

Chapter Four

The Late Lancashire Witches

The Late Lancashire Witches is a collaborative effort between Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome. The former wrote prolifically in the final years of the Elizabethan era, during the time of James and for most of Charles' reign. A dominant theme in Heywood's works is God created the universe in which each element joined in a great cosmic harmony¹. Only evil could violate this order. A typical Heywood play ends with the restoration of good by purging the sinful elements, all in accordance with divine providence. However, there is a certain undercurrent that lies underneath this tight structure: "There sometimes creeps, perhaps in spite of his avowed didactic purposes, a reflection of the contradiction and ambiguities of his time"². Perhaps Heywood's primary concern "with making his simple theological point"³ could not entirely avoid the discrepancies within the morality of his plays — as the character of Mr. Generous (The Late Lancashire Witches) demonstrates. Although Heywood does introduce witch characters in works such as Gunaiketon and The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels, in The Late Lancashire Witches, he explores the witchcraft theme with greater intensity.

Richard Brome began his playwriting career just before the succession of Charles and served an apprenticeship under Ben Jonson. Most of Brome's plays keep in the tradition of satiric comedy perpetuated by Jonson, in which Brome adopted Jonson's "social consciousness and his theory of the therapeutic value of comedy"⁴. Although Brome lacks his mentor's passion or refined art, he wrote pleasant works, one of which is

The Antipodes. He often presents various themes concerning lust and avarice, symptomatic of the social afflictions of his age.

Compared to The Witch and The Witch of Edmonton, both Heywood and Brome have given a much lighter treatment to the theme of witchcraft even though, at the time of writing, the infamous Lancashire witch trial loomed large in the background⁵. It is difficult to gauge the playwrights' convictions about witchcraft. There are, however, in Heywood's The Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels and Gunaikeon passages which reveal a belief in witchcraft. This is an example from Gunaikeon:

This puts me in mind of a discourse which was told by a great ladie ... a Muscatier ... heard a great noise of tatling gossips, laughing and talking aloude ... he giues fire and shoots toward the cloud at randome ... and found an old woman with a bunch of keyes at her girdle and a bullet in her buttock, dropt out of: the cloud, and the rest vanisht⁶.

Heywood and Brome wrote at a time when many questions about witchcraft were emerging and a wave of scepticism regarding the phenomenon surfaced in debates. According to Diane Purkiss, the "elite everywhere were becoming more sceptical of the claims of accusers all over the country, with a resultant fall in the number of prosecutions"⁷. This scepticism clashed with popular belief although "the growing scepticism did not produce new unanimity"⁸. On top of that, politics often encroached into these debates. Herbert Berry proposes the idea that The Late Lancashire Witches was commissioned by an elite member of society as a tactic to convince the public of the witches' guilt (during the Lancashire trial), and subsequently dispel the sceptical climate of the court⁹. In all probability, to juggle the integrity of their enterprise with the demands of patrons, the dramatists created a light-hearted play that was indefinite in its stand. Individuals such as Nathaniel Tomkyns found the play to contain "odd passages and

fopperies to provoke laughter”¹⁰.

The Late Lancashire Witches was in part inspired by one of the most vivid pamphlets about witchcraft during the Jacobean period, Thomas Potts’ The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster in 1613¹¹. His account of the scandalous Lancashire witch trial focuses on the vendetta between two families that ultimately flushed out 35 alleged witches, 10 of whom were hanged. Functioning alike the “National Enquirer” of modern times, the pamphlets allowed readers to feast on possible activities of shape-shifting and devils in disguise of horses and so on. Incidentally, this case draws much similarity to another “discovery” of witches in 1634 that also gained avid public interest. Trailing closely behind the second witchcraft implosion in Lancashire, Heywood and Brome wrote and staged The Late Lancashire Witches before the trial was over¹².

The way the Lancashire witch trials were conducted reveal disconcerting aspects of human behaviour. To secure a prosecution, rarely was a witness turned away, no matter how askew their testimonies (this will be elaborated in the section involving Edmund Robinson). Even children too young to understand the magnitude of witchcraft prosecution, could offer unlimited information, and their word usually failed to go through intellectual filtration to determine truth from gross exaggeration and outright lies. Displaced truth and variant witch tales drawn from a range of popular cultural materials such as folk-tales, slander and gossip, melted together in the hands of witnesses to materialise as testimonies that incriminate the accused¹³. The Boy in this play best illustrates this. His character is based on the principal witness (in the second Lancashire trial), a boy named Edmund Robinson¹⁴. He became a celebrity in his own right, going all

the way to London to recount his horrific encounter with witches. However, the judges of this case eventually saw through his performance. But by then, at least three prisoners died due to poor gaol conditions. After intensive sessions of interrogation, the boy recanted his confession. According to Diane Purkiss, Charles I granted pardon for all the witches, but three years later the prisoners were still incarcerated¹⁵ — this demonstrates how vulnerable women were.

Various reasons colour Edmund's motives, one of which was the opportunity to be celebrated and listened to, very rare for a child living in early modern Europe. Also, the tales were ploys to avoid his mother's "correction for not bringing home her kine, but perceiving that many folks gave ear to him, he grew confident in it more and more!"¹⁶. Edmund did not weave his tales out of thin air. Folktales, gossips and the 1613 witch scandal helped to reproduce a "truth" that started a surge of charges that incarcerated approximately 30 people. Such is the politics of paranoia that even a mere child could manipulate it.

