

Lancashire: a Land of Witches in Shakespeare's Time

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Abstract

This article focuses on the connection between Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the famous English witch trial which took place in Lancashire in 1612. The judicial proceeding was recorded by a clerk of the court, who went by the name of Thomas Potts, whose reportage of the events was inconsistent and unstable, as I attempt to point out. In so doing, I underline the reasons – political, religious and opportunistic – that possibly motivated his behaviour, highly criticisable by modern standards.

Keywords: Authorial Intervention, Lancashire Witches, Political Context, Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, Trial Records.

The ride is over, and they alight near the door of a solitary hovel ... The inside of the hut corresponds with its miserable exterior ... A caldron is suspended above a peat fire, smouldering on the hearth. There is only one window, and a very thick curtain is drawn across it, to secure the inmate of the hut from prying eyes. Pendle Forest swarms in witches. They burrow into the hill-side like rabbits in a warren.

William H. Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, 1848

1. *Introduction*

In 1606 the first example of an alleged devilish confederacy made its debut on the London stage with the most famous witches of all: the 'weird sisters' in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. Two years before, the new monarch James I, who probably wanted to show severity in matters of public order and religion, had issued a new Witchcraft Act (1 Jac. I, c.12), which decreed death for those who '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' (Luders *et al.*, IV, pt. II, 1028). As a consequence of this, in 1612 Lancashire became the scene of an extraordinary witch trial: after several months of imprisonment, seventeen women and two men, all coming from the small county of the Forest of Pendle, were tried for witchcraft and ten of them were sent to the scaffold in Lancaster. Echo of the events was thorough. It had been a large trial and, although the

numbers involved did not exceed those of any previous judicial proceeding, it had attracted to Lancaster castle enormous crowds, drawn no doubt by the ghoulish prospect of seeing so many witches choking to death on the gallows. 'No episode in the history of superstition in England, gained such wide fame' (Notestein 1911, 121).

Witch-hunting in England, but not only, is today among the most written about, yet most indefinable, of historical topics. Even before the last alleged witches were burnt (as far as we know, the last legal execution was carried out at Glarus in Switzerland in 1782), educated Europeans were trying to explain what a well-known Italian scholar, Raoul Manselli, has rightly defined 'the shame of Western Christianity' (1975, 39). This intellectual quest has continued unchanged over the centuries, but only recently the phenomenon has shown all its complexity and multifaceted variety.¹

Starting from a perspective which is both political and religious, I will briefly discuss sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Lancashire, whose particular social conditions made it appear as a land of dissidents and non-conformists; I will then concentrate on the trial which was held in the region only a few years after the act on magic and witchcraft was passed. In so doing, I will try to tease out relations with the Gunpowder Plot of 1605 to which the activities of the Lancashire witches were compared by Thomas Potts, the trial's chronicler, and whose conspiratorial connections reached into Lancashire, in the attempt to show how the families of the local gentry were implicated in the underworld of persecuted Catholicism and to suggest that their mostly Protestant Jacobean descendants sought to demonstrate their loyalty to the state by seeking out witches. The final purpose of my article is to look at what Potts' 1613 witchcraft pamphlet, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, can tell us about the importance of the connection between fiction and reality in early modern popular culture. I will not take into account just the content of the story of the Lancashire witches, but also the way in which their vicissitudes have been transmitted to us, by whom and why, and whether that process can give us access to the actual personalities and events of the time. And with respect to the particular aspect of the correlation between facts and fiction Shakespeare's *Macbeth* comes to the foreground. It was in fact after the tragedy was performed for the courtiers and lawyers at Hampton Court that the full repertoire of the black mass was witnessed in England, complete with those macabre elements – infanticide, cannibalism, necromancy, and anthropophagy – which had for so long characterized the continental demonological theory.

2. 'This so unbridled and bad an handful of England'

Considered one of the most obscure, remote, insular and backward corners of England, Lancashire had been giving the government in London cause of

concern over many centuries. Since the Middle Ages, it had been regarded as a rather wild and lawless region, a place 'fabled for theft, violence and sexual laxity and where the church was honoured without much understanding of its doctrines by the common people' (Hasted 1993, 5).

The Reformation had made matters worse by removing parishes, convents and chapels previously scattered through the landscape, and not replacing them with other places of worship. By the 1590s the atmosphere had become so disturbing that fifteen of the more Puritan clergy, including the incumbents at Whalley and Blackburn, decided to sign a petition to demand action. According to this, the majority of Lancastrians was ignoring the established religious authority: 'most of the people refraine their Parishe Church, under pretence of their Chapelles, and having no service at their Chapelles, come at [none] at all; but many of them grow into utter Atheisme and Barbarisme, manie enjoy full security in Poperie and all Popishe practises' (Whitaker 1801, 89).²

Things went on this way, so that the Puritan divine John White of Eccles had much the same to tell in 1608. Speaking of the Lancashire Catholics, he wrote:

I will not speake how unable they are to render account of the faith, to understande the points of the Catechisme, to judge of things lawfull and unlawfull and such like ... And while superstitiously they refuse to pray in their owne language with understanding, they speak that which their leaders may blushe to hear. And it cannot be answered that these are customs of a few simple people: for this I say, is generall throughout the country, the whole bodie of the common people practising nothing else, until it please God by the ministry of his Gospel to convert them. (1624, 148)

The government had tried to invert this situation in two different ways. Senior churchmen had been sent north on preaching tours to exhort local people to change their customs. Meanwhile the lord lieutenant, the High Sheriff and the magistrates received regular instructions to fine those who did not behave as decent and proper Christians. For a long time, these methods achieved little and it became clear that the justices of the peace were slow to prosecute their Catholic neighbours simply on the basis of a difference in personal religious belief (cf. Leatherbarrow 1947, 56).

Episodes such as the 1605 Gunpowder Plot, whatever its origins, did much to link the idea of Catholicism with treason in people's minds. The conspiracy and its aftermath caused a security scare of major proportions and the interrogation of the captured connivers seemed to reveal a network of Catholic subversion throughout the country. Lancashire was implicated; the plotters were fleeing towards the county when they were arrested, and two of them confessed that they were expected to start a rising there against James I.

