Witchcraft plays 1587-1635: a psychoanalytical approach

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Witchcraft Plays 1587-1635:
A Psychoanalytical Approach

by

Katherine Woods

Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the award of

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A Note on Quotations and References

Where modern critical editions are not available, I quote from the first published edition of the poetry and prose of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Because it represents a convenient landmark edition representing what his fellow poets, dramatists, and actors considered the collected dramatic works of Shakespeare, I quote his plays from the 1623 First Folio, without meaning to assert that it always represents the most theatricalised versions of them. These quotations are given in their original forms except for the modernization of the long letter s and disregard for ligatures. I offer the date of first performance in brackets after the title of the play in question according to the Database of Early English Playbooks (Farmer and Lesser 2007-) because of the emphasis on performance in this thesis. For non-dramatic works I offer the date of composition when different from that of publication. Because English lacks a gender-neutral pronoun, I will follow conversational English in employing "their" as a singular pronoun referring to a person of either gender.
Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis employs psychoanalytical theory to investigate the experience of watching a witch character on the early-modern stage. Enriching this theoretical perspective with theatre-history knowledge, I illustrate how a psychoanalytical approach disrupts the critical emphasis on antithesis found in studies of witchcraft. Witches found on the stage in the seventeenth century are geographically liminal, ambivalent, grotesque, dangerous and powerful. When male characters practise magic they are characterized in a very different way. Female witches are relentlessly associated with boundaries and margins, and a theoretical approach enables an investigation of the cultural and psychological implications of marginal spaces.

I focus specifically on representations of female witches on the English stage between 1587 and 1635 which allows me to trace the character of the witch from almost the opening of the first theatre in 1576 to shortly before the closure of theatres in 1642. I investigate the female witches of the early-modern English stage: the hag, the prophetess, the bewitching slut and the wise woman. The environment of early-modern theatres provided an arena for the interplay of subjectivities, and it is this unique atmosphere that informs my readings of the witch plays. My analysis of drama is shaped by an understanding of the conditions in the amphitheatres, indoor playhouses and
university halls in which the plays were performed, and, among others, I draw upon the work of Andrew Gurr and Tim Fitzpatrick for this information (Gurr 1992; Fitzpatrick 1999). Representations of male magicians and other supernatural characters are excluded. While these character types may provide a useful category for comparison, my work focuses on how mobile and contagious anxieties of the period were embodied in male fantasies of the female witch. Of course, such stereotypes do not correspond with the cross-section of people who were accused of witchcraft in the period (Purkiss 1996, 2-3). I investigate the gap between the reality of witchcraft persecution and the theatrical representation of the phenomenon and chart the stereotypes and communal fantasy processes that produced the theatrical witch.

Although my study focuses on a set number of plays that contain a certain character type, my use of the term fantasy is not intended to imply a genre or topic. Neither can fantasy be considered simply in opposition to reality as there was a general and widespread belief in the existence and power of witchcraft in the early-modern period. Fantasy, in my analysis, refers to ‘a staging of desire, and thus directly involve[s] in the constitution of a subject’s identity’ (De Lauretis 1995, 64). I consider how the theatrical frame constructed and contributed to the fantasy of the witch. I investigate the early-modern theatres as physical and ideological spaces in which day-to-day symbolic codes were put aside and subversive and fantastical ideas could be explored. The theatrical frame removed the fantasy from essential female
experiences and imposed patriarchal levels of meaning constructed and perpetuated by scholars of witchcraft, pamphleteers, playwrights and actors. This process represents an artificial and historically specific reflection of the process that some feminist writers see as intrinsic to social structures (Cixous 1975; Irigaray 1985). They call for a re-thinking of the language of signification in order to re-introduce the feminine into constructions of meaning. This thesis explores the patriarchal fantasy of the feminine as it is complicated by witches, who often held the power afforded by the phallus. By drawing attention to the structures that enclosed the feminine and the points at which these structures revealed their vulnerability, I hope to further a feminist agenda.

1.1 The Mind/Body Problem

Catherine Belsey identifies the early-modern period as a point of tension between competing theories of the subject: the medieval concept of the discontinuous and fragmented self, and the emerging humanist notion of the unified, self-reflective subject (Belsey 1985). For Belsey, the self was at a point of flux during the early-modern period, and the witchcraft plays of the period support this view. An investigation of those characters who visit witches illustrates that witchcraft emerges when subjectivity is in question. Attempts by characters to assert any degree of autonomy are thwarted when they are drawn irresistibly to witches. Assertions of intent, such as when
Almachildes in Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) announces ‘I will to the witches’, are undermined as it is clear to the audience that the drives luring characters to witchcraft have very little to do with ‘will’. In the case of Almachildes, the pun on ‘will’ implies that he is subject to his desire:

**ALMACHILDES**
Sweet venery be with thee, and I at the tail
Of my wish! I am a little headstrong, and so
Are most of the company. I will to the witches.
They say they have charms and tricks to make
A wench fall backwards, and lead a man herself
To a country-house some mile out of town,
Like a fire-drake: There be such whoreson kind girls
And such bawdy witches, and I’ll try conclusions.
(Middleton 2007, *The Witch* 1.1.88-95)

Almachildes, ‘at the tail / Of [his] wish’, is subject to a force that is distinct from his will. Tail, a euphemism for penis, also means to trap or ensnare (OED “tail” v.3), and Almachildes’s position highlights the anxiety associated with the question of autonomy. Sebastian, in the same play, experiences a despair so consuming that he is drawn to Hecate against his will, his religion and his identity:

**SEBASTIAN**
Heaven knows with what unwillingness and hate
I enter this damned place. But such extremes
Of wrongs in love fight gainst religious knowledge
As numberless as creatures that must die
I could not shun the way. I know what ’tis
To pity madmen now
(Middleton 2007, *The Witch* 1.2.107-113)
Sebastian’s empathy with ‘madmen’ implies that his will has been displaced; he has lost control over his decision-making and is unable to assert the will to ‘shun the way’ to witchcraft.

The sense of inevitability evoked by Sebastian’s ‘I could not shun the way’ is mirrored throughout the theatre of witchcraft. In John Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605), Syphax visits a witch because ‘A wasting flame feedes on my amorous bloud / Which wee must coole or dye’ (Marston 1606). Like Almachildes, Syphax is subject to his desire and feels he has no choice but to turn to witchcraft. In Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), autonomy over decision-making is displaced onto the environment:

Enter Gloster Solus.

Now, Gloster, in this still and silent wood,
Whose vnfrequented pathes do lead thy steps
Vnto the dismall caue of hellish fiends;

(Armin 1615, E4r)

Gloster’s uncouth and solitary surroundings not only mirror his wretched psychological state, but they also influence his actions in that they ‘lead [his] steps’ to the witch’s lair. The influence of environmental factors is also implied in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601):

[HAMLET]
'Tis now the verie witching time of night,
When Churchyards yawne, and Hell it selfe breathes out Contagion to this world. Now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter businesse as the bitter day Would quake to looke on.

(Shakespeare 1623, pp1r)
Gail Kern Paster argues that this passage in *Hamlet* reveals the humoral body’s susceptibility to environmental factors and that Hamlet’s proclamation derives, in part, from the influence exerted on his body by midnight and the exhalations of the churchyard (Paster 2004, 56).

Subjectivity is tenuous in these examples. Hamlet boasts that he could ‘drink hot blood’ thereby altering the temperature and balance of fluids in his body as well as his behaviour and resolve. Gloster also sees the benefit of hot blood:

[GLOSTER]
banish that thred-bare thought
Of Vertue,
Which makes vs men so senseless of our wrong,
It makes vs beare the poysnon of each tongue.
No, Gloster, no; he, whose meeke bloud’s so coole
To beare all wrongs, is a religious foole:
(Armin 1615, E4r)

In these examples, the body is presented as fluid, porous and susceptible to external factors. According to Galenic theory, the humoral balance of an individual predisposed them to a certain identity type. The temperaments into which all people could be classified were sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic (Paster 2004). The melancholic was the identity type most often associated with witchcraft. Although James I devoted a chapter of his *Daemonologie* to a rebuttal of the identification of witchcraft with melancholy (Stuart 1597, E2r-E4r), the association can be found in both dramatic and non-
dramatic works. Johann Weyer argued in *De Praestigiis Daemonum* (1563) that those claiming to be bewitched or believing themselves to be witches were deluded or melancholic (Weyer 1998). In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601), the Prince of Denmark, unable to believe his eyes, considers whether it is his melancholy that makes him susceptible to the devil:

```
[HAMLET]
The Spirit that I have seene
May be the Diuell, and the Diuel hath power
T’assume a pleasing shape, yea and perhaps
Out of my Weaknesse, and my Melancholly,
As he is very potent with such Spirits,
Abuses me to damne me
(Shakespeare 1623, Oo4v)
```

The melancholic body is presented as porous and vulnerable to the powers of the devil. Frances Yates argues that melancholy was, as well as the most hateful, blackest and most sullen of the four humors, also connected to the highest kind of learning. In some strains of thought, the melancholic humor of religious seers, prophets and great thinkers was a sign of genius (Yates 2001, 60). Here an interesting comparison with the male witch may be considered, for Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1592), or Barnabe Barnes’s Pope Alexander of *The Devil’s Charter* (1606), may fit into the category of the inspired melancholic.

The problem of autonomy in the subject is addressed in the question of culpability. The prioritizing of the body and the psyche over will diminishes responsibility. The connection of witchcraft with melancholy provoked
Lambert Daneau to encourage caution when determining the guilt of the witch (Daneau 1575, D5r). For many writers in the period, culpability in witchcraft and the identity of the witch were concerned with the rational choice to engage in practices of the devil. James I, for example, argued that children were exempt because they had not developed the intellectual capacity or reason to refuse the devil (Stuart 1597, L3v). William Perkins argued that those who suffered from madness did not fit the identity of the witch: ‘two sorts of people are expressly excluded from being Witches. First, such as be tainted with phrenzy or madnes or are through weaknesse of the braine deluded by the devill’ (Perkins 1610, L5v). In Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601), the title character presents himself as a victim of madness: ‘Then *Hamlet* does it not, *Hamlet* denies it: / Who does it then? His Madnesse? If’t be so, / *Hamlet* is of the Faction that is wrong’d’ (Shakespeare 1623, pp6v). Such diminished culpability is also found in debates regarding witchcraft. Jean Bodin (1580) went as far as to suggest that the witch was a victim within the crime of witchcraft: ‘of all the sins which entail their own penalty ... there is none which punishes its victim more cruelly, nor longer than witchcraft, which takes revenge both on the soul and the body’ (Bodin 1995, 173). Following this argument, Bodin suggested that the death penalty should be seen as a cure rather than a punishment.