Patriarchally-Defined Womanhood and Witchcraft

The notion that women were the "weaker vessel"¹⁷ ensured that male guardianship — church, father or husband — was imposed onto possibly every female alive. Women's innate moral inferiority had to be suppressed to hinder opportunities for the devil to tempt and cause women to fall — yet again. According to Antonia Fraser, an unmarried female's rights were absorbed by the father, who would dispose of her to marriage as he saw fit¹⁸. Once married, those rights got transferred to the husband. A woman's state of dependence from father to husband completed the transaction. In

exchange for financial, emotional and social dependence, she must engage in a lifelong pursuit to perfect the ideals of wifely virtues of serving the husband's and household's needs (as seen in Isabella in The Witch). Patriarchal "brain" deduced that for a woman to break from this vocation was most unnatural, an "aberration of nature"¹⁹ and placed her in the league of the devil. Martin Luther asserts that the antithesis of the ideal wife is "the witch who upsets the natural order in the family by being verbally aggressive when she should be silent, promiscuous when she should be chaste, domineering when she should be obedient, and, *out and about when she should stay at home* [italics mine]"²⁰. Witchcraft activities push a woman out of the private sphere of home, albeit discreetly, into the public world dominated by men, as Mrs. Generous demonstrates with her secret schemes outside her home.

A lecture on Genesis (3:11) encapsulates the lives of most early modern European women:

The rule remains with the husband, and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command. He rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions The woman, on the other hand, is like a nail driven into a wall. She sits at home ... look after the affairs of the household as one who has been deprived of the ability of administering those affairs that are outside and concern the state In this way Eve is punished²¹.

The guardianship of women ensured a subservient position that more often than not evoked a sense of restlessness, at the very least. Constraints of the social construct hinder a complete mental, emotional and spiritual growth of an individual. Thomas Cooper wrote in his treatise entitled The Mystery of Witchcraft that women tend to be "usually more ambitious and desirous of Sovereignty the rather because they are bound to subjection"²², because when "women are disfranchised in a patriarchal system, they are bound to work against it"²³.

The Late Lancashire Witches is a pioneering work in the comedy genre that explores the theme of witchcraft in a light-hearted manner. Heywood and Brome dramatise a witch's occupation involving revelry, mischief and sexual debauchery. Although not malicious and dangerous as Hecate (whose potions render men impotent) and Mother Sawyer (whose curses destroy crops and livestock), these "sinful indulgences" automatically discredit femininity and the virtue of a woman, and create a socially catastrophic environment. The activities of the Lancashire witches defy the norm of earlier Jacobean witch plays where mostly death and destruction abound. The Lancashire witches personal indulgence of food, sex and trickery do not resonate criminal nor diabolic elements in the least. Therefore, when the witches find themselves thrown into gaol, the punishment seems excessively cruel and out of sync with what appears to be a liberal attitude on the part of the dramatists.

Various condemning assumptions about witches make them *persona non grata* in the community. Firstly, witches' craft was reputed to breach the family nucleus of early modern Europe²⁴, either through negative influence or threat of danger to others (as will be elaborated through the incidents that befall the Generous and Seely households). Secondly, to support the covens, much chaos was created in homes that profoundly upset the equilibrium that holds society in a certain order, for the centre of existence is nurtured at home. In the play, the chaos involves food. As food sustains the life of a society, its homely preparation can only be overseen by a female figure — maid or mistress of the household. The witch, however, stole away from home for secret meetings and plundered other larders.

A glaring omission in the play is the playwrights' neglect to give a voice to the witches, a privilege accorded to Mother Sawyer. As a consequence, one gains little insight into the psyche, feelings and thoughts of these women. Perhaps for Heywood and Brome, it was not important to intimately acquaint readers with the witch characters, so as not to create the element of pathos. However, the absence of their voice to defend or lament their plight results in a "loud" silence that foregrounds the play.

Mrs. Generous, in The Late Lancashire Witches, leads a "double life" merely to expand her identity as an individual. Her refusal to be totally shackled by Mr. Generous', as well as society's rules, takes her on a personal adventure shared by other female friends. This creates a reassuring bond and a sense of belonging. The courageous women addicted to these small doses of freedom conduct secret meetings and merrymakings, careful to be discreet because society would definitely brand such behaviour as rebellious. However, like almost all witch characters who take liberties that run counter to patriarchal rules of conduct, they pay a high price for their "transgressive" behaviour (like Francesca and The Duchess in The Witch).

Heywood and Brome include an interesting facet to the play by illuminating the masculine fear that underlies witch persecutions. A few male characters (Mr. Generous and Doughty), who express disbelief or doubt at the efficacy of witchcraft, suddenly experience "a change of heart" whenever their sexuality, ego or pride comes under threat — surely an attempt to divert any scrutiny on their personal shortcomings. To scapegoat women punctuates the desperate attempt to restore the illusion of supremacy, a convenient but cowardly alternative to reflecting on the deformed state of masculinity.

But when it suits them, these characters revel in the witches' presence and take advantage of their magical skills and sexually liberated ways.

To recapitulate, the Lancashire witches may evoke laughter with their antics, but their activities do not amuse the male characters in the play. Although Heywood and Brome may have presented witchcraft in a comical spirit, it does not detract from the fatal punishment administered to the witches in the end. Nevertheless, the playwrights do not shy away from revealing the hypocrisy of the male characters, and demonstrate how the choice to exercise witch accusations can be misused for personal reasons. Due to its comedic value, The Late Lancashire Witches is an entertaining play. But it would serve well to also have in mind approximately 30 odd women accused of witchcraft who were awaiting their fate at the same time this play was being staged.

The Late Lancashire Witches

In this play, Brome and Heywood do not follow the common tendency among playwrights who present the witch figure as a malicious being. Mrs. Generous and her fellow coven members hex and weave magic purely for revelry. Playing pranks becomes a favourite past time and most of the male characters do not think much of it until the witches challenge their roles as men. Also, the "talons of authority" (V.i.2697) greatly disapprove the disruption of order they cause. To explore this further, I shall first look at the Generous family.

On the surface, the Generous household commands the envy of the community. Mr. Generous is a man of wealth, character and intelligence; well respected and liked by neighbours who greatly appreciate his hospitality. He is kind and considerate, and is

described as belonging “entirely to Heywood’s long line of magnanimous ... husband[s]”²⁵. To complement his stature, he selects Mrs Generous, whom he professes to be “a good woman and well bred, ... well-reputed”(II.i.717-8). Seemingly obedient and content, she runs the house with the help of Robert, the hired help.

