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Scripting the Witch

Voice, Gender and Power in The Witch of Edmonton (Rowley, Dekker and Ford 1621) and Witchcraft (Baillie 1836)

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Abstract

The current thesis compares two plays based on historical witchcraft trials of the seventeenth century in England and Scotland, respectively: *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) by Rowley, Dekker and Ford, and *Witchcraft* (1836) by Joanna Baillie. The plays are examined in order to establish why these two plays stage the witch; how the witch is staged; and what the staging of the witch communicates regarding power and gender. The theoretical perspective is provided by the theories of Michel Foucault and Simone de Beauvoir. The study finds that both plays not only actively employ historical witchcraft narratives but also expose the social mechanisms behind them. By staging witch characters and giving them individual voices, the plays direct their criticism at all levels of society. Thus the witch characters become more than disempowered victims. Although they are forced by a social script to take on the role of the witch, the role restores a degree of power to them. These aspects find resonance in Foucault's concept of power and performance, whereas de Beauvoir's concept of the "Eternal Feminine" complements and illustrates how the cultural construction of gender influences the limited choice open to the witch characters.

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1. Introduction

1.1. Why this thesis? From idea to research project

Demons and Witches: Two words caught my eye as I walked down a corridor at Tromsø University in September 2014. They were the headers for a conference that was shortly to take place: *Demons and Witches: The Impact of Demonology on European Witch Hunts*. Hosted by the Department of History and Religious Studies and the Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, this was an international event. The speakers (as I later came to learn) were comprised of some of the leading historians in witchcraft studies, amongst them Tromsø University's own Liv Helene Willumsen. In addition to having published a number of books and articles on witchcraft in Europe and Scandinavia, Willumsen wrote the exhibition texts for the Steilneset Memorial in Vardø, Finnmark, which opened in 2011 to commemorate the victims of the witchcraft trials that took place there in the seventeenth century. I knew very little about the history of witchcraft. For me, witches belonged in stories: fairy tales, on the stage in Shakespeare's plays such as *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* and Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, or in films such as *The Wizard of Oz*. I read or viewed these stories as purely fictional representations. Even knowing that Miller's play was based upon the witchcraft trials of Salem in 1692, any reference I made between this drama and actual reality related to the McCarthy era in 1950s America of which it was considered an allegory, rather than the events that took place in Salem, Massachusetts, approximately 250 years earlier.

With my curiosity aroused, I attended the conference. It became an eye-opener. The witch-hunts of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were brutal and had the most severe consequences for those convicted. What I learned was not only news to me, but shocking. It challenged my previous relegation of the subject of witchcraft to that of superstitious nonsense. I had heard of ducking witches in water, innocence proved if they drowned and guilt proven if they floated, and laughed at how ridiculous it sounded. But this conference made me consider witchcraft from a legal perspective; it was a crime for which people went to trial. The reality was that a formal process took place, replete with a judiciary, witnesses and a sentence or

acquittal. The evidence as looked at from a modern perspective was tenuous. Yet these trials resulted in the execution of a large number of people across Europe¹.

Men made up only 15-20 per cent of those convicted of witchcraft, making it a crime committed overwhelmingly by women.² Significantly the witchcraft trials represented the first time in history when women faced legal action in a courtroom. Before then, they tended to be dealt with at a lower level of authority; punishments were meted out from the church or local councils for what was considered unacceptable behaviour. However, within the context of England and Scotland, the Witchcraft Act of 1562 (and its subsequent reform in 1604) significantly “transferred the trial of witches from the Church to the ordinary courts” (parliament.uk). As Christina Larner points out:

Up to the time of the secularization of the crime of witchcraft their [women’s] misdemeanours had been the responsibility of husbands and fathers [...] As witches they became adult criminals acting in a manner for which their husbands could not be deemed responsible. (Larner: 102)

Thus the witch-hunts brought large numbers of women into the formal arena of the judiciary; they entered a new space in legal history and came into confrontation with a new form of authority. However, this did not guarantee that their voices were heard and correctly represented. Obviously, then, the theory of power and gender will be highly relevant to this study.

The introduction of the Witchcraft Act intended to send a strong message to wider society regarding the authority of the State and the courts of law. It established clear demarcations between what the authorities regarded as acceptable and unacceptable behaviour for men and women. Whilst the statistics of those convicted highlight that the witch-hunts were not exclusively a persecution of women, they certainly point to a perceived problem with women’s behaviour. As Julian Goodare

¹ "The total number of executions, let alone the number of prosecutions, for witchcraft can never be known [...] far too many records have been lost or destroyed" (Larner:15). However, as an idea Julian Goodare cites "over a thousand people were executed as witches" in Scotland (289). Liv Helene Willumsen cites 91 witches executed in Finnmark, Northern Norway(1).

² "The percentages varied from country to country and from place to place, but approximately 80 percent of all witches tried between 1450 and 1750 were women" (Levack:vii).

states, 80 – 85 per cent of convictions constituted “at least a forceful admonition to them [women] to modify their gender-related behaviour” (289). Thus the issue of gender and power is twofold; not only the power of authority to prosecute those it deemed as challenging the world order, but the power ascribed to the female form in the figure of the witch. In his book *The History of Sexuality* (1976), French philosopher Michel Foucault states that “power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society” (1980: 93). Indeed, the words “complex strategical situation” seem very fitting for the context in which the witchcraft trials took place. Similarly, the French existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of gender in *Myth and Reality* from *The Second Sex* (1949) is particularly interesting in this context, for de Beauvoir is “concerned with questions of power and behaviour in gender relations” (Tidd: 53). The relationship between gender and power structures, in particular the female gender and patriarchy, is a relationship highlighted in the context of the witchcraft trials. De Beauvoir is also interested in how gender is imagined and represented: “Beauvoir recognises that cultural representation acts as a powerful political force because it constitutes how a society imagines and represents itself to itself” (Tidd: 64).

An art exhibition held at the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh in 2013, entitled *Witches and Wicked Bodies*, described itself as “an innovative survey of images of witches from the Renaissance to the early twenty-first century” (Allerston: 9). As a collaboration between the National Galleries of Scotland and the British Museum, it cements the idea that the majority of “witch” images are female: “the stereotype of the witch, which developed during the 1400s and informed intellectual ideas during the subsequent two centuries, was rooted in the basic assumption that witches were naturally female” (Allerston: 10). This certainly seemed to be borne out in the literature I was familiar with, beginning with the fairy tales I read as a child. If we extend our search to Shakespeare, the “weird sisters” in *Macbeth* and Sycorax in *The Tempest* come to mind, yet Prospero (who performs acts similar to witchcraft) is defined as a magician. This led me to think of the question de Beauvoir asks at the opening of “Myth and Reality” in *The Second Sex*: “The myth of woman plays a considerable part in literature; but what is its importance in daily life?” (282). The context of the witchcraft trials lends itself particularly well to such a

question. Foucault's ideas from *The History of Sexuality* and de Beauvoir's ideas from *The Second Sex* combined with what I learned at the conference produced a perspective that fascinated me, and ultimately inspired this thesis.

Thus I embarked upon my research. As a literature student I was familiar with many texts that used the figure of the witch as a dramatic device. Yet here I was looking for literature based on actual witchcraft trials, for material that interpreted these dramatic historical events. Whilst there was no lack of historical source material to provide context for the events I was researching, finding suitable literary texts proved more challenging. Starting with the genre of the novel I searched for established authors. I read Elizabeth Gaskell's short story *Lois the Witch* (1860), and Maryse Conde's *I, Tituba* (1986), both based on the Salem witchcraft trials of 1692, as well as Jeanette Winterson's *The Daylight Gate* (2012) based on the Pendle witchcraft trials in Lancashire in 1612. Other novels by authors previously unknown to me, who had been inspired to write on cases of witchcraft in their locality, came to my attention. The historical research that all of these authors claimed to have carried out was extensive and the texts were consistently either in first person female voice or from the perspective of a female character who was accused of witchcraft. A strong focus upon the 'I' of the text privileged the voices of those accused, and thus invited a reading which allowed the characters accused of witchcraft to "speak back" to history. However, as a reader I felt seriously disappointed. I found these characters difficult to believe in or engage with; they seemed as typecast and one-dimensional as those of fairy tales. For me, this impacted upon the voice of the characters; they did not seem real either discursively or in their set speeches and actions.

The only prose text I found convincing came to me whilst studying a course on Toni Morrison. In a small section towards the end of *A Mercy* (2008), the character Florens takes refuge with Widow Ealing and Daughter Jane, who live on the outskirts of a puritan village. Whilst Florens is there, a visit is made to the house by a group of female witnesses and a little girl, led by a man. The group has arrived to investigate Daughter Jane who has an eye that is askew; in their view a potential sign of the Devil, requiring investigations into whether she should be tried as a witch. Once Florens enters the room, the focus shifts abruptly from Daughter Jane to Florens herself. The reference to scenes recognised in the Salem witchcraft trials is made

obvious: the little girl screams and swoons in response to Florens' appearance, Lucifer is mentioned, the blackness of Florens' skin is associated with evil. Florens is ordered to strip and is examined by the women of the group as they search for the Devil's mark. Whilst Morrison does not make the subject of witchcraft a central theme of her novel, she draws attention to the "othering" of people on the basis of physical appearance and the consequences thereof. She draws parallels between what was to become the ideology underpinning racism and the persecution of vulnerable individuals for witchcraft in seventeenth century America.

Obviously a small section in a Toni Morrison novel was not sufficient material for a thesis, so I turned instead to the genre of drama. Whilst *The Crucible* by Arthur Miller might be an obvious choice, so much had already been written on it that I wanted to look further afield. I was also curious about literature based on witchcraft trials in Britain, my home country. My research brought me to two plays: *The Witch of Edmonton* by Rowley, Dekker and Ford and *Witchcraft* by Joanna Baillie. Both are dramas based upon historical witchcraft trials of the seventeenth century. The first was written and performed in 1621 when witchcraft was still a criminal offence, and is based upon the events, which had culminated in the execution of Elizabeth Sawyer for witchcraft a few months earlier in Edmonton, a borough of London. In contrast, the second play was written over two hundred years later, in 1836. Baillie's play is located in Paisley, Central Scotland, and is based on the Renfrewshire witchcraft trial of 1697, which resulted in the condemnation of seven people on the charge of witchcraft. One died in prison and the remaining six were first strangled then burnt at the stake (MacDonald, Thom and Thom: 155).

Thus I had two dramas, one from England, one from Scotland, based on witchcraft trials in the same century, but written in different historical periods. Whilst these plays were certain to have things in common due to their subject matter, the different historical periods in which they were produced would quite naturally reflect different cultural contexts and beliefs. *The Witch of Edmonton* stages a recent history and there is no doubt that the playwrights wished to capitalise on both the sensational aspects of the subject matter, and its contemporary interest for those attending a performance. The title page declares: "*The Witch of Edmonton: A Known True Story*" (Corbin and Sedge 143) and it is no surprise to find a "real" witch amongst the cast

list, for Elizabeth Sawyer had been declared so by the judiciary and condemned to death. Joanna Baillie wrote her play in very different circumstances, almost a hundred years after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1736, and at a time when witchcraft was no longer considered a crime. This is reflected in the character list; Baillie adds the adjective “reputed” to the three women designated as witches in her play. The word “reputed” promotes the idea of uncertainty and adds a note of scepticism before the play even begins. More importantly, there are no witches in *Witchcraft*, and this is made clear early on (Act I, scene three).

1.2. The research questions

I did not simply want to juxtapose these two dramas or discuss them each as separate texts. Thus, while the plays are dealt with separately in chapters 3 and 4, the same three questions are addressed in relation to both texts.³ I am particularly interested in the voice of the witch in these plays. Voice is the most central element in the staging of a character and the thesis sets out to investigate: 1) *why* these two plays stage the witch; 2) *how* the witch is staged; and 3) *what* the staging of the witch communicates regarding power and gender. Hopefully this will also show us how the different ways of writing and different ideologies of the time affect the way witchcraft is portrayed. My theoretic approach based on Foucault and de Beauvoir is introduced in 1.8 below.

1.3. Plot summaries – *The Witch of Edmonton*

As neither of these plays are especially well known, a plot summary of each play is included below. The summaries demonstrate the relevance and validity of my research questions. In addition, an understanding of what the plays focus upon and how the events unfold, will establish links to the structures inherent in the witchcraft narratives, which form the source material upon which these plays are based. These are detailed in Chapter 2. The plot summaries also provide the context for the close textual readings of particular scenes that follow in chapters 3 and 4.

³ Initially, I sought a comparison of these plays with an emphasis on power and gender, witch and society, which I thought would allow for both consistent and diverging elements of each play to emerge.

The Witch of Edmonton has two main plots that run in parallel, and only cross into each other towards the end of the play. One is purely fictional, a domestic family drama, featuring Frank Thorney as the protagonist; the other focuses on the events that led to Elizabeth Sawyer's conviction and execution for witchcraft, and is therefore partly fictional. In addition there is a subplot involving a group of Morris dancers that supplies the comedic scenes. It is believed that these were added to please James I, who had published *The Book of Sports* (1618) three years earlier. It outlines the sports and leisure activities permissible on a Sunday; Morris dancing is specifically mentioned (Sul: 168). The entire play is set in Edmonton, recognisable as the exact location where Sawyer was judged to have carried out her evil deeds.

The play opens with the family drama and we find Frank and Winnifride in discussion after their recent wedding. Winnifride is pregnant and the wedding takes place in order to prevent gossip that would destroy her reputation. However her lowly status as a maid leads Frank to insist the marriage remains a secret for the time being. He fears being disinherited by his father whose disapproval would reduce them to a life he describes as "The misery of beggary and want" (1.1.18). Whilst Winnifride feels understandably vulnerable at being sent away until Frank finds a solution, it is clear she has no choice. Frank's plot to win over his father hits trouble when it is revealed that his father's estate is heavily in debt. There is no inheritance anyway, unless Frank agrees to marry the wealthy Susan Carter. Seeing no alternative, he then commits his first crime, that of bigamy, whilst convincing himself that he can take the money his father promises him in return and run away with Winnifride.

The newlywed Susan, reluctant to let her husband leave for what she believes is a short trip, infuriates Frank to the extent that he kills her. After stabbing Susan, he then wounds himself and frames two men who had been suitors to Susan and her sister, for the murder. However Katherine, Susan's sister discovers the knife in Frank's pocket, which is the evidence to convict him. Winnifride confirms not only that he confessed to the murder, but also that he committed bigamy by marrying Susan when he was already married to herself. Frank is executed for his crimes at the end of the play.

We first meet Elizabeth Sawyer only in the opening of Act II. Alone on stage, it is clear that she already suffers “the misery of beggary and want” that Frank so desperately wants to avoid. But she also suffers the misery of ill treatment by the local community. Labelled as a witch and blamed for the misfortunes that occur, she is singled out and abused and beaten. Through her soliloquies, Sawyer delivers a stinging critique on the society that mistreats her so, and in turn challenges the way she is defined. Staged in this manner, she clearly deserves the audience’s sympathy. Whilst it is obvious that Sawyer is not a witch when we first meet her and not responsible for the deeds she is accused of, her desperation and fury at the treatment she receives prompts a desire for revenge. Powerless to do anything other than curse, she appeals for “some power, good or bad” (2.1.107), perceptively realising “‘Tis all one/ To be a witch as to be counted one” (2.1.118-119). Her wishes are answered as the devil appears in the guise of a dog. Sawyer transforms into a witch before the audience’s eyes.

There is no noticeable difference in the way Sawyer is treated by society now she has become a witch; she is still accused of things the audience knows she has had nothing to do with, and her personal situation does not improve. In the meantime, the Devil Dog, whilst initially providing Sawyer with warm words and affection, is also pursuing his own ends. He is only after her soul, which he secures through the pact Sawyer seals with her blood. The Dog’s last words to her are “Thy trial is at hand./ Our prey being had, the devil does laughing stand” (5.1.75-76). Sawyer is seized by the authorities and executed alongside Frank at the end of the play.

Significantly the Dog is the plot device that links the two stories. Independently of Sawyer, the Devil Dog also moves into the Frank Thorney plot. Looking for “some early mischief” (3.3.1) he rubs against Frank. Although Frank cannot see him, and claims “The devil did not prompt me” (3.3.37) as he holds a knife to Susan, there is a clever play on words as he says to her “You have dogged your own death” (3.3.39) then stabs her. Not only is this act of evil committed without any involvement of witchcraft, the implication is that the Devil moves freely in society and operates on all levels. The Devil Dog, like Sawyer, also proves to be an eloquent speaker, delivering his own damning critique on society. Much of this takes place in dialogue with Young Cuddy Banks, a Morris dancer and the only other character in

the play who can see the Dog. The Morris dance forms the more light-hearted subplot, as reflected in the play's subtitle: "A Tragicomedy" (Corbin and Sedge: 143). This is comedy in the performance of singing and dancing that a communal event such as a Morris dance represents within the community. Significantly, the speech of the devil cuts across this. As Young Banks has only approached Sawyer for a traditional love potion, no evil is involved and as Young Banks finds out, nor is anyone else; it is the Dog who assumed a spirit that takes on the form of the woman he loves, rather than the woman herself appearing in flesh and blood. This allows for some fine banter. Young Banks clarifies "I entertained you ever as a dog, not as a devil" (5.1.108-109), to which the Dog replies: "True, and so I used thee doggedly, not devilishly" (5.1.110). However the conversation has a serious edge as Young Banks observes that "t'is thou hast/ brought her to the gallows" (5.1.104-105) as he learns that Sawyer is to be hanged. The Dog then delivers a lesson upon how evil operates in society; a lesson, which challenges the belief held by society that the witch is to blame.

The two main plots in *The Witch of Edmonton* mirror each other. Both have crimes committed on the basis of some form of social coercion and both criminals end up with the same penalty. However, the difference in evidence and the reactions to each of the accused by society as a whole, enable the playwrights to portray the life of a community, whilst highlighting the inequalities and hypocrisy that exist in its scapegoating of Sawyer for all its problems. Most significantly of all, in doing so, the playwrights give Elizabeth Sawyer an individual voice.

1.4. Plot summaries – *Witchcraft*

Joanna Baillie's play *Witchcraft* is relatively unknown and was not performed on stage until 2008. Until then it could only be experienced in the form of a readerly script. Moreover, Baillie wrote in a difficult time for women playwrights, when success in the theatre was deemed to be a masculine pursuit. When *Witchcraft* was published in 1836, "women's historical presence in playwriting was gradually being erased" (Donkin: 181). *Witchcraft* is based in Scotland and in the exact location for the Renfrewshire witch trial of 1697. It also has two main plots, which run in parallel. One concerns the bewitchment of a young girl named Jessie and the family's attempts to deal with the situation. The other is a drama concerning love, complicated by the

burden of familial duty. Unlike *The Witch of Edmonton*, these plots are intertwined and witchcraft interweaves with the domestic drama pushing the plot forward.

Jessie, the young daughter of Lady Dungarren, has some inexplicable illness. Lady Dungarren and the Nurse believe Jessie has been bewitched and blame two women from the locality. It appears the local community also believe these women are witches and local gossip cements their reputation. Meanwhile, Annabella (a rich relative) who is in love with Dungarren (Jessie's brother), has returned to stay at the household. His love for another woman, Violet, an orphan and the daughter of a supposed murderer who has met his death, drives Annabella into a passion of jealousy. She decides to purchase a spell from a witch as a solution to her problem.

We meet the "reputed" witches in scene three, and whilst they convene on the moor that night in order to make a pact with the Devil, their desire to become witches makes it obvious that they are not witches yet. Nor do they ever become witches despite their intention of allying with the Devil. Thus the accusations levelled against them are clearly false. Notably, however, like Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*, they are deprived, literally starving, and the response of the local community has been to turn its back on them: "They refused us a han'fu' in our greatest need" (349). The women attempt to turn to witchcraft in order to achieve "revenge for the best sport of a'" (348), which is as simple as having their own larders full whilst everyone else's is empty. However their presence on the moor at night during a storm, also coincides with Violet going to secretly meet her father Murrey, who is believed to be dead, but in reality is in hiding after committing the crime of duelling. Without a witness to confirm the duel, he has been convicted of murder. However he escaped before execution and the body in his grave is that of his servant, with whom he had swapped identities. Only Violet knows this and her father swears her to secrecy. However, fate has it that Rutherford, the church minister, a sceptic of witchcraft, passes over the moor that night on his way to pray over Jessie. The lightning enables him to see the reputed witches, as well as Violet and a man he believes to be dead and buried. Not only is Violet in the wrong place at the wrong time, but also with a man no longer of this world. This associates her with witchcraft, and the minister, his scepticism severely challenged, has to testify to what his own eyes have seen. The fact that Violet has sworn an oath of obedience to her father never to reveal that he is alive,

means she has no opportunity to challenge this misreading of her presence on the moor that night.

Meanwhile Annabella carries on her scheming. Instead of a spell, Grizeld Bane, who is considered to be the principal witch, gives Annabella advice as to how to plant evidence that will frame Violet as “the witch” who causes Jessie’s misfortunes. As witch beliefs are so strong in the local community, this is a task easy to achieve, and further misreadings abound. The planted evidence combined with the sighting on the moor leads to Violet’s arrest, and along with another “reputed” witch, Mary Macmurren, she awaits her execution at the end of the play. Annabella has positioned herself nicely to watch this execution by renting a room “with a view”, believing her revenge on Violet for stealing Dungarren’s heart is near completion. However, Grizeld Bane declares Annabella to be the true witch, and a scuffle takes place resulting in Annabella’s death. In the meantime, Murrey, Violet’s father, has come to her rescue and declares her innocence at the risk of his own life. Bawldy, a herd boy admits to stealing the evidence for Annabella, and all the charges against Violet are dropped.

The crowd still want their spectacle of burning, but are left disappointed. Joanna Baillie manipulates history and departs completely from the source material by staging the Repeal of Witchcraft Act of 1736, which in reality occurred nearly forty years after the events she portrays on stage. This allows Mary Macmurren to be reprieved, but also exposes the cruelty of the local community who vocalise their anger at the loss of their entertainment. Fotheringham, the character who delivers the Repeal, also happens to be the witness to Murrey’s duel. He can testify that Murrey did not commit murder and consequently he is declared a free man. Fotheringham also knows Grizeld Bane. She has escaped from a lunatic asylum, and her situation is resolved by her return there. The play ends with a final comment on Annabella’s dead body, which has lain on the stage for some time.

The two crimes of witchcraft and duelling highlight the problem of evidence, especially when as here, it relies on personal testimony. Attention is drawn to how people interpret what they see and hear and in some cases actively use it against each other, as they allow context to impair their judgement. The gullibility of people is also

emphasised in the ease in which collective beliefs can shape the “truth”. The “truth” is such that at the end of the play, the audience is faced with knowing two innocent women are due to be executed. The testimonies of the women themselves count for nothing: Violet protests her innocence; and Mary’s confession is forced. However, Violet is saved by the testimony of her father and Bawldy; Mary is saved by a change in the law. Double standards and hypocrisy are undercurrents in this society. Once more, a community is portrayed and exposed as the problem, rather than witchcraft as such.

