideological discourse to the different strata of society. In fact, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, both intellectual writings and popular beliefs had been adopted and formed, if not unified, at least a widely spread common set of ideas. The number of demonological treatises in different parts of the continent greatly increased and their “multiple editions, helped to spread the

belief in witchcraft among the educated and ruling elites of Europe” (Levack 2008: 69), adding the final hints to the ideological foundations of the discourse of witchcraft.

The number of writings regarding witchcraft in the Early Modern period greatly increased. It would be impossible to enumerate all of them, but some of the most relevant ones might include: Nicolas Remy’s *Demonolatry* (1595), who presented some of the cases he conducted in France; Martin del Río’s *Investigations into Magic* (1600), which enjoyed enormous popularity at the time and “in certain sense became an encyclopaedia of witchcraft, containing information and commentary on almost all aspects of witchcraft” (Levack 2008: 88); Francesco María Guazzo, in Italy, who in 1608 wrote his *Compendium maleficarum*, where not only “the different steps taken in the negotiation of the pact with the Devil” (2008: 99) were described but it also included many woodcuts of the ceremonies. Also, *Démonomanie des sorciers*, written in 1580 by Jean Bodin (1580),<sup>13</sup> which criticised sceptical positions regarding the crime of witchcraft and reassured “the justice and legitimacy of the witch-hunt-and execution” (Kors 2001: 290).

As it has been explained, when the discourse of witchcraft was finally fully articulated, it quickly spread “through an increasing number of specialized pamphlets and treatises” (Zika 2009: 2) thanks to the invention of the printing

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<sup>13</sup> Jean Bodin work was an attack on “the sceptical views of the demonologist Johann Weyer, who denied the culpability of witches” (Levack 2008: 128) and his “determination to prosecute witches at all costs contrast markedly with his commitment to religious toleration” (2008: 128).

press. However, not only written accounts were used to spread those ideas, there were also other means which aimed at the vast majority of the population who, at the time, was mostly illiterate. As Jeffrey Russell explains, sermons were an efficient means of reinforcing the popular beliefs and include the new ideas presented by theologians and inquisitors.

El sermón fue el principal vínculo entre la élite y la cultura popular: tras escuchar homilías, frecuentemente muy vivas, sobre el poder del Diablo, la proximidad del fin del mundo y las enormes huestes de los heréticos y las brujas al mando de Lucifer, el pueblo quedaba cada vez más predispuesto a creer y a temer. A través de los sermones, la imagen del Diablo se mantuvo fresca y viva en la imaginación [...] La insistencia diabológica de los sermones explica que la demonología escolástica persistiera en el protestantismo, porque los protestantes hicieron del sermón la columna vertebral de su teología. (Russell 1984: 341)

Illustrations and visual images also helped spread the ideas of witchcraft through the particular view of artists and printers. The woodcut created in 1510 by the German artist Hans Baldung Grien “would influence visual representations of this subject for the next century and more” (Zika 2009: 11). But that was only one of the many examples of illustrations that included some of the basic elements of

witchcraft. The same evolution in the discourse of witchcraft that could be perceived in writings is also reflected in different types of manuscript drawings, wall paintings, woodcuts and, in general, any type of illustrations from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern period.

Los grabados de la época, en gran número anónimos y hechos toscamente, pero que circulaban ampliamente entre aquellas poblaciones semianalfabetas, recogen con frecuencia el tema de la brujería, como si fuera algo que obsesionara a las gentes.  
(Fernández Álvarez 2002: 305)

Those images should also be regarded as an essential element in creating the discourse of witchcraft. They served to “illustrate the powers of witchcraft and to record and document its incidence and punishment” (Zika 2009: 2). They were a means of transforming the figure of the witch into something “universal and also stereotypical” (2009: 2); a recognisable figure for all different strata of society. Therefore, not only words, but also images were used in the creation of the discourse of witchcraft.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century not only witnessed the beginning of systematic witch-hunts but it was also marked by the religious changes that the Reformation and Counter-Reformation would bring about. Contrary to what it should be expected, Protestants did not put an end to popular superstitions regarding witch beliefs.

Although they criticised many aspects of Catholicism they “generally reaffirmed their belief in the presence and evil operations of fallen men and women in contractual service to Satan” (Kors 2001: 259). And, in fact, there could be perceived “any obvious division of opinion about witchcraft” (Briggs 1998: 100) between Catholics and Protestants. Martin Luther himself, “relying upon the literal interpretation of the scriptural texts” (Kors 2001: 259), believed in the reality of the Devil and witchcraft and discussed on the topic on many sermons.

By witchcraft eyesight may be injured or cured and healthy bodies made ill, blood drawn by arrows, images dedicated, and whomever they wish killed or consumed by an incurable disease [...] Tempests may be raised, and thunder, destroying fruits, killing animals and so forth. (Luther 1518: 264)

Literature on the subject of witchcraft continued to be written by both Protestant and Catholic scholars, keeping “the growing concerns with witchcraft and diabolical sorcery into the world of the reformations later in the sixteenth century” (Kors 2001: 231). Protestants such as Martin Luther (1518), John Calvin (1555) or Lambert Daneau (1574) argued in favour of the existence of witchcraft with the same emphasis as their Catholic counterparts, including the Spanish Martín de Castañega (1529).

There were, however, some sceptical voices regarding the crime of witchcraft and the methods used to condemn the accused. *De praestigiis daemonum*, written by the Dutch Johann Weyer in 1563, is considered to be one of the first writings to openly criticise witchcraft prosecutions. In his work, Weyer explains the wrongful translation of Exodus 22: 6 “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live,” where the term *witch* should be translated as “evil-doer” or “poisoner” (1563: 278). He also makes a difference between magicians and witches and explains that these later ones were merely deceived by the devil. Those women accused of witchcraft were “vulnerable to demonic deception because they were afflicted by melancholy or because they were of weak faith” (Levack 2008: 277). Therefore, they should not be classified as heretics.

Since the so-called *Lamiae* are indeed poor women –usually old women– melancholic by nature, feeble-minded, easily given to despondency, and with little trust in God [...] I would hardly dare to include those women among the heretics, since no one deserves the name of heretic unless he is warned once or twice and still constantly and stubbornly persists in his fanatical belief; heresy is not an error of the mind but a stubbornness of the will. (Weyer 1563: 283)

Torture and some of the methods used to obtain confessions, which “were partly the result of leading questions and partly memories of the confessions

routinely read at executions” (Rosen 1991: 13) were also criticised. The Jesuit Friedrich Spee von Langenfeld (1591-1635) was one of the first to understand “the power of pain to obscure rather than illuminate truth” (1991: 12). After some trials held in Würzburg in the 1620s, he published an anonymous work, *Cautio criminalis* (1631), where he explained the methods used in witch trials and denounced that, quite frequently, whole processes were based on mere hearsay.

If we constantly insist on conducting trials, no one of any sex, fortune, condition, or rank whatsoever who has earned himself even one enemy or slanderer who can drag him into the suspicion and reputation for witchcraft can be sufficiently safe in these times. (Spee 1631: 151)

A discourse which was decisive in the fashioning of witches was precisely the written one which, in Foucaultian terms (1975) was extremely powerful and influential. Furthermore, Spee argued that “most of the accused and convicted witches, having been forced to confess under severe torture, were innocent” (Levack 2008: 145) and directed his criticism towards the ruling classes: “all rulers and princes put their eternal salvation in great danger, unless they are willing to be as careful as possible” (1631: 152). His opinions were, obviously, harshly criticised. However, he was not the only one who had to suffer attacks for his sceptical opinions. Some other voices, such as the Spanish Inquisitor Alonso de Salazar

Frias (1612) questioned the validity of confessions of witches in the Basque country in the processes that took place between 1609-1611. But in general, those sceptic positions developed “much more easily regarding the guilt of specific individuals than regarding of the crime itself” (Levack 2008: 275).

Nevertheless, sceptic views were soon silenced and the new legislation contributed to the accusation and conviction of a large number of individuals in all Western Europe. In fact, although the Church was originally in charge of witchcraft prosecutions, “civil authorities had grown more cooperative and had even begun to bring witches to trial independently of ecclesiastical procedure” (Kors 2001: 16).

Apart from the various intellectual formations of the discourse of witchcraft and the developments in the legal systems in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, there were also other factors which might have influenced the prosecution of witches, including the changes most civil governments were undertaking in the Early Modern period. European monarchies were, in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, still mostly agrarian and highly traditional. Kings ruled “through the twin oligarchies of military aristocracies and the church” (Briggs 1998: 323). But the religious problems and the need to put an end to the dissidence together with the new ideas on kingship led to the “aggressive, expanding political regimes use the persecution of deviants –witches, heretics, or criminals more generally– to reinforce their authority” (1998: 322).

Monarchs reacted to threats against their authority by further developing a multi-layered and highly symbolic style of rule; the king as God's anointed, military leader dispenser of justice and cultural exemplar. (Briggs 1998: 323)



By the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the stereotype of witch was fully accepted and the discourse of witchcraft shared some common features throughout Western Europe. The witches' ability to do harm through different types of magic and incantations, the idea of the pact and the mark and also the gathering of witches in the so-called Sabbat formed, by the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, the basic elements in the discourse of witchcraft. All types of writings, from learned literature to pamphlets or ballads and even pictorial representations would continuously repeat the same characteristics, what Brian Levack called "the cumulative concept of witchcraft" (1997: 29). This prototypical image of the witch, which would be admitted by all strata of society, was constructed not only by learned men but it also included elements of popular superstition and folklore.

Las características reales y míticas se confunden en lo sucesivo para componer una imagen unificada, centrada en el pacto con Satanás, las relaciones contra natura con los demonios, los asesinatos de niños y los maleficios. (Muchembled 2004: 60)

That discourse of witchcraft contained several elements which made it recognisable in all parts of Western Europe. Although witch-hunts were by no means a unified phenomenon and the particular circumstances of each area and even each case should be examined, there are some recognisable elements which were included, to a greater or lesser extent, in most witchcraft accusations. That shared set of characteristics, which generally identified witches, was used as a proof when accusing a person of witchcraft. As it can be seen from the court records, “although the specific charges against witches varied from place to place and even from case to case, they still shared a number of common features” (Levack 1995: 51).

As it has been explained, the perception of what a witch was changed over the centuries. In a broader sense, a witch was first understood as “a person who possesses a supernatural, occult, or mysterious power to cause misfortune or injury to others” (Levack 2008: 2). However, since the late Middle Ages to the Early Modern period the definition slightly changed and came to describe “a person who exercised maleficent magical power by virtue of having made a pact with the Devil” (2008: 2). Witches were believed to possess a wide range of powers,

which they were able to use uttering spells and incantations, but sometimes using objects that had magical properties.

By their incantations, spells, conjurations, and other accursed charms and crafts, enormities and horrid offences, have blasted the produce of the earth, the grapes of the vine, the fruits of trees, nay, men and women, beasts of burthen, herd-beasts, as well as animals of other kinds, vineyards, orchards, meadows, pastureland, corn, wheat, and all other cereals; these wretches furthermore afflict and torment men and women, beast of burthen, heard-beasts, as well as animals of other kinds, with terrible and piteous pains and sores diseases, both internal and external; they hinder men from performing the sexual act and women from conceiving, whence husbands cannot know their wives nor views receive their husbands. (Innocent VIII 1484: xliii)

Another characteristic of the stereotype of the witch was that of gender. As Christina Larner points out, witchcraft “was not sex-specific but it was sex-related” (2001: 91). Jean-Michel Sallman (2000) explains that the stereotype of the witch as a woman originated around the 15<sup>th</sup> century thanks to several inquisitors manuals, demonological tracts and a wide variety of intellectual writings, one of the most relevant ones in spreading that idea being the *Malleus Maleficarum*. However, it was not only those writing arguing on the reality of witchcraft but also others

showing more sceptical attitudes that portrayed women as the typical witch, displaying negative characteristics. From Kramer and Sprenger's harsh attack on women to Weyer's condescending attitude towards women, who were portrayed as "melancholic by nature, feeble-minded" (1563: 283), it is undeniable that the discourse of witchcraft was tainted with gender connotations.

A través de la brujería se nos ofrece un sistema de representación, una visión del mundo, de las relaciones entre el género humano y las fuerzas sobrenaturales, la de los roles respectivos del hombre y la mujer en las sociedades del Antiguo Régimen. (Sallman 2000: 493)

It is not the aim of this PhD thesis to study in depth the relationship between witchcraft and gender. However, it is undeniable that witchcraft was used as a discourse of power to reinforce the patriarchy system established by the Church. In most areas the majority of the prosecuted and convicted witches were women therefore, as Christina Larner explains, witch-hunts were "to some degree a synonym for a woman hunting" (Larner 2001: 2).

The discourse of witchcraft not only included the description of the stereotyped witch and a wide range of powers attributed to them, but also some other common elements, which were frequently used as a proof in the processes against them. The idea of the pact, through which witches renounced the Christian

faith and became servants of the Devil, became a crucial element in prosecutions. It proved the “willing adherence to anti-Christian belief, a parody of confirmation and a sacrament which is heresy” (Rosen 1991: 16).

The pact formed between a witch and the devil may be either expressed or tacit. The expressed pact consists of a solemn vow of fidelity and homage made, in the presence of witnesses, to the devil visibly present in some bodily form. The tacit pact involves the offering of a written petition to the devil, and may be done by proxy through a witch or some third person when the contracting party is afraid to see or have speech with the devil.

(Guazzo 1988 [1608]: 13)

This pact included a formal oath of homage and was usually signed with the witches' own blood and sometimes it included sexual intercourse. This type of ceremony was meticulously detailed by Henrich Kramer and James Sprenger in their *Malleus Maleficarum*.

The devil demands the following oath of homage to himself: that she give herself to him, body and soul, for ever, and do her utmost to bring others of both sexes into his power. He adds, finally, that she is to make certain unguents from the bones and limbs of children, especially those who have been baptized; by all

which means she will be able to fulfil all her wishes with his help.

(Kramer 1486: 100)

It was also believed that during that ceremony the Devil left a distinctive mark in the witch's body which was insensible to pain and which was usually a birthmark, a wart or even a pimple. This mark was frequently used as the "physical proof that the spiritual apostasy had taken place, should confession fail" (Rosen 1991: 16).

The Devil brands and seals those whom he has newly claimed as his own [...] And what may seem more wonderful is that the place is entirely bloodless and insensitive, so that even if a needle be deeply thrust in, no pain is felt and not a drop of blood is shed. This fact is held to be so certain a proof of capital guilt that it is often made the base of examination and torture. (Remy 1595: 83)

This mark soon became a proof in many processes against witches but there were also other tests to prove their guilt, such as the ordeals of fire or water. However, popular culture also used various ways for both discovering and sometimes counteracting the witches' magic which varied from one area to another. In England, for example, "scratching the witch (usually 'above the breath') and so drawing blood would temporarily break a spell" (Rosen 1991: 18).

Burning the thatch of the witch's roof or simply shedding her blood were other common measures taken against witches.

Another feature of most descriptions of witches is that of the Sabbat. The idea of those meetings where witches and evil sorcerers met with the Devil to plot against Christianity might be based on some elements of pagan traditions, Christian imaginary and also, a great deal of imagination. But this belief was “not as widely held as that of the pact, and it was somewhat less uniform in its various expressions” (Levack 1997: 39). As it has been mentioned before, the French Pierre de Lancre offered a detailed description of the witches' Sabbat using confessions of convicted witches.

The Devil looked for the stormiest night he could find, so that the winds and the storms would carry their powders further and more impetuously: that two notable Devils would preside at these Sabbaths [...] That they loved the Great master, and that after everyone had kissed his backside, there were around sixty who would dance without their cloaks, back to back, each with a large cat attached to the tail of their shirt, then they would dance completely naked. (Lancre 1612: 105)

The activities performed at the Sabbat varied from area to area and were usually mixed with local folklore and traditions. For example, the feast or banquet usually “reflected local cuisine” (Levack 1995: 51). In those secret meetings witches

also performed a variety of rites and terrible acts, from the performance of a black mass to descriptions of children's sacrifices or cannibalism, and they usually included "the ritual intercourse with the Devil and the prevalence of promiscuous heterosexual and homosexual activity among the witches" (1995: 40) or with other demons: "that witches practise coition with demons, the men with Succubus devils and the women with Incubus devils" (Guazzo 1988 [1608]: 30)

Related to the idea of the Sabbat, there also developed the idea of the witches' ability to flight long distances to attend to those gatherings. As Brian Levack explains, this belief had "much more distinctly popular origins" (1995: 44) and might have come from two different traditions: either the idea of the *strigae* who transformed herself at night and ate children or the Roman goddess Diana and the wild hunt.<sup>14</sup>

Witches were supposed to be transported thanks to different means. Francesco Maria Guazzo in his *Compedium Maleficarum* (1608) discussed the three ways in which most people believed they could move those long distances. First, "the devil who, in the shape of a goat or some other fantastic animal, both carries them bodily to the Sabbath" (1988 [1608]: 34). Witches could also make ointments and thanks to them be "carried away on a cowl-staff, or a broom, or a

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<sup>14</sup> As Brian Levack explains the *strigae* "which became one of the many Latin words for witches, were also called *lamiae*, a reference to the mythical Queen of Libya, loved by Zeus, who sucked the blood of babies in revenge for Hera's killing of her children". (1995: 45) On the other hand Diana "had close associations with the moon and the night [...] and was often identified with Hecate, the goddess of the underworld and magic [...] and often depicted as Holda or Perchta" (1995: 45) in medieval Germany.

reed, a cleft stick or a distaff, or even a shovel” (1988 [1608]: 34). Finally, they could also travel on “an ox or a goat or a dog” (1988 [1608]: 34). However, this idea of the witches’ flight was highly discussed amongst theologians and philosophers for several centuries and no consensus was reached as to whether witches were actually transported or it was just a mere illusion.

Apart from those basic characteristics, there were also other elements which had a more local appeal such as metamorphosis or the keeping of familiars, but which were not included in the discourse of witchcraft on a regular basis. They reflected local beliefs and traditions but never became a basic element in the discourse of witchcraft at a general level.

By the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century, the discourse of witchcraft, which included all the elements previously mentioned, was already formed. It included “inversions of any positive values peculiar to a given society” (2001: 2) and, in some cases, the witch became the “personification of all forms of deviance and revolt” (2001: 5).

Witch-beliefs may therefore encompass a variety of alleged activities, possible and impossible, probable and improbable, and attribute to the performers of these activities a variety of characteristics, all of which serve to highlight local social values.

(Levack 1995: 126)

As it was previously explained, the witch was not only frequently associated to anti-Christian characteristics –they did not go to Church or pray, they swore and did not behave in an appropriate way– but also, as a typically female figure, she opposed the patriarchy and broke the traditional role attributed to the Christian woman: docile, obedient, dependent of men. Hence, the exaggerated descriptions where their sexual desire and their insatiability are emphasised.

Women were fashioned as the “other,” as the deviant by the authorities. They represented “the dark forces of unreason” (Purkiss 1999: 276), as opposed to the rationality of men. Again, the official discourse emphasised the dichotomy between positive characteristics associated to patriarchy, to men, and negative ones, associated to the feminine. The witch as a woman exerted an unwanted power so the discourse of witchcraft was also aimed at neutralising that threat. The figure of the witch was demonised and opposed to the characteristics of a good Christian, emphasising those positive values in a woman, docility and submission to men.

First heresy and, later on, witchcraft were articulated throughout the Middle Ages as a demonic discourse in opposition to the official discourse of both lay and ecclesiastical authorities. Then, the political dimension of the discourse of witchcraft became apparent. Witches were regarded as a subversive element that destroyed order. In the Early Modern period, not only the Church but also rulers

would use that discourse to reinforce their power. In a world where everything has its place, the witch is articulated as an element which destroys that harmony.



In this chapter I have analysed the importance of texts as “an instrument in the construction of identities not only at the individual level –that of the subject– but also on the level of the group or even that of the national state” (Bertens 2007: 177). I have also tried to outline the intellectual and legal foundations of the discourse of witchcraft while mentioning some of the elements of popular culture which were gradually added to that stereotype and that, by the beginning of the witch-hunts in the Early Modern period, were shared by the vast majority of the population in Western Europe.

Also, I have briefly mentioned some of the factors that might have triggered the witch-craze that led to a still undetermined number of executions. However, as I have mentioned before, it is impossible to point out a single explanation for the phenomenon of witch-hunts in Europe. Rather, there are a number of aspects that joined together at that particular time and triggered the whole process. The intellectual and legal foundations that I have briefly explained are considered as pre-conditions but do not provide “a complete causal explanation of the hunt”

(Levack 1995: 100). Other aspects should be taken into account, such as the social and economic conditions at the time and also the religious changes brought about by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. As Brian Levack points out:

The best that we can do is to describe the most typical environments in which witchcraft accusations arose, establish the most common social characteristics of the individuals who were singled out for prosecution, and explore some of the reasons why these individuals were particularly vulnerable to the charge of witchcraft. This technique will allow us to draw some general conclusions about the identity of the 'typical' European witch without failing to appreciate the variety of circumstances that could have led to her accusation and prosecution. (Levack 1995: 126)

Therefore, I shall now focus on how the discourse of witchcraft was articulated in England and study the different factors that led to witchcraft prosecutions in the country at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of the new king from Scotland, James I.



## CHAPTER 3

# THE DISCOURSE OF WITCHCRAFT IN ENGLAND

The reign of James I



### 3. THE DISCOURSE OF WITCHCRAFT IN ENGLAND

#### The reign of James I

In the previous chapter I have focused on the construction of the witch from Ancient times to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the discourse of witchcraft was already formed, pointing out “the basic elements by which we recognize it across cultures” (Larner 2001: 2). However, since I shall now focus on Jacobean England, it is necessary to offer a more detailed examination of the particular development of witchcraft there and also study the England of the early 17<sup>th</sup> century –when James VI of Scotland became king– in more depth.

As James Sharp suggests, on the earliest studies on witchcraft in England there always appeared the idea that that witchcraft was different from that of the continent. Alan Macfarlane (1970) and Keith Thomas (1971), George Lyman Kittredge (1929) or L’Estrange Ewen (1929) suggest that “English witchcraft and witch accusations were somehow distinctive from the ‘continental’ equivalents of these phenomena” (Sharpe 2001: 12) but, nowadays, most academics agree that it

is “rather a variation on a number of themes which can be found throughout Europe” (2001: 12).

In the Middle Ages, the English population shared similar beliefs in magic and witchcraft to those of Continental Europe and “by the high Middle Ages a wide range of sources demonstrate that such beliefs were firmly embedded at all social levels” (Sharpe 1997: 23). The reality of witchcraft was generally accepted as an integral part of everyday life and coexisted with the Christian religion.