However, the plot gradually unravels to reveal that underneath the blissful arrangement lies a restless wife leading a dual life, one as a housewife and the other as a witch. Mr. Generous is in the dark about his wife’s activities, and remains convinced of her loyalty. His rational mind and scepticism on matters such as witchcraft work to her advantage, “they that thinke so dreame, for my beleefe is, no such thing can be” (I.i.291-2). His illusion suddenly shatters when Robert tells him about his mistress’ frequent and suspicious outings that occur unchaperoned, “commonly when you are abroad, and sometimes when you are full of businesse at home”(II.i.710-11). To confirm his claims, Robert agrees to become the eyes of his master and gather more concrete evidence. The plot thickens to reveal details of her secret life/desire.

In light of this new knowledge (though unconfirmed), Mr. Generous’ faith in his wife and her “unquestion’d carriage” (II.i.718) starts to waver as he thinks that his wife might have cuckolded him. Though he entrusts Robert to probe further, he still believes in her innocence until his manservant catches her in the act. The errant wife is confronted and she confesses to a flabbergasted husband of her “shady” life as a witch. In response, Mr. Generous converts to believing about witchcraft (more so when Robert arranges for Mr. Generous to witness his wife’s shape-shifting to provide ocular proof of her secret life), and its rites to “the works of the black Fiend” (IV.i.1750). He is disgusted especially at the thought that he “must lye so often and so long with a Divell in [his]

bosome!"(IV.i.1821-2). Mrs. Generous tearfully pleads for forgiveness and swears to mend the error of her ways in a repentant speech:

(If you looke on me with charitable eyes)
Tinctur'd in blood, blood issuing from the heart
Sir I am sorry; when I looke towards Heaven
I beg a gracious Pardon; when on you
Me thinks your Native goodnesse should not be
Lesse pittifull than they: 'gainst both I have err'd,
From both I beg atonement. (IV.i.1790-6)

In supposedly one of the most touching scenes of the play, Mr. Generous magnanimously forgives her, thus reclaiming his identity as a husband. Her remorse removes the "cancer" that has infected the household; and power and order take their rightful places in the Generous household again. However, one cannot help but have lingering doubts at the ease and sincerity of Mr. Generous' pardon, and, true to patriarchal form, Mr. Generous still harbours suspicion and asks Robert to continue spying on his wife. The loss of faith is hardly a surprise.

Mrs. Generous fakes repentance and apology to regain her master's confidence in her and the marriage. The effort and resourcefulness displayed tells of the survival instincts of a courageous woman who is adamant to defend her secret life that can never exist alongside her marital life:

Some passionate words mixt with forc't tears
Did so inchant his eyes and eares. (IV.i.2046-7)

In convincing him, she maintains a secure and comfortable lifestyle, avoids brushes with the judiciary system and even the mayhem of confronting self-righteous neighbours.

Unknown to her, Mr. Generous' continued surveillance on his wife eventually traces her movements to an illicit midnight meeting with coven members. Landing on an opportunity to catch her red-handed, Mr. Generous takes home his wife's severed hand

(obtained during a fight at his mill), symbolically signalling the severing of his marriage, and uses it to force a confession that ultimately results in a “gaol delivery”²⁶:

My heart hath bled more for thy curst relapse. (V.i.2526)

One of the obvious reasons for Mrs. Generous “transgression” lies in her lack of identity in her husband’s world, a fact that certainly creates waves of discontentment. Ironically, even the hired help has a name of his own, whereas she is just Mrs. Generous, not Mary, not Elizabeth — just abbreviated Mrs. Generous, the woman who belongs to the Generous household. Her acquired status deprives her of a basic possession — her name, thus even the idea of asserting her identity becomes an impossibility. Besides that, the play does little to highlight her person. Other than her escapades and coven activities, little else is known about her.

How does Mrs. Generous resolve her predicament? She takes steps to extend her identity outside the home, whilst maintaining her status as wife of Mr. Generous. Discounting cuckoldry, the pejorative label “witch” comes, almost always, when a wife steps out of the domestic domain to pursue her own interests. Diane Purkiss asserts: “Having a reputation for witchcraft is seen as something which is done to women, not something they do. Woman involved in witchcraft entered vigorously into a struggle to control the meaning of their own lives”²⁷. Losing the struggle to determine how they are perceived ultimately means being subsumed by patriarchal imperatives. In Mrs. Generous’ case, she chooses the harrowing battle to co-exist between the woman she wants to be whilst maintaining patriarchally defined identity without her husband’s knowledge. In this, Mrs. Generous shows strength of character to clear a path that belongs entirely to her. As an individual, her pursuit of interest outside home changes her

being. The expansion of self that comes as result of redefining identity proves a gratifying reward that cannot be obtained elsewhere.

Away from home, Mrs. Generous is identified as the mistress of her “coven” and is respected and sought after for advice, “the Lady of the feast is come, welcome, welcome” (IV.i.1551) Together, the women forge a bond that allows a connection outside of the strictures of male guardianship. She avoids being entirely diminished in a world that re-iterates that “wifely submission” that “has become a matter of common sense and convention” and where “she is to make (the) best of what is settled by law and custom, and not vainly imagine that it will be changed for”²⁸ her sake. In the coven, she speaks, laughs, and sings in different volumes and tones — quite remarkable for someone who is a shadow of herself at home, silent and subservient. Mrs Generous’ “love affair” with the coven allows a space for her to explore, re-create or just be a woman in her own right.

In the end, when the authorities catch up with her double life, Mrs. Generous, admirably, displays no remorse, only regret for getting apprehended. She displays one last act of courage and defiance in refusing to satisfy the curiosity of the authorities and recount information of her double life, “I will say nothing, but what you know, you know” (V.i.2795). Reckless in courage but waning in spirit, Mrs. Generous surrenders: “And as the law shall finde me let it take me” (V.i.2796).

