

## Chapter One

### Introduction

Women have perpetually been a subject of fascination for men. It would not be extreme to say that no other creature is so scrutinized, dissected, adored or abhorred more than the fairer sex! Throughout Western history, women have been mostly placed in an inferior position. According to Jeffrey Russell, the misogyny of this civilization originates from three sources — the Classical literary tradition, Hebrew religion, and dualism<sup>1</sup>. All three sources essentially perceived women through a dualistic vision. This was evident in the categorisation of genders i.e. man was active, dominant and reasonable while woman was passive, subordinate and emotional — the classic “power and class relationship”<sup>2</sup> in the man/woman dynamics. All this unequivocally implies that women should submit to being led by men to save themselves from the inherent weakness within the feminine body. Also, the “weaker sex” had to adhere to a dualistic constitution within the female figure: the woman who pursued passive piety as opposed to the woman who was a “lustful vessel”. The former demonstrates the aspiration to be closer to God whereas the latter indicates an inclination towards Satan. In conformity to patriarchy, a “good” woman adheres to the principles of social conduct that included subservience, chastity and reticence. Adversely, independence and individuality equalled as character defects of a “bad” woman, a “pathetic outsider” who must be cast out of the community because she threatened the order imposed by patriarchy. Endless social conditioning based on fanciful notions and “phantasies”<sup>3</sup> created stereotypes of women at their worst: the crone, the hag, the temptress and, the worst manifestation of all depravity, the witch.

In this chapter, we will briefly look at the backdrop against which witch accusations thrived. Early modern Europe documents a complex history that contributed to the resurgence of witch prosecutions, which very much correlated with the great social unrest pervasive during that time, namely religious dissent and economic revolution. Religious upheaval between the Catholic Church and the Protestant reformation spanned the years 1520-1650<sup>4</sup>. According to Brian Levack, “since these years include the period when witch-hunting was most intense, historians have always assumed that the Reformation served as a catalyst for witch-hunting”<sup>5</sup>. Wars were fought and countless lives lost and minds “brain-washed” through propaganda and doctrines that exalted one sect and denounced others as religions of Satan. Religious groups that previously formed the pillar of society and disciplined the population collapsed, leaving in its wake a mass of confusion and conflict. However, both sects (Catholicism and Protestantism) shared a binding commonality — their advocacy of the evil of witchcraft and its exclusive connection to women. From the pulpit, fiery sermons of women’s frailty (quoting much of Eve’s contribution to man’s fall from God’s grace) strongly alluded to her association with the devil. Therefore, “female unruliness”<sup>6</sup> had to be subdued with religious training

that fashioned the reins of modesty and humility; selective education that showed a woman her moral duty without enflaming her undisciplined imagination or loosing her tongue for public talk; honest work that busied her hands; and laws and constraints that made her subject to her husband<sup>7</sup>.

The Malleus Maleficarum, (The Hammer Against the Witches) is a “practical guide” to witch-hunting written by two Dominican priests Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger in 1486. By 1520, it was reprinted in fourteen editions. The Malleus declared four essential points of witchcraft, of which two involve sexuality of women. This text significantly affected the religious mindset of people on the subject of witchcraft. It

helped spur and sustain about two centuries of witch-hunt hysteria in Europe<sup>8</sup>. The Malleus was tirelessly used to explain the predominance of women in witchcraft:

What else is woman but a foe to friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable calamity, a domestic danger, a delectable detriment, an evil of nature, painted in fair colours .... The word woman is used to mean the lust of the flesh ... I have found a woman more bitter than death, and a good woman more subject to carnal lust .... [Women] are more credulous; ... [than men] .... Women are naturally more impressionable .... They have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow women those things which by evil arts they know ... by her nature quicker to waver in her faith .... more prone to abjure the faith; so through their second defect of inordinate affections and passions they search for, brood over, and inflict various vengeance, either by witchcraft, or by some other means<sup>9</sup>.

Although the Reformation may not have directly contributed to the growth of the hunt, the horrendous images evoked in the propagandas intensified the process of witch-hunting in its means of triggering mistrust and suspicion, as well as fear of women and demonic power<sup>10</sup>.