1.5. Existing Scholarship

Before we begin comparing them, a brief overview of existing scholarship on each of our two plays is required. Considerable academic work has been written on *The Witch of Edmonton*, including Atkinson (1985), Bonavita (2006), McLuskie (1989) and Purkiss (1996). However, my research shows that comparison tends to be limited to other plays from the Jacobean period. One article, however, by Eric Byville (2011: 1-33) argues for the play to be considered, along with Seneca’s *Medea* and Marlowe’s *Dr Faustus*, as belonging to a neo-classical form of witchcraft tragedy where the character of the witch inhabits the role of tragic hero. Byville makes highly interesting observations but admits his focus is upon the plays as “dramatic artworks possessing a set of essential generic features” rather than as “representations of social history” (1). My primary interest lies in what the play contributes to the wider debate on witchcraft that was taking place at the time, particularly regarding the construction, identity and voice of the witch figure. The majority of critical work on Joanna Baillie’s drama, such as that of Ellen Donkin (1995), tends to focus on her *Plays on the Passions* (1798). Amongst the academic work written specifically on *Witchcraft*, we find Bardsley (2002), who concentrates on Baillie’s final play, and Christine Colon (2009), who compares it with Baillie’s other tragedies. However, to my knowledge there are no comparisons with other dramas on the topic of witchcraft from either the Romantic period in which it was written, or any other period in history. The only comparison of this play I have been able to find to works outside of Baillie’s own writing is Regina Hewitt’s (2005). She compares the play to the novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* by Sir Walter Scott, which Baillie cites as her inspiration for *Witchcraft*. To put *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* in conversation with each

other therefore, represents both a challenge and a potential for new readings of both plays to emerge.

1.6. Drama as genre: Staging witchcraft

Amongst the things that struck me during the preliminary phase of my research, was that in contrast to the novels, the plays grabbed my attention immediately. This led me to question what might make drama a genre better suited to the historical source material of the witchcraft trials. Like the novelists, the playwrights read documents on the relevant witchcraft trials before they wrote their plays. Of course, a trial of any kind is a dramatic event; speeches are performed by “characters” who inhabit defined roles of victim, accused and prosecutor. However neither of the two plays dramatises the trials that took place; the theatrical material lies in the process of bringing the “witch” to trial and execution. Both plays use historical representations of witchcraft to enable them to tell stories and both plays work initially from original, primary sources, which were in print. The most obvious common element, therefore, is the discourse of witchcraft. As Marion Gibson states, “These men or women suffered or died because of what they said, or what was said about them” (1999: 13). Spoken words in this context embodied tremendous power.

Rowley, Dekker and Ford based their play upon material provided by Henry Goodcole’s pamphlet *The Wonderful Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, A Witch* (1621), which documented the trial and execution that had just taken place (Purkiss: 232). The pamphlet was published within eight days of Sawyer’s execution, demonstrating the huge amount of public interest in the topic. Joanna Baillie “based her representation of witch-belief on histories and analyses of witchcraft written by Scottish lawyers at various points over more than a century [...] and most importantly [...] the 1697 case” (Bardsley: 247). The reliability of these source documents and how closely the playwrights adhered to their source material will be an important point in the discussion of the two plays in the chapters that follow. However we must also remember that the speech of witchcraft was filtered through a recorder as it made its way into printed text, whether that be in the form of a church minister (as it was with Henry Goodcole) or a legal clerk. This will be discussed in Chapter 2, where I also investigate the emerging patterns in witchcraft narratives. I argue that these patterns in particular are what drama is able to successfully capitalise upon.

Here it is worth noting that Joanna Baillie herself draws parallels between the genre of drama and the judicial system in her theatre theory of the stage. When Baillie's first volume of plays, *Plays on the Passions* (1798), was published it was prefaced by an "Introductory Discourse" that Ellen Donkin describes as "the most comprehensive criticism of current drama⁴ that anyone had read for some time" (159). This fact merits a mention at this early stage, but it will be discussed further in Chapter 4 in relation to its theoretical components. Baillie's theatre theory not only points out the failings of "respectable dramatic poets" in the staging of both tragedy and comedy at the time, a daring enterprise in its own right, but it also offers an alternative vision of the theatre. It argues for a focus on character rather than plot, and emphasises the role of drama as education:

The Drama improves us by the knowledge we acquire of our own minds, from the natural desire we have to look into the thoughts, and observe the behaviour of others. Tragedy brings to our view men placed in those elevated situations, exposed to those great trials, and engaged in those extraordinary transactions, in which few of us are called to act. (Baillie 1798: 11)

It is by looking "into the thoughts" and observing "the behaviour" of developed characters (what was later to be called well-rounded characters) rather than stereotypes Baillie argues, where drama has its real power. For drama supplies "the deficiency" left by "real history" in the wish "to know what men are in the closet as well as the field, by the blazing hearth, and at the social board, as well as in the council and the throne" (1798: 7). Baillie does exactly this in *Witchcraft*; she takes us behind the public label of "witch" and the stereotype it conveys, to the ordinary lives of her female characters upon whom the label has been effectively thrust. She achieves this by giving these characters a voice.

The attention in Baillie's plays to what took place "behind the scenes" in a character's life, the private persona behind the public face, is not only crucial to our understanding of a character's motivation, but is also something that she claims as original: "they [the plays] are part of an extensive design: of one which, as far as my information goes, has nothing exactly similar to it in any language" (1798: 1), "I know of no series of plays, in any language, expressly descriptive of the different

⁴ By "current drama" Donkin here refers to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century.

passions” (1798: 21). Baillie highlights therefore that her work is unique in its way of looking at the world. She argues that history’s focus on deeds or events, and presentation of men as “heroes” or “superior being[s]”, lacks the intimacy or connection with “the human mind” that underpins “our nature”. She defines this as “sympathetick curiosity” (1798: 5). She uses her “Introductory Discourse” to communicate “those ideas regarding human nature, as they in some degree affect almost every species of moral writings, but particularly the Dramatic” (1798: 2):

In examining others we know ourselves. With limbs untorn, with head unsmitten, with senses unimpaired by despair, we know what we ourselves may have been on the rack, on the scaffold, and in the most afflicting circumstances of distress. Unless when accompanied with passions of the dark and malevolent kind, we cannot well exercise this disposition without becoming more just, more merciful, more compassionate; and as the dark and malevolent passions are not the predominant inmates of the human breast, it hath produced more deeds [...] of kindness than of cruelty. It holds up for our example a standard of excellence, which without its assistance, our inward consciousness of what is right and becoming might never be dictated [...] It teaches us, also, to respect ourselves, and our kind. (1798: 5)

Drama, she concludes, makes up for the shortfall of history, and in turn makes us better people. The attention Baillie draws specifically to “kindness”, “mercy”, “compassion” in contrast to “passions of the dark and malevolent kind” enables her to make the link between the genre of drama itself and justice. She argues that in presenting the conflict on the stage:

the varieties of the human mind [...] will fit a man more particularly for the most important situations of life. He will prove for it the better Judge, the better Magistrate, the better Advocate [...] he will deal to others judgement tempered with mercy; that is to say truly just; for justice appears to us severe only when it is imperfect (1798: 6).

The power of drama to “better”, to “temper”, to attract “mercy”, and to achieve an outcome that is “truly just” rather than “imperfect” is, I argue, precisely what Baillie sets out to do in *Witchcraft*. For, drama makes up for another deficiency, this time in the workings of the judicial system. Just as it does with history, the ability of drama to explore the workings of the human mind can address the imperfections she identifies in the process of achieving justice. By drawing attention to such legal roles as “Judge”, “Magistrate” and “Advocate” in reference to the audience of a play, Baillie

not only recasts the audience in a pivotal role, but places responsibility for justice firmly in the collective hands of society. Effectively she turns the theatre into a metaphorical courtroom.

Further interesting observations regarding the theatre and its staging of witches in the context of witchcraft trials, are made by Stephen Greenblatt in his essay *Shakespeare Bewitched* (1993). He draws our attention to Aristotle's theory of drama. Aristotle defines *enargeia*: "the liveliness that comes when metaphors are set in action, when things are put vividly before the mind's eye, when language achieves visibility" (Greenblatt: 121). This suggests that the power of theatre lies in its ability to place before its audience a sense of the "present". Greenblatt cites Quintilian in order to explain this fully: "our feelings will be moved not less strongly than if we were actually present at the affairs of which we are speaking" (Greenblatt: 122). Quintilian is here talking about the rhetorical technique of persuasion in a court of law in presenting a "version of truth", which of course is precisely what was taking place in the witchcraft trials. I argue that Rowley, Dekker and Ford as well as Joanna Baillie recognise this and utilise it to offer their own competing "versions of truth". In this way, the plays are not so different from the sources upon which they are based with regard to purpose, but there is a difference in the role attributed to the witches. As Gibson points out, "what survives of the world of the past is a representation of it rather than a reflection" (2005: 2). With this she implies that all texts are shaped by those who author them and that the authors in turn attempt to shape the way we perceive the subject matter they write about. On that basis, it becomes important to understand the different contexts in which these plays were written. Thus, these contexts will be accounted for immediately below.

1.7. Contextual backgrounds: Witchcraft in the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries

The Witch of Edmonton was written and performed at a time when the idea of what constituted a witch and witchcraft was the subject of great debate. I will elaborate on this further in Chapter 2, but here it is important to recognise that the existence of the Witchcraft Act in law, did not mean that there was a consensus on the matter in wider society:

There was no single view of witchcraft, no mindless intolerance. Some people were rabidly against it, some were very sceptical, but most people's thinking on the subject was somewhere inbetween: unable to reject the notion of witchcraft entirely, they were none the less ready to evaluate each supposed instance of it on its own merits. (Sharpe in Dolan 2013: 53)

There were demonologists, sceptics, and a king on the throne who had written his own treatise on the matter (King James I *Daemonologie* 1597). In addition the growth of printing as a means to distribute material, which in the case of accounts of witchcraft took the form of pamphlets (Gibson 1999: 6), enabled a variety of texts to quickly enter circulation and reach a wide audience. Oral accounts such as ballads and stories contributed their own version of events, and the trials and executions of witches constituted a public spectacle. Accused witches therefore took on the status of celebrities in regard to their fame and notoriety. Thus, people could participate in the debate on witchcraft in a number of ways, "evaluating evidence to determine what they would accept is true" (Dolan 2013: 53). Drama had its own role to play in this: "To represent witches on the public stage was inevitably to participate in some way or other in the contestation" (Greenblatt: 113). The contribution made by *The Witch of Edmonton* to this "contestation" and how it is achieved, is explored in Chapter 3. However, drama clearly offered an alternative way of seeing that competed with other "versions of truth" at this time. Since a theatrical performance is not dependent on a literate audience for understanding, the potential to reach wider or different audiences than the printed word was to its advantage.

Compared to *The Witch of Edmonton*, *Witchcraft* was written at a much later date and in a different period entirely. However this did not mean that witchcraft had ceased to be a topic for discussion. Sir Walter Scott, whose novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819) became the inspiration for the play by Joanna Baillie, had published his own *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* in 1830. The project had been proposed to him by his son-in-law, and was meant to help Scott recover from a serious stroke. Interest in the subject matter was:

sparked by interest raised by Robert Pitcairn's serial publication of *Criminal Trials of Scotland*, covering proceedings between 1487 and 1624, and featuring many cases of witchcraft. Pitcairn himself sent Scott transcripts of yet unpublished trials, and many other students of the occult sent Scott source material on witchcraft whilst he was working on the *Letters*. (Walter Scott Digital Archive)

Scott expressed scepticism about the supernatural in his letters and the work was viewed as an early attempt to take a scientific approach to the subject matter. Its commercial success suggests that witchcraft was clearly a topic of interest in Scotland in the Romantic period for both writers and readers, in its sensational subject matter as well as for exploring issues of Scottish identity. The reasons Baillie chose the topic of witchcraft as the subject of her play, is dealt with in depth in Chapter 4, but as Marjean D. Purinton points out:

Baillie would have probably recognised the theatricality of accused witches public examinations, trials, and executions during the seventeenth century as well as the spectacle such a re-staging of witchcraft would create for early-nineteenth century spectators. (Purinton: 144)

Indeed Baillie, a good friend of Scott, wrote to him in 1827 about her play, declaring "Renfrew Witches upon a polite stage! Will such a thing ever be endorsed!" (Baillie in Purinton: 144). Her words suggest that staging such subject matter in the theatre at the time was rather daring. It could be argued that the daring went further than this, however. The importance of the genre of historical drama on the Romantic stage lies in "the specific uses to which women playwrights put it within the framework of the contemporary debate on the role of women in history" (Cristafulli and Elam: 13). Baillie makes women the centre of her play, she portrays women who are seen to transgress gender roles, and by locating the play in the Renfrewshire witchcraft trial of 1697, she effectively stages Scottish women's history.

1.8. The voice of the witch and the structure of this thesis

The Witch of Edmonton and *Witchcraft* shape our understanding of witchcraft by staging women in the characters of witches or “reputed witches”. Whilst written in very different times and contexts, the two texts share an important characteristic; they both give an individual voice to the witch characters. However what makes these plays remarkable, I argue, is not only that these characters are given a voice at all, but also what they are given to say. That the witches are allowed to “speak back”, to say the unutterable, restores agency to them. Such agency is absent in the representations of witches in the historical sources I have studied. By presenting what can be termed as “missing evidence” through the voice of the witch, *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* force their audience to look and listen again. Playing on the stereotype of the witch figure, for which I argue a preconceived script existed, and undermining it at the same time, these dramas offer a new perspective by redirecting the gaze onto the society from which the accusations arise. By inviting the audience to both see and hear things from the opposite perspective they challenge not only the traditional narrative but a view of history.

Chapter 2 of this thesis looks at the witchcraft narratives that led to a trial and argues that their structure resembles a script with specified roles and a traditional plot. In this way they can be considered theatrical, and this is something both plays recognise. Considering how the two plays stage and give voice to the “witch”, I also explore the problem of authenticity when it comes to the voice of the witch in the source materials which relate to the witchcraft trials. As this voice tends to be female, it warrants a consideration of the approaches taken to gender in witchcraft studies. Finally I will outline my theoretical perspective. This draws on Michel Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* (1976) and *Power/Knowledge* (1980), particularly in the discussion of *The Witch of Edmonton* as it deals primarily with a confrontation between witch and society. Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949) will be applied particularly to *Witchcraft* as this play focuses on the interaction between women in the context of the witchcraft trials. However, the two theoretical approaches are applied in a complementary way, where Foucault’s theories on sexuality and power and de Beauvoir’s gender theory are allowed to mutually inform each other.

The following chapters (Chapters 3 and 4) look at each of the plays in turn. Since both plays are rich enough material to warrant a thesis in their own right, the selection of scenes was difficult; only those scenes that are central for answering my research questions (see 1.2. above) are discussed. Chapter 3 looks at *The Witch of Edmonton* and begins with a performative history. The relationship of the play to the historical source material upon which it is based is then considered; the formulaic nature of witchcraft narratives is suggestive of a script that provides the context for the voice of the witch character(s). The chapter proceeds to examine the power relations as they are staged within the local community, and focuses upon Elizabeth Sawyer's performative utterances in a number of key scenes. I argue that the playwrights use the speech of Sawyer to expose the process that turns someone into a witch, and thereby orchestrate a debate upon the way in which society operates. In this manner, the playwrights challenge the belief that the witch is the problem, and instead point an accusing finger at society. Whilst the play primarily focuses upon the conflict between the witch and society, the chapter ends by considering the extent to which gender plays a role in this process.

Chapter 4 investigates *Witchcraft*. It opens with an introduction to Baillie's career as a dramatist and the restrictions placed upon her as a female playwright due to gender expectations of the time. It also considers the impact of her theatre theory as expressed in the "Introductory Discourse" that prefaced her first volume of plays. I argue these aspects are particularly relevant to what Baillie tries to achieve in *Witchcraft*. In addition, Baillie added a footnote to the play's script where she outlines the central focus of her drama and its relation to the historical source material. This is examined for the context it provides in which to read the play. In many ways, *Witchcraft* is more complex than *The Witch of Edmonton*; instead of one witch, there are five characters to whom the label "witch" is applied. Furthermore, the parallel plotlines interweave rather than running alongside each other as they do in *The Witch of Edmonton*. For this reason I look in detail only at the first three scenes of the play, rather than the play in its entirety. These scenes are illustrative of the key issues I seek to explore and which frame my research questions. I explore how the scenes, located in the community, move from the domestic, interior world of women, to the exterior world of men, and then to the moor where the "reputed" witches have convened to meet with the Devil. I discuss how this allows Baillie to orchestrate both male and

female voices on a variety of social levels, not only in the relation of the witch to society, but in the relation of women to society as well. At relevant points, comparisons to *The Witch of Edmonton* are made. Whilst there are no witches in *Witchcraft*, Baillie explores why some women might turn to witchcraft. Here, I argue that Baillie extends her analysis of the discourse of witchcraft to the discourse of women generally and, in turn, exposes the power relations at work. The suggestion is that a script is in place and that both witches and women are performing to a discourse. Finally, the chapter turns to the differences between *Witchcraft* and *The Witch of Edmonton* and what these can tell us about Baillie's play.

Notably the many "reputed" witches and their interaction on several levels in *Witchcraft* represents a more complex structure than we are presented with in *The Witch of Edmonton*, where only select scenes are reserved for the sole witch character, Elizabeth Sawyer. For this reason, and because the main comparison and discussion is located and developed towards its end, the reader will find Chapter 4 considerably longer than Chapter 3. Finally, in the Conclusion, maintaining the focus on the scripting and voicing of "witches" in these two plays, the findings from the discussion are collected and presented in relation to the research questions. The voices of the witch characters and their purpose is explained in relation to a social script for witchcraft, in relation to the question of power, and in relation to the cultural construction of gender. In addition to showing how the playwrights use the witch characters to criticize society on all social levels, this offers explanations of why the witch characters in the two plays are more than powerless victims, what makes them turn to witchcraft and take on the social role of the witch, as well as why the majority of witches were women.

2. Witch narratives, scripts, and gender

2.1. Pamphlets and other historical sources

In order to see what the plays contribute through their staging of witch characters, we must first look more closely at the witchcraft narratives of the time. For their dramas the playwrights began by consulting contemporary and historical sources. Here I investigate these sources in terms of authorship, reliability and contribution to the debate on witchcraft at the time and, in Baillie's case, across the timespan between the historical events and the play. What the playwrights do with their source material is discussed in the relevant chapters on the plays themselves. In this chapter the ways in which these documents were constructed is explored since this is crucial to our understanding of what the respective plays achieve. Recording of events in a printed format began once a suspect was brought to trial. Nevertheless the witchcraft narratives that precipitated the trials were oral in nature and it is essential to acknowledge their role: "an understanding of the process of bringing a suspected witch to trial is vital" (Gibson 2005: 3). The current chapter details this process. Moreover here, the movement from the spoken word to that of written text is not only pertinent with respect to the source material, but to the plays as well. For in the staging of their characters, the playwrights turn the printed word back into speech, texts into voices.

As noted above (section 1.6), it is well documented that Rowley, Dekker and Ford based their play upon Henry Goodcole's pamphlet, *The Wonderful Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, A Witch* (1621). Goodcole was a church cleric and his role as chaplain at Newgate prison gave him access to those on trial, Elizabeth Sawyer amongst them. He recorded her story, details from the trial, her confession, which led to redemption in the eyes of the church, and published these as a pamphlet shortly after her execution.

Whilst *The Witch of Edmonton* is attributed to one source, in the case of *Witchcraft*, Baillie is credited with looking at a variety of texts, most notably written by Scottish lawyers who analysed histories of witchcraft:

These include *The Treatise on Witchcraft* by Sir George Mackenzie (1678); Hugo Arnot's *Collection and Abridgement of Criminal Trials in Scotland* (1785, reprinted 1812); lawyer and novelist Sir Walter Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (1831); and most importantly an account by Sir Francis Grant of the 1697 case [...] describing the evidence and arguments regarding the supposed demonic possession of one Christian Shaw of Bargarren. (Bardsley: 247)

Baillie consulted a wider range of source material; a luxury afforded by the benefit of historical hindsight to which Rowley, Dekker and Ford did not have access. However it is important to note that the last text Bardsley mentions here is also a pamphlet. It is called the *True Narrative of the Sufferings and Relief of a Young Girle, who was strangely molested by evil spirits and their instruments in the West* (Edinburgh 1698). Published anonymously, its authorship is credited to Sir Francis Grant⁵, whose role, significantly, was that of prosecuting advocate in the witchcraft trial in question. Yet a new book released in March of this year, *Witchcraft and Folk Belief in the Age of Enlightenment: Scotland, 1670 - 1740* by Lizanne Henderson (2016), states that three candidates in total have been suggested for its authorship. In addition to Francis Grant, two reverends have been named, proposing that the pamphlet was “in fact written, or at least compiled by Rev. Andrew Turner and Rev. James Brisbane on the instruction of the presbytery” (Henderson: 206). Whether we read the pamphlet from a religious angle (as authored by the Reverends) or a legal angle (Francis Grant), what is clear is that the text intended to prove the reality of witchcraft. Its title, “*The True Narrative*”, chimes with Goodcole's statement of “A true declaration of the manner of proceeding against ELIZABETH SAWYER” (Gibson 2005: 303), and should remind us as readers to be wary of the underlying agenda of the authors.

Pamphlets were a way of disseminating news in a printed format, and as noted above, in the context of witchcraft they recounted the events once a suspect came to trial. Kirilka Stavreva states that from the “1590s through the first decade of the seventeenth century, the witchcraft genre par excellence remained the pamphlet” (318). Today they represent valuable source material: “The most important sources for early modern English witchcraft stories are Elizabethan and Jacobean witchcraft

⁵ “This was published anonymously, but is credited to Grant by D.Wing et al, *Short Title Catalogue . . . 1641-1700*, 3 vols (2nd edn, New York, 1994)” (Wasser: 148) and “This work has been attributed to Francis Grant, later Lord Cullen, the lawyer who prosecuted the Paisley witches” (Levack 2008: 176).

pamphlets” (Gibson 1999: 6). The fact that they were written gave them more authority than the oral accounts. However, there was often more than one version in existence suggesting that “the authority of the printed text was hardly absolute; [...] the availability of printed accounts of murders, executions, and witchcraft trials almost ensured that people – indeed, more and more of them – would keep on talking” (Leuschner: 5). Pamphlets can be regarded as the media outlets of the day and certainly generated discussion on the subject matter they contained: “details from the trials, confessions and observations of witnesses, were used as debating points in the printed literature over the reality, or otherwise of witchcraft” (Henderson: 191). Whilst the debate may have been hotly disputed on either side, what is not in doubt during this period is that witchcraft was a subject of great fascination.