In the play, Mr. Generous takes centre stage as the devoted husband, forgiving and fair in disposition — the figure of a “perfect” husband (by patriarchal standards of course). His character professes a level of liberalism that extends to disbelieving the “hocus pocus” of witchcraft, and this significantly sets him apart from most male characters of early modern plays:

They that thinke so dreame,
For my beliefe is, no such thing can be. (I.i.291-2)

Despite being a “wonderful” husband, he finds his wife’s deviant ways baffling. He cannot comprehend her behaviour, but it motivates a change of beliefs. Why does he change?

Mr. Generous disowns Mrs. Generous due to a threatened sense of manhood and dignity. His “investment” in her has proved a failure. The next move would be to surrender her to “the talons of authority” (V.i.2697) to avoid being implicated in the web of deceit. After all, most men associated with witchcraft are related to convicted witches, a husband or son found guilty by association. It serves his best interests to publicly disown his witch of a wife and cut his losses:

Up, make you ready; I must deliver you
Into the hand of Justice. (V.i.2531-2)

Mr. Generous’ newfound conviction in witchcraft professed publicly staves of possible accusation on himself. It also sets the groundwork for his crumbling marriage; admitting defeat to the invincible devil at least allows him to cling to some sense of dignity, for which mortal husband can fight the odds against the lure of Lucifer towards women (who generally possess an inherent inclination towards evil). Therefore disassociating from an unruly wife salvages his reputation and worth as a husband. Also, accusing his wife of betrayal cushions his own failure at practicing an effective guardianship/control of his wife, and simultaneously absolves his guilt for spouse abandonment. Assuming the role of patriarchal mouthpiece (for personal reasons), he strips her bare of status and reputation (obtained as Mrs. Generous) and puts an end not only to her attempts at extending and shaping an identity, but also to her life. The magnitude of her loss

compared to her “crimes” clearly transcends logic and justice, but such is life for a woman in early modern Europe.

Ironically, right to the end, Mr. Generous never once bothers to question his wife's relapse. Her motives for resorting to witchcraft remain hidden, never questioned, never understood. Here, Mr. Generous perfectly exemplifies the ignorance of husbands who have little knowledge of their wives as individuals, as women. In this, Mr. Generous who subscribes to patriarchal principals, shares the blame for wanting to exert control over a person whom he has little or no insight about. No matter how much he pretends to be liberal or protective of womenfolk, it amounts to suppression since he cannot accept Mrs. Generous as anyone but the person who runs his household business. He fails to understand his contribution in Mrs. Generous' “deviation”. He betrays his wife and marriage when he does not extend the compassion and understanding that one would expect from a man so popularly known for his generosity. It was more convenient and safer to cast out rather than confront a troublesome wife.

The Witches/Women

In this section, I will explore the so-called subversive activities “encouraged if not initiated by the devil, and intended to thwart the divine order”²⁹ that brand Mrs. Generous and friends as dangerous witches. The Lancashire coven, with Mrs. Generous as the head, embraces an elevated form of playing pranks which Doughty brands as “home-spun medley” (I.i.480). Their magical conjuration destroys neither crops nor sours or curdles butter. For the benefit of amusing themselves, mischievous fun and pranks are played where no one gets harmed or hurt, although Doughty loathes and fears the brouhaha left

in their wake. For instance, Mal Spencer mutters spells to move a pail, and covers a long distance to London in a single evening to purchase Mr. Generous' Miter wine. Food magically "disappears" from Seely's feast, resulting in a comical confusion. Transporting the stolen goods to a feast of their own, we come to see how a private celebration "invokes the super-natural only to turn it into the human and homely"³⁰. Similar to today's "girls-night-out", the "witches" revel in simple pleasures of eating and drinking while recounting sexual rendezvous and various tricks played on others. Although earthy in nature, no elements of malignant intent can be dubbed behind the simple but daring stunts. Unlike Macbeth's grotesquely frightening hags or Hecate's fatal brew, Brome and Heywood's witches overindulge on food and party the night away with ballads: "Pul for the Poultry, foule and fish, for emptie shall not be a dish this meat is tedious, now some Farie, fetch what belongs unto the Dairie" (IV.i.1535-40), and other silliness. Having a laugh at the expense of foes is as far as they go for recreation. For instance, the witches reconvene one night to devise a prank involving the Seelys:

Meg: What new devise, what dainty straine
 More for own myrth now then our gaine
 Now let us laugh to thinke upon
 The feat which we have so lately done,
 In the distraction we have set
 In Seelyes house I which shall beget
 Wonder and sorrow 'mongst our foes
 Whilst we make laughter of their woes
 Gil: But to be short
 The wedding must bring on the sport. (II.i.526-66)

In another instance, Mrs. Generous engages supernatural elements to avenge her foolish nephew's misguided pride. A humorous scene transpires where the gallants (Arthur, Shakestone and Bantam), whose snobbish dismissal and bullying ways affect Whetstone badly, are charmed with false claims of paternity. Her theatrical endeavours: "Tis all for

mirth, we mean no hurt" (IV.i.2081), trick and confuse the gallants and inadvertently unmask their fragile egos, apparently quite a strange experience for the lads:

Shak: I faine would strike, but cannot.
Bant: Some strange fate holds me.
Arth: Here then, all anger end,
Let none be mad at what they cannot mend.
(IV.i.2245-8)

Lancashire residents, on the other hand, regard Mrs. Generous and her cohorts with contempt, especially as their spirit of play has them behaving in an uncomely manner. They exemplify unenlightened beings whose disruptiveness impedes a smooth running of the household domain. The Seely household, for example, experiences a chaotic reversal of hierarchy. Heywood and Brome highlight a subversion of patriarchal power where a state of anarchy rules. Believing the household bewitched, Doughty huffs and puffs, and firmly concludes witchery as the culprit without even investigating to substantiate his claims:

This is quite upside downe, the sonne controls the father, and the man
overcrowes his masters coxcombe, sure they are bewitched Sure all
the Witches in the Country, have their hands in this home-spun medley.
(I.i.479-80)

The Seely children and servants (whom are seen but not heard) usurp the role as new masters and treat the former head of the house as one beneath them, turning the tables on the very people who have ruled with iron fist and careless authority. A neighbour comments that "such rare disorder ... breeds pitty" (I.i.286-7), indicating how seriously a home "turn'd topsie turvy" (I.i.270) creates much chaos and detriment.