Along with religious unrest, capitalism crept into the economic scene and with characteristic force, changed the family nucleus. Pre-capitalism engaged in Domestic and Family Industries<sup>11</sup> that sustained the livelihood of people, with everyone in the family playing a significant role, regardless of sex or age. Capitalists, however, drove men out of their homes into factories to earn their bread. From being equals (though this position was rarely acknowledged), women looked on to a bleak future in the work force that paid pittance for their labour and de-skilled expertise that had been honed in running their household independently.

Monumental economic changes uncovered new problems such as inflation and poverty (due to a rapid population growth), changes in the family structure, and an

increase in the number of single women. All these charged the socio-economic atmosphere with endless conflicts. According to Levack, the number of widows and singles rose due to calamities that afflicted people of that time, such as plagues that claimed many male lives and periods of warfare when women suffered less casualties than men<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, lone women (whether spinsters, widows or those separated from their husbands or families) who were economically disadvantaged became susceptible to poverty, more so when the concept of communal sharing disappeared due to capitalistic influence. In this tenuous economic situation, a growing sense of individualism and the preservation of the individual came to replace charitable practices of sharing and concern for community.

A wave of intolerance towards the poor further widened the barriers dividing the society. Some dilemmas emerged out of this situation. Turning away needy neighbours usually evoked feelings of moral unworthiness and guilt. It is reasonable to assume that newfound individualism conflicted with the Reformation's emphasis on personal piety and sanctity, a moral compulsion to lead an exemplary life and be responsible for one's salvation. More often than not, the clash of values gave rise to resentment against the persons who caused this unsettling state of mind, and so guilt and other burdensome feelings were transferred onto the other person. After all, "by depicting the unaided person as a witch and therefore as a moral aggressor unworthy of support, he could rid himself of the guilt .... In a very real sense the guilty neighbour projected his guilt on to the witch"<sup>13</sup>. Since witches personified evil in contemporary society, they seemed an ideal site to impose such projections. Joseph Klaitz also asserts that the search for scapegoats focused on poor and unprotected women who "touched the subconscious

anxieties of the villagers who saw in their isolation the worst fears they had for themselves"<sup>14</sup>. Added to that was society's perpetual suspicion that women (of certain characteristics, of which will be elaborated in subsequent paragraphs) in dire financial straits would most likely resort to diabolical alternatives so as to improve their economic situation, even if it meant taking advantage or victimizing fellow neighbours who turned them away. Levack observes: "In this indirect way the witch gave both the individual and the community the opportunity to gain reassurance regarding their own moral worth"<sup>15</sup>. In other words, society's misfortunes were conveniently pitted on women. Its devastation and frustration, brought on by the hardships of life (i.e. failed crop or cattle) and massive social changes were projected on women. The workings of science eluded them<sup>16</sup> and society ignorantly clung to the assumption that misfortunes in the community originated from the devil who lures and employs his servants — namely women — who were most susceptible to carry out his bidding. The social unrest (described above) set a chain of reactions that affected every facet of society and, in turn, long held principles and values were threatened. This unsettling of long held norms perforated the morale and sense of security of the people, and subsequently aggravated the witch hunting campaigns.

Before we delve further into this topic, let us explore the definition of "witchcraft". Generally witchcraft refers to mainly two types of activities. The first involves the use of black magic (maleficent magic) in order to carry out harmful deeds. Maleficent magic or "maleficia" is supernatural, occult or preternatural power that usually kills or inflicts pain and sickness on people. It also brings about failed crops or, even worse, causes impotence in a bridegroom. The second activity involves witches who

worship the devil. The “pacts” with the devil make them heretics and apostates, deliberately rejecting their Christian faith to serve His enemy instead<sup>17</sup>.

Women regarded as witches shared certain qualities. Reginald Scot describes witches as “doting, scolds, mad, divelish... so firme and steadfast in their opinion”<sup>18</sup>. If the witch happened to express sorrow or lament about her fate or even utter a harsh word, she would immediately be labelled a “scold”. Witches had similar socio-economic backgrounds i.e. they were usually from the lower strata of society. Italian physician Girolamo Cardano describes witches as “miserable old women, beggars, existing in the valleys on chestnuts”<sup>19</sup>. Apart from that, they usually indulged in similar sexual activities. A sexually experienced woman or someone who had had a history of committing sexually related “crimes” such as abortions and infanticide<sup>20</sup> exposed herself to witch accusations for lacking in moral worth. It was believed that women with questionable moral traits could easily yield to the devil's temptations. However, one other quality of the witch involves her aptitude. She was most sought after for her skill and knowledge of herbs and medical matters. Matilda Joslyn Gage writes:

The superior learning of witches was recognized in the widely extended belief of their ability to work miracles. The witch was in reality the profoundest thinker, the most advanced scientist of those ages<sup>21</sup>.