The possibility of sympathy presented in early-modern scholarly tracts perpetuates an image developed in the medieval period of feminine weakness
drawing women to witchcraft. Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger’s *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) is perhaps the most notorious work on witchcraft of the period, and it lingers over the reasons why women were enticed by the devil. The authors claim that women were more impressionable, credulous and weak and so more susceptible to the powers of the devil (Sprenger and Kramer 1928, 43). The debate on gender in reference to witchcraft continued into the early-modern period when Perkins argued that ‘the woman being the weaker sexe, is sooner intangled by the deuills illusions with this damnable art, then the man’ (Perkins 1610, L4v).

The characters drawn to witchcraft in the theatre of the period embody the tension between the images of subjectivity suggested by Belsey. At times we see a strand of self awareness, when characters appear to make a conscious choice to alter their body and engage with witchcraft. At other times, the individual is presented as fragmented: subject to the environment, passions and desires that are presented as distinct from will. We see a drive which produces behaviours and which, despite a pervasive focus on interiority and self-analysis, is largely unknowable to those characters subjected to it. Gloster, Sebastian and Almachildes in the examples above are unable to sufficiently understand or articulate what draws them to witchcraft. Gaps appear in narratives of self-knowledge, and these gaps are filled in the plays by a fantasy produced by a repressive patriarchal regime. The tension between self-knowledge and self-estrangement in these plays, and the thwarting of
attempts to assert autonomy, throws into view the realm of the unconscious and creates a focus on the threat of what is unknowable in the self. When the subject is presented as ambivalent in these plays, witchcraft emerges. Anxiety and ambivalence are central to the figure of the witch, who is fantasized as unknowable and liminal. Christopher Pye describes his interest in the ‘limit-points of symbolization where ... the cultural and sexual contours of the early modern subject come into view’ (Pye 2000, 13). Pye’s interest in the cultural and sexual elements of early-modern subjectivity highlights a relationship that is important to my thesis as I do not mean to assert a universal or transhistorical subject by drawing on psychoanalytical theory. We shall see how the cultural landscape participated in the sexual anxieties and preoccupations of the individual because images of castration, phallic maternity and phallic symbols existed long before Freud theorized them. Witches harbour a threat which reveals the perceived weakness engendered by lack of autonomy. The witch we encounter represents an extreme expression of patriarchal anxieties about women: she is fantasized as evil, liminal, dangerous, castrating, phallic, grotesque and bewitching. We shall see how the fantasies theorized by Freud were present in cultural imagery in the early-modern period, a time that equated power with genitality when women were silenced on account of their perceived threat.
1.2 The Witch as Other

In the theatre of witchcraft, we see a tendency to construct witches as a representation of otherness. In Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), the witch’s home, and by extension the witch herself, is described in terms of what it is not: ‘A habitation, not for God, nor men’ (Goffe 1633, D3r). The positioning of witches as other to constructions of legitimacy has been highlighted by socio-historians (Ginzburg 2002; Stratton 2007). Justyna Sempruch suggests that ‘The archetypal “witch”, simultaneously a particular and peculiar representation of “woman” in Western history and culture, offers one of the most spectacular and complex metaphors for identification with difference’ (Sempruch 2008, 2). Such othering enables a process of scapegoating, which is referred to in Reginald Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) and dramatized so tragically in Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621). It is through the symbolic process of categorization that Elizabeth Sawyer is originally transformed into a witch. She is the economic, social, domestic and familial other. Poor, lonely and infertile, her contribution to society is to symbolically represent what the rest of society is not. In this scenario, the other can be seen as one half of a self/other dichotomy: something external to the self or the community.
The extensive writing on witchcraft in the period positioned witchcraft as other to structures of legitimacy. King James, in his pamphlet on the subject, places witchcraft and the Devil in binary opposition to God:

Doubtleslie who deneyth the power of the Deuill, woulde likewise deny the power of God, if they could for shame. For since the Deuill is the verie contrarie opposite to God, there can be no better way to know God, then by the contrarie; as by the ones power (though a creature) to admire the power of the great Creator: by the falshood of the one to consider the trueth of the other, by the injustice of the one, to consider the Iustice of the other: And by the cruelty of the one, to consider the mercifulnesse of the other: And so foorth in all the rest of the essence of God, and qualities of the Deuill. (Stuart 1597, H3v-H4r)

Scholarly debate on witchcraft identified, prosecuted and punished witches as other. In the theatre, however, witches often represent a projection of the individual’s internal thoughts or desires. Macbeth, in Shakespeare’s play, admits that the witches ‘shake ... [his] single state of Man’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r), implying a divide in the subject. As we shall see in Chapter Four, the other represented by witchcraft is located within for Macbeth and is part of the process of subjectivity.

The witchcraft plays of the period blur boundaries between the internal and external other. The other is identifiable as a figure against which the individual and the community can define itself: something external, demonized and persecuted on account of the threat of difference. The hatred and fear engendered by these others point to the discomforting acknowledgement that the other is a projection of something ‘that has been
estranged only by the process of repression’ (Freud 1955b, 234). The other represented in the witchcraft plays exposes the interior/exterior binary as fallible and fluid. What emerges is a model of the subject which is both social—constructed, shaped and reshaped by social practices and structures—and psychological, with a personal history and individual psyche. The paradox of the position of the other, as both internal and external, is reflected in the theatre of witchcraft in the problem of the boundary, a place characterized by power and danger (Douglas 2002).

The preoccupation with boundaries in witchcraft plays and mythology indicates that the critical emphasis on inversion in the studies of witchcraft needs to be rethought. This emphasis has often centred on issues of gender (Whitney 1995; Willis 1995; Smith 2007). For these critics, the stories of witches stealing penises represent a symptom of the feminine usurpation of male dominance and constructed the witch as the antithesis of the perfect woman presented in the conduct pamphlets of the period. Historians of the witch trials, such as Lyndal Roper and Deborah Willis, consider legal documents, pamphlet literature and religious tracts in an attempt to discover why women were more often accused of witchcraft than men. Roper argues that in early-modern Germany, those accused of witchcraft were often lying-in-maids because they were considered to be the antithesis of the mother. She argues that because lying-in-maids were often infertile, they were thought to be envious and malicious and argues that accusations were to do with
psychosexual anxieties about maternity (Roper 1994, 214-215). Roper’s study calls for a focus on the body in corporeal terms and an acknowledgement that bodies felt pain and desire in ways that superseded mediation (Roper 1994, 21). This approach has influenced my own because the theatre provided a particular focus on bodies and subjectivity as individuals in the audience reacted with and responded to bodies as signs on the stage. My focus on theatrical representations, rather than trial records, allows for an investigation of the additional levels of patriarchal mediation allowed by the theatre and the processes of fantasy that participated in the theatrical witch.

Willis draws on play texts as well as historical records and argues that the witch was overwhelmingly associated with perverse and malevolent maternity. Willis argues that in the theatres witches are gender transgressors, although this is not necessarily true of those actually accused of witchcraft in the period (Willis 1995, 9). Willis’s identification of the gap between theatricality and reality usefully draws attention to patriarchal mediation and fantasy. Willis’s examples, almost exclusively from the plays of Shakespeare, illustrate how witches were the antithesis of the good mother (Willis 1995, 167). For Diane Purkiss, the impact of the witch plays was to widen the gap between the binaries that structured meaning and to ‘help to fix the valuelessness of the negative term in each binarism’ (Purkiss 1996, 183). These studies depend on the language of polarization; in contrast, the readings of the witch plays that follow show that horror is produced through the collapse of binaries.
Fantasies of witchcraft did not present an inversion of gendered codes but rather a subversion of the symbolic structure that renders these codes possible. Hierarchical structures are undermined through inversion, but the merging of categories of signification points to the dissolution of the structure, and it is this that produced instances of horror in the fantasy of witchcraft. I illustrate how the story of witches stealing penises reveals fantasies and anxieties which posit a powerful and dangerous woman participating in subjectivity. We shall see, through an investigation of the witch plays, that this maternal figure is fantasized as both castrating and phallic.

1.3 Crossing Boundaries

This thesis demonstrates that witches on the early-modern stage relentlessly cross boundaries. They operate in liminal spaces: in caves and isolated woods on the outskirts of the community. Although these spaces are characterized in the play texts in some detail, there remains a large portion of the unknowable. The witches’ space is developed around a boundary which sets up a distinction between the interior of the witch’s lair and the external world where this lair is depicted. The crossing of this boundary is associated with great danger. This geographical boundary is reflected by an ideological one; the witch is depicted as culturally and morally other but also crosses the boundary that maintains her position as other to the dominant, patriarchal order. The boundary of the body is also vulnerable to witches who penetrate corpses and draw fluids out
from within. This tendency to cross and so threaten boundaries is part of that which produces horror.

When characters encounter witches they invariably describe their feelings in relation to the body. Orestes, in Thomas Goffe’s play, describes how ‘my soule hath lost / His humane function, at this hellish sight’ (Goffe 1633, E1r), and Macbeth describes the image of the witches, ‘Whose horrid Image doth vnfixe my Heire, /And make my seated Heart knock at my Ribbes’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r). The language of splitting and fragmentation points towards a split in the subject. The split experienced by both Macbeth and Orestes allows a realization of fears and imaginings which the plays depict as having lain dormant. The witches know and unleash ‘black and deepe desires’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1v). They represent a projection of the other that is located within, and this other crosses the boundary of repression.