The play builds up further when the Boy (a character inspired by Edmund Robinson) claims to know the witches' identities. He tells a tale of being spirited off to a festive gathering in which he witnesses a dramatic event of shape shifting:

Now blesse me heaven, one of the Greyhounds turn'd into a woman, the
other into a boy! The lad I never saw before, but her I know well; it is my
gammer Dickinson. (II.i.955-7)

The boy observes a sabbat³¹ in all its glory — feminine sexuality, feasting and amusement. A great commotion follows the boy who captivates the crowd with sensational tales and heroic deeds, and he also divulges to Doughty (his godfather) the names of witches at the sabbat:

My Boy thou hast satisfied me in their names, and thy knowledge of the
women, their turning into shapes, their dog-trickes, and their horse tricks,
and their great Feast in the Barne But a little more of thy combat with
the Divell, I prithe; he came to thee like a Boy thou sayest, about thine
owne bignesse? (V.i.2315-21)

Quite obviously, the boy's testimony spurs the movement to exterminate the witches and this inflates his self-importance. Basking in this attention, the Boy feels no wrong has been committed since his testimony complements the adults' repulsion of the witches.

The Boy's act of self-interest is consistently shared by adult male characters whose wavering conviction ultimately motivates superstitious belief in witchcraft, despite initial scepticism in the "hocus pocus" of witchery. In the opening scene, Arthur, Shakstone and Bantam banter about trying to justify a session of rabbit hunting gone awry. Hunting of helpless animals has always been a field to boast about masculine prowess. Arthur claims witchery when a rabbit escapes his clutches, but his friends are sceptical:

Art: So you may call them
Chances, or crosses, or what else you please,
But for my part, I'll hold them prodigies
As things transcending nature.

Shak: Somewhat strange, but not as you inforce it.
(I.i.4-20)

The men mention witchcraft not because of their belief in it, but rather to protect their egos. Shakstone, suspicious, dismisses Arthur's excuse of witchery to gain leverage over him; both take opposite sides of the argument to defend their reputation and sense of masculinity.

There is another instance of threatened ego when Whetstone, the coxcomb, and his aunt, Mrs. Generous, conjure scenes to create doubts on the paternity of each gallant for constantly ridiculing him: "It is a way to call our wits in question, to have him seene amongst us" (I.i.77-8), leaving each of them physically shaken and emotionally vulnerable. To dissolve the feeling of inferiority, the gallants retaliate by reconfiguring their beliefs using witch accusations to discredit and condemn Whetstone and his aunt's scandalous claims. Only then can each feel at ease as their rightful paternity is reconfirmed. Avenging wounded pride, Arthur gleefully exposes Mrs. Generous' fraud and secretly revels in her capture as it tarnishes her reputation and exterminates any possibility of truth to her unsettling claims about his parents. Although the gallants represent sophistication of mind found lacking in the general populace, they possess fickle dispositions. When masculine pride comes under threat, saving their ego takes precedence over rational thought and behaviour (similar to Mr. Generous who gives in to pressure when his dignity as a husband and respected member of the society is "scandalized" by his wife).

Doughty is another character who oscillates between superstition and unconvincing scepticism. He firmly believes that witchcraft has haunted the Seely household into a state of disorder, only to change his mind when patriarchal order is

restored again: "I feare nothing that you have your wits againe" (III.i.1196-7) for "there is no such thing" as "sprite or goblin" (III.i.1344-5), and mocks others who do: "Art thou mad to dreame of Witchcraft?" (III.i.1375). Doughty looks to external factors to help deal with frustration over a failed love affair with Mal his mistress. As a self-defence mechanism, he self-righteously claims witchcraft as the only possible reason for failed attempts at love,

Witchery, witchery, more witchery, still flat and plaine witchery. Now do
I thinke upon the codpeece point the young jade gave him at the wedding;
Shee is a witch, and that was a charme, if there be any in the World
(IV.i.1904-7)

and still retains that air of indifference, to hide his wounded feelings and severely bruised ego from public eye. He even takes it upon himself to "worry all the Witches in *Lancashire*" (IV.i.2206-7) by disseminating "information" and organising to eradicate the witches in Lancashire.

Young or old, rich or poor, sophisticated or simple-minded, quite obviously the belief of witchcraft masks masculine anxieties and inner conflict. According to Lacan, a "vital patriarchal requirement of bolstering men's identity — their sense of potency and phallic power which cannot be sustained without women"³². That would mean women must be compelled to participate in the patriarchal order to maintain men's precarious hold of power, which explains the need to project women as defective, as it becomes, according to Toril Moi, "a defence against the thinking male subject's potentially devastating insight into his own lack"³³. To keep the female gender in submission, they are perpetually indoctrinated with concepts that divide and define the genders: man as powerful, woman as weak; man as godly, woman as evil and so on. Women become a site to project male lack and any feminine strength and potential must be "buried alive"³⁴

in full-bodied male culture. In further denigrating the female self, “the witch woman, unruly monster or whore”³⁵ are among the identities thrust forward to dissuade attempts of transgression. Obviously, conferring a bogus power to “phallicity” renders it an arbitrary element that ceases to have value if women come out of their roles blatantly or discreetly. Mrs. Generous sought to expand her role outside the home sphere, but no such development can be allowed to take place for fear of derailing the very foundation of patriarchal dogmas. The male characters, on the other hand, insist on vilifying women for weaknesses that lie within the former’s own hearts and minds. Various examples set by Mr. Generous, Arthur, Doughty demonstrate this.