This knowledge, although most prized, also evoked fear for the potential harm she could wreak using her power/knowledge. “as knowledge has ever been power, the church feared its use in woman’s hands, and levelled its deadliest blows at her”<sup>22</sup>. She usually lived independent of male influence and tended to be assertive in her opinions and thoughts. Her lifestyle almost always aroused suspicion and mistrust among neighbours.

These stereotypes (briefly described above) also tie in closely with how women were viewed during this period. First, overwhelmingly patriarchal structures of society conspired against women. It revealed alliances between varied structures (religion, economy, political, law and social) that tied closely with patriarchy. People from every stratum led life according to roles designated by the ruling class, through social indoctrination and law, closely intertwined with moral and religious norms. In retrospect, women's place in society was steeped in unexplained contradictions. Theories about women's minds, thoughts and bodies (mostly illogical and inaccurate) provided the license to draw up artificial ideals on women's roles, their behaviour and way of life. Aristotle's theory helped justify men's perception of women:

Women were wet and cold, men were hot and dry. The coldness of women dictated their intellectual inferiority as well as their physical shape - fat hips, narrow shoulders, small brains - for being cold, women lacked sufficient energy to drive matter upward. What might have been female brains remained alas, below the waist. That women rarely became bald was, remarkably, a further sign of their inferiority. Men grow bald because of their internal heat, which literally burns the hair off their heads<sup>23</sup>.

Various methods were devised to ensure women's complete conformity to patriarchal paradigms/restrictions<sup>24</sup>, for example John Calvin manipulates biblical interpretations that demand women's subordination to men:

There is no other shift but women must needs stoop and understand that the ruin and confusion of mankind came in on their side, and that through them we be all forlorn and accursed and banished the kingdom of heaven ... all this came of Eve and womankind ... there is none other way but for them to stoop and to bear patiently the subjection that God hath laid upon them, which is nothing else but a warning to them to keep themselves lowly and mild<sup>25</sup>.

Her being was made devoid of any independent thought, decision or behaviour; and those who managed to develop as individuals had to quell their desires and distrust their

instincts in order to adopt patriarchal values, or risk paying dearly for their defiance. Women were drilled to distrust their feelings and disobey desires and needs, or risk being stigmatised as lascivious, shallow and malicious. Careful construction of rules enslaved women in a highly regulated society, especially in aspects of economy, law and the judiciary system. Consequently, most women believed the elaborate lie that they were powerless and unconditionally accepted the strict guardianship of father, brother, husband, government and church.

However, women living without the influence of men in their lives, either by choice or circumstances, faced a bigger danger. Spinsters or widows usually aroused the suspicion of community. According to Levack, worry towards unattached women arose out of fear of them being seduced by demons impersonating a man<sup>26</sup>. Another worrying factor was the financial burden posed by those women, whose poverty and inability to self-support forced them to beg to survive. It is no coincidence that those prosecuted for witchcraft came from the lower strata of society.

It could be said that one way early modern society reacted to its volatile environment was by scapegoating its most vulnerable member. Social tension germinated profound confusion, fear and frustration over various unpredictable events in life. Instead of resorting to self-reflection as a positive alternative to dealing with life's vicissitudes, society tended to project those feelings onto women termed as "deviants". Projection of "sins" and shortcomings on public enemies such as witches deflected society's sense of guilt and responsibility for the conflicts and catastrophes that afflicted its life.



### **Witchcraft During the Jacobean Era**

When discussing witchcraft in the seventeenth century, especially the Jacobean period (which is the focus of my study), King James emerges as an important figure. He expressed an acute interest in witch-hunt, an interest that originated from an attempted assassination on him and his bride. Agnes Sampson, only one of the many accused of conspiring in the attempted assassination of James was,

fastened to the wall ... an iron instrument with four sharp prongs forced into the mouth, so that two prongs pressed against the tongue, and the two others against the cheeks. She was kept without sleep<sup>27</sup>.