One final thing of note to be considered in the written sources, whether they be pamphlets, legal transcripts or legal records, is that of authenticity in relation to voice; in particular the voice of those accused of witchcraft and the accuser. This is particularly important to the current study since it raises again the importance of the transition from spoken word to written text. Once contact was made with the legal system in the form of an accusation, the details had to be recorded in writing for presentation before the civic authorities. Literacy was an issue; most of those accused and many accusers were illiterate. Even for those who were literate, they would have no training in legal or civic literacy. Thus clerks were employed to record accusations and testimonies, question and responses, confessions and trials. These accounts were often written up some time (up to two days) after the events, contained legal terminology and constituted a summary of what the clerk/court deemed relevant (Gibson 1999: 14). The written record therefore did not necessarily tally with what was said verbally. Thus these sources undermine the reliability of the original voices informing them. The situation is no better with regard to pamphlets:

The pamphlets’ content, their production, their reception and survival thus can be seen to be determined by a large number of factors, rather than being stages in an organic process whereby events were transferred cleanly into text, conveyed directly to readers and so into ‘history’. (Gibson 2005: 8)

The publishing of a pamphlet after a trial depended to some extent upon economic factors. Thus financial and commercial interests played an active part in what was recorded. Pamphlets had to satisfy the demands of the intended audience (the general public), if they were to be successful. In addition, clerics such as Henry Goodcole could only construct his representation of the accused by becoming the narrator of their story. As Diane Purkiss highlights, “Once a gap opens up between the person speaking the words and the ‘I’ of the narrative, all authenticity of confession is lost” (238). This does not only apply to confessions, but to other speaking parties within witchcraft narratives, as the voice of the literate narrator, whether clerk or cleric, and consistently male, takes over.

With regard to this competition to present the “true” version of events in relation to a story of witchcraft, Marion Gibson underlines that: “[our] wish to define [...] a true story about witchcraft [...] would depend in part on what we believe witchcraft to be” (1999: 4). Gibson’s use of the pronoun “we” suggests that more than one person was involved; indeed, as we shall see below, bringing a witch to trial was a collaborative process that brought the community and the legal system together. But the idea of “truth” is particularly difficult when applied to the crime of witchcraft; it was regarded as a *crimen exceptum* and normal rules regarding evidence did not apply. A liaison with the Devil was never witnessed, its links with the supernatural automatically made it a secretive endeavour taking place when most people were asleep, and belief in the power to be invisible made it impossible to apply the standard normally required for evidence for other crimes. This leads Gibson to term witchcraft “an impossible crime” (1999: 5) in relation to a definition of truth. However it was through an agreement of “what we believe witchcraft to be” that enabled the law courts to define a “truth” in relation to the crime of witchcraft and thus convict those it deemed guilty. To understand this process we need to turn to the witchcraft narratives themselves, for they embody the beliefs that made an accusation of witchcraft credible.

2.2. Witchcraft narratives and scripts

It is important to recognise the complexities inherent in witchcraft narratives and historians and scholars of witchcraft studies draw attention to the problematic nature of such narratives. The work of both Marion Gibson and Frances Dolan has been critical in helping me to position the problematics identified in witchcraft narratives in relation to the plays at the centre of this thesis. Marion Gibson points out that there were a number of participants in the “creation of a witchcraft story”: the accuser (who originates the idea for a story), the accused, and the questioner (legal system). Working together as co-authors, Gibson suggests these participants engaged in a “process [which] begins to sound like the production of a theatrical event or a movie – ghost-written fiction of the least reliable but most interestingly complex kind” (1999: 78). Describing the process that would lead to witchcraft trials as a “production” emphasises the performative nature of what became legal trials. The words “theatrical” and “fiction” draw further attention to what Frances Dolan highlights as unique to this context; the role of stories as evidence. The accusations were “a narrative of hotly contested events, usually both perceived and put into words in circumstances of great stress and anxiety” (Gibson 2005: 3). Both Gibson and Dolan use the label “story” in their analyses of accounts, and in turn highlight the difficulty the label poses when attached to these narratives: “their dubious stature as evidence makes witchcraft a continuing subject of debate” (Dolan 2013: 51). Positioning the construction of a witchcraft narrative, which constituted evidence in a legal setting, alongside the literary form of a story, blurs the lines between reality and what we consider to be fiction. This, it can be argued, is precisely what drama does on the stage.

Patterns emerge in these “stories” that support Gibson’s assertions of co-authorship, as both accuser and accused worked with a questioner. Yet the term co-authorship also poses a dilemma regarding who contributes and who leads; it does not automatically mean that all participants had equal roles. It seems the very questions presented by the legal system shaped the trials and determined the answers. What was said on both sides was deemed to be “tailored to its hearer” (Gibson 1999: 79). The power that Gibson suggests was embodied in the questioner is also the power that resides in the public figure of authority; the judge. Gibson therefore identifies the crucial role of the judiciary in shaping the narratives in witchcraft trials:

The story was recorded at the moment of first contact with the legal system when the magistrate became the authority resorted to with the agreed story [...] in each case the learned person is called in as part of the ongoing process; and a plausible, almost by definition typical, story – the latest version – must be prepared for the learned person, who will expect certain features, ask searching questions, then act. (Gibson 1999: 80)

The idea of a script comes to mind. Indeed, many historians have claimed that for a witchcraft narrative to be credible, and therefore one that compelled belief, it had to follow a certain formula. As Frances Dolan points out, “According to some early modern commentators on witchcraft, accusers in villages and the legal personnel who gave credence to their charges shared a striking agreement on what constituted a credible narrative of witchcraft” (2013: 58). It seems a standard plot was established in witchcraft prosecutions based upon a “frequently replayed narrative” (Dolan 2013: 60). Agreements on a “credible narrative” that is then “frequently replayed”, suggests that the participants in witchcraft narratives either took on, or were allotted, certain roles. When it came to credibility, there were also expectations regarding what they would say. Thus to apply the metaphor of a script and a standard plot in theatrical terms to these narratives, underlines further striking similarities between the witchcraft narratives of the trials and the dramatic nature of the stage. The position of power that both Gibson and Dolan point to as inhabited by the role of the judiciary, also clarifies who was “directing” the discourse, both in a legal context (questions and reported answers), and in the reported actions of the accused witch within the community.

A typical witch was poor and this was inscribed in both the appearance and the actions of the witch figure. Reginald Scot, a sceptic of witchcraft, published a text Stephen Greenblatt describes as “the greatest English contribution to the skeptical critique of witchcraft” (114). Writing in 1584, Scot’s text *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, pointed out the elements that mark the appearance of a typical witch: “women which be old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle and full of wrinkles: poore” (Dolan 2013: 58). John Gaule, who was writing almost a hundred years after Scot echoes this, remarking that: “every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furr’d brow, a hairy lip, a gobber tooth a squint eye [...] having a rugged coate [...] is not only

suspected, but pronounced for a witch” (Dolan 2013: 58). These physical features that both Scot and Gaule identify are markers of poverty and deprivation. But they also emphasise “that a person can tell a witch because she looks and acts like a witch” (Dolan 2013: 58). Thus it seems a role existed replete with “costume” that rendered certain vulnerable members of society a perfect fit. There are two markers here: gender and poverty. Poverty implies disempowerment, thus not only gender but also power (or the lack of it) are present here. The role of “witch” was typecast and as female and poor.

Scot elaborates on how easy these people were to target, confined to the margins of society by circumstance: “It is natural to unnatural people, and peculiar unto witchmongers, to pursue the poor, to accuse the simple, and to kill the innocent” (Scot in Swain: 73). Scot makes direct links between accusations of witchcraft and poverty whilst also underlining the power relations involved. Thus the economic situation of those accused of witchcraft appears to be significant. Poverty on its own of course, is not the pattern. Not all poor people were accused of witchcraft and poverty was not unusual in Early Modern England, Scotland or across the rest of Europe where witch-hunts took place. Personal grudges and village tensions also played a part, but the fact of poverty seems to be a central part of the discourse pattern in accusations. In *The History of Sexuality* Foucault talks about particular types of discourse in relation to power. Whilst he refers to discourse with regards to sex in this instance, specifically the body of the child, the question he asks seems particularly relevant in the current context: “In a specific type of discourse [...] in a specific form of extortion of truth, appearing historically and in specific places [...] what were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work?” (1990: 97). For an answer, we need to look to the local community, for this is where the disputes were initiated.

Scot details that those who are accused of witchcraft have been reduced by poverty at some point to begging for charity. They have been forced by circumstance to perform a certain act. Scot draws attention to these performative acts. He highlights the patterns in a stereotypical witchcraft narrative as so evident as to undermine them:

These go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe; without the which they could hardlie live [...] It falleth out many times, that neither their necessities, nor their expectation is answered or served. (Scot in Gibson 1999: 80)

This story then forms the basis of the accusation by the person who refused the charity and provides the motive for the witch's malice. That the witch's malice is always delivered in the form of a curse, allows us to define it as a scripted response. However, in terms of power, the accusation significantly functions to transfer the notion of guilt away from those who refused charity in the first place, onto those who depend upon it. It displaces the source of the problem. Posing Foucault's question allows us to see the power relations in witchcraft narratives as much more complicated than simply that of the legal system against the witch.

Scot outlines both the appearance and the act of begging for charity from the local community by the witch figure, and the refusal of charity, as the key ingredients in the plot and thus pulls together the common strands on which my interpretative strategy is built. It illustrates how power operates and, as the typical witch was female, how power operates in relation to gender. I shall develop this in detail in my argument about the structures of action and discourse in the two plays discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. Already, however, we have found by examining the patterns inherent in witchcraft narratives, that there is a formula in the spoken narrative (as highlighted by Gibson and Dolan) and in the appearance and dramatic performance of the witch figure (as highlighted by Scot). If we look at this in theatrical terms, to all intents and purposes we have a drama script.

Interestingly, Scot himself makes links between witchcraft and the stage. Scot insists that witchcraft is based upon trickery and deviousness rather than any real supernatural power, and in turn denotes witchcraft as nothing more than a performance. In reference to confessions, he goes on to state: "I for my part have read a number of their conjurations, but could never see anie divels of theirs, except it were in a plaie" (Scot in Greenblatt: 117). As Greenblatt points out, Scot was writing in 1584, a considerable time before Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth* were staged. Still Scot is astute enough to recognise the dramatic and performative

notions that reside in the testimonies of witches. Scot draws attention to the theatricality of witchcraft and so, I argue, do the plays themselves.

Scot's motive as a sceptic was to dismiss belief in witchcraft and expose it as fiction. Indeed the repetitive patterns that underpin the construction of these narratives certainly lead us to question the relationship of the stereotype to reality. Gibson points this out: "A 'witch' [...] is thus a person defined as such by his or her society, and has no intrinsic, essential qualities which would make the label an objective one". Since the label is a subjective one, Scot could explain what motivated the accusers and the witchmongers to target the poor and vulnerable in the witch-hunts; they were easy scapegoats for the misfortunes of society. He was also able to understand and therefore explain why those accused may express malice in the form of a curse; they lacked the resources to defend themselves and had only words to resort to. Yet what he was unable or unwilling to account for, were the circumstances where "the 'witch' may choose to accept the label, and may even court it or create it" (Gibson 1995: 5). This would award the witch figure a degree of agency that is notably absent in his text.

Whilst Scot's text is clearly valuable in identifying the repetitive patterns that establish the stereotype, it can be argued that he presents the witch-hunts in simplistic terms: a persecution of the "poor [...] simple [...] [and] innocent". He presents them as weak victims, and by using the term "innocent" he is able to reposition the term "guilty" back onto the powerful witch-mongers. Therefore he inverts the script used by those persecuting witches to highlight what he perceives as an injustice. However Scot's argument did not help those accused. As Frances Dolan points out, both Scot and later Gaule's "insight did not prevent prosecutions [...] Even as resolute a skeptic as Scot helped codify and sustain such conventions [as to how a witch looks and acts], however inadvertently, by cataloguing them" (2013: 58). It seems Scot's inscribing of the stereotype, ultimately and despite his intention, served to secure the typecast role of the witch rather than challenge it.

Despite this, Scot's interpretation has held sway with more modern historians of witchcraft, most notably Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane. Keith Thomas' book, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (1971), is described as a "historical classic"

(Barry: 2). Regarded as hugely influential at the time of its publication, it reaffirmed this idea of a simplistic explanation for accusations of witchcraft:

Thomas claimed: ‘The overwhelming majority of fully documented witch cases fall into this simple pattern. The witch is sent away empty-handed, perhaps mumbling a malediction; and in due course something goes wrong with the household, for which she is immediately held responsible’. (Swain: 73)

Thomas’ use of the word “simple” leads Marion Gibson to describe Thomas’ explanation of “the stereotypical witch and her story of conflict over charity [...] [as] a functionalist explanation of witchcraft accusation” (1999: 81). Whilst satisfying in its clear-cut justification for certain behaviours in witchcraft narratives, Thomas’ analysis is superficial and avoids inherent complexities.

The most obvious complexity Thomas avoids is the question of gender. For whilst both Scot and Thomas look at the marker of poverty in terms of class and economic conditions for explanations, they make no attempts to tackle the gender issue: they conflate poverty and woman into one. The typical witch is old and poor. She is also a woman. Stephen Greenblatt describes this as a major predicament: “one of the central paradoxes of the discourse of witchcraft, widely recognised in the period [seventeenth century], is that the women identified as wielding immense physical power were for the most part socially marginal” (Greenblatt: 113). Diane Purkiss charts the response to this paradox by looking at how sceptics and demonologists from the Early Modern period to historians of the present have dealt with this conundrum. She argues that both sceptics and demonologists, whilst disagreeing fundamentally on whether witchcraft existed, consistently shared the same desire to

deny that strange old women in villages had any real power [...] While demonologists displaced the witch’s power onto male demons or refused her even this much authority, Scot saw the witch as completely powerless, since in a providential universe divine power could brook no competition from demons or witches. (Purkiss: 64)

Purkiss argues further that sceptics of witchcraft such as Reginald Scot and George Gifford, based their ideas on “a notion of power which explicitly excludes women”.

This, she states, is continued by Thomas and Macfarlane in the 1970s: “Where they [Scot and Gifford] deny the witch all supernatural power, modern historians [Thomas and Macfarlane] deny her all *social* and *cultural* power” (66, emphases in original). Thomas and Macfarlane present witches as “harmless old beggars who had the misfortune to be caught in a changing social system” (66) and that they “give no real thought to the question of why witches were women, except to remark lamely that perhaps women were somehow less provided for than men and so more inclined to begging” (68). Purkiss argues therefore, that for these writers, female gender excludes the possibility of power.

This reluctance to make gender significant is something both Diane Purkiss and Julian Goodare draw attention to regarding historical research. Purkiss states that “English witchcraft studies [...] [are] almost silent about gender, though it has an unacknowledged gender subtext” (59). This seems surprising, considering that “witches were among the few women given any space whatever in pre-feminist history” (Purkiss: 9). Similarly Goodare writes: “Witches have rarely been studied as if their gender mattered” (304), whilst noting the great irony of the “invisibility of [male witches] [...] accentuated by the habit of many historians of using feminine pronouns for witches” (304). Of course to use a masculine pronoun to describe a group where 80-85 per cent of those affected were women would be inappropriate. Yet witchcraft seems to be the one area of history where the female pronoun predominates without being commented upon. Elspeth Whitney explores this trend:

[A] case in point is an important collection of articles on witchcraft published in 1990 by Oxford [...] It includes eighteen articles by many of the most important historians of the hunts. Only four deal even briefly with issues of gender beyond noting the sex of the accused and none make gender a central focus of discussion. Interestingly, there is a tendency in this volume as elsewhere to use the generic male pronoun for everyone, that is, the historian in the abstract, for the reader, the accusers, and the victims of witchcraft, except in the cases of the witches themselves for whom the generic female pronoun is used. (Whitney: 82)

This linguistic practice not only excludes men as witches, but fails to account for the complexity of female relationships that existed in the various roles of accuser,

accused, victim and witness that were enacted by women during the witch-hunts. What it achieves is to render women invisible in any other role than that of “witch”. As de Beauvoir states: “man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative” (15).

The late Christina Larner is the historian and sociologist most credited by scholars as tackling the gender question in relation to the witch-hunts. Focusing on the crime of witchcraft in Scotland but placing it in the wider context of rural Europe, she again typifies witches as “predominantly poor, middle-aged or elderly women” (Larner: 89). Whilst she argues that “the relationship between women and the stereotype of witchcraft is quite direct: witches are women; all women are potential witches”, she concludes that “Witches were hunted in the first place as witches. The total evil which they represented was not actually sex-specific [...] the fact that eighty per cent or more of these were women was, though not accidental, one degree removed from an attack on women as such” (Larner: 92). Anne Llewellyn Barstow finds Larner’s conclusions most disappointing. According to Barstow, citing the political ideology of Christianity and the crises in law and order, Larner “turned away from the theory of persecution by gender, which she more than anyone had validated. Once again women as a gender group are seen not to matter” (Barstow: 17). Thus we face a continuing paradox; 80–85 per cent of convicted witches were women, but gender is not considered to be a major, contributing factor.

I agree that to read the witch-hunts solely in terms of a persecution of women is too simplistic. Purkiss argues that some radical feminist historians have done precisely this and that it results in nothing less than myth-making: “it is a story with clear oppositions. Everyone can tell who is innocent and who is guilty, who is good and who bad, who is oppressed and who the oppressor” (8). However, we are still left with no adequate account for the striking statistics regarding the number of women convicted for the crime of witchcraft, at a time when those committing the majority of crimes were men.

Witchcraft – arguably English women’s most notorious, well-documented, and ill-fated confrontation with the law – offers an extreme test case for an historical inquiry into the role of stories as legal evidence, the material consequences of literary convention in the courtroom, and the role of gender in determining credibility. (Dolan 1995: 1)

The fact that for the majority of witchcraft prosecutions, women inhabited the main role as that of “witch,” makes “the role of gender in determining credibility” central to the current study. This forms the basis for investigating the social processes and the aspects of power and gender in the construction of the witch, as reflected in the two plays.

2.3. Gender in the context of witchcraft

It may seem obvious to remind ourselves that the term “gender” relates to men as well as women, but Julian Goodare does just this in his essay, *Women and the Witch-Hunt in Scotland* (1998). Here he presents a convincing argument regarding the role of gender in relation to credibility. He examines what made women in particular a good “fit” for the role of witch in the Early Modern period, beginning with a quotation from King James I text *Daemonologie* (1597). Before we look at this, some comment needs to be made with regards to the fact that the ruler of the country was a leading participant in the debate surrounding witchcraft. James I believed in the reality of witches, considered himself a victim of witchcraft, and his text clearly positioned himself in opposition to the sceptics. *Daemonologie* explicitly criticises Reginald Scot, and it is claimed that he ordered Scot’s book to be burned (Greenblatt: 118)⁶. Goodare points out that James I seems to have no problem equating women with witchcraft: “that sexe is frailer than man is, so it is easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Devill, as was over well proved to be true, by the Serpents deceiving of Eva at the beginning, which makes him homelier with that sexe sensine” (Goodare: 287). The belief that underpinned Christianity, that women were the weaker sex as enshrined in the biblical actions of Eve, suggests women’s frailty is the answer. However, as Goodare points out, that does not explain the 15-20 per cent of men who were convicted and he draws attention to the other factors that were involved.

⁶ This is contested by Philip C. Almond in *Notes and Queries* Oxford Journals June: 2009 209-213.

Goodare states “Witchcraft was part of a broader pattern of moral offences [...] Most of these moral offences had one thing in common: they related to sex. And so did witchcraft, at least when women were accused of it” (294). The pact with the Devil was based on sexual relations where women were concerned. Of course this was an event that was never witnessed, so evidence relied on either confession, and when that was not forthcoming, the practice of “pricking”⁷. Regarding evidence from confessions, Goodare emphasises the role of the questioner in determining responses: “most witches, no doubt with a little prompting, managed to get the right answer [...] it seems clear that sex entered into most confessions because the interrogators wanted it there” (295). Like Gibson, Goodare highlights the power of the questioner to shape a witchcraft narrative and reinforces the notion of a script; there were expectations regarding what would be said. He also suggests that many witches may have confessed to a sexual pact with the devil, precisely to avoid the procedure of “pricking”, which he describes as being “strip-searched and pricked with pins until an insensitive spot was found” (Goodare: 302). Torture by “pricking” represents another self-fulfilling method of interrogation, since pain could only be relieved if the victim allowed the insensitive spot to be found. Also, whilst “strip searched” is a modern phrase it conveys intimidation and humiliation that women were subject to during this procedure. In addition it clarifies the methods available to assert influence when evidence was gathered.

Men accused of witchcraft, on the other hand, were not alleged to have had sex with the Devil: “He made the demonic part, as the women did; he angered his neighbours, as they did. He just did it less dramatically” (Goodare: 304). A man accused of witchcraft may confess to “charming a cow with a red silk thread [...] [or] he may have been a recognised folk healer” (Goodare: 304), or he may just have defended his wife against the charge of witchcraft. In addition, men were often seen to have learned witchcraft from women: “while we often find that male witches had previously had wives executed for witchcraft, there seems to be no women whose witchcraft was acquired from their husbands. With witchcraft, women were in the

⁷ “The witch pricker therefore was a key figure in the process of gathering evidence. His [or her] role was to examine the suspect for unusual bodily marks and then to test these marks by pricking them to find out whether they were insensible. The theory was that the Devil consummated the Pact by nipping the witch, and that the permanent mark thus made was insensible to pain and would not bleed. The finding of such a mark constituted evidence of the Pact” (Larner: 110).

front line” (Goodare: 304). Thus men’s behaviour lacked the theatricality and performative aspects in his interactions with the Devil that made women’s behaviour so transgressive. In conjoining with the Devil, women were seen to reject both the Church and men.

Goodare underlines that: “Men’s ultimate defence of challenges to their honour was through physical violence; women, however, used words” (297). So when it comes to offences committed by women, it seems that their role as “speakers” takes on a greater significance. Scolding, a verbal offence, which involved being argumentative, a public nuisance, having a quarrelsome tongue, is defined in legal dictionaries as a female trait (Duhaime Law Dictionary). This verbal behaviour involved utterances such as curses, insults and threats. Similarly, in committing the offence of witchcraft, the verbal act of cursing became a central feature, as we have seen, in the patterns identified in witchcraft accusations: “These curses were a recognisably feminine attribute: hardly any male witches were charged with malevolent cursing” (Goodare: 297). Thus criminalising certain aspects of the verbal behaviour of women, led to women either censoring what they said so as to avoid accusation, or recognising the power attached to their utterances: “The most powerful weapon of the witch, the early moderns agreed, was the word” (Stavreva: 312). This may well explain why some women, especially those identified as meeting the stereotypical elements that “fit” a witch as the poor and marginalised, may have embraced this sense of power and confessed to being witches. It was the only opportunity that was offered to them to perform with physical power and discursive confidence.