For most people [...] Christian belief of this type was perfectly compatible with a greater or lesser acceptance of other areas of belief. [...] There is ample evidence that people accepted the reality of ghosts, fairies, poltergeist, the power of prophecy and spirits of all sorts. In such a mental world, the presence of witches is hardly surprising. (Sharpe 1997: 59)

Witchcraft accusations started to appear in England as in other parts of the continent in the Middle Ages and, although to a lesser extent than in the rest of Europe, there started to be a gradual shift in mentalities regarding the use of magic from good to evil, and a greater stress in the negative effects of witches’ powers and maleficia.

There also appeared references to sorcery and similar practices in different types of writings. However, probably because of the few and moderate heretical

manifestations in England,<sup>15</sup> there were practically no cases in which witchcraft was related to the cult of the devil. One of the few exceptions in the British Isles would be that of lady Alice Kyteler, who was accused of sorcery in Ireland in 1324. Her case is relevant because, as Brian Levack suggests, it can be regarded as “an early indication of the emergence of this new image of the witch” (2008: 32).

The bishop discovered that in the town of Kilkenny there had been for a long time, and still were, very many heretical sorceresses who practised all kinds of sorceries and were well-versed in all kinds of heresies. Carrying the investigation of these witches as far as he was bound by the duties of his office, the bishop discovered that a certain rich lady, Dame Alice Kyteler, mother of William Outlaw, was involved in various heresies, along with several accomplices. (Davidson 1993: 40)

Dame Alice Kyteler was accused, together with some other associates, of performing *maleficium*, “sacrificing animals to a demon and using powders, ointments, and lotions to commit murder and persuade young men whom she had infatuated by magical means to give their possessions to her” (Levack 2008: 39). There also appear references to sexual intercourse between Dame Alice Kyteler and a demon. That account also included an early description of what later would

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<sup>15</sup> As Jeffrey B. Russell points out “en Inglaterra no había Inquisición ni derecho romano, sino tan sólo una tradición herética bastante débil. La disidencia más importante en Inglaterra durante la Edad Media, la de los lolardos, fue una herejía moderada con escasos vínculos en el continente, que nunca fue asimilada con la brujería” (1998: 115).

become an almost recurrent image in the prosecution of witches in England, that of the familiar.

The said lady had a certain demon as *incubus* by whom she permitted herself to be known carnally, and that the demon called herself son of Art, or else Robin, Son of Art. Sometimes, it was claimed, he appeared to her in the shape of a cat, sometimes in the shape of a shaggy black dog, sometimes as a black man with two companions bigger and taller than himself, one of whom carried an iron rod in his hands. (Davidson 1993: 41)

Levack also suggests that the case had “a number of novel elements that are not found in the usual trials of ritual magicians in the early fourteenth century, and these elements anticipate many of the charges later brought against witches” (2008: 39). They were accused of holding “nocturnal meetings” (Davidson 1993: 40) and “deny faith in Christ and the church” (1993: 40) but the most striking element is that “these sorcerers were female, unlike most ritual magicians” (Levack 2008: 39). Hence, the link between witchcraft and gender starts to be perceived in the British Isles as soon as the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

In the late Middle Ages, England would witness “sporadic outbreaks of witchcraft accusations” (Sharpe 1997: 42) both among the lower and higher classes. In fact, as James Sharpe (2001) explains, in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, there was

already a demonological theory in England based on three basic premises: God's permission, satanic power and human agency in the form of a witch.

However, most of the accusations still focused on the witches' powers rather than on the satanic cult. In fact, it was the "hostile plots involving magic and witchcraft [which] became a regular problem for the English monarchy" (Sharpe 1995: 23). In 1376, Alice Perrers, Edward III's mistress, was accused of using magic against the king "gaining his affections, procuring his madness and enervating his bodily strength" (1995: 24). A century later, in 1441, the wife of Henry V's brother, Eleanour Cobham, was accused together with other people, amongst whom there was an astrologer, of plotting and using magic against her husband. And even Anne Boleyn was suspected of witchcraft. As Sharpe points out, it was frequent at the time, not only in England but also in the rest of the continent, that political tensions were "accompanied by allegations that magic and necromancy were being used against the monarch or the royal family" (1995: 24). In that sense, the political dimension of the discourse of witchcraft is made clear through this demonization of the elements that oppose the institutions or, in this case, the figures of authority represented by the monarchs.

Although the Neoplatonic ideas "were never totally ascendant in England and most educated people still viewed the world in terms of the existing Aristotelian system" (Sharpe 1997: 38) some of its notions were eagerly accepted, such as "the Renaissance magus and the acceptance of a polymathic approach to

knowledge” (1997: 38). John Dee (1527-1608) would be a fine example of that. He was an astrologer and mathematician and he was even asked “to name an astrologically auspicious day for the Queen’s coronation” (Scarre 2001: 35). At the time, not only monarchs but even popes understood science as inseparable from magic and resorted to it on some occasions. However, there were some practices which were negatively perceived and rejected by the authorities; particularly “magic involving the raising of evil spirits or the spirits of the dead continued to attract general disapproval” (Scarre 2001: 35).

The use of magic was not only a concern for the upper classes but also meant an immediate threat to the vast majority of the population. Intellectual writings were gradually mixing with popular beliefs, with that magical mentality of the common people, and created the discourse of witchcraft. Nevertheless, there were still differences between them. As Sharpe explains, religion was an important part of the lives of the lower classes but it emphasised different aspects from those of the ruling classes. It served to “reinforce ideas of right and wrong in everyday interpersonal dealings, to add meaning to the rites of passage of birth, marriage and death, to help give some sense of meaning to a difficult and at times harsh world” (Sharpe 1997: 59).

However those Christian beliefs were compatible with “a greater or lesser acceptance of other areas of belief which both we and their educated contemporaries would describe as superstitious” (1997: 59). Magic was a part of

the lives of most of the population as a whole but, whereas the ruling classes were more concerned about the pact and some other aspects highlighted in learned writings, “the main concern of the population at large was the witch’s capacity to do harm by occult means” (1997: 60).

English villagers prosecuted their neighbours as witches not on the grounds of night-flying, intercourse with demons or taking part in orgiastic rites at the sabbat; they did so because they thought the alleged witch had done harm to them, their children, their spouse or their farm animals. (Sharpe 1997: 113)

In fact, most accusations of witchcraft in England focused on maleficium. In general, all illnesses, accidents and misfortunes were attributed to witches; however, they were also “almost invariably interpreted in interpersonal terms” (Sharpe 1997: 65) and linked to the social relations within the community. Many authors, like Alan Macfarlane (1999) have stressed the relevance of popular beliefs and local tensions between neighbours when making witchcraft accusations and have placed them within “a broad framework of socioeconomic change” (1997: 62). However, we should also take into account the ideas of educated men and intellectuals who supported all those processes.



The legal developments regarding the crime of witchcraft were a crucial element in the formation of the discourse of witchcraft and the eventual hunts that shook European countries. However, the particular development of the judicial system in England can account for some of the main differences from their European counterparts regarding their prosecution.

In the 12<sup>th</sup> century, Henry II had reorganized the legal system in the country and centralised it in the permanent royal court known as the King's Bench, led by specialised judges from the clergy but also lay men. It was precisely “the establishment of a stationary royal court, functioning independently of the king's personal presence, which marks the origin of the traditional judicial system of England” (Baker 2002: 18). In 1166, he issued a declaration at the Assize of Claredon and appointed some of those judges to travel on a regular basis to different parts of the country, which was divided into different circuits, and hold regular regional sessions for both civil and criminal cases. This Assize system, as it became known, meant that the laws applied by the judges sitting in London would also be applied to cases in the rest of the county.

Later, in 1285, during the reign of Edward I, the Justices of Peace were officially appointed and overtook the task of enforcing the law at a local level. Initially judges also held political positions but they gradually separated from the executive power in the following centuries in an attempt to achieve more

independence. In fact, by the 16<sup>th</sup> century, with the exception of Elizabeth I, there were no judges in the different monarchs' Privy Councils. However, that desired need of independence was not fulfilled because since the Reformation the monarch was in charge of the making of the laws while the judges merely acted as interpreters of it.

England did not follow an inquisitorial system, like the rest of the continent, but an adversarial one based on Common Law. Juries were used in witchcraft trials and they needed to reach a unanimous verdict of guilt for the conviction of witches. Also, hanging was the commonest method used for their execution, not burning. Nevertheless, the law allowed people convicted of witchcraft to be burnt and although it was not a frequent practice, there is "a well-documented instance of this practice [...] in Northumberland in 1279" (Sharpe 1995: 24).

Unlike the rest of European countries where torture was used on a regular basis to obtain confessions, this method was never used "in witch-cases though it was used for a wide range of felonies considered milder than witchcraft, including burglary and assault" (Purkiss 1997: 239). The particular development of the English legal system meant that "convictions could be obtained without confession" (Briggs 1998: 332) and that absence of torture meant a moderation in the prosecutions compared to those which were taking place in the rest of the continent.

One of the more remarkable developments of the period is in fact that of higher abstract standards, better jurisprudence and a concern for procedural rigour. By the middle decades of the seventeenth century, these trends were actually having a distinctly beneficial effect, in the sense of moderating earlier excesses; they played a very large part in ending large-scale prosecution of witches. (Briggs 1998: 332-333)

As regards witchcraft accusations, there were three main types of court which dealt with those cases. In England, ecclesiastical courts only held a small proportion of the witchcraft cases, so it was secular ones that undertook most of the cases. People accused of the crime of witchcraft were more likely to be tried at Assizes courts, where professional judges trained in the law heard the case and offered a verdict based on standards of proof, not on hearsay or local tensions against the accused. But witchcraft cases could also be tried at country quarter sessions, which were generally held four times a year by Justices of Peace in every county. There, as James Sharpe points out, “normally the country gentlemen who served as justices of peace, while willing enough to examine suspected witches and commit them to gaol, were as unwilling to judge on witchcraft as on other capital offences at their sessions” (1997: 92).

The legal foundations of the discourse of witchcraft were, as it has been explained, an essential precondition for the witch-hunt in Europe. As Robert

Briggs explains, laws were “fashioned by the powerful to suit themselves” (1998: 332) and followed the official discourse, punishing those attitudes which were regarded as unacceptable. Together with other offences, witchcraft was soon included in the English legislation and the punishment for that crime would gradually increase, until it meant death by hanging for those found guilty in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

During the Middle Ages, there were some laws against different types of magical practice but most of them were meant to “discourage the original pagan religions, which are now, of course, spoken of as devil-worship” (Rosen 1991: 21) or to deal with sorcerers “involved in conspiracy or rebellion” (1991: 22). As Alan Macfarlane explains, it is likely that authorities treated witchcraft “as a branch of heresy, an ecclesiastical offence which was later punished by the State under the writ *de haeretico comburendo*” (1999: 14).

The first legislation regarding the crime of witchcraft would not be passed until the 16<sup>th</sup> century, during the reign of Henry VIII. The 1542 *Act against Conjurations, Witchcrafts, Sorcery, and Enchantments* defined witchcraft as a felony and dealt with “all manner of magical activity, from magical harming (maleficium) to treasure-hunting, and imposed the death penalty for all of these” (Gibson 2003: 1). However, king Edward VI repealed this first secular bill against witchcraft five years later, in 1547, without ever being enforced once. In the following years, there were more urgent matters to attend so witchcraft did not

receive much attention on the part of the authorities, which left the Church in charge of all witchcraft cases.

However, with the arrival of queen Elizabeth I at the English throne the situation changed. As some scholars suggest “the establishment of a new Protestant regime” (Sharpe 2001: 16) and the subsequent return of some of the exiles who had escaped prosecution during the reign of Mary I might have influenced some clerics and scholars who “had familiarized themselves with contemporary continental witchcraft theory” (Kors 2001: 302) on the passing of the new legislation and the restoration of witchcraft as a felony.

Elizabeth I’s government was concerned “at the amount of contemporary treasonable activity which took the form of false prophecies, astrological prediction and other amateur conjuring” (Macfarlane 1999: 14). However, as James Sharpe explains, the situation could have been more complex and might have involved the discovery of a Catholic plot which tried to use witchcraft against the queen. When the authorities realised that there were no laws to prosecute them, they understood the need of new legislation. John Jewel, who would later become archbishop of Salisbury, argued in favour of those changes regarding the crime of witchcraft:

This kind of people (I mean witches and sorcerers) within these last few years are marvellously increased within this your grace’s realm. These eyes have seen most evident and manifest marks of

their wickedness. Your grace's subjects pine away even unto death, their colour fadeth, their flesh rotteth, their speech is benumbed, their senses are bereft. Wherefore your poor subjects' most humble petition unto your highness is, that the laws touching such malefactors may be put in due execution.  
(Notestein 1965: 303)

The 1563 *Act against Conjurations, Enchantments and Witchcrafts* “prohibited non-harmful magical activities such as treasure-hunting and was accompanied by an Act against fond and fantastical Prophecies, especially those of a political nature” (Gibson 2003: 3). Again, the threat of seditions would be associated to the crime of witchcraft. However, as Deborah Willis suggests, it is not only the welfare of the queen that worried Jewel, “his deeper concern is with the health of her majesty's kingdom” (1995: 84), a kingdom which was “embedded in larger ideological struggles” (1995: 84).

As it was explained in the previous chapter, the religious changes that the Reformation brought were one of the factors which influenced the large prosecutions in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. In the case of England, the transition from the Catholic queen Mary I to the Protestant Elizabeth I meant a change in the attitudes. By promoting the witchcraft laws, “an emergent Protestant elite could display a greater piety and ‘biblical correctness’ than its Catholic predecessors” (1995: 84).

New modes of reading the Bible led to new conceptualizations of the witch's crime. Witch prosecutions became part of a larger campaign carried out by state and religious authorities against many varieties of 'false belief,' including papistry, scepticism, mere ignorance, and popular magical traditions both black and white. (Willis 1995: 84)

The discourse of witchcraft should, therefore, be understood as “embedded in larger ideological struggles” (Willis 1995: 84). The Protestants’ “new modes of reading the Bible led to new conceptualizations of the witch’s crime” (1995: 84) and that meant a greater concern on behalf of the authorities. The new legislation tried to emphasise the difference between the prior Catholic rule and display “a greater piety and biblical correctness” (1995: 84).

Witch prosecutions became part of a larger campaign carried out by state and religious authorities against many varieties of “false belief,” including papistry, scepticism, mere ignorance, and popular magical traditions both black and white. (Willis 1995: 84)

In the new legislation, witchcraft was still defined in terms of maleficium, rather than diabolical pact, and followed the existing legal framework for dealing with this type of felony. “Although bewitching to death attracted the death penalty,

injuring persons or good or cattle and seeking treasure, warranted only prison and pillory for the first offence” (Corbin 1986: 2). Only on the second offence could death penalty be used.

If any person [...] shall use, practise or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery [...] then every such offender or offenders their counsellors and aiders, being thereof lawfully convicted, shall for his or their first offence or offences, suffer imprisonment by the space of one whole year, without bail or mainprise, and once in every quarter of the said year, shall in some market town, upon the market day or at such time as any fair shall be kept there, stand openly upon the pillory by the space of six hours, and there shall openly confess his or her error and offence; and for the second offence, being as is aforesaid lawfully convicted or attainted, shall suffer death as a felon, and shall lose the privilege of clergy and sanctuary. (Rosen 1991: 55)

A number of witchcraft processes followed the passing of this new legislation. One of the most famous ones would be that of the Chelmsford witches in Essex country in 1566, followed by two more processes in 1579 and 1589, which would establish a precedent for future prosecutions in England. But apart from that, the Chelmsford trials were also relevant because they “inspired the first of many pamphlets on both the subject of witchcraft and particular trials that constitute an important source for witchcraft beliefs” (Kors 2001: 303). “The

examination and Confession of Certaine witches at Chelmsford in the Countie of Essex, before the Queenes Maiesties Judges the XXVI daye of July anno 1566” (Rosen 1991: 72) described some parts which involved many women of the area and also members of the same family. Amongst others, Elizabeth Francis, Agnes Waterhouse and her daughter Joan, were accused of bewitching a boy and using maleficia.

The Chelmsford processes reflected the most characteristic features of witchcraft in England, including references to the witches’ mark and its insensibility to pain or the emphasis on the keeping of familiars. As Ramos Bossini (1976) explains, cases such as those in Chelmsford help us understand to what extent magic formed part of everyday’s life in Elizabethan times, and also the degree to which people were afraid of it.

She learned this art of witchcraft at the age of 12 years, of her grandmother [...] She counselled her to renounce GOD and His word, and to give of her blood to Satan (as she termed it), which she delivered her in the likeness of a white spotted cat.

(Rosen 1991: 73- 74)

Since 1566, pamphlets started to be published whenever a witchcraft process took place. Those texts offered an insight into the “linguistic cultural, social and political fabric of the past” (Brannigan 1998: 12) and demonstrate “a

growing sophistication in theological debates about witchcraft” (Sharpe 1997: 98). Pamphlets also pointed to “a firming up of legal proceedings” (1997: 98) against witchcraft from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century.

The last decades of the sixteenth century in England witnessed an increase in witchcraft trials [...] Confessions and testimony revealed a deep-seated fear of the awesome powers of the witch to perform unnatural harmful actions and a pervasive credulity among both the learned and the unlearned. (Kors 1997: 394)

Pamphlets were one of the many factors that contributed to the spreading of the ideas about witchcraft and fixing them on people’s minds. In fact, during the second half of Elizabeth’s reign, the number of cases grew considerably. There were a number of trials which attracted public interest, such as those at Chelmsford in 1566 and 1579, the witches at Windsor in 1579 or the processes at St. Osyth in 1582. However, English processes were quite moderate if we compare them to those in the continent.

The 16<sup>th</sup> century not only witnessed a rise in the number of witchcraft prosecutions but there also appeared the first intellectuals who “raised themselves in sceptical opposition to increasingly widespread notions of the witch and her powers and to the general sense that the testimony of the trials were manifestly

true” (Kors 2001: 394). Surprisingly, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, a sceptical work written by the Calvinist Reginald Scot in 1584, would become the first and most important English writing on the topic of witchcraft. However, his scepticism was “in large part derived from his belief in the sovereignty of God and the absence of any biblical foundation for witch-hunting” (Levack 2008: 285).

Although Reginald Scot believed in the reality of some types of witchcraft, he rejected most of the traditional ideas about witches. For Scot, “if witches manage to perform any of the feats attributed to them, it is because they are able to fool the credulous by trickery and sleight of hand rather than as a result of any diabolically inspired power”. (Sharpe 1997: 53) He believed that “to ascribe to witches the powers they were meant to possess was to blaspheme by attributing to them powers which were limited to God” (1997: 52).

As James Sharpe suggests, “Scot’s views on papery place him firmly in his cultural context” (1997: 54). From a Protestant perspective, he attacks on Roman Catholic practices, which he compares with witchcraft. Learned demonologists based part of their beliefs on the existence of witchcraft on the Scriptures, but Reginald Scot, as Johann Weyer had done before, explained that it was based on an erroneous translation of “a number of Hebrew terms, and claimed that, in any case, the magical practitioners described in Scripture had little in common with the old women being tried for witchcraft” (Sharpe 1997: 53).

He also studies some cases that took place in England and provides “a social analysis of witchcraft accusations, identifying poor women who begged for charity and who had been estranged from their neighbours as the most likely to be accused of having caused their misfortunes” (Levack 2008: 285).

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  
human nature. (Scot 1972 [1584]: 4)

Reginald Scot “responded to the attacks that were levelled against Weyer, especially by Jean Bodin in 1580” (Levack 2008: 285) and, one by one, disregarded all the learned accusations made against witches, from the demonic pact or the gathering in the Sabbat to the sexual relations with demons or the metamorphosis but also attacked other types of magical practices, such as divination, alchemy or many of the generally-held popular beliefs. And he did that by displaying his wide knowledge on the subject referring to “over 200 foreign and thirty-eight English works” on witchcraft, including classical authors such as Ovid or Virgil, and more recent demonologists like Johannes Nider (1435-1438), Kramer and Sprenger (1486), Lambert Daneau (1574) or Jean Bodin (1580), but also English tracts on recent witchcraft cases.

Finally, at the end of his work, Scot also “cuts the scope of spiritual agency in the affairs of the physical world to a minimum” (Sharpe 1997: 54) which, following his logic, leads to “a denial of the reality of the spirit world as surely as it did to a denial of the reality of witchcraft” (1997: 55), something which completely opposed the generally-held ideas of his time. That made him the target of strong criticism from his contemporaries, including king James I, Henry Holland or John Darrell<sup>16</sup> amongst others.

As it has been explained, the Elizabethan period witnessed the beginning of specialised witchcraft literature, including not only the first pamphlets on real cases but also anti-demonological tracts. In the case of the literary production, witchcraft never became a central theme, but it was “an occasional one which kept on appearing, sometimes in unexpected contexts” (Sharpe 1997: 47). This echoes how heavily were witchcraft beliefs embedded not only in popular culture but also among the authorities.

At the very least, it is obvious that well into Elizabeth’s reign, witchcraft, prophecies and the casting of figures were seen as matters of concern to the central authorities. And Privy Councillors were important men, leading administrators, powerful aristocrats, high churchmen. If they were taking

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<sup>16</sup> In the beginning of the 17th century, demonological tracts concerning witchcraft were frequently published in England, amongst the most famous ones there should be included William Perkins’ *Discourse of the damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608), Henry Holland’s *A Treatise against Witchcraft* (1590) or John Cotta’s *Tryall of Witch-Craft* (1616).

serious notice of witchcraft on however occasional a basis, as part of the business of central government, our contention that the issue was still a live one among the political and social élite receives further reinforcement. (Sharpe 1997: 47)



In 1603, when James VI of Scotland became king of England he was already “an accomplished Scottish ruler and something of a philosopher prince” (Kishlansky 1997: 69). His way of approaching witchcraft was linked to his previous experiences, but also to his way of understanding his role as a monarch, the concept of Divine right.

In his early years in Scotland, James had read extensively and “was trained by his guardians in the Protestant faith” (Tyson 2001: 2). His interest in demonology might have originated in his visit to the court of Denmark to marry his wife Anne where he met different “theologians and philosophers, including Niels Hemmingsen, a Lutheran professor whose writings James later cited with approbation in his writings on demonology” (Burns 2003: 150). However, his attitudes towards witchcraft would change in 1590 when he was personally involved in a case of witchcraft in North Berwick.

The North Berwick trials started in 1590 when there were some accusation of “malicious acts of magic worked at the behest of the Devil against ordinary townfolk in the region around Edinburgh” (Tyson 2001: 16) and would last for other three years. It is important to point out that they were not isolated cases but part of “a larger outbreak of witchcraft trials that had begun in East Lothian in the second half of the 1590 and would spread into other parts of Scotland by the end of 1592, then abate for a few years, and then flare up again in 1595-7” (Normand 2000: 2).