The stranger within is theorized by Freud in his essay on the uncanny and refers to the repressed drives of the oedipal complex (Freud 1955b). The concept of the uncanny is at the core of my approach because it acknowledges the double nature of subjectivity. The uncanny refers to the feelings initiated by a revelation of repressed desires and anxieties. Macbeth’s ‘black and deep desires’ are unwieldy: he is unsatisfied with the series of murders he commits in his attempt to achieve them. The stranger within is ambivalent, dangerous and often insatiable in these plays. In Freud’s definition, the uncanny is
concerned with, amongst other things, the unknown coming to light: a revelation of something that is familiar yet unfamiliar (Freud 1955b, 224-225). According to Freud, the uncanny ‘is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is ... In other words, there is a doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self’ (Freud 1955b, 234). Doubling, repetition and the merging of familiar and unfamiliar forms recur in witch plays, and the following chapters illustrate how witchcraft on the early-modern stage was characterized by the uncanny.

We also see in *Macbeth*, as in many witchcraft plays of the period, a re-animation of the dead (Shakespeare 1623, mm6v), another uncanny trope. In Thomas May’s *Antigone*, written in 1627 but not produced on stage and so, because of the emphasis on performance, not studied in detail in this thesis, the witch instructs her companion to ‘Apply your ointments to the body, whilst I / Prepare, and speake a charme shall quickly call / Th’ affrighted soule backe to his mansion’ (May 1631, D2r). At the appearance of the apparition, Creon describes the ambiguous line between life and death: ‘The face retaines pale death; yet seemes to liue’ (May 1631, D2v). Such apparitions represent a collapse of the boundaries between inanimate and animate, or life and death, and this collapse contributes to the uncanny nature of the witch and her activities. The repeated image of re-animated corpses suggests that more focus should perhaps be attributed to the doll, Olympia, in E.T.A. Hoffman’s *The Sandman* than Freud does in his reading of the story to illuminate his
theories. Hélène Cixous argues that Olympia is uncanny in the extreme because she points to the ambiguous nature of categories of identification (Cixous 1976). Barbara Creed argues that in Freudian theory the uncanny is almost exclusively male because it centers on the paternal castrator (Creed 2005). The witch plays disrupt the masculine privilege of castration because female witches, in these plays, castrate and threaten patriarchy. For Creed, Cixous and other post-Lacanian theorists, the uncanny is produced by that which represents a threat to the symbolic order by dissolving the borders between categories of identification.

1.4 The Castrating Witch

In Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), Master Generous describes his crisis in subjectivity when he discovers that his wife is a witch:

```
Gen[erous] My blood is turn’d to Ice, and my all vitals
Have ceas’d their working! dull stupidity
Surpriseth me at once, and hath arrested
That vigorous agitation; Which till now
Exprest a life within me: I me thinks
Am a meere Marble statue, and no man;
Unweave my age O Time, to my first thread;
Let me loose fiftie yeares in ignorance spent:
That being made an infant once againe,
I may begin to know, what? or where am I
To be thus lost in wonder.
(Heywood and Brome 1634, G4v)
```
Generous wants to return to a time of infant incompetence and dependency. Generous’s speech supports Willis’s argument that witches were often constructed as maternal because this relationship represented a time when the normal gendered power hierarchy was inverted and young boys were subject to their mothers: ‘the witch or witch-like woman is one who can make the adult male feel he has been turned back into a child again’ (Willis 1995, 6). This speech also contains implications of horror and desire. Generous’s body is stiffened and frozen. He imagines himself as a marble statue and his blood hardened to ice. This language of hardening and stiffening in reference to the body implies an erection, and would have done so for contemporary audiences given how richly allusive the language is within these plays. The effects of witchcraft produce a crisis in subjectivity, and the erection references illicit desire for a dangerous woman who participates in the construction of subjectivity. The witch is a figure of desire and treachery, and the illicit desire is punished. Despite the erection, there exists the implication of impotence and castration. Generous’s ‘vitals have ceased their working’; his announcement that he is ‘no man’ indicates that, despite the stiffening, Generous experiences castration anxiety. Freud describes how the castration complex transforms the murderous wish against the father into an anxiety that the child will be punished for mutinous and incestuous desire towards the mother in the form of genital mutilation (Freud 1959, 217). Female witches have a complex relationship with penises in early-modern fantasies. They
steal them, obtain the power afforded by them, have penis substitutes and cease their working. For Freud, the acquisition of the knowledge that women do not have a penis confirms castration anxiety. This knowledge jars with the belief that she once did have a penis and recurs in symbols later in life, which stand in for castration anxiety. These symbols resonate in the theatre of witchcraft.

We see in Generous’s speech a troubling of Freudian categories. Freud suggests that the erection produces a safeguard against castration anxiety or a comforting reminder that the protagonist has a penis (Freud 1964, 213). In Generous’s speech, however, the allusion to the erect penis signifies that which much be punished through castration. Generous’s admission that he is ‘no man’ is symptomatic of the culture that equated power with genitality. Unable to prevent his wife’s transgression, Generous has failed to display the power appropriate to his genitals and his position as a patriarch and husband. The loss experienced by Generous refers simultaneously to the genitals and to an imaginary wholeness of being. He imagines his ignorance as infancy: he is returned to a time of childlike bewilderment and dependency as his symbolic position of an authoritative male is undermined. Jacques Lacan’s critical employment of the term castration shifts the emphasis of loss. Castration, for Lacan, is connected to the symbolic lack not of the genital organ but of the phallus (Lacan 1977c, 282). Generous’s lack is brought about by a culture that
equated power with genitality, and Lacan is a key thinker for collapsing the literal and metaphorical in relation to the penis.

The symbolic order is the order or discipline imposed by language and culture. The symbolic, in Lacan’s account, is constructed through a series of categories where meaning can only be understood in relation to other categories:

Through the word—already a presence made of absence—absence itself gives itself a name in that moment of origin ... And from this pair of sounds modulated on presence and absence ... there is born the world of meaning of a particular language in which the world of things will come to be arranged. (Lacan 1977a, 65)

Language, the source of subjectivity, is learnt from outside the individual and introduces an otherness into identity. Lacan’s re-elaboration of Freud enables a theorization of the gaps in signification. When the structure that forms identity, assigns social roles and dictates proper behaviour is revealed as arbitrary or unstable in the plays studied here, witchcraft emerges. Symbolic categories tend to fail in the representation of witches: they trouble usual distinguishing categories of male and female, moral and immoral, natural and supernatural, fertility and infertility and so forth. This troubling of categories highlights fallible points in the symbolic order: the patriarchal structure that enforces and perpetuates the repression of unconscious drives. Generous’s speech collapses the literal and the symbol; his failure in the social realm resonates in the sexual. Castration emerges as an anxiety that relates
simultaneously to the genitals and to a lack in the subject in symbolic terms. This approach is particularly illuminating for a study of the early-modern period because, as Lyndal Roper notes, ‘sixteenth-century culture can clearly be described as a phallic culture’ (Roper 1994, 94). Roper illustrates how images of the penis permeated high and low culture and contributed to the equation of power with the phallus in the period. To consider castration as relating simultaneously to the genitals and to a symbolic construction of manliness illuminates the recurring preoccupation with gender and genitals in the theatre of witchcraft.

The belief that witches could cause impotence, elaborately set out in The Malleus Maleficarum (1486), incorporated psychical and social anxiety and spectacularly illustrates how the two reflect and mutually reinforce each other. Although Purkiss warns that the story of witches stealing penises and hoarding them in nests is overused in feminist criticism (Purkiss 1996, 11), the fantasy is certainly referred to repeatedly in the drama of witchcraft. In Middleton’s The Witch (1616), for example, Antonio’s magically induced impotence leads to a precarious position for both him and his new wife as they are unable to sufficiently take up the position expected of them by society: Antonio is mocked for a perceived inability to enter manhood and Isabella is paradoxically a wife and a maid. In the patriarchal circulations of power in the play, subjectivity depends on sexual control. By preventing consummation, the witches disrupt the performance of the genitals and the structures of power
which construct subjectivity. Antonio’s impotence embodies the genitals and the phallus as signification. Antonio’s failure to consummate the marriage compromises his legitimacy as a controlling patriarch, and the precariousness of his authority stimulates an anxiety that is centred on the performance of his genitals.

1.5 Meddling with the Dead

In John Marston’s *Sophonisba*, the witch Erictho is typical of witches of the period because she unsettles categories. Despite her age and infertility, she tricks the play’s villain, Syphax, into having sex with her because she desires his royal seed. She surrounds herself with death and decay, yet she yearns for life within her barren womb. She embodies an unsettling mixture of the natural and supernatural, life and death, fertility and waste. For Syphax and the audience alike, she is both fascinating and revolting because she is that which does not ‘respect borders, positions, rules’, that which ‘disturbs identity, system, order’ (Kristeva 1982, 4). Syphax experiences a crisis in subjectivity after visiting Erictho, manifested when language fails him: ‘Can we yet breathe? is any plagued like me? Are we? let’s thinke’ (Marston 1606, F2r). He dies soon after, unable to effectively take up a position as a soldier. For Julia Kristeva, the place of abjection is where meaning collapses and where ‘I’ does not exist. Erictho is an embodiment of the abject because she violates boundaries and categorization and initiates dissolution of symbolic identity.
She penetrates the dead, burying her knuckles in the eyes and thrusting her tongue down the throats of corpses, and this violation of the boundaries of the body contributes to her horror. By desecrating corpses, she points towards the fallibility of the subject. Kristeva explains that abjection occurs when the border becomes an object (Kristeva 1982, 4) and that matter which points to the border is abject: the corpse (the border between life and death), or more mundanely for Kristeva, the skin on milk (the border between liquid and solid).

Kristeva’s definition of the abject focuses primarily on bodily excretions that threaten the self as it is constructed through the body: blood, excrement, pus. Witches are surrounded by such matter. They also violate boundaries of social categories of good and evil, male and female, human and non-human, exceeding Kristeva’s definition of the abject. For Kristeva, images of the body are most abject when they acknowledge biological conditions. She argues that ‘the body must bear no trace of its debt to nature: it must be clean and proper in order to be fully symbolic’ (Kristeva 1982, 102). It is for this reason that the maternal body is often constructed as abject. The symbolic feminine body, epitomized by the Virgin Birth, does not acknowledge its debt to the functions of biology; in this image of maternity, the body is unpenetrated. The bodies of witches on the early-modern stage were connected relentlessly with maternal functions that revealed the borders of the body as fluid and penetrable. In Marston’s Sophonisba (1605), for example, a
comparison is constructed between the bodies of the heroine Sophonisba and
the witch Erictho. Sophonisba’s body is unpenetrated and enclosed; in
contrast, Erictho admits that her lust is for the ‘bloud of kings’ (Marston 1606,
F2r) in her anticipated offspring.