From the government's point of view, therefore, Lancashire was a hot-bed of seditious intrigue centring on the religious question. Inevitably, stern measures were to be taken. Early in 1612 the JPs of the province received

orders from the council of the crown that they were to compile a report of all those who refused to take communion in church, and to confiscate any arms they might own. Besides, it was also commissioned that on Easter Sunday (8 April) a notice should be read from every pulpit in the county that non-communicants had twenty days in which to conform or be listed for prosecution. And it was exactly at this time, when the magistrates were deeply busy in their districts tracking down religious subversion, that Roger Nowell, Esquire of Read Hall, chose to take action over some long-standing witchcraft accusations in the Forest of Pendle.³

3. The horror of the Murthers and the crying Sinne of Bloud': Events Leading Up to the Trial

We know of the occurrences surrounding Pendle because one of the officials who presided the trials had been commissioned by the court judges to produce a comprehensive account of the nineteen 'notorious' witches arraigned at Lancaster castle in August 1612:

Upon the Arraignement and triall of these Witches at the last Assizes and Generall Gaole-deliuerie, holden at Lancaster, wee [the judges Altham and Bromley] found such apparent matters against them [the witches], that we thought it necessarie to publish them to the World, and thereupon imposed the labour of this Worke vpon this Gentleman by reason of his place, being a Clerke at the time in Court, imploied in the Arraignement and triall of them. (Potts 1612, 11)

The entrusted man was Thomas Potts, an expert in legal matters who had acted as clerk in the Lent and Summer Assizes of the Northern Circuit.⁴ Although not an unbiased reporter, as is shown in section 4, he registered for posterity the dramatic story of the Lancashire witches. In his reconstruction of the events we read that everything began on 18 March 1612 when Alizon Device, on her way to Trawden Forest to start her habitual occupation of begging, had a fateful encounter with the pedlar John Law, as a result of which, following that refusal of a favour which so often provoked the wrath of a wretched individual, the man went instantly into what was identified as a witchcraft-induced illness.⁵ The victim, helped by his relatives, decided to invoke the aid of officialdom, and on 30 March Alizon Device with her mother Elizabeth and her brother James appeared at Read Hall to be examined by a magistrate. In the presence of authority in the person of Roger Nowell, Alizon was so awe-struck as to agree with the suggestions implied in the magistrate's questions. On 2 April Nowell, as further accounts of *maleficia* reached him, also interrogated Elizabeth Device's mother, the eighty-year-old Elizabeth Southern (alias Old Demdike), Anne Whittle (named Chattox), and three local witnesses. Around 4 April the magistrate committed Alizon Device, Demdike, Chattox, and Chattox's daughter Anne Redferne to prison awaiting

trial at the next session of the Assizes. On Good Friday, less than a week after the four Pendle women had been lodged in Lancaster castle, several friends of the Demdike family visited Malkin Tower.⁶ Two of the visitors were relatives, two were near neighbours, and some went there out of idle curiosity to discuss possible verdicts at the forthcoming trial, in August. When rumours of this obscure meeting reached Read Hall, Nowell decided that more enquiries should be made. His examination of Elizabeth Device and her children James and Jennet convinced him that Demdike's old home had been the scene of a witches' coven and that all who had been present must be witches.

Space constraints do not allow me to thrash out the way in which the confessions of the alleged witches changed as their interrogations proceeded, and the way in which initial denials or cautious statements turned to confession as judicial pressure and questioning became harder. The evidence of the children Jennet and James Device was vital in initiating the wider suppositions of witchcraft, and a thorough analysis of the examinations of the trials shows that by this stage suspects were clearly beginning to panic and accuse each other.⁷ The investigations had reached critical mass, and fellow citizens came forward in large amount to tell the authorities of acts of witchcraft that had taken place sometimes many years before. This aspect is very interesting because it reveals how witchcraft suspicions were quite often enmeshed in local feuds and rivalries.

More or less contemporary, over the county border in York, another woman, Jennet Preston of Gisburn, was arraigned before Judge Altham on a charge of killing by witchcraft Mr. Thomas Lister and causing great loss to Mr. Leonard Lister. In 1611, as Potts says, she had been before the Assize Court for the murder of a child but had been found not guilty and acquitted. At her present trial the depositions of Elizabeth, James and Jennet Device were read out to show that at Malkin Tower she had enlisted the help of her friends from Pendle Forest to kill Mr. Lister, but the most important evidence was provided by a witness, who stated that 'Jennet Preston, the Prisoner at the Barre, being brought to M. Lister after hee was dead, & layd out to be wound vp in his winding-sheet, the said Jennet Preston comming to touch the dead corpes, they bled fresh bloud presently, in the presence of all that were there present' (179). She was found guilty and executed at York Castle: 'after the Gentlemen of the Lurie of Life and Death had spent the most part of the day, in consideration of the euidence against her, pronounced Iudgement against her to bee hanged for her offence' (185-186).

The Lancaster Assize Court opened with pomp and ceremony on Monday, August 17, with Judge Bromley playing the leading role. With him on the bench was Judge Altham and, to assist them in their deliberations, several important personalities including Lord Gerard and Sir Richard Hoghton. The prosecution lay in the hands of Roger Nowell who had made the preliminary examinations and had sent the accused for trial. The prisoners, frightened,

suffering from the foul conditions of jail life, crowded together and guarded by gaolers, had no counsel to plead for them and were not allowed to call witnesses to speak on their behalf. All that they could now do was to plead 'guilty' or 'not guilty', listen to the evidence of witnesses against them, hear their own confessions, and then wait for the inevitable verdict. The judges could, if they wanted, ask questions to help the accused, but it will be clear what use was made of this rule in the Pendle case.

Old Demdike had died in her cell before her case came up. The sudden death of a woman who, although old, still enjoyed good health throws a suspicious light on the work of the warder Master Cowell. In the records of the trial we read that he took 'great paines ... during the time of [the] imprisonment [of the accused], to procure [the court] to discouer ... such other Witches as he knew to bee dangerous' (78).⁸ Nevertheless, we are never told in which way depositions were obtained, neither do we know if torture was used as a means of coercion. Apparently then, the defendants spontaneously confessed their crimes, but on 18 August James Device 'was so insensible, weake and unable in all thinges, as he could neither speake, heare, or stand, but was holden up to receiue his triall' (69). This particular detail allows us to suppose that the so often reported 'great paines', also with reference to other prisoners, could just be an example of understatement.

Anne Chattox, Elizabeth Device, James Device and Anne Redferne were tried on the first day, and all, with the exception of Anne Redferne, were convicted. 'But the innocent bloud yet unsatisfied, and crying out vnto God for sastisfaction and reuenge; the crie of his people (to deliuer them from the danger of such horrible and bloudie executioners, and from her wicked and damnable practices) ...' (109) led the judges to try the young woman again on the following day, as were Alison Device, Alice Nutter, Katherine Hewitt, John and Jane Bulcock, Isabel Roby and Margaret Pearson.