However, there was another accusation added to the initial ones, which might have been extracted due to the use of torture. Some of the accused explained the king that “a conspiracy of witches had allegedly tried to prevent the arrival of his bride, Princess Anne of Denmark, in Scotland [...] and allegedly tried to use witchcraft to murder him” (Levack 2008: 140). Although James VI had faced some plots on behalf of the Scottish nobles that had threatened his life during all his reign, it was the first time that he “found himself and his new bride threatened by the supernatural” (Tyson 2001: 3).

The North Berwick trials involved a great number of people and the king and his Privy Council were in charge of the examination and trial. The king took a leading role in the questioning of the accused and promoted the extensive use of torture, which might account for the detailed descriptions of the witches’ gatherings and powers and also for the large number of people accused.

Soon, James VI became convinced of the reality of witchcraft by the many confessions, particularly when one of the witches supposedly told him what he and his wife had talked about during their wedding night. The king understood the threat that witchcraft represented and reasserted his idea that not only *maleficium* but also all magical practices, included those which popular culture regarded as natural or white, stemmed from the Devil. In fact, one of the accused, Agnes Sampson, was “the renowned midwife and healer known as the Wise Wife of Nether-Keith” (Tyson 2001: 23).

On the one hand there was the power of God, which had ceased to produce prophecies or miracles since the time of Christ, and on the other hand there was the power of Satan, which waxed stronger in the modern age than at any other time in history due to the imminence of the end of the world, and was responsible for all marvellous effects that were other than natural. (Tyson 2001: 5)

The account of their gathering in the night of Halloween in a church in North Berwick fitted the learned stereotype of the witches’ sabbat and, in fact, “provided the prototype for countless subsequent descriptions” (Tyson 2001: 18). They were thought to have “convened with the Devil, who stood in the pulpit dressed in a black hat and black gown, surrounded by burning black candles”

(2001: 17). There are also references of the digging up of corpses to create potions and many other different magical practices which belonged to popular folklore.

It is important to point out that the North Berwick trials were a rather exceptional case since “relatively uneducated peasant women talked with highly educated and sophisticated leaders of church and state” (Normand 2000: 5). Therefore, both popular and learned beliefs on witchcraft were mixed and it can be perceived how “through the legal processes of interrogation and torture stories were produced out of material draws from historical memory and contemporary circumstances, and refashioned into a new configuration of witchcraft” (Normand 2000: 5).

Nevertheless, the interrogation of the witches led to more earthy matters dealing with Francis Stewart Hepburn, earl of Bothwell, and James’ political enemy, who had a claim to the throne as long as the king had no heir. Both men “truly despised each other” (Tyson 2001: 23) and at some point of the trial some of the accused pointed at him directly as being their leader. This, added to Bothwell’s reputation as a powerful magician, convinced the king of his involvement in the case and drove him to demand that he was tried for charges of witchcraft and high treason.

On May 9, Bothwell was held in Edinburgh Castle for “conspyringe the King’s death by sorcerye.” On June 25 a proclamation was issued against Bothwell accusing him of

“consultatioun with nygromancris, witcheis, and utheris wickit  
and ungodly personis, bayth without and within this cuntre for  
bereaving in his Hienes lyff.” (Tyson 2001: 20)

The active role the king had on those trials can be linked to his “belief in the divine status of kingship” (Burns 2001: 150). At one point of the interrogation, Agnes Sampson, one of the accused, confessed when she was being tortured that “the Devil considered him to be his chief opponent, and it was for this reason that Satan hated him and wished to bring about his death” (Tyson 2011: 3). That reaffirmed James VI’s notion of the witches’ position “into the broader scheme of things, and what ought to be done about them” (Sharpe 2001: 8).

James was convinced that the more vigorously he persecuted those he viewed as the servants of the Devil, the less power the Devil would have to harm him or anything that was his. This included not only his wife and household but also the entire nation of Scotland. By using the utmost severity against the accused witches, James was defending his realm against the power of Satan. (Tyson 2001: 27)

Apart from his genuine beliefs on the reality of witchcraft, the political benefits of his active role in the prosecution of those witches were undeniable. As William E. Burns explains “the self-presentation as a great enemy of witches and

Satan” (2003: 150) in the English pamphlet *News from Scotland* (1591) helped to highlight that image of a powerful monarch chosen by God to defeat evil. The king was perfectly aware of the ideological function of words as an instrument of power and would use them to reinforce his position. Using Biblical references, James VI “cast himself into the role of the white knight of God who dispensed the wrath of heaven against the wicked, using as his weapon the power of the word” (Tyson 2011: 21). He became the powerful leader confronting the forces of evil; something which perfectly fitted his belief “in the divine status of kingship” (Burns 2003: 150) and which he would later explain in his *Basilikon Doron* (1599).

The processes extended another three years and ended with the trial of Earl Bothwell in August 1593, who would suffer exile. Also, the king pushed the juries “toward conviction and execution” (Burns 2003: 150) of many of the accused. As a consequence of the North Berwick processes, not only laws regarding the use of magic were toughened but also the views on witchcraft in Scotland would change significantly, adding many of the elements of the European discourse of witchcraft.

After the episode in North Berwick and as a direct attack to the most sceptical positions of Johann Weyer’s *De praestigiis daemonum* (1563) and Reginald Scot’s *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), James VI published his *Daemonologie*, where he argued in favour of the existence of witches basing his opinions in the Calvinist idea of predestination.

The fearefull abounding at this time in this countrie, of these detestable slaues of the Deuill, the Witches or enchaunters, hath moved me (beloued reader) to dispatch in post, this following treatise of mine [...] to resolute the doubting harts of many; both that such assaultes of Sathan are most certainly practised, and that the instruments thereof, merits most severely to be punished: against the damnable opinions of two principally in our age, wherof the one called SCOT an Englishman [...] the other called VVIERVS, a German Phisition (sic). (James VI 2002 [1597]: xi)

James VI's decision was also "partially fuelled by his desire to school his subject on the danger of witchcraft to both the Stuart regime and the Protestant faith" (Sharpe 1997: 50). His idea of kingship made him understand the organization of the state as that of "the patriarchalism of the family" (Goldberg 1989: 85). Therefore, his duty was to guide his subjects, to teach them of the workings of the Devil and provide methods for his detection. In fact, he wrote his *Daemonologie* in the form a dialogue between two characters, Philomathes and Epistemon, who extensively discuss on the subject.

First published in Edinburgh in 1597, *Daemonologie* was followed by an English edition in 1603 and later translation into Dutch, Latin and French. In his tract, James VI made reference to other intellectuals who had written about the topic and presented his argument for the existence of witches, which was mainly based on his Protestant ideas.

Como buen calvinista que era, Jacobo basaba su principal argumento a favor de la existencia de las brujas en la predestinación [...] Como los que no habían sido escogidos eran seguidores del diablo, nada más natural que algunos siguieran abiertamente a su siniestro señor en el culto brujeril.

(Russell 1998: 122)

For James VI, witches should be prosecuted no matter the “sex, age nor rank” (James VI 2002 [1597]: 77) because, as Barbara Rosen points out, “witchcraft to him meant regicide, the Satanism of the Sabbath, unnatural powers to fly through the air or move across the sea” (1991: 332). When trying witches he not only allowed “the testimony of children, wives, and confessing witches” (Levack 2008: 140) but he also included other methods to obtain proofs.

There are two other good helps that may be used for their trial: the one is the finding of their marke, and the trying the insensibleness thereof. The other is their fleeing on the water [...] so it appears that God hath appoynted (for a super-naturall signe of the monstrous impietie of the Witches) that the water shal refuse to receiue them in her blossom, that haue shaken off them the sacred Water of Baptisme, and wilfullie refused the benefite thereof. (James VI 2002 [1597]: 80-81)

James VI's ideas were not only drawn from continental literature but he also based them on his own experiences as an examiner in the witchcraft trials. His *Daemonologie* not only followed "a hard line regarding the punishment of offenders" (Levack 2008: 140) but it also understood that "the consulters, trusters in, ouer-seers, interteiners or sturrers up of these craftes-folkes, are equallie guiltie" (James VI 2002 [1597]: 78). Therefore, due to the seriousness of the crime, James argued strongly that those convicted of witchcraft should be put to death according to the laws of each country.

As it has been mentioned, James was well aware of the power of words as a way to articulate power. As Jonathan Goldberg explains "even before James arrived in England to begin his reign, he had been preceded by his words" (1989: 55). The same year he was going to be crowned king he made three of his writings be published in England – *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598), *Basilikon Doron* (1599) and *Daemonologie* (1597). Therefore, their future subjects were able to have a clear idea of the monarch's opinions on topics he considered of great importance. James I realised that language and politics were "mutually constitutive" (1989: xi) and throughout his reign there were clear attempts "to control writing and to control by writing" (1989: xii). In fact, one of the first things he did when he became king of England was to put theatres under his royal patronage.

Discourse was a powerful weapon so he made use not only of his own writings but also of those of others as an effective instrument of royal power. With the publication of his works, James made sure his subjects were well aware not only of “his status as a witch-hunter” (Sharpe 1997: 48) but also as “a major intellectual, writing theoretical works on government and engaging effectively in debate with leading Catholic polemicists on theological and political issues, as well as [...] the recent and menacing introduction of tobacco” (Morrill 2000: 28).

However, James I's arrival at the English throne was not easy. The economic and social situation in England was changing. The population growth which had been taking place since the early 16<sup>th</sup> century meant a pressure “not only on food resources but on land” (Morrill 2000: 3) and led to a decline in the living standards. Unemployment and changes in marketing were also a problem. The socioeconomic structure of English communities was rather varied but, in general, the changes that were taking place at the time and the demographic growth “accentuated pre-existing social stratification” (Sharpe 2001: 35) and made the division in many villages between a majority of poor people and “a loose oligarchy of yeomen farmers, petty gentry, and the more prosperous tradesmen and craftsmen” (2001: 35) more accentuated.

The excessive expenses of the new monarch did not help the situation. In fact, “his lack of fiscal self-restraint both heightened his financial problem and reduced the willingness of the community at large to grant him adequate supply”

(2000: 29). Added to all that, his bad relationship with the Parliament also increased the internal tensions.

His personal vision, the union of the crowns of Scotland and England into a unified kingdom of Britain met serious difficulties, and his desire to “promote the peace and unity of Christian princes” (Morrill 2000: 30) ended up in failure with the outbreak of the Thirty Years War<sup>17</sup> and the problems in the Low Countries.<sup>18</sup>

As regards religion, although Protestantism had been established as the religion of the state, reformists from all fronts were asking for further changes.

He sought to use his position as head of the ‘Catholic and Reformed’ Church of England, and as the promoter of co-operation between the Presbyterian Scots and episcopal English Churches, to advance the reunion of Christian Churches. His attempts to arrange an ecumenical council and the response of moderates in all churches, Catholic, Orthodox, Lutheran, and Calvinist, to his calls for an end to religious strife were again wrecked by the outbreak of the Thirty Years War. (Morrill 2000: 30)

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<sup>17</sup> The origins of the Thirty-Year War can be traced back a century before when the religious struggle between Catholic and Protestants began and meant a confrontation between different countries with opposed ideologies.

<sup>18</sup> The competition in trade between England and the Low Countries lead to a series of confrontations and wars during the first half of the 17th century.

However, James I also promoted colonial expansion in America and established a “plantation policy in Ulster”<sup>19</sup> (2000: 30) and, despite all those problems, he was able to achieve “political stability in England, a lessening of religious passions, domestic peace, and the continuing respect of the international community” (Morrill 2000: 30).

From the very beginning of his reign, James I used the power of words, the power of discourse to reinforce his position as a ruler and proclaim “his theory of kingship” (Goldberg 1989: 56).

James VI & I took literally whatever metaphors theorists had constructed about the renaissance ruler. He was the head of the body politics; the husband in a loving marriage; the father of a well-ordered family. Now he had become the monarch of one Great Britain, united in his person and in his heirs perpetual. ‘What God hath conjoined, then let no man separate. I am the husband, and the whole isle is my lawful wife; I am the head and it is my body,’ the King told the English parliament. (Kishlansky 1997: 77)

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<sup>19</sup> As his predecessor, Elizabeth I had done before, James I continued with the policy of settlement in Ireland, particularly in Ulster, in the northern part of the island, which meant expelling the original Catholic owners from their lands and establishing a Protestant rule in the area. Eventually, this policy would lead to a major rebellion in 1641 against the English and Scottish settlers, which seriously threatened their hegemony.

One of his first public appearances was in a conference at Hampton Court attending the petitions of some ministers who had asked “for reforms of the clergy, ceremony and doctrine of the Elizabethan church”<sup>20</sup> (Kishlansky 1997: 72). However, James used it to “establish royal control over the church” (1997: 72) and “exercise his wits, display his learning and demonstrate his rhetorical skills” (1997: 72). This anecdote illustrates the way he perceived himself and the importance he placed on words.

He believed that kings derived their authority directly from God and were answerable to God alone for the discharge of that trust. But James also believed that he was in practice constrained by solemn oaths made at his coronation to rule according to the ‘laws and customs of the realm.’ (Morrill 200: 28)

Only one year after he became king of England, he passed the 1604 *Act against conjuration, witchcraft and dealing with evil and wicked spirits*. This new legislation meant a turn to the European ideas on witchcraft he had presented in his *Daemonologie* and which were now available to the British audience. It not only focused on the mefificium and the “materials of the supposed trade of the witch” (Gibson 2003: 5) but it also made the keeping of familiars an offense.

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<sup>20</sup> As Kishlansky explains “this Millenary Petition was a moderate appeal to a King who had promised to act ‘as good physician’ to the soul of the body politic.” (1997: 72)

If any person or persons [...] shall use practise or exercise any invocation or conjuration of any evil and wicked spirit, or shall consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any intent or purpose; or take up any dead man, woman, or child out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone, or any other part of any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, sorcery, charm, or enchantment; or shall use, practise, or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm, or sorcery, whereby any person shall be killed [...] then every such offender or offenders, their aiders abettors and counsellors, being of any of the said offences duly and lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer pains of death as felon or felons. (Rosen 1991: 57- 58)

More emphasis was put on the idea of the pact with the Devil and “greater stress was laid on the punishment of intention to use witchcraft as well as its actual use” (Macfarlane 1999: 15). The previous legislation only sentenced to execution those who had caused the death of a person but in the rest of the cases, they only had to serve a one-or-two year sentence. However, in the 1604 Act the first offence was punished by death by hanging –not burning– as it was the English custom and the properties and goods of those convicted of witchcraft were automatically confiscated.

Many of the accusations made against the witches in North Berwick, such as the use of corpse parts to make powders and ointments, were included in this new legislation, which can be regarded as an “English effort to please their rather puzzling new monarch” (Burns 2003: 151). However, although some new elements were added to the Elizabethan legislation, James’ laws regarding the crime of witchcraft were not as harsh as the ones passed almost a century before under Henry VIII. And, in fact, figures show that the number of executions did not drastically increased during his reign.

During the Jacobean period, there were many demonological tracts published in England, from William Perkin’s *Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (1608) to John Cotta’s *Tryall of Witch-Craft* (1616). As James Sharpe explains, all those writings shared similar ideas with their continental counterparts although on some occasions they might emphasise different aspects. However, they all describe three basic elements for witchcraft to operate: “divine permission, satanic power and malevolence, and human agency in the shape of the witch” (2001: 17).

It is difficult to know if the mentality of English subjects regarding witchcraft drastically changed with the arrival of James I to the English throne, his new legislation and the arrival of continental ideas through numerous writings on the subject. However, it is clear from the very beginning that the discourse of witchcraft would be one of the many tactics of government used by the king to

establish a fierce control over his subjects. The representation of witches was not simply a way of presenting the English audience with continental ideas on witchcraft. As Diane Purkiss explains, by turning the witch into a figure of disorder, it “allows the king to become the site of interpretative truth set over against a disorder which is not mysterious, but completely comprehensible in the authoritative discourses of science and medicine” (Purkiss 1996: 201-202).

By the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the English stereotype of the witch was similar to that of the rest of the continent although there were, as in other parts of the continent, some variations. The description of the witch followed similar patterns but as well as the basic elements there were also some characteristic features of the English discourse of witchcraft. I shall now focus on those similarities and differences while also discussing on the particular circumstances of English society under Jacobean rule.

From the remaining court records but also from other types of writings, it can be gathered that witches in England were not generally held responsible for such a wide variety of disasters as their continental counterparts but they rather caused minor misfortunes such as the killing of animals or damaging property.

Witchcraft seemed to act in some measure as an explanation for misfortune: when animals died or a child fell ill inexplicably, the problems might be attributed to the malevolence of a witch. English witches, it seemed, were

commonly thought to be responsible for these essentially personal troubles, rather than raising storms, blasting the crops, sinking ships at sea or causing plagues. (Macfarlane 1999: xiii)

As in the case of continental Europe, witches were mainly women. The numerous writings of the period reinforce that idea of women being more prone to temptation as they were considered inferior, weaker and less intelligent than men. And those ideas were mainly based on the Scriptures, as explained in many writings of the periods, such as this one by William Perkins.

In general terms I comprehend both sexes or kinds of persons, men and women, excluding neither from being witches [but] the woman being the weaker sex, is sooner entangled by the Devil's illusions with this damnable art than the man. And in all ages it is found true by experience that the Devil hath more easily and oftener prevailed with women than with men [...] His first temptation was with Eve, a woman, and since [then] he pursueth his practice accordingly, as making for his advantage. For where he findeth easiest entrance and best entertainment, thither will he oftenest resort. (Perkins 1608: 95)

However, there is also a new shift from early representations of the witch as “the malevolent mother” (1995: 88) to “a heretic, a class upstart, a traitor, and an unruly woman more than a malevolent mother” (1995: 89). Early pamphlets, for example, portray those characteristics of the witch as an evil woman, a dangerous mother.

Featuring quarrels, usually between women, over sources of nourishment, milk, feeding, and child care, in which the witch is typically portrayed as the caretaker and nurse of demonic imps who bring death and disease to the community’s children.

(Willis 1995: 89)

However, in Jacobean times, both the ideas on witchcraft from the elites and populace in general seem to merge and they gave rise to a new discourse. The witch is not only part of Satan’s army, the enemy of God, but she also stands for “a rebel against the state” (Willis 1995: 88).

Elite texts appropriate some aspects of village-level representations of the witch but also significantly rewrite them, in ways that carry different implications for gender as well as for the political and theological controversies in which they were usually embedded. (Willis 1995: 89)

Witches were linked to the idea of the deviant with even more strength than before and exemplified the opposite of the good Christian. Traditionally, most of the people accused of witchcraft, not only in England but also in the rest of the continent, were poor old women, frequently widow, and associated with negative characteristics such as swearing and cursing. They were described in negative terms not only physically but also within the community framework and generally portrayed as “motivated by ill-will” (Briggs 1998: 25), despised by their neighbours and lacking “the proper sense of neighbourhood and community” (1998: 25).

Supposed-to-be witches were generally marginalised figures and it is frequent to understand them as the scapegoat for the problems of the community, someone to blame for all the miseries. However, James Sharpe offers a rather different perspective from that traditional interpretation of witchcraft prosecutions. Challenging common interpretations, he argues that “in a surprising number of instances, indeed, it seems that people accused of witchcraft were able to mobilise considerable support within their communities” (2001: 47), obtaining a verdict of not guilty or even often avoiding trial.

One is left wondering how many other, undocumented, cases there were in which alleged witches were either acquitted, or saved from trial entirely, by the intercession of local notables who were convinced of their innocence. What such examples

demonstrate, it must be emphasised, is the inaccuracy of the view which would argue that a person suspected of being a witch would be destined automatically for trial and execution [...] Indeed, the coming of a witchcraft case to trial and the subsequent conviction or acquittal of the witch were frequently affected by existing splits and factions within the local community. (Sharpe 2001: 47)

Accusing someone of being a witch was a way of seeking revenge among neighbours since there could “hardly have been a more effective way of damaging communal or personal relationships than calling a neighbour a witch” (Briggs 1998: 23). However, as it has been explained, there are many other aspects which should also be taken into account so it is important to study the causes for the prosecutions locally and understand they might vary from case to case.

Although the main concern for the vast majority of the population in England was the effects of the maleficium, by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of the pact in which witches sold their souls to the devil was established not only among learned men but also among lower classes. Although Protestant theologians could not find any reference to the pact in the Scriptures, they generally understood it as “the inversion of the covenant between the Almighty and the Christian believer” (Sharpe 2001: 18). In fact, it was believed to be signed by all practitioners of magic, either magicians or witches, male or female.

Once the prospective recruit agreed to renounce God and take the Devil for master, the latter gave symbolic force to the change of allegiance. This normally meant touching the new witch to impose the mark, leaving either a visible blemish on the skin or an invisible place. (Briggs 1995: 25)

In the European descriptions of the pact, there frequently appeared two elements: the witch's mark and the sexual intercourse with the Devil or some other demons, either incubi or succubi. In Early Modern England, those ideas did not frequently appear but, as we have already pointed out, with the arrival of James I to the English throne those differences started to blur. The king himself had described this mark in his *Daemonologie*.

He makes them to renounce their God and *Baptisme* directlie, and giues them his marke vpon some secreit place of theirs bodie, which remains soare unhealed, while his next meeting with them, and thereafter euer insensible. (James VI 2002 [1597]: 33)

As it can be seen in James VI's account, the emphasis on the pact, which frequently included accounts of a mark left by the Devil, was clear. In fact, in the 1604 Act, it was made a capital offence. However, most of the descriptions of the pact in England lacked one of the most frequent elements, that of the sexual

intercourse with demons. Also, although the insensibility of the mark was frequent in accusations in the continent, and James I himself had mentioned it in his *Daemonologie*, there were few witchcraft processes in which that supposed insensibility appeared and, in fact, this idea was never fully established in England.

However, that place on the witch's body was frequently perceived in relation to their familiars, which were characteristic of the discourse of witchcraft in England. Although it "may never have been a necessary element in an English witchcraft trial, the idea that a witch was usually assisted by a familiar in the shape of an animal constantly recurred in pamphlet accounts" (Sharpe 1997: 71) and different types of writings. In general, the keeping of familiars which was originally included in more popular beliefs was already perceived in the Elizabethan period as a typical characteristic of the discourse of witchcraft and, by the 17<sup>th</sup> century, it would be included in most writings dealing with witches. Later, in 1604, the Jacobean legislation would make the keeping of those familiars an offence.

As James Sharpe (2001) explains, the origins of these familiar spirits are uncertain. They could have been part of the traditional folklore and, with the arrival of Christianity, they could have been transformed into evil creatures and associated to negative ideas such as spreading illnesses, bringing death or sexual perversions. They might also come from the fairy lore or animal demons in several classical literary traditions or from the demonic spirits which allegedly helped magicians during the Middle Ages.