Witchcraft plays theatricalise the the mother as troublesome and the
necessity of rejecting and expelling her body. Kristeva’s theorization of the
abject inverts Freudian psychoanalysis because it prioritizes the mother in the
formation of identity: ‘The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this
time within our personal archeology with our earliest attempts to release the
hold of the maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the
autonomy of language’ (Kristeva 1982, 13). What emerges in the witchcraft
plays is a power struggle in the construction of subjectivity between the
paternal and maternal, and both in their own ways are castrators. Patriarchal
castration occurs through repressive and patriarchal culture, which organizes
desire. When Antonio in The Witch loses authority when he is unable to
consummate his marriage, it is a symptom of a patriarchal culture that equates
power with the performance of the genitals. This castrating force, however, is
superseded by the mother, who in the figure of the witch is a figure of
treachery, as she punishes for desire which is the very thing she initiates.

In critical work since Kristeva’s essay ‘Powers of Horror’, the term abject
has been used interchangeably as a verb and an adjective (Korsmeyer 2004).
The abject refers to a process by which the subject rejects and expels the other, starting, according to Creed, with the body of the mother (Creed 1993). Abjection is part of the process by which the self protects itself against the threat of the other by maintaining a border between self and other, and this is manifested in the disgust displayed by those characters who engage with witches. As we saw in Generous’s speech, witches enlist an infantile dependency on the body of the mother. Witches, like Kristeva’s category of the abject, are presented as necessary as they provide an other against which to define the self, and they present an uncanny fascination. There is a lure towards the body of the mother evident in the witch plays when characters are drawn irresistibly to witches in their caves. Kristeva theorizes a similar lure towards the mother’s body and states that it is this that ‘beseeches, worries, and fascinates desire’ (Kristeva 1982, 1).

The work of Kristeva has influenced the work of a number of critics of the horror genre who provide a theoretical framework that combines the abject with the pleasures of looking found in psychoanalytical theory (Creed 1993; De Lauretis 1995). Looking engages the pleasures of scopophilia and voyeurism by positioning the viewer in a structure of power where what is looked upon is objectified. Although these two terms are often used interchangeably in psychoanalytical criticism, the subtle difference exemplifies the different viewing experiences enabled by early-modern theatres. Scopophilia is concerned with gaining sexual pleasure from looking
(Freud 1962, 18), and this pleasure can be derived in both its active and passive forms, that is from viewing or exhibiting. Voyeurism, however, is concerned with the covert look and the pleasures of looking without being looked upon (OED “voyeur” n.1). In the following chapters, I consider the differences in the look of the amphitheatres and indoor theatres of the early-modern period.

1.6 The Witch and the Gaze

The uncanny found in witchcraft drama was often produced through an interrogation of the witch’s look. It was believed that the power of witchcraft was transferred through the eyes of the witch: ‘Fascination is a binding, which comes from the spirit of the Witch, through the eyes of him that is bewitched, entering to his heart’ (Nettesheim 1651, H3r). To be the subject of the witch’s gaze was to be objectified because the witch’s power entered the heart and influenced behaviour and identity. The uncanny danger of this position feeds the comedy of John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (1591):

_Half[penny]_ Crosse your selves, looke how she lookes.
_Dro[mia]_ Marke her not, sheele turne us all to Apes.
(Lyly 1594, E4r)

In this thesis, I consider how this uncanny threat was extended to the audience who were placed as objects of the witch’s gaze and how the environment of early-modern theatres elaborated on this uncanny power structure.
The uncanny is concerned with seeing and encountering. When we meet our double, or the image in the mirror unaccountably winks at us, we encounter the uncanny. Because of this emphasis on looking, the theory of the uncanny illuminates a theatrical-historical approach – one which attempts to recover the experience of seeing a witch on the early-modern stage. Looking and being the object of looking form a powerful social force: ‘We form our conception of the environment by looking and, at the same time, wondering how we ourselves are interpreted by the looks of others and the visual orders structured on the basis of these looks’ (Seppänen 2006, 59). The intercepting gazes of individuals in the theatre supplied an arena for the construction of mobile subjectivities. Barbara Freedman accounts for the gaze in theatrical terms. Theatricality, she explains, is an awareness of being seen; this awareness is reflected to the viewer and so the original look is deflected, causing discomfort (Freedman 1991, 1). This gaze disturbs the imaginary correspondence between the ego and the mirror image. The position of beholder and beheld is reversed and so stable identification is disallowed. The gaze displaces the act of spectating because the spectator is made aware of their own position of looking. This feeds the uncanny image of what was unknown in the self becoming known once more: ‘the structure of the uncanny gaze places the beholder in an unexpected, often frightening, position in relation to the object of the gaze’ (Creed 2005, 29).
Something strange happens to identity in theatres whereby the individual becomes part of a collective, and an audience is asked to respond to what is occurring on the stage in a communal way. Michael Goldman argues that ‘we are intimately allied to our neighbours in the theater, responding not quite as individuals (the isolated laugh disrupts a comedy just as much as group laughter confirms it)’ (Goldman 1972, 5-6). The theatres of early-modern England, particularly the open-air amphitheatres, provided a fertile ground for the uncanny gaze. Amphitheatres were organized so that the audience surrounded the stage on three sides and plays were performed in daylight. Such an environment allowed for the breakdown of the unconscious boundaries between self and other. Identity was collective and shared and observable by the actors on stage. Katharine Eisaman Maus argues that the theatre was an art of collectives: groups of actors performed before a varied group of auditors (Maus 1995, 31). Maus suggests that in this environment, when there was a direct encounter between purveyor and consumer, the relationship between subjectivities was closer to the surface than when literature was produced for a specific patron. In the theatre of witchcraft, we see a trait by which the witch is revealed through a smokescreen of fantasy where characters describe the witch and her activities before she finally appears. Such linguistic foreshadowing may have been accompanied by theatrical smokescreening through the use of spectacular stage apparatus. These techniques deflect and reflect the look of the spectator. This focus on ambivalence is theorized by Creed, who argues that the uncanny gaze is
dependent upon ‘a gradual development, an ambivalence, a difficulty in at first seeing clearly the nature of the uncanny thing or event’ (Creed 2005, 28).

1.7 The Feminine Gaze

In the theatre of witchcraft, women tend to be presented in terms of their relationship with the male signifier: their lack or monstrous acquisition of the phallus. Witches are fantasized as stealing the power of the phallus by causing impotence; other female characters, such as Sophonisba in Marston’s play, represent the category against which symbolic manliness is defined. This scenario is reflected in psychoanalytical concepts of the uncanny, fetishism and the castration complex, which speak to the male subject with its male anxieties, complexes and desires. Sue-Ellen Case argues that the female subject is in a position of double alienation in the process of subjectivity because she is ‘split once as the male-identified subject and his subjectivity and split once more as the woman who observes her own subject position as both male-identified and female’ (Case 1989, 130-131). The look of the theatre magnifies and disrupts such psychical constructions of the feminine. The act of representation in the theatre removed the feminine voice; because the actors were boys and the playwrights were men, women did not contribute to the fantasy of witchcraft. However, the processes of spectatorship provide an avenue to investigate the feminine experience in relation to the fantasy because women also frequented the theatres (Gurr 2004a, 66). Linda Williams
identifies ‘a surprising (and at times subversive) affinity between monster and woman, the sense in which her look at the monster recognizes their similar status within patriarchal structures of seeing’ (Williams 1984, 85). Here, I investigate how the affinity developed between the feminine spectator and the witch contributed to the horror but also enabled feminine empowerment: ‘the relation of the female viewer to the female on the screen is one of double vision – of seeing the other as the same, familiar and known, yet at the same time, different, unfamiliar and unknown’ (Mallan 2000, 27). The plays dramatize what will later be theorized by critics of the horror film: a subversive and potentially empowering link between woman and monster.

Feminist theory has often drawn on psychoanalysis to deconstruct the oppressive nature of patriarchal linguistic and social conditions. Laura Mulvey does so in relation to the gaze:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active / male and passive / female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy on to the female figure which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey 1989, 19)

Such insights are magnified when applied to the theatres of the early-modern period due to the relative silencing of women during the period and the absence of women from the craft:
The subject of liberal humanism claims to be the unified, autonomous author of his or her own choices (moral, electoral and consumer), and the source and origin of speech. Women in Britain for most of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were not fully any of these things. Able to speak, to take up a subject-position in discourse, to identify with the ‘I’ of utterance and the uttering ‘I’ which always exceeds it, they were none the less enjoined to silence, discouraged from any form of speech which was not an act of submission to the authority of their fathers or husbands. (Belsey 1985, 149)

Early-modern theatre ‘operated self-referentially as a sign-system’ in which ‘the sign of the female was constructed in a performance context’ (Aston 1995, 17). The smooth complexion and soft voice of the boy actor was supported with gendered gestures to construct the feminine. Witchcraft plays interrogate these structures of representation and do so in terms of the look. In the theatre of witchcraft, we see the exhibition of femininity when in Thomas Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604) Luce, a young woman, resists her public display:

*Luce.* I doe not love to sit thus publickely: And yet upon the traffique of our Wares, Our provident Eyes and presence must still wayte Doe you attend the shop, Ile ply my worke. I see my father is not jealous of me, That trusts meet to the open view of all. The reason is, hee knowes my thoughts are chast And my care such, as that it needes the awe Of no strict Overseer (Heywood 1638, A4v)

The over-display of femininity in the theatre of witchcraft transforms the gaze into what Elaine Aston refers to as ‘looking-at-being-looked-at-ness’ (Aston 1995, 90) and which encourages an interrogation of the codes relating to
looking. These techniques point to gender as a fictitious construct and draw
attention to woman’s absence from the stage.