All of them were found guilty. To Alice Gray – whose trial was not recorded, though she was as deeply implicated as her companion, Katherine Mouldheels – and to three other people from the Samlesbury contingent, the judge gave solemn warning not to presume too heavily upon God's mercy. They had been acquitted in this instance, 'yet without question there are amongst you, that are as deepe in this Action, as any of them that are condemned to die for their offences' (167). He bade them forsake the Devil, 'fall not againe', be of good behaviour and present themselves at the next assizes at Lancaster. To those sentenced to death, Sir Edward Bromley uttered with emphasis and gravity those dreadful words we find in the final verdict:

What persons of your nature and condition, euer were Arraigned and Tried with more solemnitie, had more libertie giuen to pleade or answer to euerie particular point of Euidence against you? In conclusion such hath been the generall care of all, that had to deale with you, that you haue neither cause to be offended in the proceedings of the Iustices, ... nor with the Court that hath had great care to giue nothing in evidence

against you, but matter of fact [...]. It only remains I pronounce the Judgement of the Court against you by the Kings authoritie, which is: you shall all goe from hence to the Castle, from whence you came; from thence you shall bee carried to the place of Execution for this Countie: where your bodies shall bee hanged vntill you be dead; and GOD HAVE MERCIE VPON YOVR SOVLES. (163-165)⁹

The execution took place on the following day, 20 August, upon the moor about a mile from the Castle, watched by an immense crowd in raptures for whom this was a gruesome and indispensable spectacle.

4. *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster: the Testimony of a Distracted Clerk*

In the autumn of 1612, the pen of Thomas Potts marked the word 'Finis' on the enormous quarto that had kept him hard at it in the comfort of his lodgings in London's Chancery Lane since late summer. On 7 November, with the voluminous bundle of papers produced by his labours in his hands, the obscure registrar had *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* entered in the Stationer's Register. A few weeks later, to his great gratification (and possibly, he hoped, to his advancement), there came into his hands a copy of his work. He had every right to feel proud for he had brilliantly recalled what had so deeply upset the 'North Parts'. The manuscript had been revised and approved by Sir Edward Bromley, who wrote a prefatory note for the first edition of the pamphlet in which he praised the narrative skills of the author and guaranteed the authenticity of his transcriptions:

After he had taken great paines to finish it, I tooke it upon mee to reuise and correct it, that nothing might passe but matter of Fact, apparent against them by record. It is very little he hath inserted, and that necessarie, to shew what their offences were, what people, and of what condition they were: The whole proceedings and Euidence against them, I finde upon examination carefully set forth, and truely reported, and judge the worke fit and worthie to be published. (9)

But at the end of his relation, Thomas Potts would specify: 'it is no part of my profession to publish any thing in print, neither can I paint in extraordinary termes. But if this discouerie may serve for your instruction, I shall thinke my selfe very happie in this Seruice, and so leaue it to your generall censure' (168-169). Soon after, as if to justify himself for missing faults and imperfections, he also added:

It was a worke imposed vpon me by the Iudges, in respect I was so wel instructed in euery particular. In hast I haue vndertaken to finish it in a busie Tearme amongst my other imployments. My charge was to publish the proceedings of Iustice, and matter of Fact, wherein I wanted libertie to write what I would ... And this I hope will giue good satisfaction to such as vnderstand how to iudge of a businesse of this nature. (168)

These lines show how the jurist, before taking leave of his book, had been animated with the desire to state that, although overburdened with other engagements, he had tried to carry out his task with anxious zeal and a good deal of flair, using ‘matter vpon Record, euen in their owne Countrie tearmes’ to recreate vividly for the reader the activities, the processes and the convictions of the Lancashire witches (168). A careful reading of his precise work, however, highlights the fact that we are not in front of a reliable version of the events and suggests that the author’s conclusive apologies are only a pure formality: ‘If I have omitted any thing materiall, or published any thing imperfect, excuse me for that I have done’ (168). When confronted with a matter unknown to him, Thomas Potts was not at all unprepared. As an active and selective reporter, he represented prior written depositions as *viva voce* testimony, improved the jury speeches to display the shining efficiency and impartiality of the legal system and intentionally manipulated the judicial hank:

Heere you may not expect the exact order of the Assizes ...; but the proceedinges against the Witches, who are now vpon their deliuerance here in order as they came to the Barre, with the particular poyntes of Euidence against them: which is the Labour and worke we now intend (by Gods grace) to performe as we may, to your generall contenment. (31)

As a consequence, one of the most striking characteristics of the pamphlet is the presence of incongruities and ambiguities. About the length of Elizabeth Demdike’s career as a witch, for example, Thomas Potts offers diverse conflicting reconstructions. We must keep in mind that he never met the old woman because she passed away before he was appointed as assistant to Lancaster, but none the less he described her personality in detail, thanks to the information previously collected by the magistrate Roger Nowell:

She was a very old woman, about the age of Foure-score yeares, and had been a Witch for fiftie yeares. Shee dwelt in the Forrest of *Pendle*, a vaste place, fitte for her profession: what shee committed in her time, no man knowes. Thus liued shee securely for many yeares, brought up her owne Children, instructed her Graund-children, and took great care and paines to bring them to be Witches. (16-17)

Here Potts stresses that she had been a witch for a very long time, fifty years. But in old Demdike’s personal confession we read that she had been ‘generall agent for the Deuill in all these partes’ for a shorter period:

The said Elizabeth Southernns confesseth, and sayth; That about twentie yeares past, as she was comming homeward from begging, there met her this Examine, ... in the sayd Forrest of *Pendle*, a Spirit or Deuill in the shape of a Boy, ... who bade this Examine stay, saying to her, that if she would giue him her Soule, she should haue any thing that she would request. (18)

These assertions are once again discredited when Demdike's daughter, Elizabeth Device, appears at the bar; when questioned about the activities of her mother, she admits that she had been a witch 'by the space of fourty yeares' (26). With reference to the duration of her years of servitude Thomas Potts only comments: 'the Deuill and shee knew best with whome shee made her couenant' (26). Elizabeth Demdike was a widow, but we hear nothing of her husband, not even his name. The fact that one of her sons was called Howgate, while the rest of the family was known as Southern, lets us assume that he was illegitimate, unless she had been married more than once. Whether her deposition was the result of threats, ill treatment, or promises of good turn, we do not know. Roger Nowell, the only person who saw her alive, may have convinced her that she was a witch, and that the animals she encountered in the fields or that strayed into her house were the Devil in disguise. Or, by intimations and insinuations, he may have turned the story she told into the tale he wanted to hear, perfectly knowing that a later denial would have carried little weight. And Thomas Potts, always so alert in registering the proceedings, behaved similarly.