Nevertheless, familiars in Early Modern England were understood as demons in the shape of an animal. In fact, by the end of the Elizabethan period, familiars were already identified as the Devil himself or, at least, as one of his subordinates. They could be any type of animal from toads to rats but they were usually described as dogs or cats, and they received a wide variety of strange names such as Vinegar Tom, Tibb, Sack, Sathan, etc.

Although familiars were not a common element to all European countries it is not unique to England. There appeared references in other parts of Western Europe, including Germany or the Basque country. One of the first mentions of a familiar related to witchcraft accusations is that of lady Alice Kyteler in Kilkenny, Ireland, who –as it has been explained before– confessed to having a familiar pet named Robert or Robin Artisson, which appeared to her in the shape of a cat, a dog or a black man. In England, there also appear references in the Chelmsford trials and in many different pamphlets and ballads from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century to the end of the Jacobean period.

Beliefs concerning familiars greatly varied but most witches were thought to own one which would not only accompany them but also help them in various misdeeds. There are many accounts where witches explain how their familiar that taught them to perform maleficium or achieve whatever they wanted.

He oblishes himselfe to appeare at their calling vpon him, by  
such a proper name which he shewes vnto them, either in

likenes of a dog, a Catte, an Ape, or such-like other beast; or else to answer by a voyce onlie. The effects are to answer to such demands, as concernes curing of diseases, their own particular menagerie: or such base things as they require of him. (James VI 2002 [1597]: 19)

In continental Europe, the pact with the Devil and the witch's mark was a basic element for witchcraft prosecutions. In England, these ideas frequently appeared related to the familiar, which would suck blood from the witch, hence, sealing the pact. And it would be the identification of that mark which would become "one of the most definite proofs of witchcraft in England" (Sharpe 2001: 64).

The animal familiars or imps which appear in almost every well-documented case quite clearly performed the role of the Devil. The witch [...] usually allowed them to suck her blood and was supposed to have special teats for this purpose. The last took the place of the diabolical mark, becoming the object of regular searches by special juries of local midwives and matrons. (Briggs 1995: 29)

This idea of the witch having a familiar which sucked their blood and had a very intimate relation with them was also related to the European idea of sexual

intercourse with demons. The witch did not have relations with incubi but with their familiar, who sucked their blood through a particular place, usually described as a mole or a teat.

In the early pamphlet accounts the place where the witch was sucked varied: face, nose, chin and forefinger, but also thigh, shoulder or wrist. By the end of James I's reign, however, the mark was most often thought to be located on the genitalia or near the rectum of the witch. (Sharpe 1997: 73)

Other element in the discourse of witchcraft in continental Europe was that of the Sabbat, which included, as it has been explained, a wide variety of activities. However, only from the mid-16<sup>th</sup> century onwards, some English intellectuals began to accept some of the ideas about the Sabbat.

If the Devil made only slow progress from being a peripheral figure in English witchcraft beliefs, it is not surprising that the great occasion when the Devil met witches, the sabbat, was a phenomenon which was only rarely alluded to in sources dealing with witchcraft in England. (Sharpe 2001: 59)

This idea of the Sabbat, which is generally linked to accounts of witches travelling long distances to gather at those secret meetings, was discussed in James'

*Daemonologie*. However, although the king believed in those gatherings he showed some scepticism regarding those supposed journeys.

Bvt by what way say they or think ye it possible that they can com to these vnlawful couentios? [...] There is the thing which I esteeme their senses to be deluded in, and though they lye not in confessing of it, because they thinke it to be true, yet not to be so in substance or effect. (James VI 2002 [1597]: 38)

Nevertheless, the idea of secret meetings of witches and the Devil “crept gradually on to the English scene albeit in a rather tame and homely form” (Briggs 1995: 53). In fact, the sabbat only appeared in few cases, including the Lancashire processes of 1612 and 1634, where there were also accusations of supernatural practices and exorcism.

In common with Protestant writers abroad, English demonologists placed little emphasis on the witches’ sabbat, where witches supposedly met for cannibalistic feast and orgiastic group sex, or about the related issue of night-flying, or about sexual intercourse between human beings and demons. (Sharpe 2001: 18)

While the idea of the sabbat was not fully developed in England, demonic possession was generally accepted by most of the population. That belief was, however, harshly attacked by Protestant reformers in Elizabethan and later in Jacobean times. As Stephen Greenblatt explains in “Shakespeare and the Exorcists” (1988b), it is linked to the “bitter struggles over religious doctrine and practice” (2001: 96). Authorities tried to demystify exorcism and expose the fraudulence of Catholic practices. In fact, the Anglican Church adopted “a highly sceptical position that was then reinforced by the new king, James I, with his enthusiasm to search out fraud” (Briggs 1998: 264). Several writings, including many pamphlets, supporting this idea were published, including Samuel Harsnett’s *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* (1603), where he “specifically attacks exorcism as practiced by Jesuits” (2001: 97). However, “he does so not, as we might expect, to claim a monopoly on the practice for the Anglican church but to expose exorcism itself as a fraud” (2001: 97).

All those elements which conformed the discourse of witchcraft had been forming throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> century and, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the arrival of James I, new elements were also added to the official discourse. European witchcraft literature was then published in England and it became a greater concern for the ruling classes. Both educated and popular views on witchcraft “interacted, the one constantly informing and modifying the other” (Sharpe 2001: 52)

It is therefore sometimes possible to see how what we might describe as popular ideas about witchcraft connected not just with the more general popular belief system, but also with the elite mentalities and, in particular, with the official religious beliefs of the period. (Sharpe 2001: 52)

Jacobean authorities would use that new discourse of witchcraft to enforce certain values. The witch, together with Satan, stood for the enemies of God, the adversaries of order, who defied the establishment. Therefore, a new period of persecutions started and many methods of detecting and trying witches were introduced.

In Jacobean times, the discourse of witchcraft was used as a vehicle of power to impose a new order and authorities took a leading role in policing all forms of deviance. Witches, as part of those elements of disorder which should be purged from society, were systematically persecuted. New laws were introduced and the authorities contributed to its enforcement.

The justice of peace offered villagers a new, more effective means of protection, an orderly method to assuage local fears. Though witchcraft trials could not have proceeded without active support “from below,” the justice of the peace may have performed a key

role in transforming informal village-level witch-hunting into formal prosecution by the state. (Willis 1995: 85)

In the rest of the continent, the commonest way of getting confessions was torture. However, “there is no evidence that physical torture was officially allowed in England, except where treason was involved” (Macfarlane 1999: 20). Nevertheless, James I was aware of the different methods to obtain confessions. In fact, in his *Daemonologie* he had explained some of the ways of discovering witches, which had been used in different processes in Scotland.

The seriousness of the crime leads him to permit the testimony of children, wives, and confessing witches. He also allows the use of spectral evidence (the visions afflicted persons saw of the witches as they were allegedly causing them harm), the pricking of witches to detect the Devil’s mark, and the swimming of witches (the old water ordeal). (Levack 2008: 140)

As Ramos Bossini (1976) points out ordeals were included in the Hammurabi Code and were later adopted by the Church: “el principio de la ordalía es que Dios intervendrá para distinguir entre culpable e inocente” (Russell 1984: 96). Although these practices had been banned by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 and almost completely disappeared by the end of the Middle

Ages, they began to be used again in some European countries for discovering witches and their accomplices.

Las inculpadas eran arrojadas al río o lago, atadas a una fuerte cuerda que impedía se ahogaran, una vez hundidas, o que fueran arrastradas por la corriente. Esta cuerda las ceñía como un cíngulo por la cintura, llevando sólo un camisón, generalmente de color amarillo [...] Al ser arrojadas llevaba, además, sus manos y pies atados; se les solía atar la mano derecha con el pie izquierdo y la izquierda con el pie derecho.

(Ramos Bossini 1976: 104)

Ordeals were based on the idea of divine intervention. It was said that if the witch floated they were guilty since God had rejected them. Although the validity of this test was questioned by many demonologists, James “accepted it as a proof of witchcraft” (Levack 2004: 144) and it was “often employed by local communities during the period of witch-hunting” (2004: 144).

However, English legislation and procedures were quite different from those of Scotland and, in fact, ordeals were never used in official judicial processes. The mark of the witch became the best evidence when witches did not confess to the crime as well as testimonies of neighbours. Nonetheless, James introduced in England some of the methods that were already been used in witchcraft processes in Scotland and which were quite close to torture.

They included keeping the suspect awake for several nights, immersing them in water, and continuous questioning. Probably of much more general importance were indirect pressures: the mounting suspicions of neighbours, the persuasive advice, threats, and promises of clergy and justices. (Macfarlane 1999: 20)

Apart from official procedures, there were also a series of remedies used by common people to counteract witchcraft including ordeals, the burning of the thatch of the witch's roof or scratching her face or other part of their body to draw their blood, making a witch cake<sup>21</sup> or forcing them say the Lord's Prayer, since they were thought to be unable to say it correctly. However, in most of the cases, people looked for the help of cunning folk, who were believed to perform good magic through different means, including "verbal spells and charms" (Sharpe 2001: 56).

Cunning folk carried out a number of useful services. They helped find stolen goods, gave servant girls in particular advice about future husbands, provided folk medicine for the sick, and helped people identify those who were bewitching

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<sup>21</sup> The witch cake was made using "urine from the bewitched person mixed with grain of some kind to make a cake, and then burnt on the fire, thus, by sympathetic magic, afflicting the urinary-genital system of the supposed witch, and forcing her to reveal herself when she came to find the source of her affliction." (Sharpe 2001: 53-54)

them and gave the supposedly bewitched advice about how to deal with their tormentors. (Sharpe 2001: 56)

Cunning folk were extremely popular in England and “inhabited an intellectual frontier zone between popular and elite magical beliefs” (Sharpe 1997: 68). That is why they represented a threat. English authorities wanted “to eradicate beliefs and practices which the English Protestant mind defined as superstitious” (Sharpe 2001: 19). Those practices included, as it has been mentioned before, “rituals of the Roman Catholic Church” (2001: 19), such as exorcism, but also the activities of cunning folk, who were considered as dangerous as witches.

Like the malefic witches, the ‘good’ witches surely derived their powers from the devil, but were even more harmful than malefic witches in that they drew the populace away from right religion, and pretended to do good when they in fact did evil. English Protestant demonological writers seem to have devoted as much space in their tracts to excoriating the ‘good’ witch as they did to expressing their horror of the activities of the bad ones. (Sharpe 2001: 19)

Although authorities regarded them with contempt and made serious efforts to put an end to their practices, common people continued to see them as positive figures that provided useful services. And, in most witchcraft cases, they

were not usually the accused ones but those who provided evidences and helped discover the real witch.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, despite the increasingly wider appeal of the discourse of witchcraft in England and the general view on magic and the Devil, James I's reign was marked by what might have seemed an ambivalent position regarding witchcraft. Cases such as that of the schoolmaster Peacock, arrested "for plotting to influence James by witchcraft" (Sharpe 1997: 49) and sent to the Tower of London contrast with his sceptical attitude towards some other witchcraft accusations.

Whatever the English expected, James's most heavily publicized actions in England in regard to witchcraft were not those of a persecutor or promoter of persecution (in fact, prosecutions declined in his reign from their Elizabethan peak) but of a skeptically minded investigator of alleged crimes by alleged witches. (Burns 2003: 151)

The king investigated several cases of supposed bewitchment between 1605 and 1611 and, in all of them, he seemed "interested in fair and careful investigation rather than in avid persecution" (Sharpe 1997: 49). One of the most famous witchcraft trials was that of Leicester in 1616, where the king himself "established through his own questioning that nine women had been hung because

of accusations by a boy of thirteen, whose simulated fits in the courtroom impressed the judges and onlookers” (Briggs 1998: 132).

In most of the cases, James I seemed to “have been more likely to intervene to save witches than to secure their convictions” (Sharpe 1997: 49). However, this did not mean that he was growing sceptical on the reality of witchcraft or the threat it meant. It was simply a reflection of his own time, which was rapidly growing sceptical regarding the reality of witches. His ambivalent position should rather be regarded “as part of his wider views on kingship” (1997: 50), as his way of understanding his position as a ruler imbued by Divine Right.

In Early Modern times, the “political thought was dominated by theories of natural order, posited on the basic assumption that stability and hierarchy were the normal, God-given state of affairs” (Briggs 1998: 323). James I strongly believed in Divine Right and was determined to impose his idea on kingship on his subjects, using the different institutions but also other vehicles of power, such as writing, to achieve his goal.

When church and state were united in reinforcing hierarchical values, promoting the authority of natural rulers through society, down to the basic level of the father within the family, this group of largely female outsiders made an ideal target.  
(Briggs 1998: 324)

Witchcraft was perceived as a threat to both the religious and civil authorities, to this divine order so the state became “the dynamic agency, labelling and punishing deviants as part of a ruthless drive to enhance its power” (Briggs 1998: 324).

Whatever else state formation in early modern Europe involved, the arrival of divine right monarchy and confessional absolutism meant that rulers began to take a heightened interest in matters religious, and that the good citizen became more closely identified with the good Christian (the type of Christianity in question was, of course, usually that prescribed by the relevant secular ruler). (Sharpe 2001: 7)

James I understood he had been chosen by God to watch over his subjects and protect them against all evil. And that included witchcraft. He was “occupying God’s place as his lieutenant” (Goldberg 1989: 118) and that divine right gave him the ability to discern between good and evil, between real and fake cases of witchcraft. According to him, it was his duty to guide his subjects, to be “a teacher of his people” (Burns 2003: 151) and identified himself “with the biblical King Solomon” (2003: 151).

Like his predecessor Elizabeth I, James I was completely aware of the power of words, the influence they had so he would use them as “an instrument of royal power” (Goldberg 1989: 55). He was a sovereign imbued by Divine Power so he

fashioned himself as a “fatherly authority” (1989: 117) who would act as judge and punisher. He also understood the organization of the state as a family. In that sense, “the subordination of the family to its head is analogous to, and also a direct contributory cause of, subordination of subjects to the sovereign” (1989: 86). He not only introduced new legislation and enforced the punishments of those who defied his power but he also made use of different institutions to spread his ideas and reinforce his position as head of the state.

Texts produce power but they also reproduce it. Each period has its particular mode of power and in Jacobean England, as Goldberg explains, theatre, the literary text is clearly related to royal power, to modes of power: “the shared language of literature and royal power” (Brannigan 1998: 70). In that sense, playwrights, authors of pamphlets and any type of writing were intermediaries in the transmission of his discourse. Playwrights would include topics that appealed the king and add elements of that official discourse, which would be, then, taken to the general public.

In fact, from the beginning of his reign, witchcraft would be a recurrent theme in many different types of writing, from theatre plays to pamphlets and ballads. Many plays had characters of witches, including Ben Johnson’s *The Masque of Queens* (1609), Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1603) or Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1615-1616). All those different works increasingly began to include continental ideas about witchcraft, which soon started to enter the official

discourse of witchcraft and mixed with both popular beliefs and learned ideas already present in England. But there were also later writings, including theatre plays such as *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) or pamphlets, which reflected new, more sceptical attitudes in Jacobean society.

James I used not only the theatre but also writing in general to introduce his new discourse of witchcraft in an effective way to the general public. He understood the power of performances and used the theatre as a useful tool to instruct the masses. Representation was used as a means of teaching but also of controlling his subjects. Therefore, again in Foucauldian terms, we can assert that the discourse of theatre, the same as the discourse of the printed word was a way of exerting power and influence over audiences and readers respectively.



# CHAPTER 4

## THE DYNAMICS OF POWER IN WITCHCRAFT PAMPHLETS

Henry Goodcole's

*The Wonderful Discovery of*

*Elizabeth Sawyer*



#### 4. THE DYNAMICS OF POWER IN WITCHCRAFT PAMPHLETS

##### Henry Goodcole's *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer*

In the previous chapters I have explained the main characteristics of witchcraft both in Europe and, specifically in England. The arrival at the English throne of the Scottish king James VI meant a change in the official position and also a higher level of integration of European ideas into the country. The discourse of witchcraft, as we have seen, was marked by the particular magical mentality of the Europeans in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period and included elements from both elite and popular culture.

In the final chapters of my PhD thesis I shall focus on the case of Elizabeth Sawyer, a woman accused of witchcraft in Edmonton, Middlesex, in 1621. I shall use her particular case to analyse the dynamics of power and how texts were a useful way of transmitting the official ideas through the study of the only two remaining accounts of her story in two popular types of writing of the period: a pamphlet written by Henry Goodcole, *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth*

*Sawyer*, and a theatre play, *The Witch of Edmonton* written by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford in 1621. And for that, I will be using the 1999 edition by Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge.



When using any type of text, we must bear in mind that it is impossible “to find a single unitary meaning or point of view in a text” (Purkiss 1997: 75). In an attempt to reconstruct real events, it has been a common practice to use written records, as if they could offer direct access to actual facts:

[Some] have synthesised the stories, looked for patterns in them that would allow coherent interpretation of supposedly ‘real’ events, and treated the stories about witchcraft as if they were almost transparent, a window through which we can view early modern life and see, vividly, witches and their victims interacting. (Gibson 1999: 4)

However, as Louis Montrose points out, “a historical criticism that seeks to recover meanings that are in any final or absolute sense authentic, correct, and complete is pursuing an illusion” (1981: 415). In that sense, Stephen Greenblatt

stressed the “impossibility of fully reconstructing and reentering the culture of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century, of leaving behind one’s own situation” (Greenblatt 1984: 2). Nevertheless, it is possible to “examine the existence of an ideological system by reading its material practices, customs and rituals” (Brannigan 1998: 28).

The historical period in question is seen as a remote culture whose various discursive manifestations –the texts of all kinds that have come down to us and which constitute all that we have to work with- need detailed attention and need to be brought into contact with each other so that the power relations and the forces operating in that culture may be brought to light. (Bertens 2007: 180)

One of the most frequent sources of information from witchcraft cases in the Early Modern period was that of court records and intellectual writings of all types but there were also more popular forms, such as pamphlets or theatre plays. However, it is also important to bear in mind that there were also other forms of oral texts which helped promoting those ideas among the lower classes – particularly to those unable to read– and which might include sermons, ballads and even the illustrations which appeared in various types of documents.

In the case of England, court records are scarce. Most witchcraft prosecutions were held in the Assize courts and, as Brian Levack points out, many of the records are “limited to the indictment and the indication of the outcome of

the trial” (2008: 190). Another source of rich information would have been “the written depositions of witnesses” (2008: 190) but again, in most of the cases, they have been lost or destroyed.

In the case of Elizabeth Sawyer, none of these legal documents has survived until our days. Therefore, we must rely on the few sources still available to try to understand the forces at work in her conviction. One of the most important documents would be Henry Goodcole’s pamphlet, which provides “a narrative of the trial and summarizes the evidence presented against the witch” (Levack 2008: 190). However, it should not be forgotten that not only Goodcole’s account but also pamphlets in general “should be treated more like oral history than proven fact” (Gibson 1999: 10). It is then important to highlight the “sources, authorship, ideologies, styles and genres to come to a better understanding of the construction of witchcraft and our interpretation of them” (1999: 6).

The method of representation of witchcraft, and the aims and conventions of the method, clearly determine what is included or omitted, how the stories are told and what effect they had on contemporaries, and have now on the modern reader. Pamphlets, manuscripts and legal records need to be recognised *as* texts representing, and not merely transmitting, information about witchcraft. (Gibson 1999: 7)

Therefore, I shall explore the story of Elizabeth Sawyer, who was tried and later convicted of witchcraft in 1621, through Henry Goodcole's pamphlet and study the role of that type of writings in Jacobean times as a powerful tool to transmit the official discourse of witchcraft.

Since 1566 and for almost two centuries, until 1763, there appear "references to witchcraft in the courts records of the period, while it is also mentioned in contemporary theological works of a more general nature, and in diaries and letters" (Sharpe 2001: 13). Traditionally, pamphlets were regarded as valuable sources of information when legal records were not available and, in other occasions, as a complement to the official accounts of particular cases. In the late 1960s, Alan Macfarlane studied pamphlets in some of the cases of witchcraft Essex between 1579 and 1645.

The pamphlets themselves provide three principal kinds of information of value for this study; they give added information about those involved in prosecutions, their age, wealth, personality, and relationships; they indicate how witchcraft was believed to work, the power of cursing, the use of spells and familiar; they reveal the motives ascribed to witches and the actual incident which was believed to have prompted the bewitching. (Macfarlane 1999: 81)

Alan Macfarlane studied the case of four different pamphlets and compared them with the indictments, finding some differences. He argues that they are a “reliable source, providing otherwise inaccessible material and correcting the somewhat narrow impression of witchcraft prosecutions given by indictments” (1999: 86). However, Macfarlane’s claim of reliability must be questioned. Although, in cases such as this of Elizabeth Sawyer, the pamphlet can offer us information about the actual charges and the context of the witchcraft case itself, the very nature of the pamphlets make them an unreliable source.

As Macfarlane himself acknowledges, most pamphlets were “written for the sensation-loving London literary market” (1999: 81), so it is natural to believe that they also tried to fit the taste of those who read them. In fact, in the case of Elizabeth Sawyer’s account, it will be analysed how the narrative of events was adapted to fit the particular circumstances of Goodcole as a pamphleteer in the London market and also the official discourse of the Jacobean authorities.

Again, it cannot be assumed that pamphlets, like any other type of text, are factual accounts providing reliable information. They should rather be studied as representations of events which “need to be studied structurally, with traditional literary enquiries into their construction, as well as considered in a more historical way as a database of ‘facts’” (Gibson 1999: 7). Pamphlets, as well as other writings of the period, are “only representations of events” (Gibson 1999: 7) and, therefore, it is important to study them within their own context, within their literary

tradition. They should be understood as a literary form and “appreciated with reference not only to immediate social and political context, but to the traditions and conventions of pamphleteering” (Raymond 2004: 25).

After the invention of the printing press, the word pamphlet started to be used to describe a set of booklets which were usually unbound and short. In England, this form of writing acquired great popularity during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as a kind of modern account of recent news and that included different types of crime such as witchcraft accusations.

In fact, as Barbara Rosen explains the most important source of “public information” (1991: 20) about witchcraft came from those “crude blackletter pamphlets, accounts of trials put forth by enterprising printers” (1991: 20), which by the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century were widely distributed in Elizabethan England. They were cheap to produce and an easy way to make money. By the 1580s, the word pamphlet came to refer to “a short, vernacular work, generally printed in quarto format, costing no more than a few pennies, of topical interest or engaged with social, political or ecclesiastical issues” (Raymond 2004: 8).