In an entirely different situation, when witches pose little personal threat, men are not averse to exploiting their magical powers and sexual freedom. Whetstone provides the best example of wounded pride seeking revenge using magic. He turns the table against his tormentors (Arthur, Shakestone and Bantam), the gallants who bully and perpetually put him down. The advantage of being the nephew of a witch gives him an edge over the bullies, for he solicits her powers to conjure different paternity for them:

One morning, when your mothers husband rid early to have a *Nisi prius*
tryed at *Lancaster Syzes*, hee (the pedant) crept into his warme place, lay
close by her side, and then were you got.

(IV.i.2126-8)

In another instance, Robert (Mr. Generous hired help), does not seem too disturbed having a witch for a girlfriend, partly for the benefit of exploiting her sexually liberated ways (the conflation of witches and licentiousness has long been established), and even has her running some of his tedious errands:

Robin: I have yet to Lancaster to ride to night, and this my bandileer of
bottles, to fill tonight, and then halfe a score mile to ride by currie-
combe time, i’ morning, or the old man chides, Mal

Mal: Well Robert ... ile undertake you shal be at Lancaster, and twice as far, and yet at home enough, and be ruled by me.

(II.i.1021-3)

Loud hints of witchery fail to trigger Robert's anxiety about the phenomenon. At best, he is merely puzzled at her craft, but it does little in the way of jolting him out of his bawdy "revelry" with Mal. His attitude seems bizarrely liberal in a period that looks ominously at diabolical practices. Before long, however, something happens that enrages him. In persuading Mrs. Generous from leaving home (as ordered by her husband), she forces him to become the horse that transports her to the coven meeting. Upon recovering his wits, Robert quickly reports back to Mr. Generous to impart a minute-by-minute report of her blatant disregard of his authority:

And that's in plain *English* a Witch,
a grand notorious Witch.

(IV.i.1806)

Staying true to the hand that feeds him, Robert is also secretly delighted for being the catalyst that brings punishment upon his mistress, (the only acceptable avenue for him to punish her for mistreating him in a manner that degrades his masculine pride)

She will make me no more her journey-man...
and then away with the Witch.

(IV.i.1911)

The phrase "retrograde and preposterous" (I.i.272) from the play best describes the male gender that claims: "God hath given to the man great wit, bigger strength, and more courage to compell the woman to obey by reason"³⁶. Similar to Middleton's Sebastian (who solicits Hecate's magic) and Sir Arthur Clarington of Edmonton (infamous for sexual perversion), Robert and Whetstone's behaviour embody the hypocrisy and instability within the patriarchal body. Both men fail to uphold the moral code, but no punishment falls upon them, as would happen to women who commit

similar crimes. This fall from patriarchal “moral grace” remains unaddressed and untreated by patriarchal authorities, thus perpetuating a culture that blatantly practices double standards. But more importantly, it also creates a problematic relationship between rigid moral codes and masculine conflicts (such as Robert’s sexual incontinence and Whetstone’s inferiority complex) that remain irreconcilable and bring about much discontent within the masculine self. That this usually manifests itself in further victimisation of women cannot be overstated.

In conclusion, Heywood and Brome have dealt with the theme of witchcraft in a comedic setting. Although the typical witch figure represents disorder, in this play they essentially indulge in pranks and tricks that contain none of the malignant essence of witchcraft and devilry. The play also affords a glimpse into the changeability of human conviction under desperate circumstances. When one feels threatened, one would go as far as to lie to oneself, as a means of self-preservation. Witchcraft essentially served to hide frailties within the self (men) and, more importantly, the opportunity for self-discovery of personal identity (women). The latter occurs due to absence of legitimate ways to lead an autonomous and self-directed life. It cannot be denied that witchcraft accusations brought out the worst in human beings, but it also awakened the courage and resilience within women. In the face of adversity, they braved through various obstacles to create a space for self-exploration (as Mrs. Generous demonstrates), and just exult in the *jouissance* of being. Taking on the character of a witch becomes an empowering experience that liberates the feminine spirit. Patriarchal society reacted violently towards transgressive behaviour, but it did not totally hinder women from embracing the challenge to rise above patriarchal limitations. In the process of self-discovery, these

women lost much, their lives even, to the horrors of patriarchy. However, that personal journey achieves new realms of truth and reality (for women) that ultimately spell a great triumph for womanhood.

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- ¹ Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest For Moral Order (London: Methuen, 1979) 51.
- ² Ribner 50.
- ³ Ribner 53.
- ⁴ Ann Haaker, introduction, The Antipodes (London: Edward Arnold Publishers Ltd, 1966) xv.
- ⁵ Although comic relief in the play entertained the masses with “home-spun medley” (I.i.480), it contrasted starkly with the accused women still incarcerated, whose predicament provided entertainment and merriment.
- ⁶ 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) 106.
- ⁷ Diane Purkiss, Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations of Witchcraft (London: Routledge, 1996) 231.
- ⁸ Purkiss 231.
- ⁹ Heather Hirschfeld, “Collaborating Across Generations: Thomas Heywood, Richard Brome, and The Production of *The Late Lancashire Witches*,” Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies 30.2 (2000), 354. According to Herbert Berry, The Earl of Pembroke wished to discredit Archbishop William Laud (a man unconvinced of the occult) by requesting the witches, prosecuted in Lancashire in 1633, be presented as real and guilty using stage displays. However, the end work does not reflect the dramatists having totally complied with their patron’s wish, although patriarchal nuances in the play will be further discussed.
- ¹⁰ Hirschfeld 355. Tomkyns is the secretary of Sir Robert Phelps, one of the patrons of the play.
- ¹¹ Anthony Harris, Night’s Black Agents: Witchcraft and Magic in 17th Century English Drama (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980) 13. Thomas Potts was the clerk of the court during the famous case involving a vendetta between two families in the Forest of Pendle.
- ¹² Briggs 99. According to Briggs, this play is strongly impressed with details of the witch confessions and accusations. The speculation is, “[Heywood] must have worked upon a pamphlet giving full details of the trial, been present at it himself, or had copies of the depositions” (102).
- ¹³ Diane Purkiss, The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations (London: Routledge, 1996) 234.