Disagreeing features can also be found in the rendition of Alizon Device's story; in this case, apparently without noticeable authorial intervention, Thomas Potts tries to involve as directly as possible the reader in the encounter between the witch, the pedlar and the witness.¹⁰ But if we consider the three different accounts of Alizon Device's story, Thomas Potts' interference becomes much more evident. The first version we have is the young woman's own confession; on 18 March 1612 she set off for Trawden on a begging expedition. Near Colne Field she met one John Law, a Halifax pedlar, whom she asked to buy some pins. What happened after the pedlar refused to open his pack is related as follows:

The Black Dogge spake vnto this Examine in English, saying; What wouldst thou have me to do vnto yonder man? To whom this Examine said, What canst thou do at him? And the Dogge answered againe, I can lame him: wherevpon this Examine answered, and said to the said Black Dogge, Lame him: and before the Pedler was gone fortie Roddes further, he fell downe lame. (140-141)

These words are presented as the transcription of what she said in court; it is Thomas Potts himself who declares that her confession 'agreeth verbatim with her Examination taken at Reade, when she was apprehended and taken' (140-141). The second version of Alizon Device's story comes from the pedlar himself:

He [John Law] went with his Packe of wares at his backe thorow Coln-fielde: where vnluckily he met with Alizon Device, now Prisoner at the Barre, who was very earnest with him for pinnes, but he would give her none: whereupon she seemed to be very angry; and when he was past her, hee fell downe lame in great extremitie; and

afterwards by meanes got into an Ale-house in Colne, neere vnto the place where hee was first bewitched: as hee lay there in great paine, not able to stirre either hand or foote; he saw a great Black-Dogge stand by him, with very fearefull firie eyes, great teeth, and a terrible countenance, looking him in the face. (142)

The pedlar does not say that Alizon asked him to buy pins, but that she begged them from him. The two versions are evidently versions quite clashing. Since Alizon also said that she was going out to beg in Trawden Forest that day, it may seem likely that she would beg pins from John Law rather than ask to buy them. But John Law's son, Abraham, gives yet another version of events, which makes the reader question the stability and truthfulness of any of the stories about the case. Abraham Law told the authorities he had been sent for by letter on 21 March 1612, and had found his father 'speechlesse, and had the left side lamed all save his eye' (143). He subsequently describes the conversation with his father, who

had something recovered his speech, and did complaine that hee was pricked with Knives, Elsons, and Sickles, and that the same hurt was done vnto him at Colne-field, presently after that Alizon Device had offered to buy some pinnes of him, and she had no money to pay for them withall; but as this Examinates father told this Examinee, he gave her some pinnes. And this Examinee further saith, that he heard his said father say that the hurt he had in his lamenesse was done vnto him by the said Alizon Device, by Witchcraft. And this Examinee further saith, that hee heard his said Father further say, that the said Alizon Device did lie vpon him and trouble him. (143-144)

He therefore affirms that Alizon begged pins from his father, but that John Law gave her pins rather than refusing them. If this were the truth, Alizon would have not had any valid reason to attack him. So, what did really happen that day in Pendle? And how can we interpret the contradictions contained in the text? Are we dealing with a physiological element, that cannot be avoided when facts are reported (and so the witnesses' tales can be considered reliable) or are the differences, or contradictions, the result of the colouring the zealous clerk did of the events, here as well as elsewhere? Thomas Potts' *Wonderfull Discoverie* offers a useful case study of the problems involved in reading Elizabethan and Jacobean popular accounts of witchcraft.¹¹

The legal historian James S. Cockburn has neatly summarised views about how early modern news pamphlets represent witchcraft trials with this dexterously balanced admission of the complex and paradoxical nature of the sources:

Some of the pamphlet evidence is persuasive ... on the other hand doubt about the reliability of the pamphlet evidence persists. This is not to suggest that assize indictments contain no reliable material of a quantifiable nature, merely to emphasise the necessity of first giving due attention to the complex problems of interpretation with which they are clearly synonymous. (1972, 183-184)¹²

Thomas Potts said he had 'taken great paines' over the account of the Lancashire witches, respecting as much as possible the restrictive instructions he had received and toiling 'for the benefit of [his] Countrie' (1612, 6). But what kind of advantage did he hope to offer his fellow countrymen by printing the transcripts of that legal material which, as the novelist Robert Neill ironically pointed out, became literally his dusty memory?¹³ Since his evidence is the only source of information we have on the Pendle witch case, in order to answer this question it is necessary to examine it carefully to see why it was written, what was the author's point of view, and how accurate an account he was likely to give.

If we consider the religious context in which Thomas Potts operated, it will be clear that he was not entirely unbiased. He was the client of Sir Thomas Knyvet, who was an effective channel for him to gain the ear of the king when presenting the glorification of the authorities involved in the Pendle affair. Knyvet was probably aware of the fact that the *Wonderfull Discoverie* would have been well received at court and this would have turned to his advantage as promoter of the book. He was the man who had made the discovery of the explosives in the basements of the House of Commons and had effectively foiled the Gunpowder Plot in 1605 by arresting Guy Fawkes. As a keeper of the Jewell House under Elizabeth I he had held a certain amount of respect, but his had never been a high-flying position. Following the episode of the plot, he became a favourite of James I and was appointed Warden of the Mint; he was also made a knight and privy councillor, guardian to princess Mary and, in 1607, became Baron of Escrick. In his memoirs on the conspiracy, king James I called Knyvet 'one, of whose ancient fidelity both the late Queen and our now Sovereign have had large proof' (1697, 141). Unfortunately for Knyvet his skills in handling money were somewhat limited and thousands of pounds of royal funds had miserly been lost. He could hold on to his position by sharpening the threat to James I's person from the Catholics and endorsing himself as 'Keeper of the King's Person. The publishing of the *Wonderfull Discoverie* in 1613 was providentially timed so as to revive his fortunes within the court. In the Epistle Dedicatory of his pamphlet Thomas Potts sets out his intention of ensuring that there would be no mistake as to where his loyalties lay: 'to the right honorable, Thomas, Lord Knyvet, Baron of Escrick in the Countie of Yorke, my very honorable good Lord and Master. And to the right honorable and vertuous Ladie, the Ladie Elizabeth Knyvet his Wife, my honorable good Ladie and Mistris' (1612, 3). To the modern eye these words are a touch oily, but they manage to go downhill from here onwards:

Let it stand (I beseech you) with your favours whom profession of the same true Religion towards God, and so great love hath united together in one, jointly to accept the Protection and Patronage of these my labours, which not their owne worth hath encouraged, but your Worthinesse hath enforced me consecrate unto your Honours. To you (Right Honourable my very good Lord) of Right doe they belong: for to whom shall I rather present the first fruits of my learning then to your Lordship:

who nourished then both mee and them, when there was scarce any being to mee or them? And whose just and upright carriage of causes, whose zeale to Justice and Honourable curtesie to all men, have purchased you a Reverend and worthe Respect of all men in all partes of this Kingdome, where you are knowne. (3-4)