However, pamphlets were far from a stable genre in the Early Modern literary production. As Barbara Rosen explains, there was a “change in the prose literature of English witchcraft” (1991: 213) around the 1590s. The first witchcraft pamphlets used to rely almost completely on legal documentation and usually included “extremely detailed and careful accounts, where the writer has obviously

had access to court records and examinations and, on occasion, the judge, or some party to the case” (1991: 20). This does not mean that they should be considered as reliable sources of truthful information –on many occasions “fabrication can be seriously suspected” (1991:20)– but rather, that their authors worked “with a documentary approach to truth and proof” (Gibson 1999: 114).

From the 1590s well into the 17<sup>th</sup> century, pamphlets would undertake several changes. Probably, the most obvious one is that they shifted “from reproduction of documents produced by the participants in witchcraft prosecutions, to narrative recreation of events” (Gibson 1999: 114). But what changed was not only the type of sources they relied on for telling their accounts, but also the profile of the authors who wrote them, as well as their “authorial intentions” (1999: 114).

Due to the diversity of pamphlets, it is impossible to offer a type description of the pamphleteer, since they could range from professional writers and gentlemen to “amateurs rather than publishers’ hack writers” (Gibson 1999: 115). And the same happens with their intentions.

Witchcraft reporting fell into the hands of amateurs, or professionals writing reports on commission. Ministers justify their beliefs; rich families protect their local reputations by ‘authentic versions’ of events; doctors defend their professional

competency; judges display their own models of procedure.

(Rosen 1991: 213)

Understanding these changes is crucial for analysing the way pamphlets were generated and reading them in an adequate way. Pamphlets, in general, do not contain “a coherent view of witchcraft but several aspects of a developing consensual view, produced over several years” (Gibson 1999: 125). And, as it has been explained, the arrival of James I at the English throne meant that new ideas regarding witchcraft were introduced in the country and added to the official discourse.

James I's ideas of divine-right monarchy and his way of understanding his role in society led him to use writing as an effective means of royal power and the role of pamphlets became apparent due to its appeal as a cheap, easy-to-read type of writing which reached a vast majority of the population. In fact, from the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, pamphlets began to be “part of the everyday practice of politics, the primary means of creating and influencing public opinion” (Raymond 2004: 26) and, by the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, they would eventually become “a foundation of the influential moral and political communities that constitute a ‘public sphere’ of popular political opinion” (2004: 26).

Henry Goodcole's pamphlet stands for the official discourse of the period in his emphasis on the moral of the story and also his praise of the legal proceedings. The case of Elizabeth Sawyer is used as yet another example of how

dissidence is punished and how the authorities alone can restore order. However, it also highlights the ambivalence of the official discourse and allows us to understand the particular characteristics of pamphleteering in Jacobean England which had become a popular and profitable activity at the time.



Henry Goodcole was born in Clerkenwell in 1586. There are no evidences that he attended university and “his status as a minister of God’s word is rather unclear” (Gibson 2000: 299). However, he became a chaplain at Ludgate and Newgate prisons in London where his main tasks were “to preach and lead services in these two prisons and attend to the prisoner’s spiritual welfare” (Robson 2001: 1). It was then when he began his writing career, which included “seven pamphlets recounting stories of crime and conversion” (2001: 1). *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer, a Witch, late of Edmonton, her conviction and condemnation and death* was his third publication and like his first pamphlet, *A True Declaration of the Happy Conversion, Contrition and Christian Preparation of Francis Robinson* (1618), Goodcole also highlights “his privileged access to prisoners as the gift-horse of his accounts” (Gibson 2000: 300) and explains how the materials presented had been “gathered in the course of his job” (Robson 2001: 1).

Unable to attend university or to gain preferment in the church until late in life, Goodcole eked out a living as a chaplain attending condemned prisoners in Newgate, publishing their confessions to augment his income. (Goodcole 1621: 136)

*The Wonderful Discovery* offers an insight into Jacobean ideas on witchcraft but also into the social and political concerns of the period. In general, it “connects witchcraft pamphlets firmly with the general literature of sin, crime and punishment” (Gibson 2000: 301).

Goodcole’s pamphlet is divided into four separated sections which are used for different purposes. In the first part we can read “The Author’s Apology to the Christian readers, who wisheth to them all health and happiness” (1621: 136). Here, Goodcole talks about the current state of affairs regarding witchcraft. In the Jacobean period, witches were a concern for all different strata of society, not only “among the ignorant, but among some of the learned” (1621: 136). The new legislation promoted by James I had brought harsher penalties and several processes had taken place in the first two decades of his reign. Both higher and lower classes had reinforced their belief in the reality of witchcraft and the threat it meant. However, the emphasis for both had been different. While the educated classes, both clergy and laymen, had focused on the idea of the pact and the

struggle between the forces of good and evil, the lower classes were more concerned about the influence of magic in their daily life.

However, as it has also been explained, even from the beginning of James I's reign attitudes towards witchcraft had been ambivalent. The king had sporadically intervened in some of the processes but his aim was not to look for conviction but rather to expose fraud. As a consequence of that, there started to appear some who challenged the reality of those accusations. Goodcole's introduction also suggests that "he feels witchcraft to be a dangerous subject to discuss publicly" (Gibson 2000: 300). Curiously enough, after the publication of *The Wonderful Discovery*, and for unknown reasons, his "promising career as a pamphleteer was interrupted" (Gibson 2000: 300) for several years.

Witchcraft had become a controversial issue due to the "diversity of opinions" (Goodcole 1621: 136). He, then, makes it clear that "it is none of my intent here to discuss or dispute of witches or witchcraft" (1621: 136). However, simply the fact that he is writing about witchcraft turns it into a relevant topic for Jacobean society; at least, something which is worth writing about.

This introduction to the reader also helps us place Goodcole within that tradition of pamphleteering. As it has been explained, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, most pamphlets had "drifted away from the early Elizabethan use of documents with minimal intervention" (Gibson 2000: 301) to a striking "concern for recording question and answer and printing them as a recreation of events" (2000: 301).

However, as Marion Gibson suggests, it seems that writing about witchcraft demanded “higher levels of proof than writing about other crimes” (2000: 301). Hence, that “anxiety to recreate the moment in more detail than is usual in the reporting of other crimes –an anxiety presumably stemming from the debate about the evidence needed to prove that this exceptional crime had taken place” (2000: 301). Before starting with his description of the process and his conversation to the convicted witch, Henry Goodcole makes an interesting statement.

Another reason was to defend the truth of the cause which, in some measure, hath received a wound already by most base and false ballads which were sung at the time of our returning from the witch’s execution. (Goodcole 1621: 136)

At the time, it was common that famous cases were not only recorded in pamphlets but there also appeared in some other popular forms such as ballads. Goodcole’s intention here is to make clear the seriousness of his account opposing the “ridiculous fictions” (1621: 136) only “fitter for an ale-bench” (1621: 136) to his story, which he makes look like a court record, emphasising in that way its reliability and seriousness.

He is extremely worried about proving to his audience that his account is true and shows resentment towards those less serious pamphlets which

nonetheless become published: “I wonder that such lewd ballad-mongers should be suffered to creep into the printers’ presses and people’s ears” (1621: 136). Goodcole criticises the attitude of those publishers who take to print anything that can be sold. At the time, pamphlets were extremely popular and he could have made a good living out of his writing. But as it has been mentioned, pamphlets were now generally written by amateurs and Goodcole seems to resent the fact that their writing, where invented material is frequently included, receives more attention than serious accounts like his.

Pamphlets of the period were generally regarded either as serious or trivial. Those last ones seem to have “attracted exhibitionism and outrageous falsehood” (Gibson 1999: 118). They privileged “genre or style above factual reporting and produce a version of witchcraft which may be heavily influenced by the form of its narration” (1999: 119). However, this does not mean that more serious pamphlets could be regarded as sources of truthful information, since they can be as unreliable.

What Goodcole is doing when emphasising the truthfulness of his account is trying to categorise himself in that first type of serious pamphleteer, claiming “complete transparency” (Gibson 1999: 120) and offering an “apparently coherent eyewitness account” (1999: 120). He not only tries to separate himself from the other pamphleteers and writers who adapt their stories to the general taste but he also attempts to give his account an air of seriousness and reliability.

However, as Diane Purkiss points out, his complaints about less serious works and ballads which included invented material should be read “as a denunciation of his more lurid competition rather than a sincere distinction between himself and the vulgar” (1997: 237).

His claim of truthfulness is also a fallacy. We must not forget that he is “creating his own textual evidence of the truth of the crime and the confession” (Gibson 2000: 301). Thanks to the supposed conversation he had with Elizabeth Sawyer he was able to obtain a confession. He fears that even though he emphasises on many occasions that his writing is a “true declaration” (Goodcole 1621: 137) that “will not protect him from censure and doubt” (Gibson 2000: 301).

Henry Goodcole is here presenting himself to his audience in a particular way, representing himself as a serious pamphleteer within the Jacobean literary market. As Stephen Greenblatt explains, self-fashioning was a common process in the Early Modern period since there seemed to be “an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process” (1989: 2).

Self-fashioning is apparent at various levels, from Goodcole’s representation of himself to the way witches are perceived and presented or the portrayal of judicial authorities. As Greenblatt explained “self-fashioning is achieved in relation to something perceived as alien, strange or hostile” (1984: 9). Goodcole fashions himself as a reliable source of information in comparison to the false stories which circulated at the time.

However, self-fashioning also works for Elizabeth Sawyer, for witches in general. His writing is included in the official discourse about witchcraft. His praise of the authorities exemplifies the official views on that fight against “the threatening other” (Greenblatt 1989: 9) and how the discourse of witchcraft circulates through different levels in Jacobean society. “In the Renaissance the self is produced publicly through performance, dress, visual display and public appearance” (Colebrook 1997: 202). Henry Goodcole as an author writing in Jacobean times is part of that dynamics of power which transmits the official discourse through different means, including pamphlets, using the power of words.

Stories of witchcraft are not only narrations which are easily stereotyped but this stereotype feeds back to shape the teller’s and the hearer’s perception of reality. Since it was the representation of events by victim and witch to the justice and then to the judge and jury which mattered in preliminary hearings and in court [...] this circular need for coherence and plausibility is important. (Gibson 1999: 8-9)

The witch is constructed not only through acts but also through words. The theatricality of the executions, the public reading of the charges and the sentence is complemented with the accounts of each particular story. Once again, the power of words becomes apparent through these public performances and contributes to

the discourse of witchcraft. Elizabeth Sawyer is a witch. She opposes the positive characteristics and values of Early Modern societies and defies the authorities as well as the established order. She is portrayed as a subversive element that should be removed from society.

In that sense, not only pamphlets but also other types of writing such as demonological tracts were used to emphasise the particular values of Jacobean society. They do not only reflect the “village-level beliefs about the witch” (Willis 1995: 89) but they also include most of the concerns of the elites, such as “promoting a new religious orthodoxy and maintaining social order” (1995: 89) and this intention is clearly perceived in the description of Elizabeth Sawyer.

Despite Henry Goodcole’s claim of truthfulness, he does not present his audience with a real woman but the stereotype of a witch. He includes the commonest elements which, by the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, were included in the official discourse of witchcraft following a “pattern of self-definition at the expense of ‘the other’” (Briggs 1998: 325) and where negative characteristics are emphasised.

Physically, Elizabeth Sawyer is described as “crooked and deformed, even bending together” (1621: 139) and her face was “pale and ghost-like without any blood at all” (1621: 139). She is said to be “ignorant” (1621: 141) and, like many other women in her position, she could only speak the few Latin words that the Devil had supposedly taught her.

QUESTION. *Were you ever taught these Latin words before by any person else or did you ever hear it before of anybody, or can you say any more of it?*

ANSWER. I was not taught it by anybody else but by the Devil alone, neither do I understand the meaning of these words nor can speak any more Latin words. (Goodcole 1921: 136)

Her “unfeminine behaviour” (Gibson 2000: 300) is also stressed –“she behaved herself most sluttishly” (1621: 140)– as well as her constant “cursing, swearing, blaspheming and imprecating” (1621: 137). And although she is not presented as a lonely figure but as a married woman, there is an emphasis on her isolation from the community: “why did not reveal it to your husband or to some other friend” (1621: 145). It can be seen then, how Elizabeth Sawyer’s description is used to emphasise the values promoted by both civil and ecclesiastical authorities. She is constructed as a witch –in Greenblatt’s words (1980) “self-fashioned”– using the opposite values of the good Christian, the good citizen and the good neighbour.

The first of these values was rooted in the changes the Reformation had brought about in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Since the end of the reign of Mary I and the succession of the Protestant Elizabeth I, both the authorities and the state were concerned about the promulgation of the Reformation doctrine and its emphasis

on the correct reading of the Bible. As it has been mentioned in the previous chapter, practices such as exorcism were exposed as fraudulent as well as the working of cunning folk and many different activities related to magic. The ecclesiastical authorities wanted to emphasise a certain set of values and behaviours which made the good Christian as opposed to Catholic practices and superstitions. The discourse of witchcraft is used to link those aspects they wanted to eliminate from society to negative aspects. In this case, as it had happened with exorcism before, they relate them to the figure of the witch.

However, pamphlets were not only used to place witchcraft “in the broader context of the cosmic struggle between good and evil” (Sharpe 2001: 21) but also to offer “a clear warning of the dangers of Satan’s snares” (2001: 21). Goodcole, as a minister of the church, wanted to present the people with those ideas and, following the tradition of other tracts and pamphlets, he not only described “the events constituting the core subject matter” (2001: 21) but he also included “passages (often in the form of a foreword or epistle to the reader) which pointed out the moral of the story” (2001: 21).

Pamphlets rarely lost sight of the didactic function explicit here: their readers had to be warned against witchcraft, but the warning was normally couched in terms of the war between God and the devil. (Sharpe 1997: 100)

The discourse of witchcraft was not only used by ecclesiastical but also by civil authorities to emphasise the ideas of the good citizen and the good neighbour. In Jacobean England, the religious concern was very much active but the “new zeal for the policing of public morality and keeping peace” (Willis 1995: 85) soon became apparent in most writings of the period.

Along with this post-Reformation campaign for greater religious conformity went a more secular campaign for “good order” in many areas of village life [...] as new laws were introduced and enforcement of the old expanded in matters such as public drunkenness, churchgoing, vagrancy, rowdy behaviour, illegitimate births, and the like. (Willis 1995: 84-85)

Elizabeth Sawyer is not only an element of disruption in religious terms. She is also perceived as a figure of disorder. The witch is fashioned as the other, as the dissident who breaks the established order of society.

In this light, the witch with her sharp tongue and quarrelsome behaviour can be thought of as yet another disturber of the pace, akin to the male “brawler” and the female scold. And in disturbing “good order” she also disrupted social hierarchy; her attacks on other women (not to mention those on men) injured the male “masters” to whom they were connected. (Willis 1995: 85)

Goodcole's pamphlet, as well as other literary texts of the period, participates "in the consolidation and/ or construction of discourses and ideologies" (Bertens 2007: 177) and highlights the role of the ecclesiastical and civil authorities in policing society. *The Wonderful Discovery* participates, in that sense, in the official discourse, particularly in the second part of the pamphlet, entitled "A true declaration of the manner of proceeding against Elizabeth Sawyer, late of Edmonton, Spinster, and the evidence of her conviction" (Goodcole 1621: 137) where the legal proceedings that led to the conviction of the witch are carefully detailed. Also, the supposed conversation Goodcole held with the convicted felon reinforces the idea that the authorities are the only reliable means of efficiently dealing with the threat of witchcraft.

One of the characteristics of witchcraft cases in England, which makes it different from that in most of the other Western European countries, is that prosecutions usually took longer and judges were more reluctant to prosecute them based simply on one minor act or hearsay. Proofs of the actual workings of the witch as well as testimonies from their neighbours were usually required. Even in some cases, although someone was accused of witchcraft if their neighbours testified on their behalf, the process could be stopped. Hence, Goodcole's emphasis on the fact that Sawyer was not accused because of an isolated event but

he affirmed that “a great and long suspicion was held of this person to be a witch” (1621: 137), a fact ratified by Elizabeth herself in her supposed confession.

QUESTION. *How long is it since the Devil and you had acquaintance together, and how oftentimes in the week would he come and see you and you company with him?*

ANSWER. It is eight years since our first acquaintance, and three times in the week, the Devil would come and see me. After such his acquaintance gotten of me, he would come sometimes in the morning and sometimes in the evening. (Goodcole 1921: 136)

By this presentation of events, Goodcole makes it clear that not only have Elizabeth’s dealings with the devil been taking place for many years but also that their meetings were not scarce but almost on a daily basis. Goodcole is here creating his own evidences and justifying the sentence that led to her execution.

Then, he continues with his explanation of the legal proceedings for her prosecution. First of all, the Justice of Peace is presented. It becomes clear from his words that Mr Arthur Robinson, as well as Sawyer’s neighbours were “watchful over her and her ways” (1621: 137). It can be seen how different social groups were involved in the hunt of witches and, hence, how the witch disturbed the hierarchical order of those small communities. It was not only the authorities, the king, who introduced new laws for the prosecution of those dangerous elements in society, but also other figures of authority, such as the Justice of Peace. Those

members of local elites used that position as way of emphasising their “membership to the ruling classes” (Briggs 1998: 325) in those rural contexts.

It seems clear that in some regions, at least, justices of peace saw it as part of their role to be on guard against the witch. They may have been active in identifying suspects and in encouraging villagers to come forward when they suspected a neighbor of witchcraft. (Willis 1995: 85)

However, no legal proof of her implication in the misfortunes that were happening at the time could be offered. At this point of the account, Goodcole provides a description of one of the practices frequently used by the lower classes to prove the guilt of a suspected witch, the burning of the thatch of her house. When Elizabeth Sawyer arrived at her house to see what was happening, people understood that she was a witch, responsible for all the calamities that they had been suffering.

And to find out who should be the author of this mischief an old ridiculous custom was used which was to pluck the thatch of her house and to burn it, and it being so burned the author of such mischief should presently then come. (Goodcole 1621: 137)

Goodcole's position towards this practice, which he censures as "an old ridiculous custom" (1621: 137), echoes that of the authorities in his "rejection of traditional superstition" (Briggs 1998: 325). It marks the different mentalities between both a literate minority and popular beliefs and reflects the current mentalities during James I's reign when a number of educated people were becoming increasingly sceptical about witchcraft practices.

The constant "complaints of neighbours" (1621: 139) seem to have triggered a response from the local authorities, who were presented as the only ones able to protect people from witchcraft. Order can only be restored through the representative of God on Earth, the king or those appointed by him. Hence, the intervention of the local authorities and the exhaustive description of the whole procedure.

Her charges are presented in the title of the pamphlet. She was accused of using witchcraft and convicted for "the persons that she murdered and the cattle that she destroyed by the help of the Devil" (1621: 141) and, although she did not confess to the crimes, she was nonetheless convicted.

This view of theirs and answer that she had such a thing [mark] about her, which boldly she denied, gave some insight to the jury of her who, upon their consciences, returned the said Elizabeth Sawyer to be guilty, by diabolical help, of the death of Agnes Ratcliffe only and acquitted her of the other two indictments.

And thus much of the means that brought her to her deserved  
death and destruction. (Goodcole 1621: 140)

In England, when no confession on behalf of the accused was obtained, there were other burdens of proof that could be used to prove her guilt. In the case of Elizabeth Sawyer, Henry Goodcole presents his readers with two basic reasons for her conviction, which match perfectly with the legislation of the period.

The first element which seems to prove her guilt is her constant “cursing, swearing, blaspheming and imprecating” (1621: 137). The Church discourse frequently emphasised that those attitudes were one of the ways by which the Devil could approach his victims. Goodcole emphasises the reiteration of her attitude, which not only took place on many occasions before the events of which she was accused, but also during most of the trial proceedings against “the Judge, jury and all good people” (1621: 137).

Goodcole, as a minister of the Church, is trying to instruct the readers on the dangers of that behaviour. That attitude could not be allowed in a Christian society and it became a proof of her guilt: “her tongue was both the instrument by which she injured others and the means by which she was herself exposed and defeated” (Dolan 1994: 201). The pamphlet explains how she behaved imprudently “with execrations and false oaths to affront justice” (1621: 138) but also emphasises how “God did wonderfully overtake her in her own wickedness to

make her tongue to be the means of her own destruction which had destroyed many before” (1621: 138).

Elizabeth Sawyer challenges the authority, including the Justice of Peace. This is precisely why witches are dangerous, why they should be extirpated from society. The witch breaks the natural order of things, that of the hierarchical structure of society, of patriarchy, of God. In the Jacobean mentality, she is fashioned as the figure that has transgressed both heavenly and earthly laws so only through her death can order be restored.

However, the most important evidence in her conviction was not her behaviour but the physical mark of the pact she had made with the Devil. This mark was generally regarded by law as a proof of the witches’ guilt when no confession was acquired so, at the time, it was a common practice to send some women to look for it in the accused’s body.

The Bench commanded officers appointed for those purposes to fetch in three women to search the body of Elizabeth Sawyer to see if they could find any such unwonted mark as they were informed of. (Goodcole 1921: 140)

As in many other cases when women were charged with witchcraft, the findings of those women and their testimony would be crucial for the eventual conviction of the felon.

All three said that they a little above the fundament of Elizabeth Sawyer, the prisoner there indicted before the Bench for a witch, found a thing like a teat, the bigness of the little finger and the length of half a finger which was branched at the top like a teat and seemed as though one had sucked it, and that the bottom thereof was blue and the top of it was red. (Goodcole 1921: 140)

It was no use for Sawyer to deny the charges. As in similar cases, the legislation was very clear. Once the mark was found, it was enough evidence for the jury to find the accused guilty of the crime and sentenced to death.

The next part of Goodcole's account corresponds to the various conversations he had with the convicted felon at Newgate prison. Although this account should offer an insight into Sawyer's perspective, it soon becomes clear that it is not her who we hear but Goodcole. In fact, the veracity of the account is questioned on many occasions through the leading questions and the elaborate answers. Therefore, Goodcole, as the one who rewrites the facts, has the power to control the effect that the narrated events were going to have on the readers, since he is obviously going to offer his own biased perspective.

Goodcole's interrogation of Elizabeth Sawyer should be understood in terms of the mentality of the period. As Diane Purkiss explains, Goodcole's questioning is perceived as "a means of salvation and reintegration" (1997: 237).

For Goodcole, the confession purports to have absolute spiritual value rather than legal validity; he understands the legal system of conviction and execution only as an instrument of the providential unfolding of divine truth. Elizabeth Sawyer's interrogation by her confessor is not an act of unfeeling cruelty, but a way of encouraging her to utter the stories that can return her to the Christian community from which her diabolic pact had exiled her. (Purkiss 1997: 236)

First, it must be noted that Sawyer's way of speaking does not correspond to what should have been expected from a woman of her status. Also, Sawyer's answers are not a real account of her actual words, but rather what Goodcole wants his audience to believe. He presents her as an envious and revengeful woman led to witchcraft by her own evil doings and her tongue. However, once more, Goodcole claims it is a "true relation" (1621: 141) made "in the presence and hearing of divers persons whose names to verify the same are here subscribed" (1621: 141).