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- ¹⁴ Purkiss 234. In 1633, a second witch-scare occurred in Lancashire with prosecution relying once more on a child's testimony - Edmund Robinson. His self-staging gained not only fame, but also some fortune for his family, at least until his popularity lasted.
- ¹⁵ Purkiss 234.
- ¹⁶ Purkiss 234.
- ¹⁷ Antonia Fraser, The Weaker Vessel: Woman's Lot In Seventeenth-Century England (London: Arrow Books, 1999) 1.
- ¹⁸ Fraser 5. According to Fraser, for those who do not marry, "common law met that problem blandly by not recognizing it. In the words of The Laws Resolutions: 'All of them are understood either married or to be married' ".
- ¹⁹ Kate Aughterson, Renaissance Women: Construction of Femininity in England (London: Routledge, 1995) 55.
- ²⁰ 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) 78.
- ²¹ Cullen Murphy, introduction, The Word According to Eve: Women and The Bible in Ancient Times and in Our Own, (England: Penguin, 1999) xiii.
- ²² Coudert 78.
- ²³ Coudert 78.
- ²⁴ Viviana Comensoli, 'Household Business': Domestic Plays of Early Modern England (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) 19. According to Comensoli, in England, the increasing fragmentation of the family unit that occurred especially from 1540-1640 alarmed church and state authorities. The blame fell on women again. Indirectly, however, the patriarchal system is revealing the weakness of its body by giving a much elevated status of power to the craft of witches. But, it also goes on to discount men's responsibility in building the desired family unit.
- ²⁵ Comensoli 110.
- ²⁶ Hirschfeld 361.
- ²⁷ Purkiss 145.

²⁸ N. H. Keeble, The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman (London: Routledge, 1994) 146.

²⁹ Comensoli 110.

³⁰ Hirschfeld 363.

³¹ Jeffrey Russell, A History of Witchcraft: Sorcerers, Heretics, and Pagans (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 37. According to Russell, "a strange picture of witchcraft was drawn by writers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries during the witch-craze". Witches' sabbat take place at night deep in the forest, cellar, cave or deserted heath. Coven members go to meetings on foot (for those living nearby), or rub their bodies with ointment that enables them to levitate, or fly off on animals or brooms. "If a neophyte is there, an initiation ceremony precedes the ordinary business of the meeting. The novice will be bound to the cult in such a way that he or she will find it difficult to withdraw She orally renounces the Christian faith and seals her apostasy by stamping on, or excreting on, a crucifix Next she adores the male master of the cult, the Devil or his representative, by offering him the obscene kiss on the buttocks. [An] assembly takes part in feasting and drinking. The witches enact a parody of the eucharistic feast, bringing in the bodies of children whom they have previously murdered After the feast The orgy commences each person takes the one next him in lascivious embrace. The encounters are indiscriminate When the orgy is concluded, the witches take ritual leave of their master and return home replete to join their sleeping spouses".

³² Rosalind Minsky, "Lacan: The Meaning of Phallus" Psychoanalysis and Gender (London: Routledge, 1996) 159.

³³ Minsky 160.

³⁴ Minsky 193.

³⁵ Minsky 160.

³⁶ Comensoli 22.

Conclusion

Early modern Europe witchcraft phenomenon has demonstrated the inner workings and interlinking of the genders' psyche, heart and behaviour. The complexity of this phenomenon is underlined by the vulnerability of men in contending and dealing with witchcraft. However, the power structure of patriarchy afforded a passage to look outward (at women) as a means of resolving/denying its deep-seated anxiety and frailty.

The defamation of the female gender as possessing an innate inclination for evil has motivated insurmountable abuse and violation against women under the guise of “purifying the body of Christ”¹:

They are more credulous.... women are naturally more impressionable ... more ready to receive the influence of a disembodied spirit... since they are weak, they find an easy and secret manner of vindicating themselves by witchcraft.... they are feebler in mind and body.... For as regards intellect, or the understanding of spiritual things, they seem to be of a different nature from men; a fact which is vouched for by the logic of the authorities, backed by various examples from the Scriptures. Terence says: Women are intellectually like children.²

Patriarchy's inability to define and understand the “other” sex culminated in a false perception of womanhood that inevitably broke down the tie and relationship between the genders. Witch-hunts, quite simply, was one of the maladies borne out of that ruptured relationship.

All three plays, The Witch, The Witch of Edmonton and The Late Lancashire Witches, illustrate the ways in which patriarchal power manipulates and oppresses women so as to hide its own inherent frailties. Patriarchal fundamentals/strictures demand a stoic adherence of man and woman to specific gender roles, a parasitic relationship where the former plays the role of dominator to the latter's forced subservience.

Undoubtedly, asserting such control functions to domesticate and manage the latent insecurity of patriarchy that, above all, fears possible threat to “the male monopoly in every sphere”³. In the process, women are alienated from their protectors. The husbands in the abovementioned plays fail to protect their wives. Antonio fails Isabella, Frank fails Winnifride and Susan, and Mr. Generous fails Mrs. Generous. Patriarchal “fathers” fail Mother Sawyer. The promise of patriarchy is repeatedly broken!

Closer analysis reveals the inability of the masculine body to reconcile desires of self with patriarchal demands pertaining to sexuality, morality, economy and social conventions. In other words, men fail to successfully assimilate patriarchal rules of conduct within themselves. Subsequently, the unresolved internal predicaments deter a complete construction of the masculine identity, resulting in a fragmented self. The typical reaction to disconnection with self does not seem to vary much (at least among the male characters in the plays). Either one becomes like Frank (although this is quite a rarity) or like Antonio, Sebastian, Sir Arthur Clarington, Doughty and Arthur along with his gentlemen friends. The death sentence that awaits Frank propels a battle with his inner demon through introspection and soul-searching. Only then could he recognise that much of the cruelty directed at the women in his life originated from a place within that harbours an acute sense of inadequacy. In this realisation, Frank is liberated from pressures of participating and perpetuating restrictive thoughts and ways of patriarchal institutions.