With such an ambitious benefactor, Thomas Potts must have been strongly influenced by Protestantism. Indeed, he reveals as much in the first part of his pamphlet, where he acknowledges that 'Lord Thomas' grave and reverent counsell reduced [his] wauering and wandring thoughts to a more quiet harbour of repose' (6-7) and deliberately compares the Lancaster trial with that of the Gunpowder conspirators, quoting the words of the judges in his description of the witches' felonies:

Practices, meetings, consultations, Murthers, Charmes and Villanies: such and in such sort, as I may justly say of them, as a reverend and learned Judge of this Kingdom speaketh of the greatest Treason that ever was in the Kingdome, *Quis haec posteris sic narrare poterit, ut facta non ficta esse videantur?* That when these things shall be related to Posteritie, they will be reputed matters fained, not done. (50-51)

As a land of dissenters, Lancashire offered security and protection for outlawed Catholic priests smuggled over from Europe 'who by reason of the generall entertainment and protection they find, and great maintenance they have, resort hither. This Countie of Lancaster ... now may lawfully bee said to abound as much in Witches of divers kindes as Seminaries, Jesuits, and Papists' (94).

From a political outlook, Thomas Potts' interest surely lay in backing his protector's loyal support for James I and the Protestant succession; accordingly, no opportunity is missed for a flattering reference to the king.

The subject of witchcraft was itself one of great interest to James I. He had, he believed, himself been object of a murder plot by Scottish witches before he came to the English throne.¹⁴ In his *Daemonologie* he had formulated witchcraft as a menace to the state. In 1584 the learned Reginald Scot had published *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* in which he poured scorn on the whole idea of magic. In the preface of his treatise James I denounced the 'damnable opinions of this Englishman, [who] is not ashamed in publike print to deny, that ther[e] can be such a thing as Witch-craft' and ordered Scot's book to be destroyed (1597, 4). He argued that monarchs were godly appointed instruments on earth, and ruled by divine right. It followed then that God's eternal enemy, Satan, should be the sovereign's enemy too. As the king was on the side of good and head of the established Church, it was obvious that all those who did not conform in religion were in league with the devil, and there was little difference between such heresy and treason:

since the Deuill is the verie contrarie opposite to God, there can be no better way to know God, then by the contrarie; ... by the falshood of the one to consider the

trueth of the other, by the injustice of the one, to consider the Iustice of the other:
And by the cruelty of the one, to consider the mercifulnesse of the other. (55)

As Stuart Clark points out, 'demonism was, logically speaking, one the presuppositions of the metaphysics of order on which James's political ideas ultimately rested' (1977, 156-157). Certainly, there were great divisions in his kingdom. Like his predecessor, he needed to impose religious uniformity on the country to unite it politically and had reason for fearing an uprising by the strong Catholic faction in the country, strengthened by its links abroad. Equally, he was convinced of the existence of witches, and felt their operations could be a real threat to his position. For this reason, in 1604 he had promulgated a new *Witchcraft Act* which not only stiffened the penalties, but also altered the bearing of the previous laws by amplifying the 'invocation section' to include the keeping of familiar spirits and exhumation of corpses or use of bones for the purposes of witchcraft.¹⁵ The use of bones or skin from the dead was more common in Scotland than in England, and it was implied in few cases, even after this date. But mention of the familiar, already common in popular English witch-beliefs as a privately owned spirit in animal form, had the effect of giving formal and legal sanction to the idea that the very existence of a witch's pet was indeed proof of her commerce with the forces of evil. This led directly to search for the teat at which she supposedly nourished her familiar and encouraged many judges to value its possible presence as most important demonstration for the prosecution.¹⁶

Given this background, it is not surprising to find faithful supporters of the king deeply concerned in rooting out witchcraft. Thomas Potts specifically refers to James I's book and to the Lancashire trial as a demonstration of its accuracy: 'what hath the King's Majestie written and published in his *Daemonologie*, by way of premonition and prevention, which hath not here the first or last beene executed, put in practise or discovered?' (1612, 153-154), and regards the publication of his pamphlet as a patriotic duty:

That the example of these convicted ... may worke good in others, rather by withholding them from, than imboldening them to, the Atchieving such desperate actes as these or the like, and further exhorts his readers my loving Friends and Countrymen ... awake in time and suffer not yourselvs to be thus assaulted. (6-7)

Even the distinction between two different kinds of witches seems to follow the model proposed by James in his treatise:

Potts:

The two degrees of persons which chiefly practice Witchcraft, are such, as are in great miserie and pouertie, for such the Deuill allures to follow him, by promising great riches, and worldly commoditie; Others, though rich, yet burne in a desperate desire of Reuenge. He allures them by promises, to get their turne satisfied to their hearts contentment. (115)

James IV:

These two degrees now of persones, that practises this craft, answers to the passions in them, which ... the Deuil vied as meanes to intyse them to his seruice, for such of them as are in great miserie and pouertie, he allures to follow him, by promising unto them greate riches, and worldlie commoditie. Such as though riche, yet burnes in a desperat desire of reuenge, hee allures them by promises, to get their turne satisfied to their hartes contentment. (1597, 32)

But the Lancashire witches were not tried simply for being poor women in search of richness or revenge. Amongst the copious crimes they were charged with, one of the most compromising for them was that of having taken part to a witches' sabbat. To enforce this point, Thomas Potts described the 'Great Assembly' held on the Lancaster Moor in heightened language; having told, for instance of the imprisonment of old Demdike, Chattox, Alizon Device and Anne Redferne, he says that:

Heere they had not stayed a weeke, when their Children and Friendes being abroad and at libertie, laboured a speciall meeting at *Malkin Tower* in the Forrest of Pendle, upon Good-fryday, within a weeke after they were committed, of all the most dangerous, wicked, and damnable Witches in the County farre and neere. (1612, 27)

He then goes on explaining the reasons of the clandestine rendezvous, where all the table-companions had 'had to their dinners beefe, bacon and roasted mutton' and had

mette there for these ... causes following, as this Examinates said mother [Elizabeth Device] told this Examinee [James Device]. The first was for the naming of the Spirit. The second cause was, for the deliuerie of his said Grand-mother; this Examinates said sister, Alizon; the said Anne Chattox, and her daughter Redfern; killing the Gaoler at Lancaster, and before the next Assizes to blow up the Castle there; to the end that the foresaid Prisoners might by that meanes make an escape, and get away ... (119)