She finally confessed that a large company of men and women had sailed in sieves to North Berwick on the night of Halloween, where they indulged in revelry of dancing, entered a kirk using black candles and paid homage to the devil at his buttocks. They intended to raise a storm that would kill King James and his bride when they sailed to Denmark. The attempt was foiled and only his entourage ship was destroyed. Sampson further revealed another plan to murder using toad's blood. She and those involved in the treason were hanged together as witches.

It was also under the duress of torture that Sampson implicated many others, one of whom was Gillis Duncan who, she said, "did go before them playing this reel and dance upon a small trump, called a Jew's trump, until they entered a kirk"<sup>28</sup>. James delighted in this piece of information and insisted on being present in the interrogation of Duncan that, inevitably, included some form of torture. With Sampson's vivid evidence of the witches' journey, James commanded Duncan to perform the dance (as done in her witch meetings) for him. By turning it into a theatrical event, James reasserted his royal power and became "master of the witches who had threatened to master him. He restores

the hierarchy and order threatened by the witches"<sup>29</sup>. This incident encouraged King James' obsession with witch-hunts and inspired Daemonologie, a treatise that vehemently condemned witchcraft. The text considerably influenced King James' subjects and caught the imagination and attention of the public — witch accusers, judges, justices, printers, pamphleteers, ballad writers, clergymen, those in the medical profession; poets and dramatists. Writers felt that they had the royal sanction to freely explore the subject of witchcraft.

Jacobean dramatists encapsulated the anxiety and repulsion of the masses for witches in their writings. These plays in turn further inflamed witchcraft hysteria. Initially, the witchcraft phenomena existed in the thoughts of people without ruining their peace of mind, but it took a turn for the worse, mutating into a malignant force, especially when teachings of Daemonologie<sup>30</sup> by King James I infiltrated the mind-set of his subjects. This treatise attempted to prove that witchcraft existed, and illustrated methods of punishing witches. With this work, King James went to great lengths to ensure that the populace took the threat of witchcraft seriously, to "resolue the doubting harts of many; both that such assaultes of Sathan are most certainly practiced, and that the instrumentes thereof, merits most severly to be punished"<sup>31</sup>.

The beginning of the seventeenth century produced writers of witchcraft who varied in fanaticism. Their treatises, broadsides and pamphlets flooded the market to meet public demand, capitalising on the latest witch trials to ensure readership. A good example of this is Thomas Potts' The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster<sup>32</sup>. Some learned men also wrote authoritatively to endorse certain plans of action/cruelty towards witches. Typical of such writing is William Perkins's A Discourse

of the Damned Art of Witchcraft, which approves the use of torture, "the rack or some other violent meanes to urge confession ... when the partie is obstinate"<sup>33</sup>. Appetite for such writings continued on until approximately 1628<sup>34</sup>.

### **The Elizabethan and Jacobean Stage**

The Elizabethan stage treatment of witchcraft was comparatively lighter and more tolerant than that of the Jacobean dramatists. Ironically, surviving records indicate that witchcraft prosecutions peaked during the reign of Elizabethan and gradually declined under James. However, the treatment of witchcraft on stage runs counter to this fact. Plays concerning witches gained a wide audience after 1597 and intensified further in 1611<sup>35</sup>. A series of short-term revivals during the Lancashire witch case of 1633<sup>36</sup> also occurred before the trend dissipated. The Elizabethan stage used characters belonging to the supernatural realm: classical witches, sorcerers, wise women, prophetess and fairies. These stage characters rarely indulged in malicious activities nor were they threatening or fearful figures. Conversely, the stage depictions of the witch figure reflected a noticeable lack of interest with the fates of incarcerated witches facing death sentences.

It would appear that popular culture did not define the concept of witch distinctively. General ideas of "the witch" were culled from Catholicism, folktales, fairies, popular witch-lore; drama and elite witch-lore, despite the serious legal meanings and implications<sup>37</sup>. Sometimes a woman hailed as a prophetess at one place could be accused of being a mean witch in another. According to Diane Purkiss, in the sixteenth century the elite drew new distinctions to control the mass of meaning attached to the word "witch", a categorization process took place to make the witch figure a clear and

recognizable stage “type”<sup>38</sup>. Inevitably, this connected to questions of gender in the political and social realm. The main agent for this emergence is Shakespeare whose principal source of information was Reginald Scot’s Discoverie of Witchcraft. Other dramatists include Middleton and Jonson. Even though Elizabethan dramatists were pre-occupied with questions of witchcraft in relation to women, they treaded carefully because a queen ruled the country<sup>39</sup>. Thus the Elizabethan stage was fairly silent even when witchcraft phenomenon rose to a fevered pitch. Fear of the queen and her disapproval must have narrowed the possibilities and autonomy to explore this subject, especially when she was known to punish those who offended her<sup>40</sup>.