However, from the very first question he asks and the following answer, Goodcole's intention of moralising his audience is made clear. He presents her evil acts and then her repentance.

QUESTION. *By what means came you to have acquaintance with the Devil and when was the first time that you saw him, and how did you know it was the Devil?*

ANSWER. The first time that the Devil came unto me was when I was cursing, swearing and blaspheming; he then rushed in upon me [...] the first words that he spake unto me were these, 'Oh! Have I now found you cursing, swearing and blaspheming? Now you are mine'. & A wonderful warning to many whose tongues are too frequent in these abominable sins. I pray God that this her terrible example may deter them to leave and distaste them, to put their tongues to a more holy language than the accursed language of hell. The tongue of man is the glory of man and it was ordained to glorify God; but worse than brute beasts they are who have a tongue as well as men that therewith they at once both bless and curse. (Goodcole 1621: 141)

This part also offers further details of Sawyer's story, which adds up to the typical discourse of witchcraft. As we have seen, the main features of witches in England in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century included an emphasis on the maleficium and the idea of the pact with the Devil who, in some cases, could be changed for the figure of a familiar spirit.

That charge of the keeping of a familiar was included in Jacobean legislation regarding witchcraft. Familiars, as explained in chapter 3, were commonly understood as "imps or demons usually in the form of small animals

such as dogs, cats, mice and toads, which did their bidding in return for nourishment from a special nipple concealed on the witch's body, and known as her witch-mark" (Scarre 2001: 27).

The description of the pact echoes those made by previous convicted witches in similar processes where the witch renounces her faith and offers her soul to the Devil. And, immediately after that, the pact is sealed with blood. It is also relevant to point out the violence that those encounters imply.

*QUESTION. What talk had the Devil and you together when that he appeared to you, and what did he ask of you and what did you desire of him?*

*ANSWER. He asked of me, when he came unto me, how I did and what he should do for me, and demanded of me my soul and body, threatening then to tear me in pieces if that I did not grant unto him my soul and my body which he asked.*

*QUESTION. What did you after such the Devil's asking of you to have your soul and body and after this his threatening of you? Did you fear grant unto the Devil his desire?*

*ANSWER. Yes, I granted for fear unto the Devil his request of my soul and body; and to seal this my promise made unto him I then gave him leave to suck my blood, the which he asked of me.*

*(Goodcole 1921: 143)*

Through this account, Goodcole confirms that the charges against her are real, that she has made a pact with the Devil. This is important because, as explained, there was a growing concern about the reality of the charges against witches. What Goodcole achieves through this is depicting himself in similar terms to other figures of authority. In several cases James I was able to discern the truth from the lies. The king had not only uncovered false accounts but also obtained confessions, such as in the North Berwick trials in Scotland, a case which was well known to the English audience. Goodcole is then fashioning himself not only as a reliable pamphleteer but also as a figure of authority who is able to achieve what others could not – obtain a confession from the convicted witch.

In his account, Goodcole also presents the confirmation of other charges made against the witch. The mark that the women had found in her body was not an invention but the very place where the Devil had sucked her blood and sealed the pact. There is also a vague reference to the insensibility of that spot when she says: “he would be sucking of me the continuance of a quarter of an hour, and when he sucked me I then felt no pain at all” (1621: 144).

As in many other witchcraft cases in England, it is not the Devil in human form that appears to the witch but an animal, a familiar. In the case of Elizabeth Sawyer, it was “always in the shape of a dog of two colours, sometimes black and sometimes white” (1621: 143). Her powers are also linked to that animal through which she is able to bring “many Christians’ and beasts’ death” (1621: 142).

QUESTION. *What said you to the Devil when he came unto you and spake unto you; were you not afraid of him? If you did fear him, what said the Devil unto you?*

ANSWER. I was in a very great fear when I saw the Devil, but he did bid me not to fear him at all for he would do me no hurt at all but would do for me whatsoever I should require of him, and as he promised unto me he always did such mischiefs as I did bid him to do, both on the bodies of Christians and beasts. If I did bid him vex them to death, as oftentimes I did so bid him, it was then presently by him so done. (Goodcole 1621: 142)

At this point, Goodcole returns again to the problem of the truthfulness of his accounts by comparing what he is telling with the erroneous accounts and stories that circulated at the time.

QUESTION. *What were those two ferrets that you were feeding on a farm with white bread and milk when divers children came and saw you feeding of them?*

ANSWER. I never did such a thing.

QUESTION. *What was the white thing that did run through the thatch of your house? Was it a spirit?*

ANSWER. So far as I know it was nothing else but a white ferret.  
(Goodcole 1921: 143)

In a footnote, Goodcole explains that he asked her those questions because “some children of good bigness and reasonable understanding informed the Court that they had divers times seen her feed two white ferrets with white bread and milk” (1621: 145). His comment echoes the idea already present in many of the trials that were taking place at the time, that not all accounts made by witnesses could be regarded as real. The king himself had uncovered the truth on many cases and discredited some evidences because they were not true. The fine line between facts and hearsay is again dealt with in Goodcole’s questioning about the Devil visiting her in prison.

QUESTION. *How long is it since you saw the Devil last?*

ANSWER. It is three weeks since I saw the Devil.

QUESTION. *Did the Devil never come unto you since you were in prison? Speak the truth, as you will answer unto Almighty God.*

ANSWER. The Devil never came unto me since I was in prison nor, I thank God, I have no motion of him in my mind since I came to prison neither do I now fear him at all. (Goodcole 1921: 146)

Using once more a footnote, he clarifies that he made her those questions because “it was rumoured that the Devil came to her since her conviction, and shamelessly printed and openly sung in a ballad, to which many give too much

credit” (1621: 146). However, Goodcole’s irritation towards the inaccuracy of some of the accounts which were currently circulating about Elizabeth Sawyer’s story is somehow ironical, since he is himself adapting the story to fit his own aims. That claim of objectivity and veracity is also a lie on his behalf, an attempt, as it was explained, to fashion himself as a serious pamphleteer.

This fact is highlighted in the last part of the pamphlet. Again, it becomes clear that it was him who talks through Elizabeth’s words. Her appearance “on the scaffold could be read as a carefully staged promotion of Goodcole’s fiction rather than as the urgent truth of the dying speech” (Purkis 1997: 236). Goodcole presents himself as the one who has saved her soul and made her feel repentance for what she did.

This confession which is now read unto me by Master Henry Goodcole, Minister, with my own mouth I spake it to him on Tuesday last at Newgate, and I here do acknowledge to all the people that are here present that it is all truth, desiring you all to pray unto Almighty God to forgive me my grievous sins.  
(Goodcole 1921: 148)

Elizabeth Sawyer’s final confession before being executed emphasises the main aims of the pamphlet. First, Goodcole is fulfilling his function as a clergyman “warning of the consequences of a sinful life” (2000: 299). He presents the

devastating effects of swearing, which first attracted the Devil into her, made her sign a pact and eventually led her to her death, as well as the consequences of her sinful life and behaviour. The moralising value of the pamphlet perfectly fits the mentality of the period, particularly in her final “repentance and social reintegration” (Purkiss 1997: 243), which promotes the attitudes required of a good Christian.

The pamphlet also makes a “promotion of the justice of the legal system” (Gibson 1999: 128), reinforcing the idea that only the authorities can restore the natural order. In that sense, Goodcole’s narrative, as well as other writings of the period, is “a form of contribution to the effective dominant culture” (Ryan 1996: 3) because it helps transmit the values the ecclesiastical and civil authorities want to impose.

The category “witch” is, then, created “through a dynamic process of institutional exclusion and inclusion” (Colebrook 1997: 43). Elizabeth Sawyer is fashioned as the deviant, as the “other”, using the elements of the current discourse of witchcraft and opposing her to the adequate behaviour of the good Christian and the good citizen.

Finally, it must not be forgotten that Goodcole not only tried to please the authorities with his discourse, which he knew was a controversial one at the time, and fulfil his duty as a minister of the Church, but most importantly, he was writing for a specific purpose: to make a living out of his writings. Despite

Goodcole's attempt to oppose his "truth to the commercial exploitativeness and crudity of other [writings] and especially popular accounts of witchcraft" (Purkiss 1997: 232), he clearly participates in the sensationalism that the consumers of that type of writing demanded, offering them what they wanted to hear.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE DYNAMICS OF POWER

### ON STAGE

*The Witch of Edmonton*



## 5. THE DYNAMICS OF POWER ON STAGE

### *The Witch of Edmonton*

Theatre plays and pamphlets have traditionally been regarded differently when studying witchcraft. While plays were understood as mere imaginary narrations, which were sometimes only vaguely linked to real events, pamphlets were understood as more reliable sources of information and frequently compared to court records. Pamphlets were used by historians looking for facts while theatre plays belonged to the literary realm.

However, as it has been explained in the previous chapter, this difference is far from real. While pamphlets on witchcraft frequently aimed to a more descriptive account of events, the stories they told were mere narrations, biased accounts which had an agenda. Similarly, plays cannot be ruled out of historical analysis simply because their approach to the stories is overtly fictional.

New Historicism proved the usefulness of those types of accounts when analysing the forces at work in particular societies. In fact, as Catherine Gallagher

explains, it is important to read “literary and non-literary texts as constituents of historical discourses” (1989: 37); an idea drawn from Clifford Geertz, who understood culture as “an acted document” (Gallagher 2001: 27).

[Geertz’s] descriptions of cultural texts strengthened the insistence that the things that draw us to literature are often found in the non-literary, that the concept of literariness is deeply unstable, that the boundaries between different types of narratives are subject to interrogation and revision. (Gallagher 2001: 30)

Following Louis Althusser ideas, literature is understood as “one of the institutions which participate in making state power and ideology familiar and acceptable to the state’s subjects” (Brannigan 1998: 5).

Literature will reflect the values, customs and norms of the dominant interest in its society [...] and so is mobilised, mostly unconsciously, by the state as an ideological weapon, an army of metaphors which seek to persuade and manipulate rather than coerce. (Brannigan 1998: 5)

Within that literary realm, theatre became one of the most important institutions in Early Modern England to convey the sovereign’s ideas. As it has

been explained, James I “ruled by the word” (Goldberg 1989: 56) and was perfectly aware of the power of the theatre. Soon after he became king of England, he took theatre under his royal patronage and, for example, Shakespeare’s company became the King’s Men.

The links between the state and the theater were particularly strong in the period, and not only because the theaters had come under direct royal patronage with the accession of James. The theater was the public forum in which royal style could be most fully displayed. (Goldberg 1989: xiii)

Theatre is “at once responsive to and constitutive of the social formations of Renaissance England” (Kastan 1991: 2). James I understood how words could be a powerful tool to convey his ideas, his way of understanding monarchy. Theatre, then, became “an agent of the absolutist state, reproducing its strategies and celebrating and confirming its power” (1991: 5). And its popularity turned it into the perfect means to reach the vast majority of the population.

However, although theatre participated in the social formation many scholars have “actively resist any such totalized understanding of social practices, emphasizing difference rather than dominance, contradiction rather than containment” (Kastan 1991: 7). Stephen Greenblatt answered those critics arguing that “the circulation of social energy by and through the stage was not part of a

single coherent, totalizing system” (2001: 19) but it “rather served as a fertile medium through which cultural meanings and values were shaped, transmitted, challenged, and changed” (Kastan 1991: 6).

Dramatic texts are sites rather than the exclusive sources of meaning, places where audiences, readers, actors, writers (not to mention scribes and composers) construct and contest meanings. And those meanings are in turn inflicted by systems of patronage, censorship, and newly emergent market relations. (Kastan 1991: 2)

As in the case of pamphlets, it should not be forgotten that theatre in Early Modern England was “designed in intimate and living relation to an emergent commercial practice” (Greenblatt 2001: 13). It was not only a popular entertainment but also a profitable one.

Public theatre was popular theatre not only because it played to a large general public, but also because it was audience-centred, giving that public what it wanted. These are plays whose chief function is not to express an artist’s personal vision but to cater to the needs and tastes of an audience; they are a consumer product, part of a commercial enterprise. (Leggatt 2005: 2)

Theatre plays, like other popular writings of the period, used the current popularity of witchcraft for their own purposes. In order to sell, pamphlets, ballads and theatre plays, amongst others, turned to those topics which attracted more attention and, as a consequence, stories “grew more and more sensational” (Purkiss 1997: 231). Witchcraft, which had become more fashionable than ever with the arrival of the new king, was a recurrent topic. Sensationalism marked those different types of writings that “were eager to turn the uncovering of the truth about the witch into a saleable commodity” (1997: 231).

Dramatists were therefore only one group involved in the displaying of witchcraft: also involved were witches’ accusers and their families, judges and justices, the witches themselves, their relatives, printers, pamphleteers like Goodcole, puppeteers, ballad-writers, the king, the court, the clergy, and the medical profession. (Purkiss 1997: 234)

Witchcraft became “increasingly popular on the London stage” (Levack 2008: 329) with the arrival of James I and those theatre representations “contributed to the formation of the image of the witch in both learned and popular culture, [...] to heighten the awareness of witchcraft in England during the early seventeenth century” (2008: 320).

Dramatists were eager to please the new sovereign and used the king's weakness for witchcraft as much as the king used theatre to circulate his ideas. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was "probably first performed in 1606 and several times thereafter" (Kors 2001: 334) and soon after, in 1609, Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens* and Thomas Middleton's *The Witch* (1615-1616). *The Witch of Edmonton*<sup>22</sup> written by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford in 1621 also follows this trend. Written the same year Elizabeth Sawyer was executed, it heavily draws on Henry Goodcole's pamphlet and other sources of the period. There is a record of its performance at court by the Prince's Men on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1621 but it had been previously represented at the Cockpit and the private Phoenix theatre.

Theatricality is "not set over against power but is one of power's essential modes" (Greenblatt 2001: 46) and the new king would use theatre not only to reinforce his ideas on witchcraft but also on government and his Divine-right monarchy. The plays staged during James I's reign tried to please the new sovereign and followed not only the ideas expressed in his *Daemonologie* but also those of European demonological tracts. In the case of Ben Jonson, for example, his use of the European discourse of witchcraft and his reference to various authors highlights the new trend that would enter England with the arrival of the new king.

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<sup>22</sup> As with Henry Goodcole's pamphlet, I will be using the revised version edited by Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge in 1999 (1997).

Ben Jonson's *The Masque of Queens* was performed in 1609 and is remarkable not only for its reflections of contemporary witchcraft beliefs, but for the extensive and learned readings notes that Jonson wrote to accompany the depiction of the witches in the first part of the masque. These reveal Jonson's considerable familiarity with contemporary witchcraft theory, citing Nider, the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim, Bartolomeo Spina, Bodin, Rémy, James VI & I, Martin del Rio, and other recent (and many ancient Greek and Roman) writers on the subject. (Kors 2001: 335)

The official discourse of witchcraft added, then, new elements from continental Europe and was reinforced through new legislation as well as a variety of channels, including sermons, ballads, pamphlets and theatre. However, although the authorities reinforced the prosecution of demonic witchcraft, there was also a parallel action exposing fraud in many of the cases, following James I's scheme.

James, admittedly, was motivated chiefly by a cynical wish to display himself to best advantage as a truth-finder, but others, including his son Charles, were more interested in the genuine discovery of truth. (Purkiss 1997: 231)

The discourse of witchcraft was, in that sense, used to reinforce James I's idea of the monarch imbued by Divine power. While he firmly believed in the reality of witchcraft, his reign was marked by a growing scepticism and exposure of fraudulent cases of witchcraft. That ambivalent position can be clearly perceived in many of the writings of the period. From the earliest plays on the topic of witchcraft, which heavily drew on continental ideas, there is a gradual shift to more sceptical positions, as in the case of *The Witch of Edmonton*.

It reflected the growing and amused scepticism of the learned, while incorporating half-understood fragments of once-cogent popular beliefs into its glittering and getpenny rhetoric. (Purkiss 1997: 231)

However, it is “important to resist the integration of all images and expressions into a single master discourse” (Greenblatt 2001: 3). Neither Goodcole's pamphlet nor *The Witch of Edmonton* “directly reproduce society” (Goldberg 1989: xiv) but they emphasise the link “between power and representation” (1989: xiii) and the way words are used to shape the discourse of witchcraft in Jacobean society. And one of the most relevant aspects of Early Modern England is the concept of self-fashioning, which Stephen Greenblatt explained in his *Renaissance Self-fashioning*.

It is in the sixteenth century that *fashion* seems to come into wide currency as a way of designating the forming of the self. This forming may be understood quite literally as the imposition upon a person of physical form [...] But, more significantly for our purposes, fashioning may suggest the achievement of a less tangible shape: a distinctive personality, a characteristic address to the world, a consistent mode of perceiving and behaving. (Greenblatt 1984: 2)

As it was explained in the previous chapter, self-fashioning in Goodcole's pamphlet worked at two different levels, first in Elizabeth Sawyer, who was transformed into the stereotypical figure of the witch and, secondly, in his own presentation as clergyman at Newgate's prison, but most importantly, as a serious pamphleteer writing a reliable account of events.

In the case of *The Witch of Edmonton*, there can be perceived three different levels of self-fashioning in the play: the actor is fashioned into the witch, then Sawyer –as a character in the play– is fashioned as a witch and finally, the witch is fashioned into a stage character inside the theatre play.

*The Witch of Edmonton* as a theatre play is a representation where actors fashion themselves into the different characters. The actor who plays the role of Elizabeth Sawyer fashions not only into a woman but also into a witch. That is the basis of theatre, which depends on that theatricality, “on the apparent transformation of the actor into the voice, the actions, and the face of another”

(Greenblatt 2001: 114). The actor is a man playing the role of a real woman who, at the same time, has also been turned into a theatre play character. He is representing a stereotype, turning the real person into a mere role in a stage performance.

Although there are no references to the way actors actually disguised themselves into the different characters, the various representations of witches in woodcuts and other types of illustrations, as well as Sawyer's own description of herself in the play, might offer some hints so as to what aspect she might have had. Goodcole's pamphlet was also illustrated by a picture of the convicted witch, clearly depicting her as an old, ugly woman of low social status. Theatre, then, reinforced to stereotype of the witch not only through words but also through images.

The stereotype of the witch was already fixed in the popular imagery. Her physical presentation, as it had happened in Goodcole's pamphlet, was widely accepted and was designed to reinforce the discourse of witchcraft, emphasising the negative characteristics of the witch, her "otherness". In her first appearance on stage, while she is gathering sticks, Elizabeth Sawyer not only presents herself in front of the audience who can see her physical appearance –or it would be better to say, the way the actor has fashioned himself into that character– but that image is reinforced by her words. She is described as having "her tother eye out" (II. i. 96-

97), as “poor, deformed and ignorant, / And like a bow buckled and bent together” (II. i. 3-4).

However, it is not only Sawyer’s physical appearance but also her actions, her behaviour, which defines her as a witch. Hence, the emphasis on her “bad tongue” (II. i. 11), on a variety of negative aspects frequently opposed to Christian values. Discourse is again the means through which the witch is perceived. She is labelled through her speech.

Abjure all goodness, be at hate with prayer,  
And study curses, imprecations,  
Blasphemous speeches, oaths, detested oaths,  
Or anything that’s ill. (II. i. 119-125)

Elizabeth Sawyer is replicating the discourse of witchcraft which was deeply embedded in Jacobean society. Those stories of witches told again and again had shaped the beliefs of the members of the community, turned some characteristics into proofs of witchcraft. As Marion Gibson (1999) explains, the concept “witch” was not based on individual realities but on a shared stereotype. Elizabeth Sawyer, as well as the rest of the community members at Edmonton, have interiorised that discourse. As Stephen Greenblatt points out, witches “learn their roles without realizing at first that they are roles” (Greenblatt 2001: 107). They interiorise that role of the “witch” so much that it eventually ends up defining them. Since

Elizabeth Sawyer is believed to be a witch by her community, she decides to act according to that role and fashions herself into that stereotype.

Some call me witch,  
And, being ignorant of myself, they go  
About to teach me how to be one, urging  
That my bad tongue, by their bad usage made so,  
Forspeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn,  
Themselves, their servants and their babes at nurse.  
This they enforce upon me, and in part  
Make me to credit it. (*The Witch of Edmonton*. II. i. 8-15)

Elizabeth Sawyer's words emphasise the idea that the "self is always a construction" (Bertens 2007: 179), that our representation of ourselves depends on others, on how we are perceived. Those stories of witchcraft "are not only narrations which are easily stereotyped but this stereotype feeds back to shape the teller's and the hearer's perception of reality" (Gibson 1999: 8). Sawyer, as a dramatic character, fashions herself into a witch, into what society expects of her: "Tis all one / To be a witch as to be counted one" (II. i. 126-127).

However, the use of the term "witch" is controversial. Although Elizabeth's neighbours call her a "witch", that can be simply understood as a way of naming the outcast, the other. Mother Sawyer's attitudes do not fit the standard. She does not behave like the rest of her community. Her conduct and constant cursing sets

her apart from the mainstream and adds to the fact that she is old, poor and isolated from the rest. She is an element that breaks the social order so she is presented as an element opposed to the standard. She is the “other” and therefore, she is demonised and labelled as a witch.

However, the extent to which calling someone a witch and actually believing in her having demonic powers is difficult to know. The play here suggests that the members of the community are calling Sawyer a “witch” but they do not actually believe the very same stereotype they are directing at her. When Young Banks approaches her looking for her assistance with Katherine, he does so sceptically. When Sawyer starts *acting* the way a witch is supposed to act, Young Banks states: “I think she’ll prove a witch in earnest” (II. i. 242). This emphasises the degree to which the discourse of witchcraft was used as a means of highlighting otherness and also how the category “witch” was compared to other negative figures such as that of “murderer,” as in the case of Frank Thorney. It was a way of naming those elements that did not fit in society.

Finally, a third level of self-fashioning appears in the figures of the Morris dancers.<sup>23</sup> Their conversations reflect that theatricality of the figure of the witch, how real people can be transformed into a different person, into a character of their own play.

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<sup>23</sup> The term refers to a group of people who usually performed different types of dancing but also other forms of light entertainment to amuse their audience.

*Young Banks.* [...] Have we e'er a witch in the morris?

*First Dancer.* No, no; no woman's part but Maid Marian and  
The hobby-horse

*Young Banks.* I'll have a witch. I love a witch.

*First Dancer.* Faith, witches themselves are so common nowa-  
days that the counterfeit will not be regarded. They

Say we have three or four in Edmonton besides Mother

Sawyer. (*The Witch of Edmonton*. III. i. 8- 15)

The Morris dancers “propose that a woman who is really a witch should act as one” (Purkiss 1997: 245). This highlights again the different levels at which theatricality is embedded: “Elizabeth Sawyer becomes increasingly absorbed in *acting* as a witch” (1997: 245). But it also points out theatricality in real life. It echoes that fashioning of women into the witch and then, those same witches turn into a character, into a stereotype and behave following that pattern, that “part” they are supposed to play.