Weaving Potts' meticulous descriptions together, we find, apart from the feasting of the participants, nothing of the classic stereotype of the old hag, who flew in the darkness of the night on her broomstick to reach the place where the orgiastic banquet would be celebrated. It is plausible that a reunion of people worried about their fate and that of their relatives really took place in old Demdike's home, but the plan of a possible assault to the castle definitely appears fictional, although destined to grip the popular fantasy. What is interesting here is the fact that before Malkin Tower it had never been alleged in England that witches gathered for ceremonial meetings. Geoffrey R. Quaife has argued that 'witchcraft was neither a religion nor an organization. English witches ... showed no sign of co-operation with each other, no continuing or common aspect in ritual' (1987,

59).¹⁷ James Sharpe has corroborated this view by stating that accusations of collaboration or beliefs in secret communities were 'little more than suspicions of *ad hoc* co-operation between witches and certainly little by way of organised rituals or the worship of a devil who was present in person' (1997, 76). Sharpe has also demonstrated that, although learned concepts of the sabbat might have entered popular consciousness, there was a general lack of attention to this theme in the English demonological writings (in this volume, 161-183). But, if allegations of such a terrible menacing assembly were almost alien to the imagery of the time, where did Potts take the idea of the diabolic confederacy? Some indications suggest that he might have been inspired by the first performance of *Macbeth*.

By the middle of December 1605, the King's Men had been back at the Globe, and by the end of the year they went up to the palace as usual to open the Christmas season at Whitehall, staging some plays in the Banqueting House. On the following summer the company was called back for performances, twice at Greenwich and once at Hampton Court, on August 7, 1606, at the conclusion of the visit of the royal brother-in-law King Christian of Denmark. He had come to see her sister, who was pregnant, and to firm up his relations with England in anticipation of the war with Sweden, which his practical council managed to delay until 1611.¹⁸ It is most likely that the play performed on this state occasion, in which all the leaders of the English judiciary would have been in attendance, was *Macbeth*. The absence of swearing in the work indicates that it had probably been cleansed of profanity after the *Acte to Restraine Abuses of Players* was passed by the Parliament on May 27. No swearing, but no renounce by Shakespeare to represent on stage the use that James I had made of witchcraft to serve his political ends. In this way he would further contribute to his patron's ideology of divine right, by deepening the subject of magic, which the king had been cultivating for many years. It is not mere coincidence, then, that Shakespeare's witches, although associated with those 'Sisters Three' or 'Furies fell' who shear the thread of life in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, or with the three baleful women Macbeth and Banquo encounter by chance in Holinshed's *Chronicles*, are exactly like those described in the *Daemonologie*.¹⁹ They are ugly females, with 'choppy finger[s]' and 'skinny lips' (1.3.44-45) and own familiars, the cat Graymalkin and Paddock the toad; they beg food from door to door, and when a sailor's wife refuses one of them the chestnuts she is eating, she revenges herself by sending succubi to her husband: 'I'll drain him dry as hay / Sleep shall neither night nor day / Hang upon his penthouse lid; / He shall live a man forbid' (1.3.18-21).²⁰ They spread disease among the animals ('killing swine') and wind up enchantments of various types: 'The Weird Sisters, hand in hand, / Posters of the sea and land, / Thus go about, about: / Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine, / And thrice again, to make up nine / Peace! – The charm's wound up' (32-37). There are however more serious matters. As shown in the prologue, *Macbeth's* witches use to congregate: 'When shall we three meet again? / In thunder, lightning, or in rain? / When the hurlyburly's done, / When

the battle's lost and won. / That will be ere the set of sun. / Where the place? / Upon the heath (1.1.1-7). And by reciprocating in rhyme, they accumulate a malign collective purpose that could be Shakespeare's decisive contribution to the appearance in England of the equivalent of the continental figure of the witch. For Terry Eagleton, this repetitiveness is a signifier of the 'sisterly community' in which the witches exist and, 'revolving around dance, the moon, pre-vision', compact with the forces of darkness (1986, 2-3). In a gloomy cave, with a boiling cauldron in the middle, the witches assemble and mix strange ingredients to produce a potent brew: 'the charm is firm and good' (4.1.38).

The Devil does never concretely materialize in the play, but we are told of the existence of superior demons. When questioned by Macbeth, the 'weird sisters' answer by saying: 'Speak. / Demand. / We'll answer. / Say, if thou'dst rather hear it from our mouths, / Or from our masters? ... Pour in sow's blood, that hath eaten / Her nine farrow; grease, that's sweaten / From the murderer's gibbet, throw / Into the flame. / Come, high, or low; / Thyself and office deftly show' (4.1.61-63 and 64-68).

Through these hell-gate scenes, Shakespeare buried 'popular culture under a thick topdressing of exploitative sensationalism, unblushingly strip-mining both popular culture and every learned text he [could] lay his hands on for the sake of creating an arresting stage event' (Purkiss 1996, 207).

James I must have been enormously pleased with *Macbeth*. It was the Stuart play, 'celebrating his ancient lineage, portraying the critical event in it and in Scotland's history, and making divine-right kingship identical with nature and sanity' (Kernan 1995, 88). But there was more; Shakespeare, in his play, had also been able to elaborate a new paradigm of witchcraft as a political conspiracy centred on the perversions of the sabbat. This is significant and relevant as, just six years later, the fantasy of a convention first appeared in English law at the trials of the Lancashire witches. We have no way of knowing if Thomas Potts was among the illustrious guests hosted at Hampton Court, but we know for sure that at that time he was in London to study law. We can presume that he heard of the great stir caused by the official performance at court and kept it in mind when, in 1612, he had to provide the court with proofs, which showed conceivable evidence of illicit motive – the sabbat:

Vpon Good-fryday they met, according to solemne appoyntment, solemnized this great Feastival day according to their former order, with great cheare, merry company, and much conference. When they hath finished, all the witches went out of the said House in their owne shapes and likenesses. And they all, by that time they were forth of the doores, were gotten on Horsebacke, like vnto Foales, some of one colour, some of another, ... and they all presently vanished out of ... sight. (119-120)

Thomas Potts knew that the story of the 'solemne appoyntment' at Malkin Tower had to be told in terms that the judges and the juries could recognize, be-

lieve and at last condemn. Insisting therefore with pedantry, over many pages, on those features that were recurrent in English witchcraft – the Lancashire witches had, for example, familiars, as well as ‘withered face[s]’ – he came to the conclusion that ‘if this were not an Honorable meanes to trie the accusation against them, let all the World vpon due examination give judgement of it’ (128). In this perspective, it is interesting to see how paradoxically different was the fate of the Salmesbury witches, who were acquitted although their description of the sabbat was much more compromising of that provided by their Lancaster companions. ‘Upon her Oath’, one Grace Sowerbutts blamed her grandmother, Jennet Bierley, her aunt, Ellen Bierley, and a friend of them, Jane Southworth, of having bewitched her. Her accusatory statement invited suspicion in its sensational details, rather than in its familiar outlines:

This Examine and the said Ellen Bierley stayed there, and the said Jennet Bierley went into the Chamber where the said Walshman and his wife lay, & and from thence brought a little child ... and after the said Jennet Bierley had set her downe by the fire, with the said child, shee did thrust a naile into the nauell of the said child: and afterwards did take a pen and put it in at the said place, and did suck there a good space. But she saith, that she thinkeeth that the said child did thenceforth languish, and not long after dyed. And after the death of the said child the next night after the burial thereof, the said Jennet and Ellen Bierley, taking this Examine with them, went to Samlesburie Church, and there did take up the said child, and the said Jennet did carrie it out of the Church-yard in her armes, and then did put it in her lap and carried it home ... and having it there did boile some thereof in a Pot, and some did broile on the coales, of both which the said Jennet and Ellen did eate ... And after they had eaten, the said three Women and this Examine danced, euery one of them with one black thing, and after their dancing the aforesaid black things did pull downe the said three Women, and did abuse their bodies, as this Examine thinketh, for she saith, that the black thing that was with her, did abuse her bodie. (89-90)

To demonstrate the absurdity of these accusations, Thomas Potts assessed the evidence point by point, dwelling on the alleged carnal commerce with the devil as especially doubtful: ‘here is good Evidence to take away their lives. This is more proper for the Legend of Lyes, then the Evidence of a witness upon Oath, before a reverend and learned Judge, able to conceive this Villanie, and find out the practice’ (98). On the one hand, he juxtaposed the two cases, Lancashire and Salmesbury, to show the perspicuous judge’s ability to distinguish credible from incredible; on the other hand, he contrasted witches who really populated English forests and courtrooms to the excessively voracious and licentious spectres of legends and lies (cf. Dolan 1995, 94-95). While ‘monstrous’, the Lancashire witches ‘were never so cruell nor barbarous’ (98) as those portrayed by Grace Sowerbutts, and it was this moderated brutality that qualified their ‘otherness’, making them believable, terrifying, and therefore, all the more worthy of a severe punishment.

5. Conclusion

From the excursus outlined in these pages, it is evident that a trustworthy report of the Lancashire trials of 1612 will never be attained. The evidence we have from Thomas Potts' pamphlet and other sources leaves it open to doubt how far the accused were involved in witchcraft practices. We do not know under what conditions confessions were obtained, or whether the educated prosecutors and the convicted individuals even understood each other completely. As to why this particular case was so expertly publicised by the authorities in that precise period calls for more than one answer. Who were these unfortunate so-called Pendle witches? Certainly, they were not witches of the classic tradition. In the main, they were ignorant peasants – social outcasts – scraping a meagre living by begging and stealing.²¹ They probably believed – or half-believed – that they were witches and knew that if they could convince the local populace of their power to kill or maim through witchcraft, they could use threats and blackmail to demand what they wanted from anyone they chose. In this respect, they had the advantage of living in an age when there was a great deal of superstition, a large amount of popular beliefs and an irrational fear of the supernatural.

As a highly political trial, the Pendle affair can be interpreted as an object lesson for the more conservative people of Lancashire in the dangers of clinging to traditional ways no longer acceptable to those in power. Their public and severe punishment was extremely effective, both at the time, when the court was crammed with spectators and the witch trial was a much-appreciated form of popular entertainment, and afterwards as accounts of it circulated in every corner of the county.

In conclusion, the fact that Thomas Potts reported on the events that took place in that frenzied year of 1612 allows us knowledge of the general development of the facts. Indeed, without the *Wonderfull Discoverie* we might have never heard about the Pendle witches; but the evidence Potts provided does not help readers and historians to fully understand how much he cleaned up his reminiscences by tidying and editing relevant information, and how much that other dust of absent-mindedness, mistake and prejudice did alter the account he has left us. If we were to remove the statements of the accused from the context of a witchcraft trial, and strip them of their fanciful Faustian embroidery, the many instances of diabolical actions quoted in the courtrooms of the Assizes would appear both normal and insignificant.

Although *The Wonderfull Discoverie* constitutes a unique (even if inaccurate) document about Pendle Forest folk during the early modern period, the doubt remains about what exactly happened four hundred years ago on those whereabouts. Indeed, the story of the Lancashire witches seems to be both a documentary reportage and a process of mythologizing in which the line between fact and fiction is inevitably and severely blurred by the suspicion of a tendentious manipulation.

As a consequence, trying to establish here to which extent Shakespeare's first performance of *Macbeth* may have influenced the contemporary criminalization of witchcraft is, of course, a complex matter, but it is not misleading, after all, to contemplate the possibility that a stage performance inspires or shapes reality or its representation, today as in the past.

¹ Scholars agree in saying that from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, Europe passed through what Hugh Trevor-Roper (1967) has described as a 'witch-craze'. Learned notions about witchcraft were superimposed upon popular and traditional ideas of black magic. Inquisitors increasingly began to look not simply for *maleficium*, but for evidence of a demonic pact, an arrangement made with the devil whereby, in return for renunciation of baptism, services on earth and one's soul at death, he promised material rewards and supernatural powers. It was thought that such witches did not operate singly, but met with others for malefic worship. Hence, allegations of witchcraft inevitably led to search for other culprits. This witch mania began in northern Italy and southern Germany in late fifteenth century. The publication in 1484 of Innocent VIII's Bull (*Summis desiderantes affectibus*) against witchcraft and, two years later, the *Malleus maleficarum* by Jakob Sprenger and Heinrich Institor Krämer, is significant. The witch-craze spread widely and quickly, and went beyond the English Channel. For an overview of English witchcraft in this period, see Notestein 1911; L'Estrange 1929 and 1933; Briggs 1962; Thomas 1971; Hole 1977 and 1979; Willis 1995; Sharpe 1997; Macfarlane 1999. This article is an expanded and revised version of a paper discussed at the Ninth World Shakespeare Congress (Prague, 17-22 July 2011).

² See Wright 1974, 198-225. On the turbulent religious situation in Lancashire see Walton 1987 and Mullet 2003. For a general history of the Reformation, see Bainton 1952; von Greyerz 1984; McGraph 1987; Wallace 2004.