Due to the fact that one cannot commit a quarrelsome offence alone, when two women were found quarrelling it needed to be decided who constituted the victim and who was the aggressor; who was the “wronged neighbour” and who was the “accused witch” (Goodare: 298). Thus women would define themselves in opposition to each other, one “asserting her own ‘honesty’ while affirming the latter’s otherness” (Goodare: 298). This idea of opposition establishes a binary and can be explained by what de Beauvoir defines as the “myth of woman”. This myth is born out of a patriarchal ideal that places women in a static category known as the “Eternal Feminine”. The “Eternal Feminine” is “against the dispersed, contingent, and multiple

existences of actual women,” restricting women to a single existence that is “unique and changeless” (de Beauvoir: 283). In reality, this creates rivalries between those women who follow the rules and respect the feminine ideal and those who do not. Once again power comes into play; it was often “wealth, status, respectability” (Goodare: 298) that persuaded a community as to who was the victim. As Foucault states, “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organised and redistributed by a certain number of procedures” (Foucault in Mills: 57). The benefit of Julian Goodare’s approach, to which I am indebted, is that his observations account for why so many women may have been convicted of witchcraft. He looks at women not only in their role as witches, but as accusers. Significantly he draws attention to the complexity of female relationships that existed; in particular how the discourse surrounding women’s behaviour, especially in the form of speech, positioned women in opposition to each other.

2.4. Witchcraft narratives and the two plays

By looking at the witchcraft narratives in detail and exploring some of the issues they raise, I have established a theatrical link between the narratives and the plays. There are defined roles (accuser, magistrate and accused); a formulaic plot based on the refusal of charity: a script in place with formulaic dialogue. The starring role, embodied by the witch, is typecast in both appearance and actions, and more importantly gender. All of these elements converge to make up a credible witchcraft narrative that embodies “truth”. I argue that the playwrights for both *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* recognise this and capitalise on what can be described as the blurring of stories as evidence and stories as fiction. Both the witchcraft narratives and the theatre present behaviours and speech acts, which are staged.

The purpose of the following comparison and discussion is twofold. Firstly I intend to investigate how the playwrights in both *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* utilise the structures that have been identified as inherent in witchcraft narratives. The plays do not merely replicate the simple patterns identified thus far in the thesis. In asking what they do differently, I argue that they address something that is absent in the source materials. They draw attention to the complexities involved in the process by which a witch is made and then convicted. This makes Foucault’s theoretical perspective on power in both *Power/Knowledge* and *The History of*

Sexuality particularly relevant. Foucault points out that “[p]ower must be analysed as something which circulates, or as something which only functions in the form of a chain [...] Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation” (1980: 98). Both dramas depict the life of their communities, the social structures that exist, and a range of characters from the very top of society to the very bottom. It is not surprising that in both plays the witches are at the bottom, but the portrayal of society as a whole is central to the question of “the nature and identity” of witches that the plays explore. This is also central to what Foucault proposes:

Individuals should not be seen simply as the recipients of power, but as the ‘place’ where power is enacted and the place where it is resisted [...] his [Foucault’s] theorising of power forces us to reconceptualise not only power itself but also the role that individuals play in power relations – whether they are simply subjected to oppression or whether they actively play a role in the form of their relations with others and with institutions. (Mills: 35)

As Mills points out, Foucault is opposed to any “simple” explanation of patterns of power, such as those Scot and Thomas suggest exists in witchcraft narratives.

Correspondingly our two plays each stage performances of power that arguably present a challenge to traditional thinking regarding the role of the witch. In his analysis of power and institutions, Foucault presents power as something that is negotiated as part of an interaction, rather than imposed in one direction from top to bottom: “power is something which is performed [...] [,] should be seen as a verb rather than a noun [...] [is] a system of relations spread throughout the society, rather than simply [...] a set of relations between the oppressed and the oppressor” (Mills: 35). In my view, *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* make this “system of relations” a central focus in their discussion of witchcraft. By exploring the kinds of behaviour that arise in response to demonstrations of power, the plays undermine the simple “functionalist explanation” of witchcraft. By focusing on the multi-faceted layers of power inherent in witchcraft discourse, the plays lead us to recognise that this ultimately resides in language: the words of the accuser, the words of the legal system, and inevitably the words of the witch. We are back to the idea of a script.

Furthermore, the two plays' greatest deviation from their source material is that they give an individual voice to the witch. As I have outlined earlier in this chapter, finding an authentic voice, particularly one that is female in the source material is problematic. Dolan asks the question of how we can trust a text where the self struggles to be heard: "We have the stories, but we cannot know who contributed what to the texts that survive to us or why" (Dolan 2013: 64). In addition to the problem of establishing an authentic female voice, the lack of attention regarding gender in witchcraft studies makes the performance of the witches in these plays even more compelling. Thus, the exploration of gender in this context is doubly complex. However, I argue this also makes the issue of gender doubly interesting in relation to the two plays. What are the witches saying? What stories are these characters allowed to shape? What contribution do the plays then make in relation to conversations taking place regarding witchcraft? The plays give us a window into the accusations of witchcraft and why some women may have desired to become a witch or taken on the role of witch. Here, Simone de Beauvoir's explanation of the way gender binaries are entrenched in culture enables us to see how the discourse of witchcraft and the discourse surrounding women and their behaviour, effectively controls and restricts the options available to women. The feminine ideal represented by the "Eternal Feminine" as described by de Beauvoir restricts women to a binary either/or; either they can conform and be "good" or resist and become "bad". This dynamic also explains how and why women work against each other. Here Foucault's emphasis on power as performance merges with de Beauvoir's concept of restrictive gender binaries.

Rowley, Dekker and Ford in *The Witch of Edmonton* and Joanna Baillie in *Witchcraft*, adopt the structure identified in both Scot and Thomas' "simple" patterns of behaviour. The Prologue of *The Witch of Edmonton* explicitly points this out to its audience, regarding the plot of Elizabeth Sawyer: "*The whole argument is this distich: Reproach, revenge; revenge hell's help desires*" (Corbin and Sedge: 145). *Witchcraft* does so more implicitly, but the plot is driven by a character who is reproached, who swears revenge and turns to the dark arts in order to achieve it.

The structural details of both plays are similar, while their settings are quite different. Whilst the plays take place in different geographical locations (Edmonton and Paisley), each begins in the context of family and the local community, the action then moves to an encounter with the judiciary, which leads to the final crowd scenes where executions are due to take place. This mirrors the process that Gibson identifies in the establishment of a witchcraft narrative: a member of the community makes an accusation to a magistrate, the legal system is involved and a trial takes place, a guilty witch is publicly executed. In this way the plays are able to present the process of bringing an accused witch to trial, as the events unfold. Other structural parallels between the plays are apparent: each play has five acts; there is a parallel plot running alongside each plot of witchcraft; the parallel plots in each play focus on an additional crime to that of witchcraft (in *The Witch of Edmonton* it is bigamy/murder; in *Witchcraft* duelling/murder).

Both plays also seem to follow the recognised script with regard to the “witch” characters, who are depicted as economically disadvantaged, vulnerable, desperate and shunned by those in the community who are in a position to help them by offering charity. Both plays feature their witches as cursing and wishing harm to those who have refused to help them; misfortunes befall the respective local communities and the accusation of witchcraft follows. These “witch” characters also wear the costume of the typical witch as identified above by Scot and Gaule. The “witches” therefore are represented on stage as people who look and act like a witch. So far then, these characters fulfil the expectations of the expected narrative.

However, where this structural argument becomes really interesting is when the playwrights capitalise upon these structures in order to question the very same established narrative they are using. In both plays, they do this in a clever manner. Whilst they follow the scripted pattern inherent in the witchcraft narratives to a certain point, they then write “outside” the script when it comes to the voice of the witches. By presenting the stereotypical form of the witch physically on stage, in appearance and actions, the plays lull their audience into a false sense of security. This is then taken away dramatically once the “witch” opens her mouth. Whilst the “witch” characters in both *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* may look and act like witches, rhetorically they take on a different form.

In this, I argue these plays demonstrate an important similarity. As Kirilka Stavreva points out, to give a witch a voice at all, especially in popular representations of the figure at the time was unusual: “Unlike murderous wives, monster-bearing and grotesque women, and other real-life female criminals [...] the witch was hardly ever given a voice in a broadside ballad” (318). So for the plays to give these witches a voice is, I argue, a daring attempt to redress the balance. To give a character who has been demonised and represents the embodiment of evil the opportunity to speak, is a bold move. What, then, is the purpose of this bold move? I propose the playwrights for each play use it as a way to criticise the way society works. The fact that these voices are female presents a further challenge to the control of the established narrative.

Critics have noted the eloquence with which these characters speak. Kathleen McLuskie, writing on *The Witch of Edmonton*, says that “Elizabeth Sawyer’s individualism, the poetic power of her satire and her denunciation of conventional society provide an oppositional resonance” (73). Dorothy McMillan, writing on *Witchcraft*, states that “Griseld Bane is a most unusual witch [...] [she] is given a number of most impressive speeches” (84). Of course, theatre monologues and soliloquies are a form of stylised speech; but they are close to the immediacy of everyday speech. A written text has no emotion in its delivery. Sound is a much more profound sense, and a speaking voice speaks to everyone whether they can read or not. The plays return the orality to the witchcraft narratives and thus return some of the narrative control to the speakers. Significantly, what the plays achieve by giving the witch characters a voice is to restore their humanity. That represents a radical step indeed.

Chapter 3: The Witch of Edmonton

3.1. The play

The Witch of Edmonton (1621) has three authors: William Rowley (1585-1626), Thomas Dekker (1572-1632), and John Ford (1586-1639).⁸ Collaborative dramatic writing was not unusual at the time, and was an activity that most professional playwrights participated in.⁹ When *The Witch of Edmonton* was written, Rowley, Dekker and Ford were firmly established playwrights. The first recorded performance of the play is 29th December 1621, at Court by Prince Charles' Men with Rowley himself amongst the cast (it is believed he played the part of Cuddy Banks).¹⁰ However it is almost certain that the play was performed earlier at the Cockpit (later known as Phoenix Theatre). Prince Charles' Men used this theatre between 1619 and 1622 and the playwrights as well as the theatre company would have been keen to make the most of the sensational subject matter following the recent execution of Elizabeth Sawyer for witchcraft in April 1621. This is evidenced by the title of the play and its subheading "A known true story" (Corbin and Sedge: 143). Wymer states: "it is highly probable that the play's first performance at the Phoenix would have been at some time between mid-June and late July, 1621" (7). Whilst this suggests the play was not written specifically for the Court, it is of no surprise to find matters of interest to James I amongst the content: the King's fascination with witchcraft was already documented in his text *Daemonologie* (1597); the inclusion of the Morris dancers as a subplot was considered to reflect James I's interest in rural customs as recorded in his text *The Book of Sports* (1618). However, it would be incorrect to assume that the theatre was merely an "ideological arm of [...] seventeenth century power relations" (Purkiss: 246). Through the stage representations of witches, drama provided one of many contributions to the highly contested debate on witchcraft at the time.

⁸ "The title page's '& c' has led at least one critic to suggest there may be other participants in the collaboration" (Corbin and Sedge: 21).

⁹ "Among the professional dramatists of the English Renaissance whose plays were performed in the commercial theatres of London [...] it is difficult to find one who did not also engage in collaborative writing during his career" (McGuire: 541).

¹⁰ A theatre troupe under the patronage of James I's son, Prince Charles.

The Witch of Edmonton experienced a revival in 1634 by Queen Henrietta's Men, due to the popularity of a new play by Heywood and Broome called *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634). This latter play was based upon an event in which four women were brought to London for further examination after having been convicted of witchcraft in Lancashire. The case reignited interest in the topic of witchcraft "which the theatre tried to exploit" (Wymer: 7). A Prologue and Epilogue was added to *The Witch of Edmonton* and it was performed at the Phoenix in the summer of 1634. It was finally published as a printed text in 1658. After the seventeenth century, no further performances are recorded until the twentieth century. However, the play is "rapidly becoming one of the most frequently performed of all non-Shakespearean seventeenth-century plays" (Wymer: 8). At the moment of writing, the last documented performance was in 2014 at the Swan Theatre, Stratford, produced by The Royal Shakespeare Company.¹¹

3.2. The staging of the witch

What is remarkable about *The Witch of Edmonton* is its unusual depiction of a witch. Whilst Sawyer's physical appearance fits perfectly with audience expectations of an old crone or hag, the sheer quality and amount of speech that the playwrights allocate to the character of Elizabeth Sawyer, gives her a prominent voice. Whilst she fits the stereotype of a witch in her ability to curse, in which she proves to be an expert, she is also presented as an incredibly articulate woman who pronounces on the inequalities present in society; this is impressive for a character who professes herself "ignorant" on a number of occasions and whose social status suggests a lack of education. In addition, Sawyer is able to use language very cleverly; she turns it around to expose the hypocrisy of those who accuse her. Thus a sense of ambiguity surrounds the figure of this witch. The playwrights seem to play on the stereotype whilst challenging it at the same time.

It must not be forgotten, however, that the play was primarily a form of entertainment. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the motif of a woman's voice with the ability to humiliate power by talking back to it is a comic device. Her criticism of society forms part of the satire, and there is much enjoyment and humour in the

¹¹ See Rowland Wymer's *A Performance History of The Witch of Edmonton* 2014.

eloquence of her words. Whilst they give a powerful female voice to Elizabeth Sawyer, the playwrights do not have gender politics in mind. Rather the voice represents “a potential connection with feminism which [can] only be more fully developed in its after-life in twentieth-century productions” (McLuskie: 73).

In this chapter I shall focus on the performative utterances of Elizabeth Sawyer in key sections of the play: her first appearance on stage in Act II, scene 1; as she appears on stage in Act IV scene 1 and her final appearance in Act V, scene 3; as she is led off to execution. These scenes are particularly pertinent to the exploration of my research questions, since they are staged to place an emphasis on conflict and as such expose the power relations at play. The application of Foucault’s questions “What is power? [...] how is it exercised, what exactly happens when someone exercises power over another?” (Foucault in Kritzman: 102) enables us to explore the complex power dynamics, which take place in the community that the play stages. These are notably absent from the traditional “functionalist” narrative of witchcraft as discussed in Chapter 2. In *The Witch of Edmonton* we witness this first of all between the witch and the local community. Through her soliloquies, Sawyer recounts to the audience the conflict that takes place as she is singled out as a scapegoat for the community’s misfortunes. We first see her on stage alone as she gathers sticks, then witness her being bullied at the hands of Old Banks, before she is left on stage on her own again and then encounters the Devil in the shape of a dog. Later in the play, in Act IV scene 1, the conflict within the community itself is explored. The Justice, representing the law, first confronts and dismisses a lynch mob in their treatment of Sawyer. Then he invites Sawyer to engage with himself and Sir Arthur in a debate about “who” a witch really is. The playwrights place characters representing the opposite ends of society on stage together in order to illustrate not only the difference in their perspectives, but the deep divide that exists within this social hierarchy. Below, I analyse how Sawyer’s speech acts not only influence the plot, but also allow the dramatists to explore and challenge the cultural and popular beliefs surrounding witchcraft at the time. The chapter concludes by examining the extent to which gender plays a role in the current discourse of witchcraft.

Although the word “witch” appears in its title, *The Witch of Edmonton* does not let Elizabeth Sawyer appear on stage or receive a mention until Act II. After that, she only appears in Act IV scene 1, the opening of Act V, and makes a brief appearance in Act V scene 3 as she is taken away for execution. Act I is used to establish the parallel plot of Frank Thorney, who commits the crime of bigamy and subsequently murder. This parallelism in plot is foregrounded ahead of the Prologue: “The Whole argument is this distich: Forced marriage, murder; murder blood requires (Thorney plot)/ Reproach, revenge; revenge hell’s help desires (Sawyer plot)” (Corbin and Sedge: 145). A three part process is in evidence in each of the plotlines here, as reflected in the structure of the distich, highlighting that one thing leads to another. The Thorney plot is purely fictional, but will become of interest to this chapter since the play places the crimes of Thorney and Sawyer side by side as they await execution.

The pamphlet which the play was based on; Henry Goodcole’s *The Wonderful Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer, A Witch* (1621); was just one available representation of Sawyer, amongst a number of competing texts, but since it had been written by a man of the church, it had authority. Indeed Goodcole describes himself as “Minister of the Word of God” on the title page (Gibson 2005: 302). Thus it is obvious that he had a “godly” intention behind the construction of his representation of Sawyer. Diane Purkiss points out that plays competed with other representations of witchcraft at the time: the trials themselves, pamphlets, ballads and even puppet shows. They were all in the business of shaping identities of witches and offering alternative perspectives. A seventeenth century audience would be familiar with a range of these representations, including Goodcole’s pamphlet (see Chapter 1) and no doubt Rowley, Dekker and Ford took this into account. Therefore it is interesting to look at what the playwrights do with their source material. Goodcole’s pamphlet records that Elizabeth Sawyer had a husband and children, and also had brooms to sell (Corbin and Sedge: 22). Rowley, Dekker and Ford choose instead to present her as completely isolated and poverty-stricken. They also give her, as mentioned in the introduction, a very strong, individual voice, whereas Goodcole’s pamphlet “becomes a full retrying of Sawyer’s case, one that places its author in the role not only of Sawyer’s confessor but also of her judge and, most significantly, her narrator” (Butler: 131). This does not prevent Goodcole from claiming in his address to the readers: “For my part I meddle

here with nothing but matter of fact” (Gibson 2005: 302) and that his work is “A true declaration of the manner proceeding against ELIZABETH SAWYER” (Gibson: 303). However, his text concludes with “A true Relation of the confession of Elizabeth Sawyer,” (Gibson 2005: 307) constructed in the format of question/answer. Stylistically, it is difficult to differentiate Sawyer’s voice from Goodcole’s: “the words ‘out of’ Sawyer’s mouth become entirely Goodcole’s” (Leuschner: 305). Compared to the pamphlet, then, the play offers its own unique representation: “The plays therefore recycle questions about truth and belief which are tackled in different ways and with different results by every text which offers to disclose a truth about the witches in question” (Purkiss: 234). The playwrights adapt the source material and shape it to their own purpose, and, I argue, do so in order to present a real challenge to society in the questions they raise.

The Prologue sets the play in Edmonton and its surroundings. This would be familiar to a contemporary audience. In addition, Corbin and Sedge point out, “One of the play’s most striking characteristics is its detailed evocation of the life of such a community, its social structure, concerns and activities” (21). We see characters from the very top of society to the very bottom and meet a wide range in between. Elizabeth Sawyer is at the bottom of this social hierarchy, and that is made clear as soon as we see her on stage. This portrayal of society is central, not only to the questions I am researching, but to the question of “the nature and identity of witches” that the play explores. As Foucault states, “I don’t believe that this question of ‘who exercises power?’ can be resolved unless that other question ‘how does it happen?’ is resolved at the same time” (Foucault in Kritzman: 103). This statement lends itself very well to *The Witch of Edmonton* and its portrayal of the ways in which society operates.

3.3. Becoming a witch: Words, oaths, and scripts

In the opening of Act II, Elizabeth Sawyer enters the stage for the first time, as she is gathering sticks to warm herself. Her actions immediately convey her poverty, and this is in turn reinforced by her words. She begins with a soliloquy, thus establishing some intimacy with the audience, and draws attention both to her position in society and to the power of words. If we consider Bakhtin’s theory of speech genres, where “each sphere in which language is used develops its own relatively stable types of

these utterances” (60), then we recognise that a soliloquy is a special speech genre. Whether Sawyer addresses the audience directly or not in her soliloquy, the two questions which frame her opening speech constitute an appeal to the audience as she reflects on her treatment at the hands of the local community: “And why on me? Why should the envious world/ Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?” (2.1.1-2). She immediately sets up the world she inhabits as disproportionately hostile towards her; the verb “throw” suggests she is defenceless, and in this context has a dimension of violence associated with it; the word “malice” is also loaded in a play that deals with witchcraft. The idea of opposition is established with the single figure of Sawyer on one side, and “the envious world” on the other. Thus, she is presented as isolated, alone and outnumbered. Her explanation for this situation, that she is “poor, deformed and ignorant/ And like a bow buckled and bent together” (2.1.3-4) denotes a society that is prejudiced, has a strong social hierarchy, and cares little for those at the bottom. After four lines, Sawyer is already making a claim for sympathy.

Sawyer draws attention to how her physical appearance and social status can be read as a list of requirements that can be ticked by society, in order to justify the behaviour of others towards her. Those in the community do not give any consideration to who she might be as a person, or even consider helping her out. Instead, like a bully, they identify her vulnerability and make her “a common sink/ For all the filth and rubbish of men’s tongues” (2.1.6-7). The reference to “men’s tongues” draws attention to a particular kind of speech; “filth” suggests insults and gossip and an intention to exclude. Part of that “rubbish of men’s tongues” is the label of “witch”. The playwrights point to the power of language here in its ability to define. To bestow the label of “witch”, as a contemporary audience would know, could have serious consequences, as indeed it does for the character concerned. The audience already know the fate of Elizabeth Sawyer.

The playwrights give Sawyer the opportunity to challenge this definition of her. She claims she is “ignorant” of how to be a witch, and turns the argument around. Sawyer points instead to how the community “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” (2.1.10-13). The words “teach” and “urging” suggest some form of training or rehearsal, and that expectations

are already in place for a particular outcome. Through Sawyer the playwrights underline that society establishes her role and defines it: “This they enforce upon me” (2.1.14). The suggestion that there is a script in existence for the role of “witch” and that Sawyer fits it perfectly, whether it is true or not, does not seem to be an issue that the community recognises. But it is certainly an issue that the play raises. It does this by inviting the spectators to see Sawyer as society sees her, whilst allowing her voice to oppose this view. The play is worked in such a way to present a challenge to the mechanisms that create witches; it removes the fault from the witch and places it firmly with society. Sawyer’s speech also makes the audience part of the problem; they are staged as part of society surrounding the witch. This is a powerful way of making the audience think about witchcraft and how it operates in their society. The audience is invited to reflect upon how they contribute to that and challenged to see their own responsibility. In this way I argue, the play undermines popular belief and sows doubt regarding the ability of the term “witch” to mean anything other than a scapegoat for society’s ills.

Sawyer’s depiction of her own reality is confirmed when Old Banks comes on stage. He represents one of those who “teach” her how to be a “witch” (2.1.8) and the audience gets to see him in action. Whilst Sawyer is on his land gathering sticks for firewood, Old Banks’ reaction seems excessive, petty (it is only a few sticks) and illustrates Sawyer’s previous claims as he utters: “witch [...] worse I would, knew I a name /more hateful [...] I’ll make/ thy bones rattle in thy skin [...] Hag” (2.1.19-31). As speech is Sawyer’s only form of self-defence, she retaliates: “Would they stuck ‘cross thy/ throat, thy bowels, thy maw, thy midriff” (2.1.24-25), and we witness a verbal contest take place. Whilst Sawyer acknowledges her “bad tongue”, it is hard for the audience not to agree with her previous comment, “my bad tongue, by their bad usage made so” (2.1.11). Unable to distinguish any difference between her speech acts and those of the community, Sawyer points to the existence of a double standard. This double standard is highlighted in the clever play on words she uses in the quote above, which exposes the hypocrisy of society. It is clear that characters such as Old Banks are instigators of verbal conflict. In forcing her to respond, they show what successful teachers they have been. They have trained her to speak the script and she curses to perfection. We can see here, that the play contributes to the debate that was taking place “about what witchcraft and accusations of witchcraft consisted of and

who witches really were, by asking about patterns of stereotype and representation rather than about reality” (Gibson: 81). Sawyer might fit the stereotype pattern both physically and verbally, but she is allowed to challenge the discrepancy that exists between prejudice and reality through her questions: “What is the name? Where and by what art learned?/ What spells, what charms, or invocations/ May the thing called Familiar be purchased? (2.1.34-36). As David Atkinson states, “she lacks any knowledge of witchcraft [...] her bitterness is the natural result of provocation rather than conscious wickedness. Indeed it is difficult to blame her for cursing her tormentor” (429). In this manner a process forms: Sawyer is excluded from society (othering), she is given all good reason to hate society (teaching), thereby she is prepared for the role of a witch (becoming).