On the other end of the spectrum, the latter group forms a certain self-defence mechanism to insulate their conscience from immoral behaviour. Their lack of self-reflection compels them to resort to cowardly alternatives as means of escape when faced

with predicaments. Projecting guilt, inadequacies and personal shortcomings onto women and a relentless focus on false feminine flaws allow the illusion of patriarchal supremacy to survive for:

Men were protected from becoming witches not only by virtue of superior intelligence and faith, but because Jesus Christ, phallic divinity, died “to preserve the male sex from so great a crime: since He was willing to be born and to die for us, therefore He has granted to men this privilege”.⁴

In the wake of such injustice against women, a culture of double standards and hypocrisy thrives to further undermine and tyrannise women. Antonio rages at his wife for suspected cuckoldry whilst maintaining a relationship with a prostitute. Sir Arthur Clarington marries Winnifride to Frank with the perverse intent of continuing their sexual relations, and Doughty’s scepticism towards witchcraft transforms to a firm conviction just so to punish a lover who jilts him. Ultimately, witch-hunt is the extreme form of scapegoating women to conceal a flawed masculine self and dehumanised patriarchal body.

Michel Foucault observes that where “there is power, there is resistance”.⁵ The environment and situations described earlier justify the feminine unrest that rises to revolt against patriarchy. Women of the early modern period faced numerous obstacles in freely embracing their sexuality. The Malleus Maleficarum stigmatises feminine sexuality and asserts the demented notion that woman defines the “lust of the flesh. As it is said: I have found a woman more bitter than death, and a good woman subject to carnal lust”.⁶ Therefore, it comes as no surprise that even the virtuous Isabella is suspected of sexual debauchery and would have readily been punished (without any investigation) if not for the testimony of loyal servants. Hecate, on the other hand, personifies the reviled promiscuous being whose incestuous behaviour is made worse only by indulgences with

incubus. Patriarchal imagination persecutes women on the assumption that feminine sexuality knows no restraint and becomes the root of all evil.

Patriarchal economic machinations robbed women's ability to be financially independent, and demonised the esoteric knowledge and skills of healers as practising the ways of the devil (as illustrated by Hecate). By keeping them dependent financially, Mother Sawyer, The Duchess and Mrs. Generous are kept in leash to ensure they "behave". In doing that, lone women such as Mother Sawyer are displaced and left to fend for themselves by begging. And when even that becomes cumbersome, (more so when Mother Sawyer insists on reminding the failure of patriarchal economic system, they are abused and accused of being witches.

The biggest stumbling block for women living in a patriarchal society is the prohibition against pursuing individuality and feminine identity. There is infinite pressure for women to conform without question to patriarchal tenets of womanhood. However, in leading a virtuous life, an ever-present danger exists where women have to contend with male debauchery bent on scaling down those very feminine virtues. Isabella exemplifies this dilemma faced by women, when she encounters danger in the form of a vengeful ex-fiancée (who plots to compromise her) and a philandering husband who distrusts her chastity. Ironically, in the case of Isabella, the resistance to her virtue comes within the patriarchal body.

In a completely different scenario, another brand of resistance brews within the feminine body — the discontent and restlessness of oppressed women, regardless of whether they lead solitary lives or are under the control of male guardianship. No compromise or explanation is accepted for any attempt to cross or extend boundaries set

for women. The pejorative labels attached to these attempts include “deviants”, “transgressors”, “heretics” and “witches”, no punishment or torture is terrible enough if it means purifying the society of these “indigestible”⁷ elements. Women’s forays into witchcraft, have always been a highly discreet venture as, more often than not, no other avenue existed for exploration into the realm of the feminine self, at least for the majority of them. In humanising the dehumanised witches/women, we identify witchcraft as a site for marginalised and alienated women to exist. The motivation varies; women like Hecate appreciate and treasure the independence and self-sufficient way of life that negates the need for neither male supervision nor restriction. The likes of Mother Sawyer, stretched to breaking point by an apathetic and cruel community, cease to live in repression by taking charge of their fate and lives by embracing witchcraft. In this, Mother Sawyer moulds a new identity — one founded in newfound strength and courage. Mrs. Generous, on the other hand, pursues witchcraft to extend the stunted identity bestowed by her guardian.

Fundamentally, witchcraft appeals to the innate desire for freedom (a basic need in human beings) within women that would otherwise remain trapped and suppressed. By transgressing, the effort to locate feminine resilience and spirit allows them to free that inner voice that would surely fade amidst the constant barrage of patriarchal indoctrination. For once, coven sisters, young and old, share a mutual experience through activities that form a bond and strong sense of belonging. They are free to laugh, cry, shriek, moan and scream if it so pleases them. Emancipated from patriarchal constraints, each woman freely explores her sexuality without that wretched boundary that reduces the value of a woman to her procreative abilities. Perhaps feminine instinct understands

that only by stepping out of the private household domain can one create the space and opportunity to achieve self-discovery and empowerment — powerful aphrodisiacs of self-hood. It matters less whether a woman wants to discover or expand an identity, as long as she is out in the open, achieving new perspective and rewriting her consciousness, surely an experience that gives new meaning to life. Considering the circumstances surrounding women of early modern period, this event of discovering one's identity could be termed as "self-born"⁸, a new conception of self and spirit that counters anonymity and object-status (imposed by patriarchy). Although these efforts are looked upon in disdain and repulsion, and the price for those choices are high, women of courage, despite fearing for their lives, will always stand up and take the risk to answer the call of freedom — the call to herself, even if she has to be called that wretched name — the witch.

¹ 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.

² Andrea Dworkin, Woman Hating ((New York: A Plume Book, 1974) 132.

³ Daly 184.

⁴ Dworkin 130.

⁵ Lawrence D. Kritzman, ed., Michel Foucault: Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings 1977 – 1984 (New York: Routledge, 1990) 122.

⁶ Dworkin 131.

⁷ Daly 184.

⁸ Roger Housden, "The Journey," The Oprah Magazine July. 2001: 34