³ Roger Nowell was about sixty years old in 1612; in 1591 had succeeded his father Alexander to the Read estate. His family had considerably increased its fortunes under Elizabeth I and would have found an interest in loyal service to her Protestant successor, supporting the established Church of England. His decision to investigate the Pendle witchcraft accusations at this particular moment may be interpreted as an astute political move. Such a prosecution showed in fact that the magistrates were diligently seeking out the king's enemies (in this case the witches) and imposing religious conformity.

⁴ About Potts himself very little is known; in the dedication of the pamphlet he says that he was brought up under the patronage of Lord Thomas Knyvet of Escrick. He probably studied law in London, being described as of 'Chancery Lane', and was instructed to prepare and publish an account of the trial by the assizes judges, who felt that the case was of special importance and should be more widely known (Baigent 2004, 1778-1842).

⁵ 'The hatred and terror which a witch evokes is due to her will and her power to inflict bodily injury ... The witch is a murderer, or may become a murderer on the slightest provocation' (Kittredge 1929, 4-5).

⁶ Old Demdike bequeathed a mystery that remains unsolved to this day – the site of her home, Malkin Tower. Was it Sadler's field, near Newchurch, or Greenhead, Roughlee, Fence, Barley? – Or was it at a place near Blacko, off the road between Gisburn and Colne? Perhaps the truth lies in both camps. Could it be that Demdike's life began in one place and ended, short of Lancaster, in another? We may never know, anymore than we shall know the origin of the name Malkin Tower.

⁷ The presence of children involved in witchcraft trials was quite usual in England. On this specific aspect, see Briggs 1962; Seth 1969.

⁸ For a critical inquiry of the case of the Lancashire witches, see Mitchell 1978 and 1984; Catlow 1976; Eyre 1975; Douglas 1978; Tempera 1981; Peel and Southern 1985; Bennet 1993; Lumby 1995; Clayton 2007.

⁹ As Marion Gibson points out, 'the story of the Lancashire witches is one of the many that became the subject of ephemeral literature from the mid-Elizabethan period until the birth of the news article industry in the eighteenth century' (2007, XII).

¹⁰ On this specific aspect, see Gibson, 1999, 78-104; on the connections between testimony and truth, see Purkiss 1996, 231- 249.

¹¹ The term 'popular', which often accompanies the description of these texts, 'indicates the pamphlets' cheapness (longer ones were prohibitively expensive for the lower sort), their ephemeral character and their sometimes crude and hastily produced content, as well as their attempt to divulge as widely as possible knowledge of their subject' (Watt 1991, 48).

¹² David Cressy has recently suggested that in approaching specific and contested events in early modern England, we should have 'to posit a double set of negotiations, a nested epistemology, involving past and present'. If in deciding what had occurred and why, we look not just at the negotiations between witches and their questioners, but also at our own attempts to untangle events, we can admit that 'the telling takes precedence to the tale' and look at the recorders and tellers, their strategies and our own expectations as readers – potentially a much richer exploration of events than a simple desire to know 'what happened' (2000, 26).

¹³ Robert Neill dedicated his novel *Mist over Pendle* 'to the dusty memory of MASTER THOMAS POTTS, sometime Clerk to the Judges in The Circuit of the North Parts who in November, 1612, at his Lodging in Chancery Lane, wrote of the Late WONDERFUL DISCOVERY OF WITCHES in the Countie of Lancaster' (1951, 4).

¹⁴ In a sensational case in Edinburgh in August 1593, a coven known as the 'witches of Lothian' was charged with having conspired to keep James Stuart from returning from Denmark with his new bride, Queen Anne, in 1590. Under torture the witches revealed that they had practised against the king's life as well. Pieces of dead bodies had been tied to cats, which were thrown into the sea; threads were prepared und knotted to raise tempests; a black toad had been roasted, hung up for three days, and the juice from it collected in an oyster shell. Eventually, as the demonic coup, a handkerchief of the king's was obtained and an image made which was passed to the devil at a witches' sabbat with ominous words: 'this is King James the Sixth, ordained to be consumed at the instance of a nobleman, Francis Earl of Bothwell' (see Carmichael 1592; Normand and Roberts 2000).

¹⁵ In England the first secular law against witchcraft appeared in 1542, during Henry VIII's reign, and was repealed in 1547 by Edward VI without having been put in action more than once. It dealt mainly with treasure seeking. Digging for gold and other precious objects in tumuli and ruined buildings was time-honoured sport in England, though it was felt to be practical to pay a magical specialist for protection against the spirits of heathen or miserly owners who might be lingering wretchedly around their treasure. It has been suggested that this act, which came two years after the Six Articles, was a propitiatory gesture towards the Catholics and an attempt to restrain the iconoclasm of the reformers who had joined the treasure seekers in searching and destroying church monuments. Witchcraft became a crime again in 1563 under Elizabeth, almost surely due to the influence of the Marian exiles, who had seen the continental laws against witchcraft and felt that England needed such provisions too. Although bewitching to death carried the capital punishment, injuries to persons or cattle or damage to goods left offenders liable to be imprisoned, but were more likely subjected to four appearances in the pillory where the local community could be involved in the denigration (see Rosen 1969, 21-29; Swain 1994, 3-5).

¹⁶ With respect to the projections of a dangerous and lewd maternal instinct on the figure of the witch, Diane Purkiss points out that: 'in and through the breast, anxieties about and longing for the maternal body are expressed. Some of these fears and desires were projected onto the figure of the witch, who acted to mark all appropriate boundaries by transgressing them.

As with all fantasies about the witch and her body, violent fear or desire is abjected into the witch, who signifies both men's and women's idea of the bad lactating mother. These worries translate into the elaborate fantasy of the witch and her suckling familiar. The witch gives blood instead of milk; the purified blood that is milk, and hence the narrative of the female body as a source of nourishment rather than poison, does not exist as far as she is concerned' (1996, 134).

¹⁷ On the history of the sabbat, see Ginzburg 1989; Bagliani 2002.

¹⁸ For the state visit as the occasion of the first performance, see Paul 1950, 317-331.

¹⁹ As Mary Ellen Lamb points out, 'the representation of witches in [*Macbeth*] confirms rather than confutes the stereotypes circulated by such texts as Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*' (2009, 190).

²⁰ The charity denied or the generosity rewarded by ingratitude and aggression, the models proposed by Keith Thomas and explored by Alan Macfarlane, as a feature of (or explanation of) accusations, are typical of the English witchcraft (see Thomas 1971 and Macfarlane 1999).

²¹ 'Because they, which are commonlie accused of witchcraft, are the least sufficient of all other persons to speake for themselves; ... the extremitie of their age giving them leave to dote, their poveritie to beg, their wrongs to chide and threaten (as being void of anie other waie of revenge)' (Scot 1584, XXIII).

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