In general, Elizabeth Sawyer's portrayal in the play is far more sympathetic than that of Goodcole's pamphlet, where she is presented as a rather negative figure for whom the audience do not likely feel any sympathy. On the contrary, in the play she is not only poor –she first appears gathering “a few rotten sticks” (II. i. 20) to warm her– and despised by her community but she is also verbally and physically abused. Throughout the play, many of the characters would address to

her using a variety of insults –“hag” (II. i. 30), “trot” (IV. i. 28), “bawd” (IV. i.137) or “fury” (IV. i. 161)– and there are also scenes which include beatings.

In that sense, the play “vividly depicts the relation of witchcraft belief to social conflict” (Dolan 1994: 218) and explores social friction between neighbours in those rural communities. One of the most common cases of witchcraft accusations, as explained in Alan Macfarlane’s study of Essex, takes place when one of poorest neighbours asked for charity from their neighbours and it is refused.

For an elderly and comparatively poor woman to request something at the door of one of her more substantial neighbours: some food, some beer, a little money, maybe the chance to do some work. This would be refused, and the woman would either curse the refuser, or go away mumbling threats or ambivalent phrases. A little later, a misfortune would befall the household of the refuser of charity. (Sharpe 2001: 39-40)

Elizabeth Sawyer, as a woman living “outside the patriarchal household” (Dolan 1994: 14) is targeted and demonized. She is poor and that poverty drives her “to make demands of those more securely positioned” (1994: 15) and for that she is despised. As James Sharpe explains, the fact that that person asking for charity is transformed into a witch helps “overturn any feelings of residual guilt which may have been felt” (Sharpe 2001: 40). It is the witch, not that neighbour

who refused charity, who is “the transgressor of community norms” (2001: 40). Their guilt is changed for anger towards the witch, who is regarded as a subversive element that should be extirpated from society.

By attributing power to such women, popular culture collaborated with the law in criminalizing poverty. Like fictions of petty treason, representations of infanticide and witchcraft locate the threat to domestic and social order in the least powerful and privileged, in those most likely to be the victims rather than the perpetrators of violence, vilification, and exploitation. (Dolan 1994: 15)

In the play, the situation is very similar to the one depicted before. Elizabeth Sawyer, who is presented as an old poor woman, is gathering some sticks from Old Bank’s land. When he finds her there, Old Bank confronts her and Sawyers starts swearing and cursing.

*Old Banks.* What makes thou upon my ground?

*Elizabeth Sawyer.* Gather a few rotten sticks to warm me.

*Old Banks.* Down with them when I bid thee, quickly. I’ll  
Make thy bones rattle in thy skin else.

*Elizabeth Sawyer.* You won’t, churl, cut-throat, miser! [*She  
throws down the sticks.*] There they be. Would they stuck  
‘cross thy throat, thy bowels, thy maw, thy midriff.

*Old Banks.* Hag, out of my ground! [*He beats her*]

*Elizabeth Sawyer.* Dost strike me, slave, curmudgeon? Now

By bones ache, thy joints cramp, and convulsions stretch

And crack thy sinews!

*Old Banks.* Cursing, thou hag! Take that and that.

[*He beats her and*] *exit.* (II. i. 19- 26)

In that sense, since Old Banks perceives her as a witch, he does not feel any remorse for abusing her both verbally and physically. Witches are Satan's agents, demonic figures who perform maleficium, and that gives him an excuse for refusing charity, for mistreating her.

However, the play also "explores why this particular character chooses witchcraft in response to her social situation" (Dolan 1994: 218). She is "at the bottom of the social order" (Corbin 1986: 21) and her isolation and poverty makes her an easy target.

*Elizabeth Sawyer.* I am none. None but base curs so bark at

me. I am none. Or would I were! If every poor old woman

be trod on thus by slaves, reviled, kicked, beaten, as I am

daily, she, to be revenged, had need turn witch. (IV. i. 86- 89)

Elizabeth is vindicating her status as an outcast. She is poor and despised by her community, set aside from society and relegated to the woods. Therefore, in that situation, revenge is her only consolation.

However, despite the apparent amount of “social criticism which is not uncommon in the drama of the period” (Corbin 1999: 99), Elizabeth Sawyer’s attitudes are censured by those around her, including the Justice of Peace: “You are too saucy and too bitter” (IV. i. 93). In fact, her anti-social behaviour is one of the negative features that is more frequently censured in the play.

However, witches in England were usually characterised not only for that negative behaviour but also for their ability to perform magic. This is included in *The Witch of Edmonton*, which not only offers the typical description of a witch in rural England but it also emphasises the *maleficium* and all the disasters the witch causes. There are references to people being “bewitched” (IV. i. 10) and turning “mad” (IV. i. 217) but also a wide variety of misfortunes are attributed to her.

*Third Countryman.* Our cattle fall, our wives fall, our daughters fall and maidservants fall; and we ourselves shall not be able to stand if this beast be suffered to graze amongst us. (IV. i. 15-18)

As in the case of Goodcole’s pamphlet, from which the dramatists drew some material, in *The Witch of Edmonton*, there is an emphasis not only on the

maleficium but also on more continental ideas. The descriptions are clearly stereotyped and follow the official discourse since they portray many of the elements highlighted in the 1604 Act, such as the idea of the pact or the keeping of familiars. In her first appearance, Sawyer shows her knowledge about what a witch is supposed to be, including not only educated but also more popular elements.

Call me hag and witch!

What is the name? Where and by what art learned?

What spells, what charms or invocations

May the thing called Familiar be purchased? (II. i. 33-36)

The play, as well as the pamphlet, portrays one of the typical elements of the discourse of witchcraft in England, the idea of the familiar spirit. Originally, that element belonged to popular beliefs but in Elizabethan times it was already included in most accounts of witchcraft. By the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, the keeping of a familiar was turned into an offence and considered a typical characteristic of the discourse of witchcraft in England.

I have heard old beldams

Talk of familiars in the shape of mice,

Rats, ferrets, weasels and I wot not what,

That have appeared and sucked, some say, their blood. (II. i. 109-

112)

The dramatists follow here Goodcole's account and describe Elizabeth Sawyer's familiar as a dog named Tom, who appeared in "two colours, sometimes of black and sometimes of white"<sup>24</sup> (Goodcole 1621: 143). As it was explained before, the witch's relation to their familiar is compared to the continental descriptions of the witch and the Devil. In that sense, Elizabeth's pact also resembles the official discourse of witchcraft and the description which appears in the play is similar to that in James VI's *Daemonologie* or other similar writings of the period.

He prepares the way by feeding them craftily in their humour,  
and filling them further and further with despaire, while he finde  
the time proper to discouer himself vnto them. At which time,  
either vpon their walking solitarie in the fields, or else lying  
pansing in their bed; but always without the company of any  
other, he either by a voice, or in likenesse of a man inquires of  
them, what troubles them. (James VI 2002 [1597]: 32)

In the play, Elizabeth Sawyer is approached by the Devil in the shape of a black dog after her confrontation with Old Banks and the Morris dancers, when she is swearing and looking for revenge. The importance of words, of discourse, in

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<sup>24</sup> Goodcole's account merely offers a descriptive image of the dog while, as Diane Purkiss points out, the shift in the colour of the dog in the play stands for "its unreliability and deceptiveness" (1996: 246).

the self-fashioning is again highlighted. It is not only her appearance but also her behaviour what turns her into a witch on the eyes of her neighbours. In fact, it was thought that “the devil needed a favourable opportunity in order to entrap his victim” (Corbin 1999: 56): “Have I found thee cursing? Now thou art mine own” (II. i. 128). Therefore, the emphasis on negative attitudes which characterises the discourse of witchcraft adds up to the moralising value of theatre.

The fact that the dog-demon arrives as Sawyer is cursing is usually read socially: cursing is a transgression of gender roles. But it can also be read medically: cursing is a sign of hot red blood overflowing, a sign to which a familiar is naturally attracted. (Purkiss 1997: 242)

James VI explains that the Devil usually comes to those “in a desperate desire of reuenge” (2002 [1597]: 32) and “perswades them to addict themselues to his seruice” (2002 [1597]: 33), to sign a pact. In most English accounts, this idea of the pact between the witch and the Devil is changed to the common image of the familiar sucking the witch’s blood from a particular spot; something which would be used as a proof for their conviction in many English trials and that directly relates to the continental accounts of the witches’ mark. This stereotypical description of the pact is portrayed by Rowley, Dekker and Ford in the play following the official discourse.

*Dog.* Art mine or no? Speak or I'll tear –

*Elizabeth Sawyer.* All thine.

*Dog.* Seal't with thy blood.

*Sucks her arm; thunder and lightning.*

See, now I dare call thee mine.

For proof, command me. Instantly I'll run

To any mischief; goodness can I none.

(II. i. 151-156)

The pact is here highlighted not only through words but also through images. The stage directions emphasise dog's wickedness, accompanying his words with "thunder and lightning" but they also point out "the theatricality of witchcraft itself" (Purkiss 1999: 246).

Other element added to the discourse of witchcraft in England, which also relates to the continental ideas, is that of the nature of the relation between the witch and her familiar. Early accounts describe how the familiar helps the witch to perform a series of damnable acts but there can be perceived a gradual change to a more intimate relation between them. Although in English accounts of witchcraft in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, there rarely appears any reference to the Sabbat or the orgies performed there, there is a clear similitude between witches and incubus in European accounts and witches and their familiars in England.

Although, at first, the dog only offers Elizabeth Sawyer help to revenge on those who have offended her, their relation turns more intimate as the play advances. A change in the way Sawyer addresses her familiar can be perceived from their first encounter to the end of the play. She first refers to him as “the devil” (II. i. 130) but later on she calls him “Tommy” (IV. i. 170) or “my Tomalin” (V. i. 6), highlighting a high degree of intimacy between them.

Kiss me, my Tommy,  
And rub away some wrinkles on my brow  
By making my old ribs to shrug for joy  
Of thy fine tricks. (IV. ii. 170-173)

Words imply what it could have been otherwise impossible to show on stage at the time.<sup>25</sup> But their degree of intimacy is apparent through some of the stage directions –“they embrace” (IV. ii. 174)– and the passionate words Elizabeth Sawyer addresses to Dog on several occasions during the play. Those continuous references point out that it is not an isolated event, but something which takes place in a regular basis, as it had been highlighted in Goodcole’s pamphlet too.

Oh, my best love!

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<sup>25</sup> As Diane Purkiss explains, elements such as “the site of the witchmark” (1999: 242) had to be substituted by discourse because they would have been “difficult to show on stage” (1999: 242) and the same happens to the intimate nature of their relationship, which becomes apparent through her words.

I am on fire, even in the midst of ice,  
Raking my blood up till my shrunk knees feel  
Thy curled head leaning on them. Come then, my darling.  
(V. i. 9-12)

This emphasis on the sexual aspects of Elizabeth Sawyer's relation to her familiar follow the discourse of witchcraft where women's sexual desire is always demonized. It also underlines the patriarchal emphasis on part of the authorities, which regard any deviance of the official standard as dangerous.

Accounts of English witchcraft also reveal a prevalent association of witchcraft with sexualities constructed as evil and unnatural because of their association with the devil; with animals; and with postmenopausal women, whose desire was assumed to be boundless, unsatisfiable through socially acceptable means, and destructive because it could not be (pro)creative. (Dolan 1994: 213)

However, the role of Dog is far more important than that of Sawyer's "lover/ infant as well as her avenger" (Dolan 1994: 220). Dog is presented as "an agent of evil, independent of Elizabeth Sawyer" (Corbin 1986: 23) and whose actions affect both "domestic *and* communal relations" (1994: 220). As Corbin

explains, the play explores “the consequences of allowing the devil to penetrate, work in and corrupt a small but representative community” (1986: 27).

Elizabeth Sawyer is located in the margins of society in the same way she is located in the subplot of the main story. Witches stood for all the negative values and did not deserve a prominent place. In fact, as Frances E. Dolan explains, “it is her familiar, Dog, not Mother Sawyer herself, who travels freely among the play’s locations and communities” (1994: 224). In exchange for selling her soul, Elizabeth Sawyer is supposed to get her revenge against “her more privileged, uncharitable, suspicious neighbours” (1994: 220) but it soon becomes apparent that she will not be able to obtain what she desires. When she commands Dog to kill those who have wronged her he refuses and laughs at her.

*Elizabeth Sawyer.* Dost laugh?

Why wilt not kill him?

*Dog.* Fool, because I cannot.

Though we have power, know it is circumscribed

And tied in limits.<sup>26</sup> (II. i. 162- 166)

Although she has made a pact with the Devil her powers can only work through the dog’s assistance. It is him who actually performs the different misdeeds; she only pretends to be a witch in front of the others using the charm he

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<sup>26</sup> As Corbin explains “the devil’s power to injure the faithful was held to be very limited” (1999: 58).

had taught her. This is made clear in her interaction with Young Banks. She has accepted the role of “witch” which has been attributed by her community and decides to play her part as such. However, witches were supposed to be powerful figures; something which Elizabeth Sawyer has clearly not interiorised yet. Hence, her doubts when Young Banks turns to her looking for help: “But dost thou think that I can do’t, and I / alone?” (II. i. 245-246).

This particular scene shows that Sawyer has not fully interiorised the role that has been assigned to her but it also points out her ignorance. She is unable to repeat the charm Dog has taught her correctly. In fact, every time she uses it she changes the words.

*Dog. I’ll tell thee. When thou wishest ill,*

*Corn, man or beast would spoil or kill,*

*Turn thy back against the sun*

*And mumble this short orison:*

*If thou to death or shame pursue ‘em*

*Sanctibicetur nomen tuum.*

*Elizabeth Sawyer: If thou to death or shame pursue ‘em*

*Sanctibecetur nomen tuum. (II. i. 179-186)*

This echoes Goodcole’s portrayal of Elizabeth in the pamphlet where she states: “neither do I understand the meaning of these words nor can speak any more Latin words” (Goodcole 1621: 146). Sawyer “falls into witchcraft through

ignorance and temptation” (Corbin 1986: 23) because she wishes to revenge on those who have mistreated her: “If every poor old woman / be trod on thus by slaves, reviled, kicked, beaten, as I am / daily, she, to be revenged, had need turn witch” (*The Witch of Edmonton*. IV. i. 87-89). In that sense, her ignorance reflects the ignorance of women who, at the time were believed to be “morally and intellectually weaker, and thus more prone to the devil’s snares” (Sharpe 2001: 43).



*The Witch of Edmonton* dramatizes the events which led to the conviction of Elizabeth Sawyer but, while doing that, it presents not only “official attitudes as presented in the law code or the demonological tract” (Sharpe 2001: 8) but also popular beliefs held by the vast majority of the population in Jacobean England.

Firstly, there are many popular elements which refer to the magical mentality of the period and which are not only linked to the particular belief in witchcraft but to a belief in magic in general. Those ideas were not only held by the illiterate population but, as it has been explained, it also included the elites, such as the belief in prophecies, which was widely spread. Prophecies, particularly those about “the deaths of monarchs or other major changes in affairs of state” (Sharpe

2001: 59), were taken very seriously by the authorities and frequently charged with treason.

However, there were also other popular beliefs which not only show how magic was part of everyday life but also reflect the concern of authorities regarding those practices, which were frequently perceived as superstitious, and needed to be eradicated from society. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, there appear many references to an “almanac” (II. i. 60) consulted by Young Banks but also a “lover’s almanac” (III. i. 53) and different magical practices most likely performed by cunning folk, such as palmistry.

*Frank Thorney.* Take't plainly then. 'Twas told me  
by a woman,  
Known and approved in palmistry,  
I should have two wives. (II. ii.118- 120)

The figure of the cunning-woman is not directly mentioned in the play. However, when Young Banks asks Elizabeth for a “charm” (II. ii. 263) the audience would have probably linked this practice to the activities performed by those people, to which most of the population resorted. In that sense, the play follows the official discourse in denouncing the falsehood of those people and also their evil nature. Authorities regarded those cunning-folk with contempt and tried to put an end to their practices.

Even greater odium was reserved for cunning men and women. The general line of thought was that these supposedly good witches, like bad ones, derived their powers from the devil, and the fact that they used these powers under pretence of doing good made them doubly worthy of censure. (Sharpe 1997: 86)

On the one hand, the audience has seen how Elizabeth Sawyer has no real power. It is Dog who performs all the magic. But that depiction also highlights the demonic nature of their practices. Even though the magic those people work has a minor scope, it is linked to the fact that evil has entered society, that all those practices have a demonic origin and lead to nothing good. In fact, both Frank Thorney and Elizabeth Sawyer would eventually be responsible for the death of others.

In Jacobean England, it was not only the belief in those minor forms of magic but there was also “a lively acceptance of the existence of the spirit world, with references to ghosts and poltergeist being specially frequent” (Sharpe 2001: 57). Ghosts and spirits were a frequent element used in many different theatre representations and, in *The Witch of Edmonton* there appears a spirit in the shape of Katherine and later on, of the spirit of Susan. Also, when Dog is talking to Young Banks, he explains how the devil could take human form using corpses.

Dog. The old cadaver of some self-strangled wretch  
We sometimes borrow, and appear human.  
The carcass of some disease-slain strumpet  
We varnish fresh, and wear as her first beauty.  
Didst never hear? If not, it has been done. (V. i. 148-152)

Apart from the elements belonging to that shared magical mentality of the period, different practices directly related to the discovery of witches and the counter-measures against their magic also appear in the play. As James Sharpe explains, there was “a folklore around proving a suspected person was a witch” (2001: 54) and this can be seen in *The Witch of Edmonton*, where there are references to different beliefs and practices to counteract demonic powers.

The Devil and his malign influence was supposed to be part of everyday life so there was a series of practices used at the time to avoid its negative effects. There is, for example, a reference to the idea that “to cross the devil’s path or to confront him exposed one to his malign influence” (Corbin 1999: 55). When one of the Morris dancers sees Elizabeth Sawyer approaching, he exclaims: “The devil cannot abide to be crossed” (II. i. 101).

There were also other practices to undue the witches’ power. Anne Ratcliffe when arguing with Mother Sawyer wants to scratch her face because it was believed that “a witch’s *maleficium* could be removed by drawing her blood and particularly by scratching her face” (Corbin 1999: 103). Other common practice to

discover if a suspected person was a witch was to burn the thatch of their roof. If she turned up at the house, it was regarded as a proof of her guilt.

*Hamlet*. Burn the witch, the witch, the witch, the witch!

*All*: What hast got there?

*Hamlet*. A handful of thatch plucked off a hovel of hers; and they say, when 'tis burning, if she be a witch she'll come running in.

Old Banks. Fire it, fire it! I'll stand between thee and home for any danger. (IV. i. 19- 25)

This was a common counter action taken by neighbours when proving the guilt of a person. In fact, one of the countryman says: "this thatch is as good as a jury to prove she / is a witch" (IV. i. 31- 32). However, this particular episode highlights the difference between the way accusations of witchcraft were handled by local villagers and authorities, represented in the play by the Justice of Peace.

*Old Banks*. Woman? A she-hellcat, a witch! To prove her one,  
We no sooner set fire on the thatch of her house, but in  
She came running as if the devil had sent her in a barrel  
Of gunpowder; which trick as surely proves her a witch as  
The pox in a snuffling nose is a sign a man is a whore-  
Master. (IV. i. 42- 47)

While the villagers use those popular practices as a way of proving Elizabeth Sawyer's guilt, the Justice sanctions their attitude towards her, their violent ways – “to abuse an aged woman!” (IV. i. 41)– and dismisses their evidence which, as Henry Goodcole had done in his pamphlet, was regarded as superstitious.

*Justice.* Come, come. Firing her thatch? Ridiculous! Take  
Heed, sirs, what you do. Unless your proofs come better  
Armed, instead of turning her into a witch, you'll prove  
Yourselves stark fools. (IV. i. 48- 51)

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the description of the judiciary process is not as extensive as in Goodcole's account but it serves as yet another example of how authorities acted in cases of witchcraft and reinforces the idea that, together with prayer, “the most effective way of dealing with a witch [...] was to accuse him or her before a court of law” (Sharpe 1997: 155).

The eruption of the demonic into the human world was not denied altogether, but the problem would be processed through the proper secular channels. In cases of witchcraft, the devil was defeated in the courts through the simple expedient of hanging his human agents. (Greenblatt 2001: 98-99)

Echoing Goodcole's account of judiciary proceedings, the dramatists portray part of the process that led to Elizabeth Sawyer's execution. First, the play explains how she is accused of being a witch by some of her neighbours, who hold a particular grudge against her.

*Sir Arthur.* Go, go. I can, if need be, bring an hundred voices,  
e'en here in Edmonton, that shall loud proclaim thee for  
a secret and pernicious witch. (IV. i. 107- 109)

These lines emphasise that it is not only individuals but a large number of people within the community that perceive her as a subversive element. At the time, the relevance of testimonies in cases of witchcraft was very important and more than just one single accusation was needed.

However, despite the neighbours' complaints, the Justice let her leave because no proof has been presented: "Let's then away.- / Old woman, mend thy life, get home and pray" (IV. i. 162- 163). The Justice's words reflect what is expected of a woman of that age, the role they should play in society, which drastically opposes Sawyer's reality. She is isolated from the rest of her community, with no family ties<sup>27</sup> and she is not a religious person, showing continuous signs of anti-Christian behaviour, such as cursing.

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<sup>27</sup> As Frances E. Dolan points out, the play "emphasizes Elizabeth Sawyer's isolation and vulnerability by silently erasing the husband that she mentions in Henry Goodcole's pamphlet about the case" (1994: 218).

Nevertheless, when new accusations are made against her, Elizabeth Sawyer is formally accused. Again, she refuses to admit her guilt –“I’ll confess nothing” (V. i. 68) but, like in similar cases of the period, no confession is necessary to begin the process and eventually convict her.

The burden of proof is presented to the audience, who is already familiar with the charges usually made against witches. They act, in that sense, as witnesses in the case. They have seen the evidences that prove her guilt and so has the system: “Thy trial is at hand” (V. i. 78).

[Witchcraft prosecutions] were handled by the secular judicial apparatus –witchcraft was a criminal offense like aggravated assault or murder– and hence reinforced rather than rivalled the bureaucratic control of authority. (Greenblatt 2001: 98)

In the case of the pamphlet, Goodcole refers to her examination by three local women who find that mark. However, such reference is not necessary in the play. The audience has actually seen Dog sucking her arm; they were witnesses to the pact.