Delving into the dramatic works of that time, one of the highlights of the Elizabethan period was John Lyly’s version of the witch in Endimion. Dipsas wields great witch power except she is unable to “rule hearts”. She says,

for were it in my power to place affection by appointment, I would make such euill appetites, such inordinate lusts, such cursed desires, as all the world should be filled with superstitious hearts, and extreme loue<sup>41</sup>.

Although Lyly depicts a witch character of great power, she is still vulnerable to her limitations, especially over the human heart and spirit. An interesting twist to this subject is Lyly’s presentation of Mother Bombie, a witch renowned for her wisdom and benevolent traits. She helps provide common sense and comfort to those around her. Whenever a troubled heart seeks her wisdom, she selflessly nudges them to the right path:

Prisius : Why haue you all bene with *Mother Bomby*?

Lucio : All, and as farre as I can see (she) foretolde all.

Memphio : In deed she is cunning and wise, never doing harme, but still practicing good<sup>42</sup>.

Another example of an Elizabethan witch can be found in Edmund Spenser's Fairy Queen:

In which a witch did dwell  
So choosing solitaire to abide,  
Far from all neighbours, that her devilish deeds  
And hellish arts from people she might hide,  
And hurt far off unknowne, whom euer she enuide<sup>43</sup>.

Spencer's witch is a solitary figure who detaches herself from society but still casts spells from afar.

To summarise, the treatment of witchcraft during the Elizabethan period ranged quite widely from benevolent witches to those who lived far from society so as to conceal their evil deeds. Katherine Briggs states that the writings of the Elizabethan period lacked the intense emotional pre-occupation with the fear of witchcraft that the Jacobean indulged in. The reason for this, as stated earlier, was that the Elizabethan playwrights lacked autonomy in exploring the subject for fear of being misinterpreted or offending the queen.

When King James ascended the throne, there was a gradual but discernible shift in the portrayal of stage witches. Poets and dramatists alike started to present witch figures in a complex manner. Jacobean dramatists yielded to temptation and explored what they deemed as the malicious and destructive facets of witchcraft. Shakespeare, for instance, had three hags in Macbeth shrouded in an element of sinister mystery. Their control of nature and prophecy of Macbeth's future made them characters to be feared. Writers like Thomas Middleton, Thomas Dekker and John Ford subscribed to certain Jacobean conventions in their plays<sup>44</sup>. Witchcraft became one of the sites to explore the estrangement of women from the "protective" arms of patriarchy. In retrospect, this

theme did not predominate the stage extensively, but it significantly left its impression behind, especially when the writers' inspiration came from witch trials, inevitably adding a sense of "realism" that further influenced the patrons and society at large. The new sinister tone in these plays complemented the rising interest in witchcraft that swept English society during the reign of King James I.

Jacobean dramatists gave a new treatment to witches on stage. She ceased to be a purely supernatural creature and was slowly integrated into the community. The Jacobean witch no longer remained a one-dimensional character, and writers weaved a complex tale of her relationship with family and neighbours. Her feelings and desires more often than not subverted social ideals. Consequently, she was feared for her craft, reviled for her economic dependence, and ostracized before being hauled to the gallows. These witches faced public condemnation for allegedly consorting with the devil and for other transgressions. Few playwrights wrote with a fair and logical perspective; in fact some witch trials inspired them to capitalise more on the scandal and opportunity to display flair and knowledge of the subject. Some even emulated King James' writings and adopted his views in the hope of gaining his favour.

Witchcraft on the Jacobean stage was a continuum to various themes presented about women. Aesthetically, the outline and idea of the witch figure fitted well with the patriarchal outlook of women and its binary opposition of "good" woman versus "bad" woman. Society at that time worshipped outward appearance. On stage, the presentation of a "good" woman conformed to the myth that outer beauty reflects inner wholesomeness. Therefore, a hag (weather beaten and "wilted-looking") purportedly reflected on her face the "sins" of her deeds. Regardless of dramatists' conviction of

belief in witchcraft, they evinced the witch figure as a model of depravity that other female characters could be measured against. Perhaps it justified the signature brutality that was Jacobean stage because, essentially, the dramatists of this period inflicted violence on female characters where they were not only “simply killed, but tortured — often elaborately over a period of time — usually by a combination of familial, judicial and religious authorities”<sup>45</sup> as opposed to adulating and falsely elevating the pets of patriarchy — the passive women.