We can see this process worked through in Sawyer’s next soliloquy. Her suffering is documented first of all: “vexed”, “tortured”, “shunned”, “hated like a sickness”, “made a scorn to all degrees and sexes” (2.1.98-102). The listing of verbs suggests the goading of her by society is unending and supports the sense of “malice” behind their actions that she mentioned earlier. This beginning of Sawyer’s speech exposes the “othering” that is taking place. She is being singled out and excluded, and that is at the root of what comes next as she moves on from her suffering, to her fury and her wish for revenge. This is what she has been taught to do. Now she is ready to become a witch: “Would some power, good or bad,/ Instruct me which way I might be revenged/ Upon this churl” (2.1.107-109). The fact that she says “good or bad” emphasises firstly her desperation and secondly her lack of knowledge in such matters, but she makes clear how far she is prepared to go: “Abjure all goodness, be at hate with prayer,/ And study curses, imprecations,/ Blasphemous speeches, oaths, detested oaths/ [...] so I might work/ Revenge upon this miser” (2.1.109-116). The references she makes to speech acts such as “curses”, “imprecations”, “blasphemous speeches” and “oaths”, demonstrate that Sawyer recognises the script she must adopt in order to become a witch, and its discourse. Uttering a final curse at the end of her speech: “Vengeance, shame, ruin light upon that canker” (2.1.120) she achieves her wish. The Devil appears in the guise of a dog and the process is about to be fulfilled: “Ho! Have I found thee cursing? Now thou art mine own” (2.1.121). The play dramatizes Elizabeth Sawyer becoming a witch shortly afterwards.

Something very complex and very clever is going on here regarding staging. Many critics see the appearance of the Devil and Sawyer's subsequent transformation into a witch as paradoxical. As David Nichol asks, "Why do the playwrights encourage scepticism about witchcraft accusations, whilst simultaneously showing the victim of them becoming a real witch?" (430). Nichol argues that this is so we can read the parallels in the plot lines, in that both Elizabeth Sawyer and Frank Thorney undergo some form of social coercion (as indicated in the distich) that leads them to commit their respective crimes of bigamy and witchcraft. Eric Byville offers another explanation: "the play represents a remarkable dramatic unity through its representation of performative language" (17). He argues that both bigamy and witchcraft are performative speech acts, using John Searle's definition of that term to substantiate this: "cases where one brings a state of affairs into existence by declaring it to exist, cases where so to speak, 'saying makes it so'" (3). When Sawyer declares "I am thine" (2.1.144) to the Devil and thus cements her pact, it is a performative act in the same way that Frank Thorney takes the sacred oath of marriage. The fact that he does this twice, turns it into bigamy: "This pattern of cursing and oath-taking and oath-making is [...] the central motif" (Byville: 21) and thus directs both plots. Both Sawyer's pact with the Devil and the bigamy that Thorney commits, influence the events that are to occur and lead the central protagonists to the gallows.

3.4. Devil, dog, and society

Another aspect of the text worth considering is the dog metaphor. Sawyer often refers to her accusers as a dog(s): "this black cur/ That barks and bites, and sucks the very blood/ Of me and of my credit" (2.1.116-118), "None but base curs so bark at me" (4.1.76), "I am torn in pieces by a pack of curs" (4.1.151), "These dogs will mad me" (5.3.41). The first example with its "sucks the very blood" is particularly striking; it brings to mind popular beliefs of the Devil as a witch's familiar. However Sawyer consistently applies these images to men within the community. Sawyer's application of the concept of a dog in her description of society and the fact that the Devil comes to her in the guise of a dog, adds another dimension to the plot: it signals the Devil at work on both sides.

Indeed, the dog metaphor ensures that there is little to distinguish Sawyer's accusers from the Devil himself. If we look closely at both how the Devil and Sawyer's accusers treat her, the similarities are revealing. Sawyer warms to the Devil initially as he speaks the only warm words to her of the whole play: "I love thee [...] pitied/ Thy open wrongs and come, out of my love" (2.1.124-127). However much in the same manner as the community "enforce" the scripted role of witch on her, the Devil Dog can be seen to do the same. His words of love are used purely to manipulate. He threatens to "tear thy body into a thousand pieces" (2.1.137) and "Speak or I'll tear", if Sawyer refuses to seal the pact. Not surprisingly, the Devil Dog is also seen to use Sawyer for his own ends. Like the community who use her as a scapegoat for society's ills, the Devil Dog shares the same final intention, the accusation of witchcraft which leads to her execution and her entry into hell: "the witch must be beaten out of her cockpit" (5.1.48), "Our prey being had, the devil does laughing stand" (5.1.76). He has duped her and she cannot escape her fate. The staging of Act II scene I, which I discussed earlier, also suggests a parallel between society and the Devil: Sawyer is alone, then bullied by Old Banks; Sawyer is alone, then bullied by the Devil.

These similarities between the Devil and society are something Sawyer elaborates on in her exchange with the Justice in Act IV scene I. Confronted with Sawyer facing a lynch mob, the Justice is presented as the voice of reason and of the law. His view of Sawyer distinguishes him from other characters: "Fie! To abuse an aged woman" (4.1.35), "You must not threaten her; 'tis against law" (4.1.52). He castigates those who are claiming that her appearance at the burning of thatch provides proof of witchcraft. If it achieves anything, it depicts them as fools. Interestingly he adds, that their attempts to provide proofs are to "turn her into a witch", a reference which resonates with Sawyer's soliloquies in Act II. What the play appears to be dramatising here is an increasing scepticism amongst the learned, in the role of the Justice. New scientific lines of enquiry as a way to discover truth brought accusations of witchcraft into question (Purkiss: 231). However, as the play illustrates, this did not mean that popular beliefs necessarily followed this path.

Obedying his orders to go, the men leave and Sawyer finds herself alone with Sir Arthur and the Justice. The playwrights place representatives of the opposite ends of the social hierarchy on stage together and engage them in discussion. This enables Sawyer to further expose the double standards she sees in society. The conversation starts as we might expect, with the Justice asking Sawyer: “are you a witch or no?” (4.1.73). His phrasing of the question seems to suggest there is a simple answer: yes or no. However Sawyer points to its complexity.

Although the Justice personifies status and authority, Sawyer is the one who holds the floor and what she proposes is particularly challenging: “Men in gay clothes,/ whose backs are laden with titles and honours, are within far/ more crooked than I am, and if I be a witch, more witch-like” (4.1.87-89). She confronts the Justice and Sir Arthur with the idea that it is those who hold the most power in society whom are “more crooked” and “more witch-like”, thereby undermining the notions through which the social hierarchy justifies itself. Considering that this play was written at a time when the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings was in place, and that these words come from the mouth of a supposed “witch”, Sawyer inverts the social order. Sir Arthur’s strong reaction indicates he sees himself in this reference: “I can, if need be, bring an hundred voices/ [...] that shall proclaim thee for a secret and/ pernicious witch” (4.1.94-96). His inability to offer anything other than a threat to what Sawyer says, suggests he recognises some truth in her argument.

Sawyer continues with her evaluation: “A witch! Who is not?/ Hold not that universal name in scorn then/ What are your painted things in princes’ courts [...] The man of law/ whose honeyed hopes the credulous client draws” (4.1.103-131). Her speeches redefine the term “witch” and apply it to every layer of society: “Rather than being forced to accept the role and identity that society has imposed on her, she forces society, in the form of Sir Arthur and the Justice, to re-evaluate that identity and to engage in debate with her on her terms” (Bonavita: 85). I argue that she also forces the audience to re-evaluate this, for they cannot fail to notice that the Justice appears powerless to oppose her argument. He lacks words, even agreeing with her at one point: “Yes, yes; but the law/ Casts not an eye on these” (4.1.118-119). Yet his response is exposed by Sawyer: For if the law does not “cast an eye” upon these people, “Why then on me/ Or any lean old beldam?” (4.1.120-121). Sawyer highlights

the hypocrisy and injustice in society. She clarifies how they pick on the most vulnerable to scapegoat, whereas the privileged get away with it: “Such so abused/
Are the coarse witches, t’other are the fine,/ Spun for the devil’s own wearing” (4.1.124-126). Sawyer links society to evil. Perhaps more dangerously she “turns the excluding label of “witch” back against her accusers in a manner which suggests that the evil they are seeking to contain and exclude is in fact endemic in society” (Bonavita: 84). If we recall Bakhtin’s theory of speech genres, there are expectations of how people will speak in certain situations. Sawyer breaks the conventions here. The playwrights give her the gift of rhetoric and she turns it against those she is meant to revere. Exasperated with her logic, the Justice tells her to go home and pray, whilst Sir Arthur states the accusation of witchcraft against her is soon to be sworn. Most notably, both men leave the stage unable to find words with which to contest her argument.

3.5. Wronged neighbour versus accused witch

Shortly after the scene with Sir Arthur and the Justice, Anne Ratcliffe confronts Sawyer. Both women view each other as enemies, and this is the only scene where the context of witchcraft is played out between women themselves. Sawyer describes Ratcliffe as “that foul-tongued whore” (4.1.170), and it is clear that the two women have quarrelled previously. Echoing her words from Act II scene one, “That my bad tongue, by their bad usage made so” (2.1.11), Sawyer suggests that she and Ratcliffe are an equal match for each other speech-wise. However, the fact that Sawyer is the one labelled “witch”, points to what Goodare highlighted (in 2.3. above) concerning a quarrel between two women; one is labelled as the “wronged neighbour” and the other as the “accused witch”. Ratcliffe’s higher social standing and status as a married woman is clearly the deciding factor in the eyes of the community, enabling her to assert “her own ‘honesty’ while affirming the latter’s otherness” (Goodare: 298). Yet this leads Sawyer to retaliate; she instructs the Dog to “pinch that quean to th’ heart” (4.1.173). Here we can see both Foucault’s perspective “Where there is power, there is resistance” (1990: 95) and what de Beauvoir describes as the “choice between the two opposed basic categories” (284) as they apply to the myth of woman. Woman is either “the Praying Manticie, the Mandrake, the Demon” or “the Muse, the Goddess Mother, Beatrice” (de Beauvoir: 284). There is no in-between, and despite the fact

that neither extreme seems an appropriate definition of Ratcliffe or Sawyer here, it dictates the oppositions that both Sawyer and Ratcliffe adopt in relation to each other.

The actions of the Dog seem to have worked as Anne Ratcliffe enters the stage talking in riddles. Her husband describes her as “stark mad” (4.1.197) and Sawyer is thrilled: “Ho, ho, ho!” (4.1.178). However the exchange of dialogue that follows between Ratcliffe and Sawyer is significant in its unity of perspective. Whilst Ratcliffe’s words may be considered “raving”, they echo the point Sawyer has recently made to the Justice: “A pox of the devil’s false hopper! All the/ golden meal runs into the rich knaves’ purses, and the poor have nothing but bran” (4.1.179-180). This critique of society and how it promotes the work of the Devil is further underlined by Ratcliffe’s response to Sawyer’s declaration of “I am a lawyer” (4.1.183). “*Anne Ratcliffe*: Art thou! I prithee let me scratch thy face, for thy pen has flayed off a great many men’s skins” (4.1.184-185). It was widely believed that scratching a witch’s face would break her spell. By applying this action to a figure of the law, Ratcliffe aligns society with evil in a similar manner to Sawyer. She exposes not only its stark divisions between rich and poor, but also sees how power operates in society. The fact that Ratcliffe can only articulate this once she is considered “mad”, suggests that enlightenment poses a risk to sanity. Ratcliffe subsequently runs off stage. Her final moments are recorded as follows: “she beat out her own brains, and so died” (4.1.210).

3.6. The witch’s perspective

Sawyer’s consistent exposure of double morality, her use of dog metaphors in reference to society, and the fact that the Devil is represented on stage as a dog, unites evil with society in a way that society cannot see. The accusation of witchcraft, its attempt to pin down evil and find a scapegoat, thereby associating evil with the “witch” rather than society itself, is in fact the Devil’s work. The process of witch accusations in their attempt to free society of evil does not work, because it does not resolve the conflict. Evil and society cannot be separated. It explains the paradox identified earlier regarding Sawyer’s transformation into a witch as not so paradoxical after all. In bringing the devil to Edmonton, Sawyer allows the playwrights to orchestrate a debate upon the way society operates. The Devil Dog links the trajectories of Sawyer and Thorney. By moving into the Thorney plot independently

of Sawyer, the Devil confirms he operates everywhere. As Sawyer is led to execution, Old Carter accuses her of acts she has not done: “Did you not bewitch Frank to kill his wife? He could/ never have done’t without the devil” (5.3.26-27). Her reply speaks volumes: “Who doubts it? But is every devil mine?” (5.3.28). The contrast between, on the one hand, the hostile crowd who jeer and falsely accuse Sawyer of things the audience knows she has not done and, on the other, the peace and forgiveness that surrounds Frank Thorney as he is led off to execution, unmasks the blindness in society concerning evil. Sawyer’s words to the crowd are perhaps the truest of all: “All take heed/ How they believe the devil; at last he’ll cheat you” (5.3.45-46).

The *Witch of Edmonton* is unique in its articulation of a witch’s perspective. The playwrights are not saying that witchcraft is not a crime, but that evil also operates in, and is committed by the very society that is attempting to contain it. The play does not let the witch off, or the bigamist/murderer for that matter. Instead it attempts to explain how people like Sawyer end up in such a situation. Her speeches make it apparent from her point of view, why she has no other choice. Rowley, Dekker, and Ford expose the process that turns people into witches as one that is based upon power relations. By applying Foucault’s perspective to the events staged in *The Witch of Edmonton*, we can see how this power operates:

Foucault’s bottom-up model of power, that is his focus on the way power relations permeate all relations within a society, enables an account of the mundane and daily ways in which power is enacted and contested, and allows an analysis which focuses on individuals as active subjects, as agents rather than as passive dupes. (Mills: 34)

Rowley, Dekker and Ford not only return agency to the figure of the witch, but by presenting her as an individual, they humanise her.

3.7. Witch and gender

Whilst the story of Elizabeth Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton* is primarily about the conflict between the witch, the community and the legal system, the issue of gender, which forms my other research question, deserves further comment beyond Sawyer's confrontation with Ratcliffe above. In her book *Renaissance Dramatists* (1989), Kathleen McLuskie makes the following observation: "Like the witches discussed by Christina Lerner¹², Mother Sawyer, in this play is hunted by Banks as a witch and not as a woman. There is nothing explicitly sexual in the denunciations of her, and she is not presented primarily as a gendered figure" (71).

As detailed above, the only scene to explicitly dramatise the conflict that witchcraft poses in women's terms, is in the context and very short encounter between Sawyer and Ratcliffe (4.1). However, if we look closely at certain aspects of both Sawyer's speech and what is said about her, references to gender are evident. Implicit they may be, but they are present. Sawyer herself makes the link between the role of the witch and women: "old beldams" (II.1.102), "If every poor old woman be trod on thus" (IV.1.77), "Why then on me/ Or any lean old beldam?" (IV.1.120-121), "Now an old woman/ Ill-favoured grown with years, if she be poor/ Must be called bawd or witch" (IV.1. 122-124). Sawyer identifies the scripted stereotype, which equates old women with witchcraft and challenges it in her dialogue with the Justice and Sir Arthur. It does not change attitudes or behaviour within the play, but it certainly highlights the construction of gender in society. Thus, McLuskie's point that Sawyer is not primarily a gendered figure does not mean that gender is not an important part of the discourse here. Not only do men talk about women, Sawyer does as well.

I argue that the question of gender and power upon which this thesis is based, is something that Sawyer's words draw attention to. This becomes apparent in the play's focus upon the power of spoken discourse. In Act IV, scene 1 Sawyer makes a distinct gendered comparison based on speech acts:

¹² See 2.2. above for Lerner's conclusion on the relationship between witch-hunts and women.

Elizabeth Sawyer: She on whose tongue a whirlwind sits to blow
 A man out of himself, from his soft pillow
 To lean his head on rocks and fighting waves,
 Is not that scold a witch? The man of law
 Whose honeyed hopes the credulous client draws,
 As bees by tinkling basins, to swarm to him
 From his own hive to work the wax in his;
 He is no witch, not he! (4.1.128-134)

Here Sawyer points out the hypocrisy in the double standards applied to male and female speech in the context of power: the power a woman employs in an expression of verbal abuse is criminalised either as a “scold”¹³ (see 2.3. above) or a “witch” or both; the power a lawyer uses in his “honeyed” words to deceive and exploit his clients is given status and rewarded. Yet Sawyer implies that the latter is a more serious abuse of power because of the resulting consequences. Interestingly, it is Sir Arthur who uses the term “men-witches” in response to this, as he explains the reason for the disparity in treatment: “But these men-witches/ Are not in trading with hell’s merchandise/ Like such as you are” (4.1.134-136). Sawyer then turns this around, applying this argument to a further abuse of male power, the seduction of young women: “tempted maiden,/ With golden hooks flung at her chastity,/ To come and lose her honour, and being lost,/ To pay not a dernier for’t?” (4.1.140-143). Sawyer suggests that the destruction of a woman’s honour is as much a “trading with hell” as anything a witch is accused of. It is also an act for which clear evidence exists (the loss of virginity/pregnancy), unlike the act of witchcraft which supposedly “kill[s] men,/ Children and cattle” (4.1.137-138). Sawyer appropriates the term “men-witches” in relation to this act: “Men-witches can, without the fangs of law” (4.1.144). Sawyer points to the different controls in place upon women’s behaviours. The evidence of “lost maidenhood” is used against the woman in question, not the man, and it is she who suffers the consequences. The fact that men “can” behave this way without admonition from the law legitimises their behaviour whilst imposing a strict censoring of women’s actions. De Beauvoir explains how this happens by quoting Poulain de la Barre: “Being men, those who have made and compiled the laws have favoured their own sex, and jurists have elevated these laws into

¹³ Goodare makes the point that “scolds were generally older, poorer women [...] - very much the same group from whom most witches were drawn” (299).

principles” (de Beauvoir: 22). The added fact that Sir Arthur has indeed seduced his own maid Winnifride touches a raw nerve; Sir Arthur declares that “By one thing she speaks/ I know now she’s a witch” (4.1.147-148). However there is no evidence to suppose that Sawyer has any prior knowledge about Sir Arthur. She is talking about men’s behaviour in general. Yet this dialogue enables the audience to reconsider Sir Arthur’s actions from a new perspective: rather than accepting his behaviour as the patriarchal norm, his actions are presented as an abuse of power on the basis of status and gender. Both Sir Arthur and the audience see the label of “witch” recast upon his shoulders according to Sawyer’s argument. Her voice challenges the double standards as they apply to men and women.

Sawyer portrays the law as a predatory beast; the use of the word “fangs” suggests the law preys on women and hunts them. In the context of the witch-hunts, of which Sawyer falls victim, this sounds a chord. However it highlights the different approaches taken towards men and women in the courts and subverts the basis upon which the notion of justice is founded. In de Beauvoir’s terms, this is “the ‘division’ of humanity into two classes of people” (de Beauvoir: 282). We see this double standard enacted in a very short scene in Act V. It is strategically positioned directly before Sawyer is brought onto the stage for execution and forms a perfect illustration to the points Sawyer makes in the analysis above. Sir Arthur is before the court for the false letter he wrote assuring Frank’s father that Frank was not a married man. The Justice states that the “bench hath mildly censored your errors, yet you indeed have been the instrument that wrought all their misfortunes” (5.2.1-3). The word “yet” highlights the discrepancy between “mildly censored” whilst being “the instrument that wrought all their misfortunes”. Sir Arthur faces a mere fine. Clearly wealth, status and gender as markers of power exert their influence here.

If we now turn to what people say about Sawyer, Old Banks is the most vocal. He states that “witch” is the most hateful word he can find for Sawyer, in addition to “hag” (a gendered insult) and a “she-hellcat” (IV.1.36). Further comments come from Sir Arthur who denounces Sawyer on the basis that “She’s bruted for a woman that maintains a spirit/ that sucks her” (IV.1.91-92). This relates to a further stereotype linking women to witchcraft on the basis of sexual relations. At this stage Sawyer has not been arrested or undergone the procedure of pricking. Whilst the audience has

witnessed the pact with the Devil Dog as he “*Sucks her arm*” (stage directions Act II scene 1), Sir Arthur lacks any concrete evidence to claim this. The subtext to all this is that the discourse of witchcraft equates women as witches.

Although there is little room in this chapter to look at the parallel plot concerning Frank Thorney and the subplot of Cuddy Banks, it is worth noting that the discourse of witchcraft extends to a wider context: “the connections between witchcraft and ways of discussing women overlap considerably” (McLuskie 71). For example, Cuddy Banks states that he is “bewitched already” (2.1.211) by Katherine, and that “I saw a little devil fly/ out of her eye” (2.1.219-220), and “I have loved a witch ever since/ I played at cherry-pit” (3.1.18-19). Winnifride describes herself as “I was your devil” (1.2.218) to Sir Arthur regarding his seduction of her. Further references to women based on Beauvoir’s “two opposed basic categories” (284) that underpin the myth of woman, and that I argue are relevant to the way the discourse of witchcraft operates, run through the text. In the case of Winnifride, her marriage to Frank reclassifies her: “Once more thou art an honest woman” (1.1.125), and she herself states “I will change my life/ From a loose whore to a repentant wife” (1.1.191-192). Frank says to the innocent Susan, “You are my whore./ No wife of mine” (3.3.30-31), based on his actions of bigamy, just before he murders her. The discourse clarifies that women are repeatedly referred to as the problem, rather than the actions of men.

As we have seen *The Witch of Edmonton* concerns itself with the morals of society, and presents a most convincing and realistic approach in its attempt to open society’s eyes. As we now move on to our second play, Joanna Baillie’s *Witchcraft*, we shall see that the discourses on power, gender, and witchcraft established in *The Witch of Edmonton* are extended further.