1.8 Fetishism and Witches

Henry Goodcole, when questioning Elizabeth Sawyer in 1621 in order to draw
out a confession, lingers on suckling. According to the confession, the devil
would put his head under Sawyer’s skirt and suckle from a teat found in her
private parts for about quarter of an hour at a time (Goodcole 1621, C3r-C3v).
It did not take long for these tantalizingly perverse details to reach public
consumption. A pamphlet recording the confession was published in April of
that year, and a play written by Dekker, Ford and Rowley was produced later
the same year. This process of documentation, publication and dramatization
sensationalizes the sexual activity of a prosecuted woman. The events leading
up to the prosecution and execution of Sawyer no longer belong to Sawyer but
are obscured by commercial and political requirements, as well as the
perversions of the scribe. In this process, Sawyer becomes a stranger to
herself and the events of her life a projection of patriarchal preoccupations
with the feminine. Held up to public display, Sawyer becomes a fetish: a
figure on which to project patriarchal anxieties relating to castration and the
redirection of power in the hands of women.
The play does not go as far as to perform the suckling of Sawyer’s privates, perhaps because the image would be too obscene for the early-modern stage. It does, however, encourage its audience to consider the possibility of the mother’s phallus (see section 4.1.1) and so constructs, in the figure of Sawyer, a fetish. For Freud, a fetish is a substitute for ‘woman’s (mother’s) phallus which the little boy once believed in and does not wish to forego’ (Freud 1961, 152). The fetish is a defence mechanism arising from extreme castration anxiety unconsciously adopted to eliminate the threat. Fetishism points to a splitting of the subject because it allows the male—both Freud and Lacan describe fetishism as an exclusively male condition—to sustain two ‘incompatible assertions’ (Freud 1961, 157). Fetishism requires displacement, the transference of sexual energy onto a non-threatening object, and simultaneously disavowal: the rejection of the knowledge that that object does not carry a sexual charge. The fetish ‘remains a token of triumph over the threat of castration and a safeguard against it’ (Freud 1961, 153). The ambivalence of the fetish is foreshadowed in the witch plays as witches are dramatized in complex ways. They are sexualized in ways in which desire is presented as illicit. They are excessive, grotesque and at times comical, and these characterizations perhaps safeguarded against her horror.

The joint mechanism of the fetish is to exhibit castration and safeguard against it, and the theatre provided a space in which to confront uncomfortable anxieties and desires from the safety of the audience. The construction of the
witch as fetish was disrupted at times, however, by the uncanny gaze, which forced the audience to interrogate the image they encountered. When the plays looked back at those looking, they obliterated the safeguarding mechanism of the fetish and enabled a revival of the horror associated with the threat of castration and displaced male power. Hecate, in Middleton’s *The Witch*, achieves this when she chooses her next victim from the audience: ‘What young man can we wish, to pleasure us’ (Middleton 2007, 1.2.27). In this scenario, the fetish looks back so that the safeguarding mechanism of theatre is threatened.

1.9 Coda

Perhaps the most significant application of psychoanalytical theory to the witch craze of the early-modern period is by Roper. She convincingly argues that confessions extracted from accused witches in early-modern Germany were developed through an interdependent relationship of aggression and desire between the interrogator and the accused (Roper 2004). Women forced to produce stories of *maleficium* (harmful magic) often did so under conditions of extreme pain. Having heard the culture’s circulating stories of witchcraft, perhaps having witnessed an accused confessing before a public execution, or heard local women gossiping about a neighbour’s actions or malice, the accused would retell familiar stories. Roper’s research shows that variable themes developed that were locally specific. These themes must have been
manipulated by the desires of the interrogator, who, inflicting pain and leading the questioning, represented the Law of the Father in the oedipal drama. Roper argues that women’s stories of witchcraft were remarkably similar to one another, suggesting that a narrative of aggression and desire was unconsciously developed to suit the psychic and social needs of the community. Janet Adelman’s essay on *Macbeth* employs psychoanalytical theory in the analysis of witchcraft on the early-modern stage. She argues that images of perverse maternity fuse Lady Macbeth with the witches as purveyors of masculine castration anxiety (Adelman 1992). Deborah Willis also focuses on the maternal function in the narrative of witchcraft. In her analysis, which like Adelman’s is based on the plays of Shakespeare, Willis argues that ‘plot and style work to dissolve the threat of the malevolent mother and to devalue the maternal body’ (Willis 1995, 163).

Critical emphasis on the maternal in the fantasy of witchcraft illuminates moments of horror in the plays; despite this, both Adelman and Willis argue that horror was subdued by what they see as the ultimate triumph of the phallus (Adelman 1992, 146; Willis 1995, 163). These critics perpetuate the emphasis on inversion set out by Stuart Clark, which pre-supposes a model of antithesis. Clark argues that ideas about witchcraft were constructed according to antithetical modes. The positive side of the binary included divinity and orthodoxy and through language, according to Clark, generated the negative side, of false worship and the diabolical (Clark 1980). In the
following chapters, I argue that such a model is ultimately undermined by the drama and by the energies at work in the theatre and that the emphasis on inversion and antithesis depreciates the horror of symbolic structures at risk. This conclusion is reached by an investigation of staging techniques which enlisted horror by engaging the spectator in the narratives of witchcraft. Witch-play criticism that attends to staging techniques often lacks a strong theoretical grounding (Thomson 1999; Booth 2007). Anthony Harris in *Night’s Black Agents* offers the most comprehensive study of witchcraft on the early-modern stage, and particularly useful is his identification of the influences, both classical and folk, on representations of witches (Harris 1980). I combine a theoretical approach with theatre history to illuminate the experience of watching a witch on the stage in the early-modern period. Outside the text, little evidence exists concerning audience engagement with stage witchcraft, and it implies that there were fluid theatrical boundaries between the world of the play and the space of the audience. The infamous story of an actual devil appearing in the playhouse during a performance of Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1592) fuelled the anti-theatricalists’ arguments:

> the visible apparition of the Devill on the stage at the Belsavage Playhouse, in Queene Elizabeths dayes, (to the great amazement both of the Actors and Spectators) whiles they were there prophanely playing the History of Faustus (the truth of which I have heard from many now alive, who well remember it). (Prynne 1633, Ggg4r).
Samuel Pepys’s diary indicates that members of the Restoration audience were often invited to perform the parts of devils (Pepys 1906, 160). Such theatrical fluidity is evident in the texts analysed here and contributed to the uncanny representation of witchcraft.

Chapter Two considers witchcraft plays across the period from a conventional literary-history perspective. I chart the plays chronologically in this chapter in order to identify emerging themes and trends. As literary critics we rely on theories of the mind to illuminate texts, and this chapter exposes the limitations of a conventional approach that does not draw on theory. I illustrate how witchcraft was portrayed according to a ritualistic formula and identify how classical influences fed the dramatization of witchcraft. I argue that a number of techniques diminished the horror of the witch in early plays and identify the emergence of a supernatural horror genre in the first years of the seventeenth century. In Chapter Three and subsequent chapters, I approach witch plays thematically rather than chronologically. This approach reveals how the representations of witches on the stage throughout the period did not follow a neat trajectory which corresponded with historical events. Through a close analysis of Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), and John Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), I identify, in Chapter Three, the emergence of a genre of horror. A consideration of staging techniques is central to this chapter and illustrates how the mechanisms of the theatre elaborated the oedipal themes
developed in the texts. Chapter Four is concerned with the abject. An analysis of John Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605), William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606 and 1616) and Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) reveals how the staging of witchcraft encouraged an examination of categories of signification. The abject was instigated in these plays in terms of the body and of symbolic categories of signification, and I argue that, while the body could stand for any bounded system (Douglas 2002, 141), the disintegration of the body evoked horror about the fallibility of the symbolic. Chapter Five extends Julia Kristeva’s investigation of the abject to consider the potential for desire and comedy when categories of signification break down. Through the analysis of Thomas Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) and Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), I consider the uncanny carnivalesque and illustrate how these narratives of witchcraft broke down a relationship of alterity between participators and spectators. This thesis will take us on a journey of theatrical presentations of the female witches, who are enchanting, maternal, horrific, grotesque and excessive.
Chapter Two

Witches on the Stage 1587-1635

This chapter charts the representation of female witches on the commercial stage 1587-1635. We shall see how recurring themes and modes of representation constructed an identifiable witchcraft genre, which was self-referential. The purpose of this chapter and the sub-sectioning within it is to orientate the reader in relation to the genre and to draw attention to the broad contrasts within its development. Subsequent chapters will illustrate how moments of misogyny in the plays were manifested in images of emasculation and horrific maternity, which were later labelled and theorized by twentieth-century psychoanalysts. Here, I chart fashions and trends for the representation of witchcraft across the period from a conventional literary and theatre-history perspective. The following plays will be surveyed below. The information provided is derived from the Database of Early English Playbooks (DEEP) (Farmer and Lesser 2007-) except when indicated by *:

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<th>Production Date / Publication Date</th>
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<td>The Valiant Welshman</td>
<td>Robert Armin</td>
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<td>The Fortune</td>
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<td>The Witch*</td>
<td>Thomas Middleton</td>
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<td>Orestes</td>
<td>Thomas Goffe</td>
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<td>The Witches of Lancashire</td>
<td>Thomas Heywood &amp; Richard Brome</td>
<td>1634 / 1634</td>
<td>The Globe</td>
<td>King’s Men</td>
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2.1 Aspects of the Genre

Anthony Harris argues that witchcraft was not a leading theme on the sixteenth-century stage. According to Harris, ‘the principal supernatural phenomena to be depicted on stage had been the devils’ (Harris 1980, 26), and he points out that there were only scattered references to witches in the period’s drama. During the 1580s and 1590s, the witches that were found on the stage tended to be presented according to a formulaic set of activities, props and imagery.

2.1.1 White Witches and Funny Witches

In Robert Greene’s *Alphonsus King of Aragon* (1587), the witch is an enchantress of classical origins. Medea is entreated by King Amurack’s daughter Iphigenia and wife Fausta to discover how the sovereign will fare in the wars against Alphonsus. Like Margery Jourdain of William Shakespeare’s *2 Henry the Sixth* (1591), Medea conjures a spirit who prophesies for the royal women. The witch acts as a plot function: a spectacular tool for changing the
pace and direction of the plot. Amurack, conjured into a supernatural slumber, witnesses the prophecy of the war’s outcome:

Amurack

What Amurack doest thou begin to nod?
Is this the care that thou hast of thy wars?
As when thou shouldst be prancing of thy steed,
To egge thy soldiers forward in thy warres:
Thou sittest moping by the fireside?
(Greene 1599, E1v-E2r)

Amurack comments at length on his feeling of impotence as he views the battle from a supernatural distance. The disempowerment of the king is described in terms of gendered roles. When he should be active, strong and aggressive, he is feminized by his passiveness.