Imitating the way of life of that time, Jacobean plays usually confined female characters in the private sphere of home (women’s rightful and only suitable place in society). This made it that much easier for dramatists to intertwine witchcraft with various themes of deviance and heresy, both monumental sins against the “body of Christ”<sup>46</sup>. Also, in the hands of the playwrights, the devil assumed a tangible form (in shapes of familiars and such) to mould public perception (using “visual effect”) of women’s susceptibility to the dark force and reinforce the relevance and stability of patriarchy that had ordained itself as the undisputed guardian of morality and salvation of the human soul.

### **Witch Plays**

In this dissertation, I have selected 3 plays that deal with the theme of witchcraft: The Witch (by Thomas Middleton), The Witch of Edmonton (a collaborative work by Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley) and The Late Lancashire Witches (a collaborative work by Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood). These plays are based on witch trials that ultimately end with the deaths or prolonged incarceration of the accused.

Although the dramatists have exploited these scandalous events in their plays, they have also managed to contribute to our understanding of the early modern household and community, as well as illuminate the underlying motivation for accusing women of witchcraft.

These plays illustrate several important issues concerning the genders which I hope to analyse. One point that my thesis asserts is that witchcraft is largely a manifestation of patriarchy's inner demon. Within the framework of these plays, I will explore this intriguing view, which will take us into the fragmented self of the male character. Patriarchy has failed to reconcile religious duties and social obligation with desires of the self, leading to conflicts with sexuality<sup>47</sup> and morality. These conflicts remain unresolved through lack of introspection and self-reflection, consequently perpetuating a state of discontent and dehumanisation of the patriarchal body. In other words, patriarchy has failed itself through its disconnectedness. This malady is further converted to other failures, mainly in its duty of protecting women. Patriarchal structures failed women again when it cannot comprehend or succeed in unravelling the "mysteries" of womanhood concerning their physical, mental, emotional and spiritual make-up (certainly a manageable feat if only women were allowed to "participate").

How does patriarchy hide its "phallacy"<sup>48</sup> and frailty? To answer, I will explore the power relations within patriarchal institutions that function against women. The principle in upholding masculine power relies on female subordination, where it thrives in the ruins of female esteem, dignity and self-worth. This is obvious in the institutionalising of gender dichotomy that essentially denigrates one sex to artificially elevate the other. Women's contrived economic dependence ensured their submissive



position. Naturally, female deviants who cross patriarchal boundaries (set by familial, judicial and religious authorities) would confront persecution and punishment. The misogynistic canon propounded that women possessed weak spirits and an inherent inclination to evil that convert into one of many forms, of the most popular being the witch. In actuality, transgressors and witches functioned mainly to absorb patriarchal failings and social devastations that befell societies of early modern Europe. The persecution and prosecution of witches restored order and faith in patriarchal reign. But, it also reveals the cruel and perverted way in which patriarchy sought to validate its power.

This thesis will also attempt to deconstruct the witch figure to uncover what is essentially a feminine struggle to expand and assert a sense of identity and individuality. Her resistance to bow to discrimination takes her on a painful but enlightening journey that may end with her life being literally wrested away. In this journey, under the cloak of a witch, she becomes a power in her own right, a figure to be reckoned with, particularly by the patriarchal powers. Self-empowerment lends the ability to exist beyond the constricting rules and regulations of the “father”, and in her separation from her supposed protector, she uncovers the frailty of men’s existence. We will further discuss different aspects of all the factors described above in subsequent chapters.

Chapter Two will focus on The Witch that explores issues of sexuality (seen as the root of evil) and how it works against women in various ways. Patriarchy manipulates sexuality to control and gain subjection of women and to persecute and condemn deviant behaviour. Thomas Middleton’s dualistic perspective of women is also vital to the understanding of early modern gender dynamics. Middleton’s division of

“good” vs. “bad” women (witch-like women and witches) provide intriguing insight into the discrimination against “the weaker sex” that propelled these women to retaliate and fight for their right to exist as how they saw fit. Patriarchal perspective on this “rebelliousness” uncovers the frailty within its body. The play illuminates the hypocrisy of male characters (representing patriarchy), whose practice of double standards contributes to the breakdown of relationships between the genders.