*Sir Arthur.* Get a warrant first to examine her, then ship her to Newgate. Here’s enough, if all her other villainies were pardoned, to burn her for a witch. –You have a spirit, they say, comes to you in the likes of a dog; we shall

see your cur at one time or other. If we do, unless it be the devil  
himself, he shall go howling to the gaol in one chain,  
and thou in another. (IV. i. 231- 238)

The keeping of a familiar was criminalised under the 1604 Act, so Elizabeth Sawyer is also guilty of that charge. But most importantly, she is responsible for the death of Anne Ratcliffe. Sawyer's direct involvement in her bewitchment and eventual death is made clear through her order to Dog: "Touch her" (IV. i. 203). The play is, then, reaffirming the official discourse and proving the reality of witchcraft. The audience does not merely hear her indictment but they witness her fall to demonic practices in order to get her revenge.

The play also highlights the idea of order, which is imposed by the watchful authorities, in this particular case embodied in the figure of the Justice of Peace. Unlike the pamphlet, the play does not give this figure a name; a fact which highlights his status as archetype of the judiciary system. His words and actions perfectly fit in the Jacobean discourse. As James I had done before, the Justice is the one who can discern reality from falsehood. He is the one who re-establishes order in society, punishing not only those who have broken the law but also those whose behaviour were not adequate.

In that sense, not only is Elizabeth Sawyer convicted for her dealings with the Devil but also Frank Thorney is sentenced to death for "adultery and murder"

(IV. ii. 188). Even Sir Arthur's behaviour is censured by the Justice who force him to pay a fine for his involvement in the case.

*Justice.* Sir Arthur, though the bench hath mildly censured  
Your errors, yet you have indeed been the instrument that  
Wrought all their misfortunes. I would wish you paid  
Down your fine speedily and willingly. (V. iii. 1- 4)

As Corbin explains, “the communal emphasis of the closure requires a recognition of social responsibility at all levels” (1999: 126). The Justice, as the representative of the authorities, of the sovereign, acts like that fatherly figure watching over his children. He is the mediator, the one restoring order and punishing deviations from the official line. In that sense, as it has been explained, witches are perceived as the enemies of God and, then, according to James I's ideas, the enemies of God's representative on earth, the king himself and those appointed by him.

Therefore, the final scenes of the play emphasise the official discourse which censures particular behaviours and illustrate “how anger, resentment and unbridled tongue can allow the devil to gain entry to the world” (Corbin 1999: 9).

*Dog.* [...] Thou never art so distant  
From an evil spirit but that thy oaths,  
Curses, and blasphemies pull him to thine elbow.

Thou never tellst a lie but that a devil  
Is within hearing it; thy evil purposes  
Are ever haunted. But when they come to act—  
As thy tongue slandering, bearing false witness,  
Thy hand stabbing, stealing, cozening, cheating—  
He's then within thee. Thou playst, he bets upon thy part.

(V. i. 137- 145)

This type of discourse appears in many of the writings of the period and echoes Foucault's surveillance system as exemplified in the Panopticon. The idea that the Devil is always present, always watching over people's actions and ready to make us fall is used by Jacobean authorities to make their subjects internalise the dominant discourse and become the subjects of their own subjection.

Hence the major effect of the Panopticon: to induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power [...] that this architectural apparatus should be a machine for creating and sustaining a power relation independent of the person who exercises it; in short, that the inmates should be caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. (Foucault 1979: 15)

The authorities highlight “how susceptible humankind is to temptation” (Corbin 1986: 27) but also promote particular behaviours by emphasising the

figure of a watchful Devil, who is always willing to make men fall and condemn the sinners for all eternity. The case of Elizabeth Sawyer is, then, exemplary as she has transgressed all the norms and that has condemned her.

It is also worth pointing out that, although the play gives “voice to subversive ideas, such questionings of the prevalent social order are always ‘contained’ within the terms of the discourses which hold that social order in place” (Selden 1993: 164). In that sense, Elizabeth Sawyer criticism of the attitudes of her neighbours and of society in general are regarded, in the end, as negative. Her challenge of the norms ends up with her fall into diabolical practices. She is “demonised and objectified as ‘other’” (1993: 164). And the same happens with Frank Thorney. Their “existence is allowed only as evidence of the rightness of established power” (1993: 164- 165).

The final proof of her status as a witch comes through her final speech. As Diane Purkiss explains, not only her “frequent displays of her inner thoughts and feelings” (1999: 242) but also “the authenticity of this form of speech is what ‘proves’ Sawyer to be a witch” (1999: 242).

Their final recognition of guilt, reinforces the discourse of the authorities and intends to teach the audience which attitudes and behaviours are acceptable and which ones will lead them to condemnation and death.

*Elizabeth Sawyer. [...]*

Bear witness. I repent all former evil;

There is no damned conjuror like the devil.

*All.* Away with her! Away! (V. iii. 51- 53)

*The Witch of Edmonton* should be read in its context, as a reflection of the mentality of the period, as yet another example of how drama echoed some of the power strategies and ideologies of the Jacobean authorities. However, at the same time, it also shows the current controversy over the topic of witchcraft, the ambivalence in the discourse, which was first focused on the prosecution of witches, the Devil's agents, and later on the discovery of false testimonies.

Nevertheless, witchcraft is used by both ecclesiastical and secular authorities to reinforce their power position, the hierarchical structure and social modes of patriarchy, social order, etc. The witch became the figure of disorder that should be extirpated from society together with other subversive elements, such as murderers or bigamous.



# CONCLUSIÓN



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En los años 80 surgen con fuerza dos nuevos enfoques en el campo de la crítica literaria que abogan por un retorno a la historia, “arranca a los textos literarios de la ilusión de su autonomía y los integra en el proceso social” (Penedo 1998: 11). Tanto el Nuevo Historicismo, que emerge en Estados Unidos gracias a autores como Stephen Greenblatt o Louis Montrose, como el Materialismo Cultural, originado en el Reino Unido y cuyos principales exponentes serán Jonathan Dollimore y Allan Sinfield, surgirán como respuesta a anteriores enfoques marcados por una visión tradicional de la cultura y la literatura, y enfatizarán la dimensión política de los textos y al papel del discurso en la construcción de la identidad.

El Nuevo Historicismo, que está ligado desde sus inicios a los estudios renacentistas, aboga por un enfoque multidisciplinar y es deudor a anteriores

autores de diversas ideologías entre los que se incluyen autores como Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Louis Althusser, Raymond Williams o Clifford Geertz.

Aunque este enfoque se caracteriza por su negativa a describir una teoría sistematizada, su práctica crítica comparte muchos elementos comunes que lo distinguen de otros enfoques. Como había hecho antes el Feminismo, el Nuevo Historicismo recupera textos antes marginalizados y los analiza en relación con el discurso dominante de cada época. Las obras se leen en relación no solo con la historia sino también con factores políticos y sociales por lo que este enfoque resulta particularmente útil a la hora de estudiar la representación de la brujería en las obras del siglo XVI y su relación con el discurso oficial.

Partiendo de las ideas de Louis Althusser, se enfatiza el papel de los aparatos ideológicos del Estado en la formación del sujeto y cómo el teatro o los panfletos, entre otros, serán, según Stephen Greenblatt (1980), vehículos de poder.

El Nuevo Historicismo analiza también el papel de las instituciones en la creación de la identidad. De este modo, nos permite entender el discurso de la brujería como un modo de control por parte de las instituciones de poder, tales como la Iglesia, el Estado o el patriarcado familiar, que utilizan distintos medios para extender su ideología y afianzar su propia posición.



Como se ha estudiado en el segundo capítulo de esta tesis, las cazas de brujas, que tienen lugar durante los siglos XV y XVI en prácticamente todos los países de la Europa occidental, compartirá una serie de elementos comunes, fácilmente distinguibles en los distintos procesos.

Este discurso de la brujería tiene su origen en creencias del mundo Antiguo, donde la magia ya aparecía con frecuencia, como se puede constatar por los numerosos textos de esta época que hacen referencia a ella y que incluyen no sólo la Biblia sino también obras de la Antigüedad clásica. El cristianismo se extiende por toda Europa y en el siglo IV ya se ha convertido en la religión mayoritaria, oponiéndose a anteriores creencias y tradiciones que son ahora acusadas de demoniacas.

La extensa literatura escrita a lo largo de la Edad Media por teólogos cristianos como san Agustín o santo Tomás de Aquino ofrece una nueva visión del mundo donde el Demonio tiene un papel más relevante y se convierte en el rival de Dios. Así, las autoridades inician un proceso de demonización de todos aquellos elementos que se oponen al discurso oficial tales como los herejes y posteriormente las brujas, que pasan a ser entendidos como parte del ejército de Satán, como un elemento que rompe el orden natural y debe ser por tanto eliminado de la sociedad. Se utiliza el discurso de la brujería para colocar a todos aquellos que se opongan al discurso oficial como enemigos de Dios y se inician los mecanismos necesarios para su eliminación de la sociedad.

Así, las creencias populares sobre los efectos negativos de la brujería se ven reforzados por un gran número de tratados sobre el tema instigados por las autoridades como mecanismos de control. De este modo, el estímulo por parte de las autoridades civiles, que promulga nuevas leyes, y de las autoridades eclesiásticas, con la declaración de la brujería como *crimen exceptum* y la posterior creación de la Santa Inquisición, resultan un elementos fundamentales para justificar la sistemática caza de brujas que tendrá lugar en el Renacimiento.

Dichas persecuciones están provocadas por una serie de factores, entre los que se incluyen no sólo ese nuevo énfasis de la autoridades por perseguir a todos aquellos elementos subversivos, sino también factores socio-económicos y religiosos, como los cambios que la Reforma y Contrarreforma provocarán en la Europa del Renacimiento. El uso generalizado de la tortura se entiende también como factor clave que incrementará el número de persecuciones ya que los acusados son obligados no solo a confesar sus crímenes sino también a delatar a sus supuestos cómplices. Además, ayuda a crear una cierta uniformidad en el discurso de la brujería, que para mediados del siglo XV estará ya formado por una serie de elementos generalmente aceptados por todos los europeos.

El discurso de la brujería se filtrará rápidamente por toda Europa a todos los niveles de la sociedad; desde los gobernantes o los nobles hasta el más pobre de los campesinos, se entenderán a las brujas como una amenaza y se verá la necesidad de extirparla de la sociedad.

La bruja se define normalmente como una mujer que, a través de su pacto con el Diablo vende su alma a cambio de una serie de poderes. Las descripciones de dicho pacto varían según la zona geográfica pero generalmente incluyen una marca distintiva en el cuerpo de la bruja, marca que será utilizada como prueba física en los numerosos procesos llevados a cabo en el Renacimiento. Además, este culto al Diablo se ve como una amenaza directa a las autoridades seculares ya que normalmente tiene lugar de manera colectiva, en las reuniones de brujos y brujas conocidas como Sabbat. Dichas reuniones, a las que se supone que llegaban volando, incluyen bacanales, orgías, canibalismo, sacrificios de niños y en general cualquier tipo de actividad opuesta al discurso oficial de las autoridades civiles y la Iglesia.

Este discurso se extenderá, gracias a la invención de la imprenta, a través de numerosos textos que incluyen no sólo tratados sobre brujería sino también formas de literarias más populares como los panfletos, pero también a través de la palabra, a través de los sermones, las baladas populares o las obras de teatro. Las ilustraciones y las imágenes visuales representadas por numerosos artistas también contribuirán haciéndola llegar a todos aquellos incapaces de leer y extenderá el discurso oficial por todo el continente.

Pero este discurso de la brujería, que incluye una serie de elementos comunes, no puede entenderse como un proceso unificado sino que variará significativamente entre los distintos países europeos e incluso dentro de una

misma zona. Por lo tanto, es importante estudiar los procesos de brujería de manera local y entender las fuerza que provocan las persecuciones en cada época y contexto particular.



Tal y como se ha estudiado en el capítulo 3, en el caso de Inglaterra, como en la mayoría de países europeos, el trasfondo político de la caza de brujas resulta aparente. En primer lugar, el rey llega a Inglaterra precedido por su fama como implacable cazador de brujas. El mismo Satán lo ve como su enemigo. Esta imagen es cuidadosamente trasladada a sus súbditos ingleses a través de varios textos como el panfleto *Newes from Scotland* o *Daemonologie*, un tratado de brujería escrito por el soberano. Un año después, en 1604, Jacobo I promulgaría nuevas leyes contra las brujas, en las que se agravan las penas para los culpables.

Sin embargo, Jacobo I no se conforma con que sus súbditos lo vean como el enemigo de Satán, sino también como el representante de Dios en la tierra. Su firme creencia en el Derecho divino le lleva a presentarse como el único capaz de distinguir realidad de ficción. Casos como el de las brujas de Leicester en 1616 refuerzan esta nueva imagen que encaja perfectamente con el status del monarca como guía de sus súbditos, como juez encargado de proteger a su pueblo.

Los distintos textos de la época contribuyen a reforzar esta imagen del monarca, que utiliza el discurso como medio para difundir no sólo sus ideas sobre brujería sino también aquellos valores que considera positivos, enfrentándolos a todo aquello que se percibe como subversivo, interpretado en términos neohistoricistas, y que amenaza por tanto el orden natural de la cosas. En ese esquema, la bruja se convierte en un elemento que debe ser eliminado.

A principios del siglo XVI, la bruja en Inglaterra, al igual que en el resto de Europa, se entiende casi exclusivamente como una mujer. El frecuente énfasis en su aislamiento o en su relativa independencia (normalmente se trata de mujeres viudas o solteras) se opone claramente al idea de mujer sumisa y obediente. Su relativa libertad coloca a las brujas en un lugar muy peligroso. Así, por ejemplo, las *cunning women* ejercen un poder tradicionalmente reservado al hombre. Sus conocimientos las convierten en peligrosas. De ahí que el discurso oficial refuerce los aspectos negativos de este tipo de mujeres para contrarrestar así su posible posición de poder e influencia en la sociedad.

Pero la bruja rompe además con la idea tradicional de la jerarquía familiar donde el hombre, el marido, ocupa el lugar más preeminente. Jacobo I entiende su reino como una familia y se ve a sí mismo como el cabeza de esa familia. Por lo tanto, dicha estructura no puede ser desafiada y menos por una mujer, que en la época era frecuentemente descrita como carente de inteligencia. La bruja, como destructora del orden natural, debe ser por tanto perseguida.

En la sociedad del siglo XVI, la Iglesia juega también un papel primordial, manteniendo la estructura jerárquica de la sociedad. No sólo la estructura familiar donde la mujer, como se ha indicado, está al servicio del hombre y cuya principal misión es la de procrear, sino también fomenta ciertas actitudes entre las que destaca la obediencia. Cada ciudadano debe conocer su lugar en la sociedad y ajustarse a lo que se espera de él. En caso contrario, el Demonio, siempre vigilante, procurará su caída. De este modo, a través del discurso, se refuerza el control sobre los sujetos. Su continua visibilidad, como explica Foucault, les hace convertirse en agentes de su propia subyugación. No se necesitan mecanismos de control pues el sujeto interioriza el discurso dominante que explica que sólo aquellos que se comporten siguiendo los dictados de las autoridades, de la Iglesia, estarán a salvo del Demonio y podrán alcanzar el reino de los Cielos.

La brujería se debe por tanto enmarcar dentro de las estrategias de poder utilizadas por Jacobo I. La frecuente utilización de metáforas para definir al monarca como marido, como cabeza de familia, como el representante de Dios en la tierra, forma parte de su estrategia de gobierno. De este modo, no sólo consigue afianzar su posición como monarca imbuido por el Derecho divino sino que fomenta en sus súbditos ciertos comportamientos y refuerza la idea del buen cristiano, del buen ciudadano dentro de la férrea estructura social del Renacimiento, dominada por el patriarcado y una fuerte jerarquización.



El estudio del caso de Elizabeth Sawyer y su representación en dos de los medio más populares de la época, el panfleto y la obra de teatro, en los capítulos 4 y 5 muestra de qué modo el discurso de la brujería se infiltra en todos los estratos sociales y es aceptado por la sociedad en su conjunto.

En ambos textos, la descripción de la bruja encaja dentro del discurso europeo, mostrando una imagen estereotipada de Elizabeth Sawyer. Es importante resaltar que el panfleto de Henry Goodcole, escrito poco después de su ejecución, fue utilizado posteriormente como fuente de inspiración por los dramaturgo. Además, ambas obras utilizaron con toda probabilidad elementos de la cultura popular, como las baladas que el propio Goodcole afirma que se escribieron sobre el tema. Pero *The Witch of Edmonton* debe ser entendida también dentro de su género y como en numerosas ocasiones toma elementos de obras anteriores como *The Witch* o *Macbeth*, además de la literatura de la época, incluyendo panfletos y tratados de brujería.

Tanto *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer* como *The Witch of Edmonton* reflejan todas las características típicas asociadas con el estereotipo de bruja. En primer lugar su descripción física, con un énfasis en su avanzada edad y su fealdad como valores negativos. A estos se unen también las faltas de su carácter, que la alejan del ideal cristiano. Sus continuos conflictos con sus vecinos,

su pobreza o los insultos lanzados contra todos aquellos que se enfrentan a ella aparecen como elementos prototípicos de la categoría “bruja” en ambas obras.

Además, elementos como el pacto y la marca que deja en su cuerpo el Diablo adquieren gran relevancia puesto que son utilizados en la época como prueba inequívoca de su culpabilidad. Asimismo, la figura del familiar, típica del discurso inglés, tiene un papel predominante en ambas narrativas. Además de por su valor como prueba de culpabilidad en los casos de brujería según la ley de 1604, el familiar se identifica claramente con Satanás, o al menos con un demonio. En este punto, el énfasis en la relación carnal entre la bruja y su familiar, su insaciable apetito sexual, su promiscuidad, se equiparan a las descripciones continentales de las relaciones entre la bruja y los íncubos.

Elementos recurrentes en otros países europeos, como la idea del Sabbat no aparecen sin embargo en ninguna de las dos narraciones. Mostrando el modo en que el discurso de brujería puede variar dependiendo de las zonas para incluir determinados elementos o excluir otros.

Sin embargo, el énfasis en el *maleficium*, en los poderes de la bruja resulta manifiesto tanto en la obra de teatro como en el panfleto. Esta magia anti-natural es uno de las principales preocupaciones de sus contemporáneos y, en el caso concreto de Elizabeth Sawyer, se materializa en su implicación directa en la muerte de una de sus vecinas.

Una vez más, la extensa descripción del proceso judicial que termina en la condena y ejecución de Elizabeth Sawyer destaca el papel de las autoridades como restauradoras del orden y las enfrenta a las creencias y supersticiones populares, que no solo en el discurso oficial sino en ambas obras son frecuentemente ridiculizadas.

Como se ha explicado, el discurso de la brujería que aparece en *The Wonderful Discovery of Elizabeth Sawyer* y en *The Witch of Edmonton*, se enmarca dentro de las estrategias de poder en la Inglaterra del siglo XVI bajo el reinado de Jacobo I. En primer lugar, el *self-fashioning* es aparente en la figura de Henry Goodcole. La identidad en la Inglaterra del Renacimiento está claramente marcada no solo por las acciones sino también por las palabras y sus continuos intentos por presentarse como un escritor serio culminan con la obtención de una confesión por parte de la criminal que quedará plasmada en el panfleto.

Queda claro también como la Elizabeth Sawyer que aparece en el panfleto no es más que una creación de Goodcole, un estereotipo que sigue el discurso oficial de brujería. Es un elemento más de su estrategia para complacer a sus lectores (ávidos de historias sobre crímenes en un mercado cada vez más difícil para los escritores), pero también a las autoridades, pues presenta una vez más un caso en que la violación de las normas sociales y las leyes culmina en el juicio y ejecución del transgresor. Goodcole como clérigo que es se convierte en el

instructor de su pueblo al que ofrece una historia de crimen y castigo con un valor moralizante.

En el caso de *The Witch of Edmonton*, la teatralidad y la identidad entendida como una formación es aún más aparente; la realidad se construye a través de las palabras. Así, el actor se convierte en un personaje y el personaje (Elizabeth Sawyer) se convierte en una bruja. Pero al mismo tiempo esa mujer catalogada como bruja por sus vecinos pasa a convertirse de nuevo en un papel dentro de la farsa interpretada por los *Morris dancers*.

La identidad se construye a través del discurso de modo que la Elizabeth Sawyer real desaparece tras las palabras de otros. No somos capaces de vislumbrar a la mujer real, del mismo modo que tampoco sus contemporáneos fueron capaces de verla. Tan solo podemos acceder a su construcción como un estereotipo, a su construcción como bruja.

Pero a través de estos textos podemos vislumbrar una época, los mecanismos de poder y de contención. Elizabeth Sawyer, como bruja, se describe como “la otra”, como un conglomerado de características negativas, no solo físicas sino también psicológica: su pobreza, su edad y aislamiento pero también su ira o sus constantes improperios. Tanto Henry Goodcole como William Rowley, Thomas Dekker y John Ford crean un personaje que encaja perfectamente con el discurso oficial. Ni siquiera los elementos que en principio podrían parecer subversivos, como la aparente simpatía que genera el personaje de Elizabeth

Sawyer al principio de la obra de teatro, pueden evitar verse finalmente como una estrategia más de contención, como un refuerzo más de las actitudes que las autoridades quieren afianzar.

Sin embargo no solo los aspectos políticos y sociales aparecen claramente reflejado en las dos obras estudiadas sino también los económicos. No hay que olvidar que tanto los panfletos como el teatro se enmarcan dentro de un creciente mercado donde el objetivo es vender. Y para vender se necesitan dos elementos principales. Por un lado dar al público lo que desea y no hay nada que capte más la atención que lo macabro, las historias de amor y muerte. Y la brujería era uno de los temas de moda: la magia y lo sobrenatural inundaban la Europa del siglo XVI. Pero por otro lado era imposible publicar, vender, si las autoridades censuraban tu obra, si la veían como algo peligroso. Así, sin necesidad de mecanismo específicos de control, los propios autores amoldaban su obra al discurso oficial.



En mi tesis *El discurso de la brujería en el teatro jacobino. Estudio del caso de Elizabeth Sawyer*, he pretendido explicar como la categoría “bruja” se construye a lo largo de la historia, añadiendo distintos elementos hasta que, en el

Renacimiento, se utiliza como discurso por parte de las autoridades para reforzar su control sobre la sociedad y mantener el orden establecido.

El caso de Elizabeth Sawyer, una mujer ejecutada por cargos de asesinato y brujería en Inglaterra en 1621 se convierte en un discurso de poder gracias a su dramatización en el panfleto de Henry Goodcole y la obra de William Rowley, Thomas Dekker y John Ford. En dichas narrativas, Elizabeth Sawyer pierde su identidad real para convertirse en la “bruja”, en un elemento subversivo dentro de la sociedad que debe ser eliminado para poder restaurar el orden natural. De este modo resulta aparente como la palabra, el discurso, no refleja una época sino que es parte activa de su formación.

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