Amurack’s powerlessness is offset by the masculinization of his wife and daughter, who, encouraged by Medea’s supernatural intervention and infuriated by Amurack’s plan to marry Iphigenia to his enemy, don armour and join the Amazons to fight against their ruling patriarch:

[FAUSTA]
I did rebuke my husband, Amuracke.
And since my words could take no better place,
My sword with helpe of all Amazones,
Shall make him soone reprent his foolishness.
(Greene 1599, E3r)

Here, the transgression lies with those who consult the witch, a typical trait found in witch plays of the Elizabethan period. Although Medea’s companions behave in ways that violate the expectations of their gender, she
advises restraint: ‘faire maide, bridle these brutish thoughts, / And learne to follow what the dates assigne’ (Greene 1599, E4v-F1r). Medea is an advisor to Fausta and Iphigenia, and the advice she offers supports the dominant, patriarchal order of the play and of the early-modern period. Medea adheres to early-modern definitions of a white witch who did not perform acts of *maleficium* (harmful magic), but instead practised magical healing and incantations to prophesy the future.

Plays during this early period often depict witches of classical origin, but their depiction is also informed by the figure of the wise woman. These influences may have been familiar for an early-modern audience because cunning folk were staple characters in the sixteenth and seventeenth-century landscape (Macfarlane 1970). Despite theatrical depictions of the wise woman as harmless and familiar, some insisted that these women must have made pacts with the devil as all magic stemmed from evil:

The *bad Witch*, is he or she that hath consented in league with the Devill, to use his helpe, for the doing of hurt onely ... The *good Witch* is he or shee that by consent in a league with the devil, doth use his help, for the doing of good onely. This cannot hurt, torment, curse, or kill but onely heale and cure the hurts inflicted upon men or cattell, by badde Witches ... Now howsoever both these be evill, yet of the two, the more horrible & detestable Monster is the good Witch. (Perkins 1610, 173-174)

Perkins believed that all witchcraft stemmed from a pact with the devil and that a witch’s presentation of herself as harmless or helpful served to ensnare
more people in the devil’s work, hence his provocative conclusion. Such a view did not reflect the presentation of witchcraft in the theatres. The white witches found in the plays of the Elizabethan period were portrayed sympathetically, and the plays depict no pact with the devil. The *maleficius* witches found on the stage of the seventeenth century were significantly more horrible monsters.

On the rare occasion that witches were represented on the sixteenth-century stage performing *maleficius* acts, the potential horror of the witch was subdued. The next surviving theatrical depiction of a witch was Dipsas in John Lyly’s *Endymion* (1588). Dipsas is hired by the jilted former beloved of Endymion to charm him into a deep sleep from which he cannot be awakened. The gruesome description of the witch is a source of comedy rather than horror. Tophas falls in love with Dipsas, and his lengthy description of her draws attention to his own foolishness rather than the horror of her appearance:

[TOPHAS]

O what a fine thin hayre hath Dipsas, what a prettie low forehead? What a tale and state- lie nose? What little hollowe eyes? What great and goodly lyppes? Howe harmelesse shee is beeing toothless, her fingers fatte and short, adorned with long nayles like a bytter. In howe sweete a proportion her cheeks hang downe to her brests like dugges, and her pappes to her waste like bagges. What a lowe stature shee is, and yet what a great foote she carryeth? (Lyly 1591, E2r-E2v)
At the conclusion of the play, the heroine Cynthia, an allegorical representation of Queen Elizabeth (Lyly 1997, 16), belittles Dipsas’s power: ‘all thy witch-craft I esteeme as weake, as the world dooth thy case wretched’ (Lyly 1591, I2v). Cynthia eventually agrees to forgive Dipsas for her witchcraft on the condition that she returns to her husband (Lyly 1591, K2v) and thus the patriarchal order. This is a strategy of subduing and containing the horror of witchcraft. In later plays, the power and horror of witchcraft is contained when they are executed or are forced to submit to the dominant order. In other plays, however, the witch survives and her threat, as we shall see, lingers beyond the boundaries of the play.

2.1.2 Ritual and Convention

The conjuring scene in Shakespeare’s 2 Henry the Sixth is typical of witchcraft scenes from this period. Duchess Eleanor employs Margery Jourdain and her companions Bolingbroke and Southwell to prophesy about the fates of the lords at court. The stage direction for the activities of the conjuring, as in Robert Greene’s Alphonsus King of Aragon (1587), is tantalizingly vague, especially in the First Folio:

Here doe the Ceremonies belonging, and make the Circle,
Bullingbrooke or Southwell reades, Coniuro
Ie, & c. It Thunders and Lightens
terribly: then the Spirit
riseth.
(Shakespeare 1623, m5r)
The first quarto works the ceremony into the dialogue:

\[
\text{Witch} \quad \text{Then Roger Bullinbrooke about thy taske,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{And frame a Cirkle here vpon the earth,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{Whilst I thereon all prostrate on my face,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{Do talke and whisper with the diuels be low,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{And coniure them for to obey my will.}
\]

She lies downe upon her face.
Bullenbrooke makes a Cirkle.

\[
\text{Bullen[broke]} \quad \text{Darke Night, dread Night, the silence of the Night,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{Whereine the Furies maske in hellish troupes,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{Send vp I charge you from Sosetus lake,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{The spirit Askalon to come to me,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{To pierce the bowels of this Centricke earth,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{And hither come in twinkling of an eye,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{Askalon, Assenda, Assenda,}
\]
\[
\quad \text{It thunders and lightens, and then the spirit riseth vp.}
\]

(Shakespeare 1594a, B4v-C1r)

The circle most likely refers to a magic circle thought to contain spirits and often depicted as a boundary or gateway between the natural and supernatural worlds. This magic circle appears on the title page of Christopher Marlowe’s \textit{Doctor Faustus}: the title character stands within a circle marked with the signs of the zodiac and the planets (Marlowe 1616, A1r). This title page is characterized by contrasting shapes as circles on the floor and wall are offset by the hard geometrical lines on the floor and window. \textit{Doctor Faustus}, to some extent, approximates magical powers with intellectual learning, and this is reflected in the title page of the 1616 edition: ‘Lines, circles, letters, characters, these are the books that Faustus most desires’ (Yates 2001, 137). The physical boundary between the supernatural and natural worlds took a number of forms in theatrical representation. In \textit{Doctor Faustus} (1592) it is a
sign of learning; in William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), considered in Chapter Four, the boundary is represented by the cauldron, which is depicted in the play as womblike and with disgusting contents. Later in the period, in Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1635) considered in Chapter Five, the magic circle represents feminine empowerment and control.

Francesco Maria Guazzo argued in 1608 that witches were associated with circles on the ground because ‘a circle is the symbol of divinity, and the earth of God’s footstool; and so he [the devil] wishes to persuade them that he is the God of Heaven and Earth’ (Guazzo 2007, 100). Perhaps formed using chalk, the circle contributed to the ritualistic tone of the scene and worked the inversions associated with witchcraft into the ceremonies of its activities. Witchcraft is also referred to as ceremonial in John Lyly’s *Endymion*, where supernatural activity is indicated simply by Dipsas’s instruction ‘goe in and finish those cerimonies that are required in our Art’ (Lyly 1591, D3v). Similarly, in Robert Greene’s *Alphonsus King of Aragon*, the witch Medea is directed to ‘do ceremonies belonging to conjuring’ (Greene 1599, E1r). Wayne Shumaker argues that the kind of ceremonial magic presented in the theatres of this time, such as making circles and uttering Latin formulas, is hardly representative of the activities of witches described in confessions; these involved fashioning and manipulating images, planting charms under doorsteps and beating water to cause storms (Shumaker 1972, 87-88).
activities of witches reported in confessions are less formal than those represented in the theatre. In the late sixteenth-century theatre, the processes of witchcraft were presented as highly ceremonial and ritualistic; witchcraft was presented specifically through the language of the theatre as a self-referential signifying system. David Bradley and Linda McJannet observe that a common code of shared conventions existed in stage directions found in Elizabethan theatre (Bradley 1992; McJannet 1999). Witchcraft in the theatre of the sixteenth century appears to have depended on a code of shared convention. The representation of the supernatural involved theatrical performance of a ritual, and this performance was formulaic enough to be casually indicated by the vague stage directions we find in the play texts.

J.L. Styan summarizes the range of early-modern theatrical convention, arguing that ‘the Elizabethan spectator took for granted matters of symbolism in character or dress, and ignored the play’s elasticity of place and time’ (Styan 1967, 28). Just as night was signified by torches and passing time by dumbshows, the supernatural was performed through a ceremony of theatrical convention. The dependency on ritual, convention and formulaic stage direction constructs a framework for the theatrical representation of witchcraft, which we see exploited and deconstructed in plays later in the period. In Thomas Heywood’s The Wise Woman of Hoxton (1604), considered in Chapter Five, the association of magic with theatrical convention is exploited
for comedy. The Wise Woman steps outside her role to present herself as playwright.

The scenes of magic in these early plays draw attention to the act of spectatorship and the artifice of theatre. Just as the audience may be inclined to observe Christopher Sly’s reaction to Petruchio and Katherine in William Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (1592), or Claudius’s reaction to The Mousetrap in *Hamlet* (1601), they are invited to observe the Duchess in 2 *Henry the Sixth* as she oversees her schemes at work. The Duchess watches Margery Jourdain’s ceremonies from above, perhaps the stage balcony. The first quarto text specifies a tower which Eleanor ‘goes up’ (Shakespeare 1594a, B4v); the Folio omits this but describes the Duchess as ‘aloft’ (Shakespeare 1623, m5r). The dialogue between Bolingbroke and Hume positions the Duchess as a spectator to the witchcraft in affinity with the audience:

*Bulling[broke]* Master *Hume*, we are therefore provided: will her Ladyship behold and heare our Exorcismes?