The Witch of Edmonton in Chapter Three again delves into the theme of sexuality, but here the focus is on older women. Patriarchy subscribes to the notion that older women are sexually voracious. In this play, Mother Sawyer is alleged of having sexual intercourse with familiars as her lack of youth and physical beauty limits her appeal to the male gender. More importantly, her economic dependence becomes a point of contention, especially when she is well past her childbearing years and ceases to be productive economically and socially. In embracing witchcraft, Mother Sawyer externalises the emotional and physical hardship inflicted on her and retaliates against her apathetic community. The theme of salvation also comes into play when both genders transgress but sadly salvation is only awarded to men. Men are seen as the only sex capable of achieving self-enlightenment. Juxtaposing both sexes, we see how the failure to uphold morality and internalise proper code of conduct results in the victimisation of women.

The Late Lancashire Witches in Chapter Four examines the witchcraft theme in a light-hearted manner. However, this does not detract from the seriousness of the attempts made by the women characters who desire to expand their roles in life and assert individual identities beyond the bounds of the home sphere. We will encounter the

betrayal of a husband in denying his wife the autonomy for self-discovery, which leads to a broken marriage. Even the authorities interfere to help the husband break the spirits of these women to ensure they become manageable, one-dimensional and fragmented beings again. The alienation of women also occurs with the calculated changeability of male conviction on witchcraft issues. Scepticism transforms into belief if it benefits masculine pride, ego and dignity. It proves the fragility of the male psyche that relies on the suppression of women to provide the “crutch” needed to stand on its own two feet.

In all three plays, I will devote much attention to the witch as a figure who subverts patriarchal authority, her struggles to shed the falsities imposed on her, her fears, and her aspirations for self-empowerment and freedom.

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- <sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Russell, A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 115. According to Russell, dualism exists in Christianity (as other major religions) where it demonises its opponents. Theologically, it subscribes to the concept that the world is ruled by the antagonistic forces of good and evil, "The stance of Christianity was clear. On one hand there were the followers of goodness and light, on the other, the minions of evil and darkness, among whom the sorcerers were prominent. Sorcery had come a long way from its origins in simple, mechanical magic" (36). For further reading refer to Russell's Satan: The Early Christian Tradition (New York: Cornell University Press, 1989).
- <sup>2</sup> Allison Coudert, "The Myth of the Improved Status of Protestant Women: The Case of the Witchcraze," Witchcraft and Demonology in Art and Literature Brian Levack (New York: Garland Publication, 1992) 65.
- <sup>3</sup> Shoshana Felman, "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, eds., Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: Macmillan Press, 1989) 133.
- <sup>4</sup> Brian Levack The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe (London: Longman, 1996) 100.
- <sup>5</sup> Levack 102.
- <sup>6</sup> Natalie Zemon Davis, "Women On Top," Gender and History in Western Europe eds., Robert Shoemaker and Mary Vincent (London: Arnold Publishers, 1998) 286.
- <sup>7</sup> Davis 286.
- <sup>8</sup> Russell 79.
- <sup>9</sup> Russell 116.
- <sup>10</sup> For further reading on the Reformation, refer to Brian Levack's The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe (London: Longman, 1996); and on economy of 17<sup>th</sup> century England, refer to Alice Clark, Working Lives of Women in Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge, 1991).
- <sup>11</sup> Alice Clark, introduction, Working Lives of Women in Seventeenth Century (London: Routledge, 1991) ix. Clark elaborates on "Domestic Industry" in which members of a household worked and all the production took place within the household. The family consumed everything it produced, without having to purchase additional supplies. Wives and husbands contributed jointly to the household

economy in a system of domestic industry. In "Family Industry", some members of the family worked for wages but work was still carried mainly within the household, so both the spouses still visibly shared the load. There may be household servants and apprentices who earn minimum wage. The profits retained belonged to the family; and the father was the head of the family.

<sup>12</sup> Levack 147.

<sup>13</sup> Levack 107.

<sup>14</sup> Martha Reineke, " "The Devils Are Come Down Upon Us" Myth, History, and The Witch as Scapegoat," Union Seminary Quarterly Review 44 (1990) 66.