Chapter 4: *Witchcraft*

4.1. The play and its context

In contrast to *The Witch of Edmonton* with its single witch character *Witchcraft* (1836), by Joanna Baillie (1762-1851), is a more complex drama with multiple characters somehow related to witchcraft or “reputed” to have engaged in witchcraft. In order to analyse the orchestration of female voices that Baillie constructs, a closer look at the author’s “Introductory Discourse” on theatre is helpful. The play is also prefaced with a footnote, setting out Baillie’s intentions, and this is considered below for the guidance it provides to the reader. The current chapter is built around a close textual reading of the three opening scenes in Act I of *Witchcraft*. These, I argue, are the scenes that best demonstrate how the play works in relation to the key issues I investigate in this thesis; script and voice. However, references are made to the wider context of the play as a whole, and comparisons drawn with *The Witch of Edmonton* where relevant. The chapter ends with a discussion of the differences between the two plays in relation to the research questions guiding this thesis (see 1.2 above).

Before turning to the play in detail, it requires locating contextually in both Baillie’s own writing career as a dramatist and within the period in which her plays were published and performed. In light of her “Introductory Discourse” (1798) (see 1.6 above) and the other prefaces and footnotes which precede her dramas, it is worth reminding ourselves of the different kind of audience for whom she wrote. In contrast to *The Witch of Edmonton*, which was written in 1621 and performed numerous times before it was published in 1658 (see 3.1 above), *Witchcraft* (as with Baillie’s other plays) was primarily presented and read in a textual format. The discursive structure of Baillie’s prefaces and introductions serve to highlight their readerly nature and thus the different approaches taken by the respective playwrights to these two dramas. Where Rowley, Dekker and Ford take a performative approach; Baillie focuses her work on the reading experience. However this does not diminish Baillie’s knowledge of the stage or desire to have her work performed. *Witchcraft* featured in her last volume of plays, entitled *Dramas* (1836), the preface to which expressed a wish for these plays to be successfully produced:

[A]fter my death, they should have been offered to some of the smaller theatres of the metropolis, and thereby have a chance, at least, of being produced to the public with the advantages of action and scenic decorations, which naturally belong to dramatic compositions. (Baillie in Burroughs: 89)

It took a long time for Baillie's wish to be realised. *Witchcraft* was performed on stage for the first time in 2008 at Finborough Theatre, London. The second performance was part of a three year project entitled "Hypertext and Performance: A Resonant Response to Joanna Baillie's *Witchcraft*"¹⁴, which began in 2010.

To stage a play in Baillie's time was not easy. The Stage Licensing Act of 1737 authorized "only two theaters, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, to perform the 'legitimate' British drama" (Burroughs: 9). This not only limited the number of plays that could be performed due to stage capacity, but also allowed for control of content: "the Licenser of the Stage [...] was charged with approving a play's political, sexual, and religious content" (Burroughs: 9). In addition, Baillie as a female dramatist faced the obstacle of gender. Whilst the ability of women to write was not dismissed out of hand, there were, as Ellen Donkin points out, "gender expectations around writing" (178) during the Romantic period that imposed restrictions upon the suitability of both subject matter and form for women.

4.2. Joanna Baillie: A female dramatist

Joanna Baillie published *Witchcraft*, her last play, when she was in her seventies. Established as a writer of poetry and drama in her lifetime, she continued to publish plays and edit poetry until her death. Greg Kucich draws attention to the fact that many reviewers in the Romantic period heralded her with great acclaim: "Joanna Baillie, rising foremost among all dramatists of the present, brings back the glories of the Elizabethan stage and leads the charge to reinvigorate not only theatrical life but the whole national literature" (25). On her death, "*Harper's New Monthly Magazine* declared her 'the most illustrious poet of the female poets of England' and remarked that '[h]er power of portraying the darker and sterner passions of the human heart has rarely been surpassed'" (Colon: xx). Yet despite these glowing testaments her path as a female dramatist was a difficult one. Baillie was well aware that when it came to the

¹⁴ This was part of a three-year funded project that took place at Concordia University, Montreal (<http://resonance.hexagram.ca/witchcraft/#/home>)

critics, her gender would in all probability detract attention from the quality of her work. Not all reviewers embraced the idea of a female playwright. This may seem an obvious point to make when we look back on the history of women writers, but it is worth considering that certain events had changed the direction of thinking in the country at the time Baillie was writing. A new emphasis had been given to the definition of gender roles. The consequences of the recent Napoleonic wars and the battle of Waterloo brought a new “conservative spirit” to the nation:

It was during the wars that voice was definitively given to the male patriot, who upheld the supremacy of the three great patriarchal institutions – family, church and state – over any other individual or collective aspirations. Such values entailed the imposition of a private and domestic role for women, in silent support of the new patriotism. For a woman, writing professionally implied, on the contrary, assuming a public voice. (Cristafulli and Elam: 6)

Thus if being a woman writer in a professional capacity in general signified a transgression of boundaries in its claim to “a public voice”, it became particularly problematic within the genre of drama:

The woman/theatre association thus became doubly dangerous [...] Unlike the writing of poetry or fiction, which could be decorously exercised at home, playwriting, if it was to leave the confines of the closet,¹⁵ required experience of playhouses, actors, managers and audiences (Cristafulli and Elam: 7).

Drama as a genre was by its nature collaborative. A production involved stage managers, rehearsals, actors, and an audience. Even Lord Byron found the latter distasteful:

Byron knew from firsthand experience how vulnerable playwrights were to audience approval [...] he wrote that he preferred not to endure ‘the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or bad, has been a mental labour to the writer’. (Burroughs: 76)

This highlights the fact that for women to continue to push the boundaries and participate in the theatre of the Romantic period was doubly challenging.

¹⁵ Closet drama refers to plays intended to be read rather than performed.

Gender expectations in regard to writing at the time focused particularly on form and content. Here, I am indebted to Ellen Donkin whose book *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London 1776 – 1826* (1994)¹⁶ helps the reader understand the context in which Baillie was operating. Donkin quotes Byron as someone who drew attention to gendered spheres and their resulting restrictions on subject matter and genre. Byron wrote in a letter in 1815: “Women (saving Joanna Baillie) cannot write tragedy. They haven’t the experience of life for it” (Byron in Donkin: 178). In a second letter in 1817, he comments: “When Voltaire was asked why no woman has ever written even a tolerable tragedy, ‘Ah (said the Patriarch) the composition of a tragedy requires testicles.’ If this be true, Lord knows what Joanna Baillie does - I suppose she borrows them” (Byron in Donkin: 178). Byron, both as a reflector of dominant culture and also as a catalyst in that culture, here perceives the writing of tragedy as a gendered operation, and Baillie as an exception. As Donkin confirms, that kind of thinking was new at the time (178). According to this dictum, tragedy clearly belonged to the male sphere. In order to be successful, Joanna Baillie had to “borrow” testicles and become male “in order to keep Byron’s categories intact” (Donkin: 178). Byron was influential, and whilst also a supporter of Baillie, he seemed to be leading the way in categorising what was seen as acceptable material for women to tackle in their role as writers and this clearly related to their “experience of life”. That is, where a woman’s sphere was restricted to the private and domestic as gender ideology at the time dictated, that should be the focus of their writing. Whilst critics at the time accepted and appreciated “Female Poetry”¹⁷ which was deemed suited to a “delicacy which pervades their [women’s] conceptions and feelings” (Francis Jeffrey¹⁸ in Donkin: 179), it seems drama was just too “public” and “indelicate” a domain for women.

¹⁶ Described as “A breakthrough volume” (Cristafulli and Elam 11), I am heavily dependent upon Donkin’s research in this section of the chapter.

¹⁷ The tag “female” indicates that even within form, women would write differently to men.

¹⁸ “One of the leading critical voices in literature [...] is very revealing about gender expectations around writing” (Donkin 178-179).

Within this kind of background it comes as no surprise that Joanna Baillie chose to publish her first *Series of Plays: Plays on the Passions* (1798) anonymously, as had other female playwrights on their debuts such as Frances Burney¹⁹ (1778) and Elizabeth Inchbald²⁰ (1784). Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" which introduced her first volume of plays can thus be seen as a way to insert herself into a line of preceding female playwrights and to intervene in the dialogue concerning the role of women as writers.

Baillie's "Introductory Discourse" represents, as already noted, an impressive piece of criticism. It made a strong argument for the experiment that Baillie was to carry out, in basing a series of plays on the passions that can take over the human mind. Her focus on "what men are in the closet as well as the field, by the blazing hearth, and at the social board, as well as in the council and the throne" (1798: 7) shows she was clearly occupied with the historical and cultural context in which she was writing. By focusing on men's lives "in the closet" and "by the blazing hearth" she is not only assigning, but also locating men in a domestic and interior space, one that was traditionally held as inherently female. In so doing, she challenges the notion of separate spheres defined by gender roles. She actively draws attention to the private, domestic aspects of men's lives that generally went unrecognised and places them on an equal footing with their public selves. Moreover, this blurring of the dividing lines has to go both ways, in turn implying that women have the potential to inhabit the space inherently associated with men: the public sphere. In addition, the "Introductory Discourse" made a further argument concerning gender. In a footnote, Baillie references the female character when she states, that "there is no man that ever lived, who has behaved in a certain manner, on a certain occasion, who has not had amongst women some corresponding spirit" (1798: 24). For every "tragick hero", she argued, there existed a heroine, thus making the case for female characters to play central roles in tragedy, something they indeed did in her plays.

¹⁹ Frances Burney: English novelist, diarist, playwright (1752 - 1840). Her first novel was published anonymously to great success. Whilst her father accepted her as a novelist, he suppressed the publication of her first play even though Richard Sheridan had explicitly asked Burney to write drama for the theatre he managed at Drury Lane.

²⁰ Elizabeth Inchbald: actress, playwright, novelist, critic (1753-1821). Her role as an actress gave her access to the stage. However her first play was published anonymously on the instructions of her producer George Colman.

Whilst the author remained anonymous, *Plays on the Passions* was well received. A year after publication it became a great talking point in literary circles and in 1800 the play *De Montfort* was staged at Drury Lane. As Donkin points out, “The voice of this critic was educated, declarative and confident” (162). It was also assumed to be male: “All the early reviews refer to the author as ‘he’” (181). However as Donkin reveals, everything changed the day after opening night, when Joanna Baillie was announced as the author: “[T]he winds of fortune began to shift [...] receipts dropped [...] The play ran for eleven nights and finally closed for good” (Donkin: 164). Sales at both the box office and of the book fell dramatically once it became known that the play was written by a woman. In retrospect then, the initial decision to publish anonymously appears wise: “It cannot be overstated how closely anonymity was connected to a woman’s effort to take charge of in her own work and to circumvent prejudice and interference on the outside” (Donkin: 181). The danger of openly writing as a woman is further highlighted by Hester Piozzi²¹, a commentator at the time: “What a goose Joanna must have been to reveal her sex and name!” (Piozzi in Donkin: 165). The revealing of sex and name as detrimental to success emphasises gender as a central issue.

What made such a stir in Baillie’s case was the popularity her book had garnered in literary circles. As it had been considered to be the work of a man, the news that the writer was female “precipitated a cultural crisis. Her work revealed that the boundaries separating male and female were not as clear as they should be, or had been inaccurately drawn in the first place” (Donkin: 181). Baillie’s bold step, in which she presented herself as both critic and writer earned her a vicious backlash; she is described as being “*devoured* by spite and malice” (Donkin: 165) by reviewers who felt perhaps they had been made fools of.

However this was not the response of everyone and the examples that follow illustrate the influence Baillie had upon the subject of women in the theatre. Women in particular, noted that Baillie was offering a new alternative to the staging of female characters: “[Sarah] Siddons²² reportedly said to Baillie, ‘Make me some more Jane de Montforts!’ It is the first instance I have come across in which an actress

²¹ Hester Piozzi (1741 - 1821): writer, diarist, literary commentator.

²² Sarah Siddons (1755 - 1831): actress famed for playing tragic heroines.

approached a woman playwright and proposed this kind of artistic collaboration” (Donkin: 166). Years later, in 1812, Baillie introduced her last volume of a *Series of Plays* with a preface Donkin describes as follows:

[H]er writings in the 1812 preface on lighting effects, blocking, and audibility are some of the most detailed and perceptive that we have from this period, because they reveal the way technical issues could shape audience reception and textual intent [...] And she is the only commentator to my knowledge who writes about the impact of these new [theatre] houses on the work of the *actress*, as distinct from the *actor*: ‘the features and voice of a woman, being naturally more delicate than those of a man, she must suffer in proportion from the defects of a large theatre.’ (Donkin: 172-173)

Two things stand out here. First of all Baillie’s attention to detail in all aspects of dramatic presentation; her knowledge and understanding of theatrical space and its impact on both performance and audience reception emphasises the interactive nature of drama as a genre. Baillie understood that a play’s success is not just down to a brilliant script; it is a collaborative experience between actors, audience and the physical space in which it is staged. Secondly, her consideration of gender appears ground-breaking for its time; not only in the creation of defining roles for women in her plays, but in the attention she drew to their physical inhabitation of the stage.

All these aspects apply to what Joanna Baillie attempts to achieve in *Witchcraft*. Despite a hostile reception that awaited female dramatists in the period in which *Witchcraft* was published, she wrote a play as a sequel to a novel, chose the genre of tragedy, which was deemed to be masculine, placed women centre-stage and gave them individual voices. *Witchcraft* is also a history play, specifically one that focuses on women’s history. This lends added weight to the emphasis Baillie places upon the role of women, both in her present, in the historical past, and on the stage in this play. As Greg Kucich states: “female writers of the romantic era [...] exerted great political energy in seeking, particularly through historical drama, to write women back into the story of the past” (21). Ironically, as Baillie writes women back into history, she was being written out of it. It took until the 1980s for her to be recognised “with the determination to fix her in theater history and Romantic studies as important for both her age and ours” (Burroughs: 105).

4.3. An important footnote

The significance of Joanna Baillie's experience as a female playwright and her particular interest in the female character on stage, will become apparent once we turn to the play itself. First, the author's footnote will be accounted for. Its importance lies in the guidance it gives the reader regarding context. Inspired by her good friend Sir Walter Scott's novel *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1819), Baillie wrote *Witchcraft* as the sequel, albeit in the genre of drama. The sub-heading to the title of this play is "A Tragedy in Prose, in Five Acts" and to this she adds a footnote²³. She first states that the play was prompted by:

[R]eading that very curious and original scene in the '*Bride of Lammermuir*,' when the old women, after the division of largess given at a funeral, are so dissatisfied with their share of it, and wonder that the devil, who helps other wicked people willing to serve him, has never bestowed any power or benefits upon them. (Baillie 1851: 613)

Recognising that Scott had come close to accounting for this behaviour (a seeming willingness for certain people to engage with the Devil), Baillie clarifies that her inability to convince Scott to "pursue the new path he had just entered into [...] and fail[ure] to persuade him to undertake the subject" (Baillie 1851: 613), resulted in Baillie herself taking on the task.

Baillie goes further in her footnote to explain the central focus of this particular drama to her readers: "the design of the play is to illustrate this curious condition of nature" (1851: 613). What she refers to here is "a very extraordinary circumstance, frequently recorded in trials for the crime of witchcraft, - the accused themselves acknowledging the crime" (Baillie 1851: 613). Acknowledgement was certain to lead to execution and Baillie is dissatisfied with the explanations that had so far accounted for this behaviour: "It has been supposed that, previously to their trial, from cruel treatment and misery of every kind, they desired to have an end put to their wretched existence, even at the stake" (1851: 613). As Baillie argues, if this was the case they could easily have ended their own lives by flinging themselves into the nearest river, rather than undergo the gruelling nature of a witchcraft trial and a "cruel death [...] by fire and faggot". Baillie also dismisses the notion that for the most part,

²³ Modern editions of the play do not contain Baillie's footnote. It was through consulting *The Dramatic and Poetical Works of Joanna Baillie: complete in one volume* (1851) that I discovered it.

these self-confessed witches were in some state of delirium; unhappy they may have been, but Baillie posits the argument that these characters may in fact have consciously believed in what they confessed to.

In her footnote, Baillie deems the “conjectures” as accounts of confessions of witchcraft as wholly inadequate; once again they seem designed to fit a simplistic “functionalist” explanation (see Thomas in 2.2 above) that erases any agency on behalf of the witches accused. Her use of the term “conjectures” emphasises the notion of speculation rather than evidence that these accounts are based upon. The footnote suggests, therefore, that there is a gap in the traditional narrative, an absence that the play aims to fill. This harks back to the point she makes in her “Introductory Discourse” (Baillie 1798, see 1.6 above) regarding the deficiencies of “real history” and the ability of drama to rectify the situation. The only way to reach any understanding of why certain women confessed to witchcraft is by going “behind the scenes”; which involves investigating the thoughts and behaviour of these characters in depth. Baillie explicitly invites the audience to look and listen carefully to her play, as she explores the “real circumstances” leading to a confession of witchcraft.

This strategically aligns the play with the aims of the judicial system, a central player in the witchcraft trials throughout British history. Here Baillie echoes the “Introductory Discourse”. She proclaims a link between the genre of drama itself and its ability to make an audience “more just, more merciful, more compassionate” (Baillie 1798: 5). As I argued in the Introduction (see 1.6 above) Baillie turns the theatre into a metaphorical courtroom. In terms of *Witchcraft* then, Baillie repositions our reading of what took place and asks the audience to judge anew.

The play attempts to supply both the gap that Baillie points out in the traditional witchcraft narrative and the gap left when Walter Scott came so close to “accounting for a very extraordinary circumstance” (1851: 613) which historically saw women turning to witchcraft. Like Rowley, Dekker and Ford in *The Witch of Edmonton*, Baillie gives a unique space to the figure(s) of the witch on stage. She makes what had been absent present as she writes the witches themselves back into the narrative as co-narrators, by letting the witch characters speak. In her theatre theory, Baillie emphasises that “the characters of drama must speak directly for

themselves” (1798: 8). Only then can an audience have the ability to judge what the witches have to say. The implication is that if “voice” is absent or indirectly reported by another person, such as was the case in the recording of witchcraft trials (see 2.1 above), the ability to judge is impaired. Thus in the case of *Witchcraft*, Baillie attempts to redress the balance; by forcing the audience to listen to what a witch has to say, she confronts it with what may be considered new evidence. In legal terms this would constitute a “re-trial”, in dramatic terms it is an invitation to “deal to others judgement tempered with mercy; that is to say truly just” (Baillie 1798: 6), and thus potentially rewrite history.

Considering the problems (identified in 2.1 above) in establishing an authentic voice in the historical sources, the extent to which Baillie goes to show that the voices in her play are genuine and true in relation to the characters they represent is notable:

The language made use of, both as regards the lower and higher characters, is pretty nearly that which prevailed in the West of Scotland about the period assigned to the event, or at least soon after it; and that the principal witch spoke differently from the other two, is rendered probable from her being a stranger, and her rank in life unknown. (Baillie 1851: 613)

The footnote recounts how voice reflects not only setting, but character and class as well in its attempts at realism. Christine Colon in her Introduction to Baillie’s *Six Gothic Dramas* points out that *Witchcraft* is “very different from her other plays. This one is not only written in prose, but it also makes extensive use of Scottish dialect with several of the major characters being lower-class countrywomen” (xxxiii–xxxiv). Whilst Baillie is consistent with her other plays in continuing in the form of tragedy, she seems to have made specific stylistic choices when it comes to language regarding the topic of witchcraft, significantly in the voice given to the witch characters. The subtext to her audience is that she has done her research, authenticating the material that they are about to see on stage.

Despite this, in a move that seems almost contradictory, Baillie concludes her footnote by stating: “The story is entirely imaginary”. She admits to “one circumstance excepted [...] a real circumstance, mentioned, I believe, in one of the trials for witchcraft, though I forget where” (Baillie 1851: 613). Alison Bardsley

argues that Baillie's "claim is quite disingenuous; indeed Baillie selectively employs features of the case throughout her play [...] Baillie incorporates numerous minor details from the case, varying them only slightly" (Bardsley: 251). The 1697 Renfrewshire witchcraft trial is described as "truly sensational" and as "one of the best documented of all Scottish cases" (Henderson: 201). Therefore there is a likelihood that the audience would have some familiarity with the events Baillie stages (witchcraft was a topic of interest in Scotland in the Romantic period, see 1.7 above). Bardsley presents convincing examples that link the play to the 1697 Renfrewshire witchcraft trial:

The name Bargarren becomes Dugarren. Christian is split into two separate characters: Jessie, a feverish little girl who never speaks, and whom others believe is possessed, and Annabella, who is actually possessed not by demons but by sexual jealousy [...] In the original case, shreds of cloth in Christian Shaw's hand proved a witch had been visibly visiting her [...] Annabella has help in both obtaining and planting the evidence [...] one of the prisoners is found strangled without witnesses [...] Annabella, too, is strangled, without a reliable witness. (Bardsley: 251-252)

Like Rowley, Dekker and Ford, Baillie uses the source material as a basis and shapes it to her own ends. One significant change to the source material that Bardsley does not highlight is that "three out of seven [of the accused] were men" (Henderson: 208). Baillie consciously makes all of her "witches" women. This is of interest to the point made in 4.2 above regarding Baillie's intention to "write women back into history" (Kucich: 21), and to the focus on gender in this thesis.

Since the case upon which Baillie bases her play was so well known, why would she choose to distance her material so blatantly? Possibly Baillie is playing a very clever game with her audience here. To state that a dramatic work intended to be performed on stage by actors belongs to the world of the imagination, may seem obvious, but she also claims that the play will examine the "real circumstances" that led certain women to make a confession of witchcraft, which she has read of as "frequently recorded in trials for the crime of witchcraft" (Baillie 1851: 613). Baillie consistently states that she has researched her topic well and that the play is based upon a "real circumstance", but then follows this with "I believe" and "I forget where". This placing of "real" and "imaginary", of historical documents and dramatic

fiction, of evidence and belief, certainty and doubt side by side is meant to present a challenge: “Since drama famously depends upon the ‘suspension of disbelief,’ it lends itself well to questions of what leads to belief in the first place” (Bardsley: 233). The purpose of Baillie’s footnote is to pose this very question to her audience since nowhere was this question of evidence and belief more pertinent than in the history of witchcraft prosecutions.

4.4. The witchcraft script unfolds

The question of belief emphasised by the footnote is staged from the very opening of the play. The scene is a domestic setting where Lady Dungarren is giving an update on her daughter “poor Jessie” to her newly returned guest Annabella. Jessie is clearly stricken with some unexplainable condition in medical terms. Yet as the events of the previous night are examined, Lady Dungarren and Annabella seem in no doubt as to the cause of her problems. The atmosphere is fraught with tension and unease: “sorrowful”, “wildly”, “strange noises”, “start and tremble”, “some being”, “to the natural eye invisible” (341).²⁴ Whilst the explanations stand in stark contrast to the approach a medical diagnosis of Jessie would take, the two women speak in all earnestness as though experts in their analysis of the situation. In the account that follows, rather than describing Jessie herself, the conversation focuses upon Lady Dungarren’s own experiences. This takes the form of an interrogation, with Annabella posing the leading questions: “Were any strange noises heard”, “What kind of sounds were they?”, “And what followed?”, “Yet you saw nothing?”, “And heard only the bursting of a door?”, “Footsteps?”, “You had no power to speak?”, “What did the Nurse think?” (341-342). Lady Dungarren describes an inability to move or breathe, a door bursting open which “I am certain I had bolted”, “strange whisperings” and then the shaking of the curtains on the bed in which Jessie lies. Lady Dungarren concludes: “I knew they were dealing with my poor child, and I had no power to break the spell of their witchcraft” (342). This belief in witchcraft as the cause of Jessie’s problems is supported by the Nurse, whom Lady Dungarren reports as naming two women from the community of whom she is sure had been in the room: Grizeld Bane and Mary Macmurren. After the Nurse’s declaration, Jessie then has a convulsion, following

²⁴ The current scholarly edition of Baillie’s play, *Witchcraft*, is found in *Six Gothic Dramas*, which only uses Act and scene numbers at the beginning of a section, and then page numbers. I use this edition throughout and only cite page numbers from this edition in the thesis.

which she is reported to utter in her sleep “in a thick untuneable voice” (342) the name of Mary Macmurren. This is regarded as a confirmation of Lady Dungarren’s and Annabella’s interpretation of events.