*Hume* I, what else? feare you not her courage.

(Shakespeare 1623, m5r)

Frances Barasch agrees that this scene draws attention to spectatorship. From Hume’s previous soliloquy, we know that he is preparing to betray the duchess (Shakespeare 1594a, B1v; Shakespeare 1623, m4r), and in Barasch’s reading of the scene, the audience thus ‘sees the dukes who watch Hume who watches...
Eleanor as she watches the conjurers raise a spirit from the abyss’ (Barasch 2001, 122). The duchess’s privileged viewing position, and Hume’s acknowledgement that a spectator would need courage, engaged the audience in the narrative of witchcraft: they too were included in the transgressions of the supernatural and let in on its secret ceremonies.

In the quarto, Eleanor takes a more active role in the conjuring: she enters with the witch and her associates and hands them a list of questions before climbing the tower (Shakespeare 1594a, B4v). In the Folio, the Duchess enters ‘aloft’ a few lines after Jourdain. This would have had a distancing effect; in the quarto Eleanor has a more intimate and active relationship with witchcraft. Accordingly, the accusations brought against her in each version are slightly different. In the Folio, she is described as the ‘Ring-leader and Head of all this Rout, / Have practis’d dangerously against your State / Dealing with Witches and with Conjurers’ (Shakespeare 1623, m6r). In the quarto, the emphasis falls on Eleanor alone ‘That prowd dame Elnor our Protectors wife, / Hath plotted Treason against the King and Peeres, / By witchcrafts, sorceries, and conjurings’ (Shakespeare 1594a, C3v).

Margery Jourdain is consulted for supernatural counsel about affairs of state; frequently, witchcraft in the Elizabethan period was presented on the stage as an illicit means of gaining political and social advancement. Eleanor, rather than the witch she consults, is depicted as the primary transgressor in 2
*Henry the Sixth*, especially in the quarto where Jourdain’s punishment is omitted from the text. The sin of witchcraft is transferred onto a non-supernatural character. This would have subdued horror by eliminating the aspect of the unknown in the supernatural which, for Howard Phillips Lovecraft, is the primary source of its horror: ‘The unknown, being likewise the unpredictable, became for our primitive forefathers a terrible and omnipotent source of boons and calamities visited upon mankind for cryptic and wholly extraterrestrial reasons’ (Lovecraft 1973, 13). In subsequent chapters, I illustrate how the unknown aspects of witchcraft appealed to the fantasy of the viewer to fill in the gaps. In these early plays, the horror of the unknown was subdued because the clients who consult with witches are depicted as the primary transgressors and are frequently depicted in a non-supernatural context. These plays place the witches in a realm beyond blame and transgression because they are removed from the dominant, patriarchal order of the plays. Part of the role of these witches is to represent a buffer, as well as a gateway, between the supernatural and the natural worlds. In plays where witches conjure a prophesying spirit, there exists another remove. These techniques perhaps provided a safety mechanism for the audience as the supernatural was facilitated by a series of removes. Eleanor consults Margery Jourdain because of her political ambition. This ambition, like Lady Macbeth’s, is for her husband. While the behaviour of each woman is illicit and unacceptable, their motivation lies within the patriarchal order. Perversely, their support of their husbands places them in the category of the
dutiful wife. The activities of witchcraft were represented through rituals of inversion, but the motivation behind such activities often lay within the dominant order and supported the patriarchal structures that organized it.

2.1.3 Healing Witches

Robert Greene’s *Orlando Furioso*, performed before the queen in 1591, also contains a white witch. Melissa, like Medea of *Alphonsus King of Aragon* (1587), enters late in the play, and her spells change the direction of the plot. Orlando has been driven mad through the careful scheming of his enemy, Sacripant, who has made Orlando believe that his wife is having an affair. Melissa gives Orlando a sleeping draught, ‘charmes him with / her wand, and [he] lies downe to sleepe’ (Greene 1594b, SD G1r). The draught sends Orlando into fitful dreams during which satyrs play music around his vulnerable body. When Orlando awakes, he is cured of his madness. Orlando’s jealousy is described in terms of disease: ‘Sacrepant had grauen these roundelaies, / To sting thee with infecting iealousie’ (Greene 1594b, G2v), and witchcraft is presented as the healing force. In John Fletcher’s *The Faithful Shepherdess* (1608), witchcraft is again presented as healing. Clorin, who has built herself a dwelling near to the grave of her dead lover, relies on her purity and knowledge of herbs to cure a list of ailments, including those that ‘through too much heat / Growne wilde or lunaticke’ (Fletcher 1610, B1v). Witchcraft in these plays is presented as a wholesome, pure and
harmless force. However, the accusations of witchcraft from mad or ignorant characters allude to the historical association of feminine healers with witchcraft persecution.

These plays employ imagery of classical as well as early-modern English witchcraft belief. Melissa and Medea are both enchantresses from classical mythology, but Greene had his surrounding characters react to them according to the stereotypes of the witch prevailing in early-modern England. The ambivalence of these witches reflects the contrasting responses to white witches found in the period. The idea that the historical rise of witch prosecutions was connected to a patriarchal need to control feminine healing has recently been disputed; Jane Davidson has accumulated evidence suggesting that belief in the supernatural origin of feminine healing was widely held to be an ignorant superstition (Davidson 2008). These plays support this view. It is Orlando’s madness that is talking when he asks ‘why sufferest thou this old trot / to come so nigh me?’ (Greene 1594b, G1r), and his companion Orgalio’s foolishness, when he describes Melissa as ‘some old witch’ (Greene 1594b, G1r). Similarly, the characters who respond to Medea of *Alphonsus King of Aragon* (1587) in terms of derogatory witch stereotypes are not sympathetic. Calchas, who calls Medea a ‘wretched witch’ (Greene 1599, E1v), is bitter at being awakened. Amurack illustrates the extent of his arrogance when he cries ‘Away, you foole, thinke you your cursed charmes / Can bridle so the mind of Amuracke’ (Greene 1599, H2r).
John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie*, performed by the Children of Paul’s in the late 1580s or early 1590s, deals with the matter of witchcraft lightly. Here Bombie insists that she is not a witch but a cunning woman who makes prophecies concerning the romantic fate of the other characters (Lyly 1594, D2r). She practises no acts of malice, and there is no evidence of a pact with the devil:

*Ser[ena]* They say there is hard by an old cunning woman, who can tell fortunes, expound dreams, tell of things that be lost, and divine of accidents to come, she is called the good woman, who yet never did hurt. (Lyly 1594, E1r)

William Kerwin highlights the precarious nature of Bombie’s position: when the prophecies look unlikely to come true, other characters are quick to demonize her (Kerwin 1997, 101). However, the comedy of the play turns on the foolishness of the characters who misjudge her:

*Half[penny]* Crosse your selues, looke how she lookes.  
*Dro[mio]* Marke her not, sheele turne vs all to Apes.  
*Bomb[ie]* What would you with me?  
*Ri[sio]* They say you are cunning, & are called the good woman of Rochester.  
*Bom[bie]* If never to doo harme be to doo good, I dare saie I am not ill. But what’s the matter? (Lyly 1594, E4r)

In the sixteenth century, there is a tendency in the plays to invite sympathy for witches by drawing attention to the ignorance concerning witchcraft and the
misuse of the term ‘witch’ as an insult. In later plays, the horror associated with witchcraft was developed more thoroughly. The notion that witches could cause harm through the power of their look is, in *Mother Bombie*, depicted as a belief of the foolish. However, in later plays this power contributed to the uncanny horror of the stage witch.

2.1.4 Joan la Pucelle

The most thorough depiction of witchcraft in Elizabethan theatre is perhaps found in the character of Joan la Pucelle in Shakespeare, Nash, and others’ *1 Henry the Sixth* (1592). The accusations of witchcraft directed towards Joan throughout the play, mostly from the English, appear to be an example of the overuse of the term to insult unruly women. She is called a ‘witch’, ‘strumpet’, ‘dame’ and ‘trull’ (Shakespeare 1623, K4v, K5v), epithets that were directed interchangeably towards disorderly women in the early-modern period (Capp 2003, 230). The character of Joan supports most convincingly the argument made by Deborah Willis and Elspeth Whitney that the identity of the witch was constructed in terms of a transgression of gender codes: Joan is aggressive, articulate, clever and skilled with a sword (Whitney 1995; Willis 1995).

The play seems to explore the stereotyping that constructed patriarchal perceptions of witchcraft, until, that is, the closing act. Theatrical
confirmation of Joan’s involvement with the occult takes place in the final act, when she begs her familiars to save her from her imminent execution:

[PUCELLE]
Where was I wont to feed you with my blood,
Ile lope a member off, and give it you,
In earnest of a further benefit:
So you do condiscend to helpe me now.

*They hang their heads.*

No hope to have redresse? My body shall
Pay recompence, if you will graunt my suite.

*They shake their heads.*

Cannot my body, nor blood-sacrifice
Intreate you to your wonted furtherance?
Then take my soule; my body, soule, and all,
Before that England giue the French the foyle.
(Shakespeare 1623, l6r)

This retreat into superstition paves the way for the stage witches found in the seventeenth century, when uncanny horror and sexual depravity became their staple characteristics. Joan’s desperate plea to her familiars anticipates the suckling and sexual immorality of Elizabeth Sawyer of Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) or Hecate of Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) and opens the uncanny narrative of motherhood found in later witchcraft plays. While Joan’s language and behaviour anticipate the horrifying witches of later plays, her motivation, like that of the Duchess of Gloucester and Lady Macbeth, remains within the symbolic order: she is driven by patriotism and the desire to prevent England giving the French ‘the foyle’.
2.1.5 Spectacle and the Supernatural

The supernatural was used as an opportunity for spectacular stage effects throughout the period covered here and was established as such since the medieval miracle and morality plays (Harris 1980, 149). The effects of thunder and lightning were probably achieved by rolling a canon in an irregular wooden trough offstage, beating drums and burning gunpowder (Nagler 1959, 80; Thomson 1999, 14). As well as signalling supernatural activity or the entrance of a supernatural character, such effects would have disguised the noise of the ascent or descent machinery that was often employed for the entrances and exits of witches and other supernatural characters. Leslie Thomson suggests that ‘thunder and lightning was the conventional stage language for the production of effects in or from the tiring house that would establish or confirm a specifically supernatural context in the minds of the audience’ (Thomson 1999, 11), and, like Thomson, I will italicise these words to reflect their use as a coded convention. Thomson argues that the pre-condition of general audience belief in the supernatural would have meant that the stage direction would be designed to scare, as opposed to modern productions when it is designed to impress (Thomson 1999, 22).