<sup>15</sup> Levack 107.

<sup>16</sup> Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating (New York: A Plume Book, 1974) 128. According to Dworkin, The Malleus further propounded those assumptions by explaining most aspects of biology, sexology, medicine (related to women), and weather in terms of the demonic. Such simplistic notions, surely lacking sound empirical observation or evidence, shaped the mental make-up of community members.

<sup>17</sup> Levack 4.

<sup>18</sup> Reginald Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft (New York: Dover Publications, 1972) 4.

<sup>19</sup> Levack 149.

<sup>20</sup> Anne Barstow, Witcheraze: A History of the European Witch Hunts (San Francisco: Pandora, 1994) 7.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Daly, "European Witchburnings: Purifying the Body of Christ," Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 217.

<sup>22</sup> Daly 217.

<sup>23</sup> Coudert 70.

<sup>24</sup> Throughout this dissertation, I will juxtapose two points of view; one, a patriarchal point of view, and the other, a feminist point of view.

<sup>25</sup> Alison Findlay, A Feminist Perspective on Renaissance Drama (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Limited, 1999) 12

<sup>26</sup> Levack 27.

<sup>27</sup> Russell 94.

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- <sup>28</sup> Diane Purkiss, Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations of Witchcraft (London: Routledge, 1996) 199.
- <sup>29</sup> Purkiss 200.
- <sup>30</sup> A treatise published in 1597 on the subject of witchcraft, that simultaneously refuted two major sceptics, Reginald Scot and Johann Weyer. Additionally, it demonstrated James's intellectual and religious integrity as a ruler. Naturally, he exuded enormous potential influence over the incidence and severity of prosecution. James is reputed to have hanged more witches than any other English monarch (Russell 79).
- <sup>31</sup> Wolf Singer, "WitchHunts in Scotland: How the Trial of Doctor Fian Began a New Craze," 1998  
<<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/2891/witches.html>>.
- <sup>32</sup> Katherine Briggs, Pale Hecate's Team: An Examination of The Beliefs on Witchcraft and Magic Among Shakespeare's Contemporaries and His Immediate Successors (London, Routledge, 1962) 100. Witch trials such as that of Lancashire created a demand for "horrific reading". The infamous pamphlet written by Thomas Potts (clerk of the Court) was especially popular as it was "most fully and soberly" reported. Its credibility was guaranteed when countersigned by 2 of the judges.
- <sup>33</sup> Anthony Harris, Night's Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in 17<sup>th</sup> Century English Drama (Bath, Pitman Press, 1980) 18
- <sup>34</sup> Briggs 27.
- <sup>35</sup> Purkiss 181.
- <sup>36</sup> Purkiss 181.
- <sup>37</sup> Purkiss 183.
- <sup>38</sup> Purkiss 183.
- <sup>39</sup> Purkiss 185. Much anxiety brewed below the surface of Elizabeth's reign. According to Purkiss, having a woman on the throne, her unclear succession and threat from Spain became major causes of worry. The dissatisfaction over Elizabeth's embrace of Protestantism also provoked the condemnation of Catholic propagandists, who accused her of being in league with Satan.
- <sup>40</sup> An example of this is a printer named John Stubbs wrote a tract entitled "The Discovery of a Gaping Gulf" to protest against the Queen's potential marriage to Duke of Alencon of France who is a Catholic.
- <sup>41</sup> Briggs 61.

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<sup>42</sup> Briggs 68.

<sup>43</sup> Briggs 75.

<sup>44</sup> These dramatists, to a large extent, conformed to Jacobean preoccupation with women. Domestic tragedies and comedies such as Women, Beware Women, A Chaste Maid at Cheapside, Lust Dominion and 'Tis A Pity She's A Whore heavily featured women as the protagonists.

<sup>45</sup> Ania Loomba, Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989) 80.

<sup>46</sup> Part title of Mary Daly's chapter 6, "European Witchburnings: Purifying the Body of Christ" in Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1978) 178.

<sup>47</sup> The Church, strictly frowned upon enjoyment of the sexual intercourse. The sexual act was relegated to reproduction; making it cold, emotionless and clinical.

<sup>48</sup> This term is borrowed from Felman's article "Women and Madness: The Critical Phallacy," The Feminist Reader: Essays in Gender and the Politics of Literary Criticism, eds., Catherine Belsey and Jane Moore (London: Macmillan Press, 1989) 6.