Importantly, this scene draws attention to the “complicated dynamic between the interlocutors” (Bardsley: 253). We can see how Annabella’s questions influence Lady Dungarren’s responses. Whilst this may be a domestic, personal scene far removed from that of the courtroom, what Baillie emphasises is the power relations that exist between any questioner and respondent. It is perhaps easier to point this out to an audience in a private setting, rather than one where authority is taken as a given, as in the courtroom. Thus Baillie exposes the problematics of interpretation; the questions and answers interweave to produce a narrative that gives a particular meaning to the situation. The ease with which this happens, the fact that Annabella knows precisely which questions to ask and Lady Dungarren’s lack of hesitation in her answers, all point to an established script.

At the same time, Baillie alerts the audience to the “social character of evidence gathering” (Bardsley: 253) taking place. It is clear that the evidence to support these assertions of witchcraft is based solely upon personal conviction. Lady Dungarren states: “I am certain”, and reports the Nurse as “she was sure”. Moreover evidence is based upon sight, sounds, sensations and feelings: “the witness’s ability to witness is dominated by her belief that her senses are by definition inadequate in the context of witchcraft, that they must be stretched (‘I listened intently’) and even superseded (‘a horrid consciousness’)” (Bardsley: 253). The potential power of suggestion is also raised; is it mere coincidence that Jessie is heard to mutter the name of Mary Macmurren after the Nurse has mentioned her name? Baillie highlights the problematics that exist in such flimsy and tenuous claims when they are put forward as evidence. Yet at the same time, there is no tone of mockery. Lady Dungarren is not presented as a fool. Rather she is a desperate mother who is worried and feels helpless about her child.

By opening the play in such a manner, Baillie significantly locates the narrative firmly in a female sphere. It is women’s voices that create this narrative: “Women tellers of stories about witches are making a narrative that makes sense

within their world of community or household” (Purkiss: 92). In a challenge to the traditional narrative, which was inscribed by a male hand (see 2.1. above), Baillie explores how women perceived the witch figure within their own lives. Baillie’s focus upon the shaping of the witch figure in the private, domestic space of the home and the personal relationships within family, gives women both voice and authorship. Diane Purkiss argues that this is precisely what historical approaches to witchcraft and gender ignore: “most historians see the witch as the Church’s Other, or as man’s Other” (97). Yet Lady Dungarren perceives her role as a mother as one in direct conflict with the role she credits the witches with, believing they cast a spell upon her daughter to make her ill. To Lady Dungarren, the witch is her Other. The symptoms displayed by Jessie fit the idea of bewitchment, a classic misfortune attributed to evil at the time. Thus in her narrative, Lady Dungarren fashions a story that makes sense of her situation. The Nurse can share this story as she perceives her attempts to care for Jessie thwarted, and we see the two women co-author a narrative of explanation. In this manner Baillie illustrates how such beliefs come into being in the first place. At the same time, the playwright gives agency to the women in her play, an agency that challenges the notion that women as witnesses or accusers were “mere mouthpieces of a patriarchal elite” (Purkiss: 91).

How these beliefs are circulated is elaborated upon in Annabella’s discussion with her maid. When asked what she knows of Grizeld Bane, Phemy replies, “Stories enow, if they be true. It is she, or Mary Macmurran, who has, as they say, bewitched the poor young lady here; and it was a spell cast by her that made the farmer’s pretty daughter fall over the crag [...] Everybody tells it, and knows it to be true” (344). Baillie draws attention to the social networks and also the collective responsibility in spreading these beliefs in the local community. There is a shared agreement on “who” has done “what”, even though Baillie carefully crafts holes in the narrative for the audience to identify: “Stories”, “It is she *or* Mary Macmurren” (my italics), “if they be true”, “as they say”, “Everybody tells it and knows it to be true” (344). This last statement highlights the power of the rumour mill to move what might begin as speculation or “hearsay” into what is “true”, and highlights the collaborative nature of the process. The fact that “Everybody tells it” is indicative of a script; they all know their lines and recite them accordingly. By 1697, the date of the events in question, the credible witchcraft narrative (see 2.2. above) was firmly embedded as a discourse.

Once again, Foucault's ideas are pertinent. We see the "most local power relations at work and how this discourse is used to reinforce their existence" (Foucault 1990: 97). Like in *The Witch of Edmonton*, attention is drawn early on to the role of all levels of society in the creation of the witch figure; from Lady Dungarren, to the Nurse, down to the maid Phemy, and out to the wider community in general. Yet Baillie goes further. Rather than merely portraying the power structures at work, she goes "behind the scenes" to investigate what motivates characters to act in such a manner.

The audience has yet to meet Grizeld Bane, (and the other "reputed witches") but Baillie presents her audience with a picture of this character, from the mouth of the other characters. Already declared a witch alongside Mary Macmurren by Lady Dungarren and the Nurse, and held responsible for Jessie's misfortunes amongst others, the image of Grizeld Bane presented to the audience is now supplemented by Bawldy the herd boy. Bane, he reports, has the traditional black cat and she is the reason that his milk cow yields poorly. In addition his fear of approaching her at night is detailed: "When she begins to mutter wi' her white withered lips, and her twa gleg eyen are glowering like glints o' wildfire frae the hollow of her dark bent brows, she's enough to mak a trooper quake; ay, wi' baith swurd and pistol by his side" (345). Attention is drawn in accordance with the stereotype to her appearance and her mutterings; conventional weapons are clearly no protection in the face of the supernatural. Bawldy confirms that Grizeld Bane both looks and acts like a witch.

It is doubtful whether Bawldy has witnessed such a scene as his fear ensures that he is careful to avoid Grizeld Bane when darkness descends. The description is more likely to come from the rumour mill that circulates such stories as those Phemy recounts. Christina Lerner states that: "It is hard to overemphasise the importance of reputation in the production of a witch in Scotland" (103). Again, the word "production" underlines the notion of a social process, taking place in the creation or shaping of a witch, and Baillie clearly points to the rumour mill as a key contributor. Yet it is when this moves beyond the local community into the legal arena that it becomes presented as truth. Lerner continues: "to consider the character of the accused in the court proceedings, in seventeenth-century Scotland [...] was a legal virtue. Reputation was considered by lawyers and demonologists to be in itself a sign (though not proof) of witchcraft" (103). But as we know, reputation is based upon

opinion and belief and it will be the community who evaluates it on a local level. Baillie illustrates the machinations at work in the “production” of a witch and identifies society as the starting point.

4.5. The reputed witches

The audience have now been introduced to the rumours, beliefs and accusations associated with the “reputed witches”. In Act I, scene 3, Baillie presents the reality of these women on stage. Significantly this is the scene where Baillie exposes the prescribed nature of witchcraft narratives; here the audience appreciate precisely how typecast the script is, how ingrained the stereotypes are, and how well everyone knows their lines. The setting for Scene 3 meets all dramatic expectations for an encounter with the supernatural: “*A wild moor [...] by a thick tangled wood [...] darkened to represent faint moonlight through heavy gathering clouds. Thunder and lightning*” (348). Through her stage directions Baillie draws attention to *how* we read particular signs. The association between storms and witchcraft was deeply rooted in society at the time of the witchcraft trials. We will see this shortly as Mary Macmurren and Elspy Low come onto the stage. However by the time Baillie’s play was published, “thunder and lightning was a recognised staging convention.”²⁵ This translation of beliefs from the real world onto the stage is something Leslie Thomson argues happened as early as the Elizabethan period: “A superstition had become a staging convention [...] it continued to be effective spectacle” (13). Here, Baillie reminds the audience how easy it is to fix cultural readings and expectations.

Scene 3 opens then, with a suitably “spooky” atmosphere, that resonates with Anderson’s earlier words of “a haunted warlock moor, and thunner growling i’ the welkin” (Act I, scene 2: 346). Onto the stage come Elspy Low, Mary Macmurren and her son Wilkin. As they stop to listen, they read this same significance into the thunder as Anderson did:

²⁵ See *The Witch of Edmonton* Act II, scene 1. Thunder and lightning occurs only once, when Sawyer makes the pact with the devil: “*Sucks her arm, thunder and lightning*”.

Mary Mac (spreading her arms exultingly) “Ay, ay! this sounds like the true sound o’princedom and powerfu’ness.

Elspy Low (clapping her hands as another louder peal rolls on) Ay; it sounds royally! we shall na mare be deceived; it wull prove a’tue at last.

Mary Mac This very night we shall ken what we shall ken. We shall be wi’ the beings of power - be wi’ them and be of them. (Act I, scene 3: 348)

The stage directions induce a sense of delight as Mary and Elspy predict the thunderstorm signifies a meeting with the Devil “this very night”. The fact that Anderson and the two women share the same reading of the storm suggests they know the script well, including the prescribed setting where witches commune with Satan and his “murky mates” (349). There is no other available explanation for why Mary and Elspy are there on the wild moor, alone and at night. This is further underlined by their delight in what they deem to gain from this meeting: power. Clearly, however, they do not have it yet. The use of the word “shall” indicates a future event. In a similar vein to Rowley, Dekker and Ford, who make clear that Elizabeth Sawyer is not a witch when the audience first meets her, Baillie presents her “reputed witches” as ordinary beings.

Like Elizabeth Sawyer, Mary and Elspy go on to document how they have reached the circumstance where they are willing to serve the devil. They express a similar life of poverty and ill treatment by the local community, once more echoing the established “functionalist” script. Whilst there is no direct reference to their clothing or physical appearance to indicate their social standing, Baillie conveys this through their use of dialect and what they wish for: “what we list at last, - milk and meat! meat and malt!” (348). They dream of “coags of cream” (348), and “fou sacks and baith cakes and kebbucks at command” (349). This is hardly evidence of the “malignant gratifications” (342) that Lady Dungarren credits them with delighting in. Quite simply, these women are starving. Furthermore, so is Mary’s child, Wilkin, whose only utterances are focused on food: “Fou! fou! meat! great meat! [...] a’fou for Wilkin” (348-349). Mary’s role as a mother is highlighted as she reassures him: “Wilkin; thou shalt ha’a bellyful soon” (348). The caring aspect of Mary’s nature on display here not only serves to humanise her, a daring thing to do with a “reputed witch”, but undermines the “othering” that Lady Dungarren subjects Mary to. For, as the events unfold, it is hard for the audience not to notice what unites these two

women. They are both desperate mothers trying to protect and care for their children, albeit at different ends of the social scale.

Baillie seems to suggest it is the very position on this social scale that determines the different directions that are open to Lady Dungarren and Mary Macmurren in their present circumstances. Whilst Lady Dungarren turns to God by inviting “the minister to pray by her [Jessie] to-night” (343), Mary takes the opposite path and turns to the Devil. These paths may represent the binaries of good and evil, but Baillie makes it clear that Mary (and Elspy) are not committing a conscious act of evil in their desire to serve Satan. They had tried the more obvious choice for help first, the local community, but were turned away. Mary states: “They refused us a han’fu in our greatest need” (349). The reference to a “han’fu emphasises how easy it would have been to rescue them from their desperate state of hunger and depicts society as hostile. Furthermore, since the church forms the basis of that community, the implication is that the door to God had been firmly shut. The lack of charity and compassion that society displays leaves Mary and Elspy with no other option. The “reputed witches” thus come to embody that very role that society eschews. Becoming a witch is a last resort in dire circumstances.

Again, like in the case of Elizabeth Sawyer, the treatment of Mary and Elspy teaches them to hate the local community and desire revenge: “the hated anes will pay the cost, I trow. We’ll sit at our good coags of cream [...] while their aumery is bare” (348/349). Baillie opens the audience’s eyes to the process that is taking place: Mary and Elspy are excluded from society (othering), given good reason to hate society (teaching), and therefore prepare themselves to embody the role of witch (becoming), which is why they find themselves upon a wild moor at night with a storm approaching. This process is the same that *The Witch of Edmonton* exposes (see 3.3 above). Yet even their revenge is in the context of food, which is as simple as having their own larders full whilst “their [the community] aumery is bare” (348). There is no mention of bewitching other children or casting spells to make people break their leg. They just, understandably, want to give the local community a taste of their own medicine. Instead of evil bondswomen of Satan, Baillie presents her “reputed witches” as human beings at the bottom of the social hierarchy, trying to survive in a hostile world. Their desperate plight earns them sympathy. By allowing the witch

figures to speak for themselves, she fills the gap that she identified in her footnote. We are able to see the “real circumstances” behind the desire to embrace witchcraft: “they wish to obtain the power to escape from their poverty” (Colon 2009: 133).

In this manner Baillie presents the evidence needed to repoint the finger of accusation. She moves it away from vulnerable women on the margins of society, back to the accusers themselves. She lays the responsibility for the creation of witches firmly at the feet of society. By highlighting *who* is writing the script, and exposing the foundations upon which it is based as hollow, she presents the “established script” which was accepted as a “credible narrative” of witchcraft in the court room, as a piece of fiction. The ease with which poor, vulnerable, deprived women could be slotted into particular roles, suggests that society was looking for scapegoats as a solution to their problems, rather than addressing the social consequences of poverty itself.

As the scene approaches its end Baillie cements how pre-scripted the witchcraft narrative is on all levels of society. Grizeld Bane (referred to as the “principal witch” by Baillie in the footnote) enters the stage and does what witches are supposed to do. She chants, waves her arms, and uses the reading of the storm to assert her powers: “The lightning has done as I bade it” (350). That Bane is not a witch is evidenced when she misreads Murrey for Satan, but she knows the script well enough to give a convincing performance of it. Similarly, Murrey, who has secretly arranged to meet his daughter Violet on the moor, is conversant enough with the script to enable him to engage in role play of “the mighty Satan” as he attempts to conceal his identity: “*Mur (in a deep, strong, feigned voice)*. What is your will with me?” (351). Murrey proves he not only knows all the words, but also the tone of voice in which to perform them. Finally, Rutherford the church minister who travels across the moor on his way to visit the Dungarren household, sees and misreads Violet’s meeting with her father, whom he believes he buried with his own hands: “[*whilst the lightning, coming in a broad flash across the stage, shows everything upon it distinctly for a moment*]” (352). Even a committed sceptic such as Rutherford is swayed: Violet is on the moor with a supposed dead man, as are the “reputed witches”, and there is a storm. The script dictates the reading.

Baillie demonstrates that men and women across all levels of the social hierarchy are affected in various ways by the pre-scripted witchcraft narrative. Annabella, described as a “rich relation” in the character list, resides at the top of the social ladder. Towards the end of Act I scene 1, Baillie gives her a soliloquy which marks her out to the audience as a character they will get to know more intimately. As a visitor to the Dungarren household she has no specific local knowledge, and initially she appears sceptical of the idea of witchcraft: “Ay, if there be in reality such supernatural agency”. However it is clear that she is attracted to the power it offers: “by which a breast fraught with passion and misery may find relief” (343). The last three words here echo Mary and Elspy in seeing witchcraft as a solution rather than a problem. Although Annabella does not share the deprivation that motivates their behaviour, she articulates desperation. Dungarren, the son of Lady Dungarren, whom Annabella feels is the perfect match in marriage for herself (which perhaps explains her early return to the Dungarren household), is in love with another. What seems to particularly gall Annabella is the fact that he is in love with a woman whose status has been questioned: “a paltry girl, who is not worthy to be my tirewoman, the orphan of a murderer [...] should so engross thy affections! It makes me mad!” (343). The “thy” referred to is clearly Dungarren and indeed her emotions seem out of control. Interestingly here Baillie presents a character outside of the credible narrative to whom an engagement with witchcraft is viewed as empowerment. She is rich, has social standing and influence in society, unlike the typical poor, deformed old woman on the margins of society whom we discussed above (see 2.2). The fact that witchcraft is the only resource that Annabella can see in her situation emphasises a quiet desperation, not unlike that we witness with Elizabeth Sawyer, albeit for different reasons. Whilst Sawyer’s desperation stems from her ill treatment, suffering, and exclusion from society, Annabella is consumed by jealousy. Sawyer’s situation is arguably more deserving of sympathy, but Annabella’s also suggests that powerlessness can be felt by women at the top, as well as at the bottom of the social hierarchy.

Whilst Sawyer literally becomes a witch on stage, Annabella flirts with the idea of being a witch, even if it is in jest. She first of all jokingly requests “newt skins and adder skins” for her new wardrobe, to which Phemy responds “That might do for a witch’s gown, indeed: Grizeld Bane might have a garniture of that sort” (343).

These may be the trappings of a witch's costume in fairy tales and folklore, but both women display an awareness that a witch needs to look the part to be credible. This is how Annabella later manages to fool everyone as she frames Violet for witchcraft. Annabella knows how deeply embedded the script is and uses it strategically for her own ends. It does not occur to anyone to suspect her since she defies the stereotype as outlined by the Sheriff: "Are not witches always old and poor?" (383). Ironically, Violet does not look the part either, but this does not save her:

[B]ut her class, good character, and innocence do not keep her from being condemned as a witch [...] Baillie reveals it is [...] an accusation that a community can level against any woman who supposedly transgresses its rule. (Colon 2009: 134)

Violet's presence on the moor at night, coupled with the evidence planted by Annabella fit the script well enough to convict her. By the end of Act I, scene 1, we see Annabella begin to put her plan to frame Violet into action. Unbeknown to anyone else, she pays the herd boy Bawldy to arrange a secret meeting between herself and Grizeld Bane.

4.6. Witchcraft script and the "Eternal Feminine"

From scenes inhabited predominantly by female characters, we now turn to Act I, scene 2 (346-348), which is inhabited by male characters only. The setting also stands in contrast to that of the former. The scene of a domestic interior now is replaced by the outside world. Dungarren has just returned from a hunting trip and talks to the servants outside the gate of Dungarren Tower. Anderson is glad to see him returned as "the night draws on" as it would not be wise to "hae been belated on a haunted warlock moor, and thunner growling i' the welkin" (346). Baillie foregrounds the fears and superstitions that reside amongst the ordinary folk, whilst building dramatic tension; indeed a storm is approaching. Pleased with the haul of birds that Dungarren has caught, Anderson adds that even nature hints that strange things are afoot: "The birds grow wilder every year [...] There's something uncanny about them too. It's a fearfu' time we live in" (346). So both superstition on a general level and a sense of foreboding is established in both the private, domestic sphere of women and in the public world of men. Anxieties are shared but also gendered: witchcraft (in the form of Grizeld Bane and Mary Macmurren) is deemed to be disrupting the domestic ideal

of the home; a warlock is thought to haunt the moor disrupting the men's ability to hunt. Added to this strangeness is the news of the quick return of "Madam Annabell" to the household, and the fact that she requested to see Bawldy the herdboyc: "Nae mair strange than true. Into the very parlour: I saw him set his dirty feet on the clean floor wi' my ain eyen" (346). The crossing of physical boundaries represented here, is marked by a movement from the exterior into the interior, from the dirty to the clean, while also presenting the crossing of social boundaries regarding class and gender: "thou'rt become company for ladies in a parlour" (346). Dungarren is curious, but unlike the audience oblivious to the plot that Annabella is hatching.

Whilst Bawldy gives nothing away regarding the secret task assigned to him, Baillie uses him to emphasise how endemic the rumour mill is in society, and once again how influential it is in propagating a narrative. This time it focuses upon the affection that Annabella has for Dungarren: "Folks said when she gaed awa', that she wou'd na be lang awa'. It wou'd be as easy to keep a moth frae the can'le, or a cat frae the milk-house, as keep her awa' frae the tower o' Dungarren (*lowering his voice*) when the laird is at hame" (347). Clearly recognising he crosses another boundary in the way he speaks to his master, Bawldy defends himself by saying he only repeats "what I hear folk say". Here Baillie draws parallels between neighbourhood gossip and the way the audience has heard rumours circulate about witchcraft. Dungarren's reply that "Folks are saucy" (347), serves to underline the apparent danger in such talk.

In a move that parallels the structure of the opening scene, Baillie ends this scene with a soliloquy; this time it is Dungarren who shares his thoughts with the audience. Here it is made clear that whatever ordinary folk think about the affections of Annabella for Dungarren, it is not reciprocated. The stage directions state that Dungarren turns "*impatiently from the gate*" as he starts to speak and then paces "*to and fro in a disturbed manner*" (347). His agitation is reflected in his language as he responds to the news of Annabella's early return. Not only does he present Annabella's behaviour towards himself as "unnatural" but also as "unladylike", as he defines her in terms that are more fitting with the title of the play than a respectable family guest: "pestered with the passion of an indelicate vixen! - She fastens her affection on me like a doctor's blister-sheet, strewed with all the stinging powders of

the torrid zone” (347). The alliteration and harsh consonants serve to underscore his strength of feeling, whilst the idea of “affection” resulting in blisters and stinging emphasises something intrinsic in Annabella that turns good things into bad. In addition, the label of “vixen”, defined as a “spiteful or quarrelsome woman” (The Concise Oxford Dictionary: 1373), is not only gendered, derogatory and clichéd, it also draws attention to Annabella’s speech acts. Describing them as “insulting insinuations” and “insolence” has wider implications beyond the personal context referred to by Dungarren, when they appear in a play entitled *Witchcraft*. For as mentioned in 2.3 above (Goodare), such verbal transgressions could designate a woman as a witch.

As Dungarren continues, the audience cannot fail to notice the sharp contrast in the language he then deploys to describe Violet, his true love: “my gentle Violet [...] a noble spirit like hers [...] my dear, dear Violet, the noble distressed Violet Murrey” (347). Following directly after his tirade against Annabella, his overflowing words effectively position these two women as opposites; the pestering, passionate, stinging Annabella versus the dear, noble, gentle Violet. Further differences are highlighted. Annabella is represented as active: “pestered”, “fastened”. Violet is passive: “must she still be subjected [...] to be exposed” (347). One is an aggressor, the other a victim. In terms of gendered behaviour, it seems they could not be further apart. In terms of categories, the most obvious labels that these oppositions represent are good and evil.

Baillie draws attention to gender construction here. In Dungarren’s eyes and in his words, Violet fits the feminine ideal. In contrast, we see Dungarren unable to register any aspect of Annabella’s behaviour as that of a woman. He ends his soliloquy by reference to her as a “termagant”, aligns her with “an evil spirit” and then denies her any femininity even in her inner self: “Had she the soul of a woman within her, though the plainest and meanest of her sex, I would pity and respect her” (347). He effectively “others” Annabella by suggesting she is “un-woman” and at the same time implicitly associates her with witchcraft by reference to an “evil spirit”. If we look at this through the lens of Simone de Beauvoir’s theory of gender as outlined in *The Second Sex*, what de Beauvoir says about the “myth of woman” and its relationship to reality adds the theoretical dimension to what Baillie is addressing.

Even though de Beauvoir is writing over one hundred years later, binaries are embedded in our culture when it comes to a way of thinking regarding gender. Dungarren's binary reductionism of these two female characters is what de Beauvoir terms the myth of the "Eternal Feminine". The "Eternal Feminine" is "against the dispersed, contingent, and multiple existences of actual women," rather restricting women to a single existence that is "unique and changeless" (de Beauvoir: 283). For Dungarren, that is encapsulated in the figure of Violet. Dungarren's attitude reveals what de Beauvoir identifies as follows:

As group symbols and social types are generally defined by means of antonyms in pairs, ambivalence will seem to be an intrinsic quality of the Eternal Feminine. The saintly mother has for a correlative the cruel stepmother, the angelic young girl has the perverse virgin: thus it will be said sometimes that Mother equals Life, sometimes that Mother equals Death, that every virgin is pure spirit or flesh dedicated to the devil. (de Beauvoir: 284)

The "correlatives" that de Beauvoir refers to, cement the idea of binary opposites in any definition of femininity. She argues they cannot exist without each other; they rely on each other to establish meaning. Following the same argument, we can see in *Witchcraft* that the gentle, dear, noble Violet Murrey has the termagant Annabella; the adjectives define one as "good", the other as "evil". But what Baillie draws attention to, as de Beauvoir does so many years later, is how very narrow this binary definition is. It not only provides a strict "either/or" in the way to read "woman," but in turn provides a strict "either/or" in how to perform "woman".

These rigid definitions of femininity defined in the words of Dungarren firmly place the blame on women who do not conform to the codes of prescribed behaviour: "If the definition provided for this concept [the Eternal Feminine] is contradicted by the behaviour of flesh-and-blood women, it is the latter who are wrong: we are not told that Femininity is a false entity, but that the women concerned are not feminine" (de Beauvoir: 283). Dungarren's soliloquy regarding Annabella's behaviour clearly represents this view. However Baillie goes on to confront this categorisation of women based on a simple evaluation of social behaviours as the events of the play unfold: "it is not reality that dictates to society or to individuals their choice between the two opposed basic categories; in every period, in each case, society and the

individual decide in accordance with their needs” (de Beauvoir: 284). In effect, it is a social construct.

In what follows, Baillie demonstrates how this restricts the choices women are able to make and the consequences that result from that restricted choice. Annabella, who declares that her actions in framing Violet as a witch in revenge for her own suffering, is “all that is left for me” (374) as she battles with her private passions, suggests she also follows a tightly constrained script. “Revenge” is the narrative of the witch. Annabella’s inability to conform to the feminine ideal that Dungarren prizes, leads her to adopt its binary opposite; a role she performs magnificently. Annabella knows how the script works. She begins with reputation: “If Violet Murrey’s faith, or pretended faith, be the rule we are to go by, the devil and his bondsfolk will have a fine time” (Act I, scene 5: 357). She presents the advice she receives from Grizeld Bane to Bawldy in order to enlist his help: “I have been consulting with Grizeld Bane, about what can be done to relieve our poor sick child from her misery [...] a garment that has been on the body of a murderer, or the child of a murderer [...] will recover it from fits” (Act II, scene 4: 373). This is enough to convince Bawldy to get hold of one of Violet’s gowns, whilst the audience knows the purpose to which Annabella will use it. Still it is in her next soliloquy, that we see how far Annabella has embraced her role as the binary opposite of Violet. The rhetoric of witchcraft is central as she speaks of her double revenge, not only against Violet but Dungarren as well: “Now shall I have what I panted for [...] To be tormented by witchcraft is bad; but to be accused and punished for it is misery so exquisite [...] revenge is mine and I will enjoy it. – It is a fearful and dangerous pleasure” (Act II, scene 4: 373-374). Annabella talks about her pleasure in a way that undercuts the language men use. The “pant[ing]” and the pounding “d” sounds aligned with “fearful and dangerous pleasure” are illustrative of the sexual language of the nineteenth century. Annabella transgresses the norm for female language. In addition she shows some self-awareness of her witch-like thoughts by reference to the price she may have to pay: “can revenge be too dearly purchased? [...] though extremity of suffering in this world, and beyond this world, were the price” (374). Concluding it is worth it and seeing no other direction in which to go, she proceeds with her plan. Revenge continues the theme of Annabella’s next soliloquy in Act III, scene 2 as she positions herself to watch Violet’s execution: “Revenge so complete,

so swift-paced, so terrible! It repays me for all the misery I have endured. – May I triumph? dare I triumph?” (389). The two questions posed at the end here emphasise the competitive positions that women adopt when they are confined to binary opposites. The word “triumph” with its connotations of victory and conquest highlight the destructive nature that underpins the rivalries created between women through the patriarchal ideology expressed in the feminine ideal. Yet in the end, it is Annabella who is destroyed; her dead body lies on the stage for much of the closing scene.

Violet Murrey is also subject to the tight constraints imposed by the feminine ideal. Whilst she meets expectations in the eyes of Dungarren, she is also subject to the expectations of her father. Violet is forced to choose between being the dutiful, obedient daughter in her promise to keep her father’s secret, or effectively consign him to “the rope and the gibbet”. Violet’s request to explain to Dungarren her reason for being on the moor, and thus dispel any suspicion regarding her own behaviour, is met with anger from her father. He accuses her of being “mad” in her desire to trust Dungarren, of being “a simple creature” who embodies “the weakness of woman”, and her father orders her to do the following: “Swear to me, on the faith of a Christian woman [...] Reason not with me on the subject, but solemnly promise to obey me [...] solemnly promise to obey me”. Violet states: “this is misery indeed”. Denied the opportunity to express her opinion, interrupted twice by her father as she tries, and told to “Hold thy tongue!” she is framed as “mad”, “simple” and “weak” in opposition to the “Christian woman” that her father demands she be. Violet acquiesces: “Let my thoughts be what they may, I dare not resist the will of a parent” (Act III, scene 1: 377). Her words acknowledge that she has to “act” rather than follow her true feelings. There is no room for compromise. Thus Violet follows the script dictated to her by her father, and performs the role of the “good” Christian daughter. However the consequences are dire. Forbidden to reveal the truth as to why she was on the moor during the storm with a man who resembled her deceased father, she is arrested and faces execution at the end of the play.

The positioning of women into “two opposed basic categories” (de Beauvoir: 284) as witnessed in Dungarren’s soliloquy, is significant. Baillie emphasises how embedded it is in wider society, in its application to women in general and crucially in its shaping of the witch figure. The same categorization that we see Annabella subject

to is applied to the “reputed” witch characters of Grizeld Bane, Mary Macmurren and Elspy Low. Here, we see how the label of “witch” sets these women apart, not only from the rest of society but from the other women in the community. Lady Dungarren and the Nurse apply these “opposed basic categories” to their own ways of making sense of the world; by categorizing Grizeld Bane and Mary Macmurren as “evil” women as they supposedly inflict suffering on Jessie through “the spell of their witchcraft” (342), they are able to perceive and define themselves, as “good”. Baillie mirrors the way Dungarren “others” Annabella to the way Lady Dungarren and the Nurse “other” Bane and Macmurren.

This emphasises the role that gender ideology played within the female sphere; it was not only something that men imposed upon women, but a way of thinking that women adapted to and engaged in as well. Women were given clear messages regarding their behaviour. Thus a woman who did not conform constituted a threat, not only in relation to male authority (as we see with Dungarren and Violet’s father), but also to women who followed the rules and respected the feminine ideal:

Their [women’s] constant jockeying for position in the community, and efforts to live up to patriarchal ideals, created a realm of women’s rivalries. In community discourse they tended to see the “other” women - those who failed or refused to conform - as actual or possible witches. (Goodare: 308)

The patriarchal ideals that Goodare refers to here in the context of the witch-hunts, goes a considerable way in its attempts to explain why so many women directed accusations of witchcraft against other women. The ideal, by its very nature, creates rivalries; women pit themselves against other women. Baillie stages these rivalries, both in the context of those labelled “witch” and the rest of the community, and in the context of the rivalry between Annabella and Violet. These contexts are drawn together. The “othering” that takes place in the identification of witches, and the “othering” that takes place with regard to gender ideology are placed side by side. Thus, Baillie interweaves the discourse on women with the discourse of witchcraft to expose that they are based on the same precept.

4.7. *Witchcraft* and *The Witch of Edmonton*

As we have seen, like *The Witch of Edmonton*, Baillie's play begins with a historical, viable event. Both plays look at the same concept; the question of belief in relation to the crime of witchcraft. They examine belief as it resides in the local community, and then as it is sanctioned as truth within the legal system as a basis on which to convict a witch. Yet the two plays differ on a dramatic level in a number of ways. First of all, there are no witches in *Witchcraft*. Baillie makes this clear from very early on (by the end of Act I scene 3). There are characters that want to be witches, characters that are accused of witchcraft, and characters that confess to witchcraft, but no witches. However, this fact does not alter the outcome of events. Women are still believed to be witches and thus convicted; the final scenes of *Witchcraft* set the stage for a public execution in the same manner as *The Witch of Edmonton*. Secondly, the staging of the dramatic conflict is different. Rather than a persistent opposition between the witch and society that we see in *The Witch of Edmonton*, Baillie presents us with dialogues between groups of individuals on different levels. These tend to be private scenes and include groups of women, the "reputed" witches, men who are identified by their positions of authority and responsibility (such as the Sheriff and Rutherford), and groups of servants. The conversations tend to be focused rather than confrontational and whilst they may articulate oppositions, these are not performed. A face to face conflict similar to that which takes place in *The Witch of Edmonton* between Elizabeth Sawyer and the local community, only occurs in *Witchcraft* on two occasions: when Mary Macmurren and her son are arrested (Act IV, scene 1) and in the final scene of public execution (Act V, scene 2). Notably therefore, although the two plays look at the same concept, they approach it differently.

By orchestrating female (and male) voices on various social levels, Baillie adds something that is absent in the first play. *The Witch of Edmonton* remains locked into staging the opposition between the witch and society in its portrayal of Elizabeth Sawyer. Its focus is upon seeing the conflict acted out. In Baillie's play, we only hear about conflict, with the exception of the two scenes mentioned above. Rather than merely presenting the oppositions, which was daring enough at the time *The Witch of*

Edmonton was written, Baillie proceeds to analyse the social mechanisms behind them. Baillie shows *how* we end up with these oppositions. This allows her to widen her scope beyond the context of witchcraft and expand her analysis to include women in general. For Baillie draws parallels in her representations between the relationship of the witch to society, the relationship of women to society and the relationship between women themselves in the dialogues she stages. As she states in her footnote, Baillie uses her play to ask a question that has not been answered satisfactorily before: why would women turn to witchcraft? In her attempts to answer it, she follows the traditional pattern identified in credible witchcraft narratives in her portrayal of the “reputed” witch characters; they are poor, deprived and on the margins of society. To this Baillie adds another dimension through the characters of Annabella and Violet.

Baillie addresses the rhetoric of witchcraft itself. She uses it not only to look at how this discourse helps the characters in her play to explain the events around them in a particular moment in history, but as a script the characters employ to achieve power:

For many of the women in this play, witchcraft is a temptation for it will supposedly grant them the power that they lack in their society [...] Baillie reveals that its dangers lie not in the supposed communication with the Devil but rather in the patriarchal society that denies them any power and then corrupts and destroys them when they attempt to empower themselves. Ironically, in their attempts to achieve power, these women can only strike at others who are only slightly better off than they are; they cannot affect any real change in the power structure. Indeed, their actions actually end up victimising other women. (Colon 2007: xxxiv)

Baillie explains how the script is used for the characters own strategic purposes. As we have seen with the characters of Mary and Elspy, you have to be really desperate to take on the role of witch; they turn to it as the final survival option. Grizeld Bane, who has been mentioned only briefly in Act I, scene 3, warrants more discussion here. Her belief in her own powers of witchcraft enables her to take control of the situation she finds herself in. We see her manipulate the stereotype of the witch, not only in the power it gives her over Mary and Elspy, which provides her with lodging, but in the money she can earn by helping Annabella frame Violet. Her knowledge of the script is demonstrated in her convincing performance. She chants in the style of the witches

in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*: "Black of mien and stern of brow,/ Dark one, dread one, hear me now!" (Act II, scene 1: 365). She tells Annabella what type of evidence is convincing in an accusation. Most significantly she exposes the facade of witchcraft: "Mischief is making with glances and words" (Act II, scene 1: 364). The way people interpret what they see through the discourse of witchcraft not only perpetuates belief, but leads to a misplaced belief in where evil lies. Bane is the one who exposes Annabella as the real "witch": "There is not a cloven foot, nor a horned head of them all, wickeder and bolder than thou art" (Act V, scene 1: 402). However the rest of society seem unable to see this. Annabella, whose motive is selfishness, employs the script as a mechanism to frame Violet. She uses it for her own ends, but Baillie points out she can use it because it is there. Lady Dungarren is another case in point. Powerless to help her daughter, she gains power by accusing others. As Violet protests her innocence at the end of Act IV, Lady Dungarren's words speak volumes: "You make me tremble, Violet Murrey: if you are innocent, who can be guilty?" (399). Her need to blame someone for her daughter's condition is an attempt to take back control of the situation in which she feels helpless. The witchcraft script not only renders powerless, it can also be a source of power. Indeed, as Foucault asserts, power here is performed and operates "as a verb rather than a noun" (Mills: 35).

Baillie acknowledges the script identified in a credible witchcraft narrative, but then recasts it. In as much as her play is about witchcraft, it is also centred upon the discourse surrounding women's behaviour in general. For in *Witchcraft* she aligns these two discourses side by side. She shows how the binary (that de Beauvoir describes) traps women in this either/or. The binary of good and evil makes it impossible to act as a woman in between these two extremes. The patriarchal ideal regarding gender sets the codes of behaviour. In Baillie's play, the choice is to conform and therefore be defined as a "good" woman, or to protest and be defined as a "witch". There is no room for negotiation. Even Violet, who conforms to her father's ideal, is not protected from society's imposition of these rigid definitions. As we go on to see, the consequences are dire. In the final scene of the play, the audience is faced with Mary Macmurren tied to the stake. She clarifies her confession was forced: "I said what I thought and I thought as ye bade me" (Act V, scene 2: 404). Violet protests her innocence as she is led to the stake: "I am condemned by what honest, though erring men, believe to be the truth" (405). Annabella is murdered:

“Repeated shrieks are heard from the window [...] and two figures are seen [...] struggling” (408). Whilst Violet is saved by the declarations of her father and Bawldy, and Mary is saved from execution as “the crime of witchcraft as a felonious offence be repealed” (412), Baillie makes the audience look at the corpse of Annabella who represents a figure of horror: “It is the Lady Annabella. She has been strangled: – she has struggled fearfully; her features are swollen, and her eyes starting from her head; she has struggled fearfully” (409). The play continues for nearly six pages whilst Annabella’s body lies there. There are only two people who comment on this. First of all, the Sheriff, who suggests she will suffice as a replacement for the burning at the stake: “They [the crowd] must have some frightful sight to stare at, and they will be disappointed of that which they came for” (409). Secondly, Dungarren himself, who shows some pity: “It wrings my heart to think of what thou wert, and what thou mightst have been” (410). Grizeld Bane is judged to be Annabella’s murderer by those whose judgement has been questioned throughout the play, and Bane is returned to the asylum from which she had escaped. Baillie ends her play as she begins it, with women centre stage. Not only does she provide excellent female acting roles with the potential to challenge the dominant discourse on gender in her time but, throughout *Witchcraft*, she also consistently emphasises the female voice.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored how the playwrights in *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* have used the structures and patterns identified in narratives of witchcraft. The plays each draw attention to the complexities involved in the process by which a witch is made. Both make the audience aware of a structure, a social script that turns people into “witches”. First of all, the fact that it is a “process” dispels the idea that this is simply a matter of identifying *who* embodies evil in the figure of a witch. The process is portrayed as a series of events that build upon one another and ultimately lead to an accusation of witchcraft. In doing so it proceeds from oral narrative to written text, from rumour to testimony, from hearsay to truth. Secondly the two plays challenge the notion that the witch represents the problem. In any form of trial, the focus is upon the accused; but in the context of the witchcraft trials, the notoriety, fame, and sensational aspects that accompanied the crime of witchcraft, brought an added focus. Since witchcraft was regarded as a *crimen exceptum*, normal rules did not apply to evidence. If a witch refused to confess, it was she who was deemed the problem, not the evidence. As highlighted in Chapter 2, in practices such as “pricking,” the gathering of evidence merged with the extraction of confessions. Interestingly the plays do not stage the trials themselves, but choose instead to dramatise the events that led to a witchcraft trial. They look at the belief systems that enabled and maintained a credible narrative of witchcraft. Thus, the playwrights shift the focus away from a single character, the accused, and repositions the gaze upon the communities in which the accusations originated.

The playwrights of *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* locate the events within local communities and aim at a portrayal of society as a whole. This might be a bold statement to make, but by this I mean that a full range of characters from the very top of society to the very bottom are present in each of these dramas. On this basis the plays proceed to explore the power relations that operate within society and draw attention to their complexities. All levels of society are implicated in the process

of creating the witch, and the two plays make this central to our understanding of the nature and identity of the witch figure(s) staged. In so doing, they also challenge a simple “functionalist” explanation of witchcraft, which portrays those accused of witchcraft exclusively as powerless victims.

The Witch of Edmonton and *Witchcraft* both follow the patterns identified in the witchcraft narratives. The figures of the witch or “reputed” witch are identified within their communities on the basis of their poverty, deprivation and marginality. They are refused charity and respond by desiring revenge and turning to the Devil. This standard script is also a social script and both dramas highlight the mean spiritedness of the local communities. Rather than help the unfortunate individuals who represent the most vulnerable and needy in society, the community turns them into scapegoats, exerting its power by imposing on them the label of the “witch”. Thus, the community solves two problems. Firstly they remove any individuality from the witch characters by defining them as the embodiment of evil; they create a stereotype, which dehumanises them and therefore justifies their harsh treatment. Secondly, they shift the blame away from themselves; the notion of guilt lies firmly with the witch.

In nearly all the cases we see enacted, revenge is a motivating factor. By taking on the role of the witch, the characters concerned attempt to regain power on some level in order to get back at society (or a rival). Sawyer makes a pact with the Devil. Whilst her power is short-lived, it resides mainly in the power of her voice to critique society; she uses her voice to channel back criticism at the very society who persecutes her. Similarly, Mary and Elspy are tempted to turn to the Devil in order to take revenge against a society that so cruelly turns its back upon them. Whilst Grizeld Bane is defined as “mad” and returned to the asylum at the end of the play, she has learned to play the witch character to perfection. It gives her the power to play the role, the power to instil fear, and a degree of economic power in the lodgings she gains with Mary and the money she earns from Annabella. Annabella may be upper class, but she also turns to witchcraft in order to gain power over her rival.

All of the witch characters ultimately fail in obtaining lasting power, but as the plays highlight, power in this context is not simply a functionalist binary between

oppressed and oppressor. Taking on the role of the witch allows these characters to exercise power for a short time, even if they know it will not last. This power is expressed in the voices given to witches. A curse is a form of power in its ability to threaten. So is a confession; even in the cases of the most powerless victims, those who underwent the torture of “pricking”, can stop the torture by becoming a witch. Taking on the role gives them the power to perform a public voice, if only for a limited time. This is in line with Foucault’s view of power as “something which is performed, something more like a strategy than a possession” (Mills 35). The depiction of witches as powerless victims, as encountered in the works of Scot, or Thomas and other modern historians, is challenged by these plays. Rather than dismiss these women as helpless and powerless, the plays value the resistance that their actions convey. *The Witch of Edmonton* and *Witchcraft* restore voice and agency to the accused women. This breaks the stereotype of the “witch” as an embodiment of evil, or as a poor, hapless, innocent victim. Interestingly, the stereotypes broken by these plays also reflect binary opposites. They are based on opposing extremes that seek to evade the complexities inherent in the situations experienced by the witch characters.

Female characters find themselves in a situation of impossible choice because of what de Beauvoir terms the “Eternal Feminine”. In a conflict between two women, she argues, there are only two roles available: “good” woman or “bad” woman. In our case these correspond to the binary of “wronged victim” versus “evil witch”. By offering no middle way, the witchcraft script ensures that one party has to take on the role of witch. This is convincingly demonstrated in Dungarren’s comparison of the two women in his life. There are only two ways: power through conforming or power through opposing, where the former represents “good” and latter “evil”.

As I stated in the Introduction, the voice of the witch in these two plays is of particular interest to this thesis. The clarity of Sawyer’s speeches cuts through all layers of society and there is much to enjoy in her eloquent words. *Witchcraft* orchestrates a diversity of female voices as Baillie widens the scope and locates the discourse of witchcraft very much in a woman’s world. As she states in both her “Introductory Discourse” and her footnote to the play, she takes us “behind the scenes” to the “real circumstances” and allows us to see the power relations at work

amongst women themselves. Most notably, whilst both plays give voice to the “witch” figure(s), these voices may be heard, but are not listened to within the environs of the play. The Judge and Sir Arthur in *The Witch of Edmonton* may be shocked by Sawyer’s words, but her criticism does not effect any change. Violet, who is told to “Hold thy tongue” (377) by her father, protests her innocence at the end of the play, and Mary states her confession was forced. However their pleas are ignored and they face execution. Ultimately they are saved only by the words of men and a change to the law. However, whilst the witch characters are heard but not listened to by the other characters in the plays, the audience are made conscious of this discrepancy. The audience listen and are made aware of the dangers in not listening to what the women have to say. On a final note regarding gender, whilst we recognise that Elizabeth Sawyer’s powerful voice cannot be seen as a move of gender politics at the time of the play’s creation, *Witchcraft* certainly has gender politics at its heart.

I began upon this journey by knowing very little about the topic of witchcraft. Through this study, the plays have opened up my understanding not only of the complex dynamics involved in the discourse of witchcraft and the witchcraft trials, but also of the dynamic and empowering portrayal of women in two dramas written in very different times. I have become aware of the social mechanisms behind the creation of witches and gained a better understanding of why, in certain situations, taking on the role of the witch could make sense. I have had the opportunity to read two relatively unknown plays about witchcraft, and discovered illuminating similarities between them in the way they treat female characters. What is most remarkable is the social critique of the societies portrayed, and the fact that the playwrights restore humanity to the witches. Finally, my work with this thesis has opened up a wide range of possible research trajectories. The two plays certainly provide plenty of highly interesting material to engage with.

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