Smoke and fire were popular stage effects often associated with the supernatural (Dessen and Thomson 1999, 92, 204). In Francis Quarles’s The Virgin Widow (1641), the stage direction implies spectacular effects: ‘A flash of fire from the Oracle; A cloud of smoak’ (Quarles 1649, I4v). An earlier
example can be found in Robert Wilson’s *The Cobbler’s Prophesie* (1590): ‘from one part let a smoke arise’ (Wilson 1594, G1v). Robert Graves has compiled evidence of how such effects were achieved and suggests that smoke and fire would have been used in both the indoor theatres and amphitheatres (Graves 2009, 214-6).

Supernatural drama employed the whole theatrical space. The space below the stage was traditionally associated with hell into which characters descended, as in Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* (1592), or from which devils appeared, as in Barnabe Barnes’s *The Devil’s Charter* (1606). Similarly, supernatural characters were often transported into the ‘heavens’, or space above the stage, using stage machinery to denote flying. The most spectacular effects, such as flying dragons or brazen heads, tended to be reserved for male magicians in the period. Robert Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bongay* (1589) contains a particularly spectacular scene in which Bongay conjures a tree and a dragon shooting fire (Greene 1594a, E4r). The most spectacular moment in Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612) is when a magical serpent is conjured from the witch’s cave, and it is specified that this magic is produced by the witch’s son, Bluso: ‘Sonne, to this purpose, straitway to thy booke, / Enter the Cave, and call a powerful spirit by thy skill’ (Armin 1615, F1r). The association of spectacular effects with specifically male magic was consistent throughout the period. John Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635) was performed at the end of the period covered here. The
most spectacular magic in this play comes from the male magicians and devils. By contrast, Calib, the witch, is limited in her power. Female witches, rather than showing off their magical abilities as Friar Bacon or Doctor Faustus do, tend to have their powers reported. This tendency provides an extra remove between the audience and the supernatural. This remove, rather than providing a safety mechanism, contributes to the unstable, ambivalent and unknowable perception of witches because it opens up a space for the imaginative and fantasizing processes of the spectator.

Although stage witchcraft in the seventeenth century became increasingly spectacular, witches were not found flying until Thomas Middleton got his hands on the subject. As I will discuss in Chapter Four, it is unlikely that Shakespeare’s weird sisters flew (Harris 1980, 159; Middleton, Taylor et al. 2007, 1170). The emphasis on the cave and the eerie echoes in John Marston’s Sophonisba (1605) implies that his witch, Erictho, was associated with the lower regions of the stage area rather than the flying machinery. The trap would probably have been used as the entrance to her hellish cave, and the dialogue implies that the echoes would have come from below the stage area:

[SYPHAX]
Harke, harke now rise jnfernall tones
The depe fetch’d grones
Of laboring spirits that attend
Erictho.
Ér[ctho] Erictho within.
Sy[phax] Nowe cracke the trembling earth and send
Shreekes that portend
Affrightment to the Gods which heare
Erictho.
Erictho within
(Marston 1606, E1r-E1v)

Like Erictho, the witch in Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612) is presented in terms of earthy interiority. The stage directions specifically indicate that she enters from her cave, which would most likely have been through the stage trap, thus capitalizing on the traditional association of the trap with hell. Other witchcraft plays preceding Middleton’s contribution have their witches enter and exit in a more human manner. The use of the descent machine in Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (1591) or Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604) would have been absurd given the very human portrayal of magic; in the *Henry the Sixth* plays flying witches would have been completely out of keeping with the tone of the narrative. It is not until Middleton had Hecate descend from the skies in *Macbeth* and *The Witch* (1616) that female witches were depicted flying in the theatre of the period. Below I survey the theatrical portrayal of witchcraft in the nine plays that are analyzed in detail over the following chapters. Chapters Three, Four and Five illustrate how this information is enriched by drawing on twentieth-century theories of subjectivity.
2.2 Thomas Heywood, *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604)

The first surviving witchcraft play of the Jacobean period was Thomas Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton*, which was published in 1638 but probably written and performed around 1604 by The Queen Anne’s Men (Gurr 1996, 320), at The Curtain or The Red Bull (Heywood 2002, xi). *The Red Bull* ‘was a large playhouse, demanding big-scale acting; there is a late reference to Fortune and Red Bull actors as “terrible tear-throats”’ (Leggatt 1992, 20). *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* certainly lends itself to such acting; full of farce, topical reference and sexual innuendo, this play contains many elements of the archetypal pantomime. Although little is known of The Curtain, it seems to have had a reputation for the bawdiness of the plays performed there. Alexander Leggatt quotes Antonio Galli, a Florentine visitor, who in 1613 described The Curtain as ‘an infamous place in which no good citizen or gentleman would show his face’ (Leggatt 1992, 40). If such a reputation existed, *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* capitalized on it by drawing attention to the dangers associated with spectatorship (see section 5.1.2).

*The Wise Woman of Hoxton* shares much with Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (1591), even specific lines such as when a young woman in each play visits the wise woman to find out ‘whether I be a Maid or no’ (Lyly 1594, D2r; Heywood 1638, B4r). The play, unlike most of its predecessors, does not draw on classical motifs but turns on aspects of contemporary sixteenth and
seventeenth-century life. The most significant differences in these two plays arise from the fact that *Mother Bombie* was performed by a boys’ company. Much of the comedy of *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* depends upon and draws attention to the differences between the boys and adults who took the different parts. The Wise Woman is a unique witch in that she has no real magical power; her identity as a witch depends upon a reputation produced by other characters. Like Mother Bombie, who ‘provides the most striking example of [the] cultural ambivalence’ (Lyly 2010, 11), the Wise Woman reflects a general ignorance surrounding witchcraft: ‘While the term [witch] had serious legal meanings and implications, ordinary people were often unsure of where its boundaries lay’ (Purkiss 1996, 183). The Wise Woman adopts a number of identities, and this social malleability enables her to interact with every section of the community:

[WISEWOMAN]
how many Trades have I to live by: First, I am a Wise-woman, and a Fortune-teller, and under that I deale in Physicke and Fore-speaking, in Palmistry, and recovering of things lost. Next, I undertake to cure Madd folkes. Then I keepe Gentle-women Lodgers, to furnish such Chambers as I let out by the night: Then I am provided for bringing young Wenches to bed; and for a need, you see I can play the Match-maker.
(Heywood 1638, D4r)

The Wise Woman deals in the illegitimate. She is a brotheil mistresse, baby trafficker, underground midwife and charlatan. She provides a service to the community that enables its members to fulfil their illegitimate desires, and she
is victimized as a witch. She, like Elizabeth Sawyer from Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), is a scapegoat, and, because she holds the potential to expose the hypocrisies of the community, others find her threatening. Second Luce calls her ‘This witch, this Wizard, or old Trot’, Chartley names her ‘the Witch, the Beldame, the Hagge of Hogsdon’ and Boister, ‘this Witch, this Shee-cat, this damn’d Sorceress’ (Heywood 1638, C1v, B3r, E1r). The identity most associated with the Wise Woman is that of a witch, and thus she alludes the pinning down of identity and categorization making her ‘the any thing, the nothing’ (Heywood 1638, G2v). Unlike other stage witches, the Wise Woman is not surrounded by spectacular stage effects. No *thunder and lightning* accompany her entrances. Her abode is familiar and local. There is no perilous journey to visit her, as we find in many witchcraft plays of the period, but just a drunken stagger from the local pub, Mother Redcaps. Heywood, in this play, deals with the matter of witchcraft sympathetically. The Wise Woman is a likeable character who develops an intimate relationship with the audience. The villain of the play is not the ‘witch’ but those who persecute the largely harmless woman.

While the Wise Woman is the only ‘witch’ in the play, she is surrounded by a community of subversive women. Alongside her cross-dressing sidekick Luce, she is a bawd to a number of women ready with a ‘wet finger’ (Heywood 1638, D2r) to pleasure men. She is a far cry from the isolated and solitary witches found later in the Jacobean period. The play does not depict a
coven of witches, such as that found in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) or Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), but alludes to the central activity of the witches’ Sabbath: illicit sex.

### 2.3 John Marston, *Sophonisba* (1605)

John Marston’s *Sophonisba* was first performed only a year or so after *The Wise Woman of Hoxton*, in 1605, but is vastly different in its depiction of witchcraft. It was performed in an indoor theatre and by a boys’ company: most probably at Blackfriars by The Children of the Queen’s Revels (Munro 2005, 242). The witch of this play, Erictho, is of classical origin and is a character who also appears briefly alongside Canidia in Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617). Marston’s source for Erictho was Lucan’s *Pharsalia*, Book VI (Corbin and Sedge 1986, 6). She is a witch ‘of the severely classical kind’ and ‘the only fully fledged example of her kind in Elizabethan drama’ (Ure 1974, 78). Erictho is a being of horror, the first in the theatre of witchcraft:

For hideous blood-curdling realism the description of the witch Erictho and her cave is, I venture to think, without parallel in literature. Tough as whipcord must have been the nerves of an audience which could listen patiently to the recital of Erictho’s atrocities. (Marston and Bullen 1887, xliiv - xlv)

In *Sophonisba*, as in Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616), Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617) and Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The
Witch of Edmonton (1621), characters turn to witchcraft when they have no other choice, and the play emphasizes witchcraft as an illicit alternative to the dominant order: ‘Since heauen helpes not, deepest hell weele trie’ (Marston 1606, E4r). Surrounded by death and decay, Erictho lives in a cave within a desert, which characters reach after a perilous journey through a tunnel.

Erictho has power over the weather, the earth and the heavens; she is the most powerful and horrifying witch to have come to the stage at the time of performance. No thunder and lightning accompany her entrance but ‘Infernall Musicke’ (Marston 1606, E4r), capitalizing on the musicians available at Blackfriars. The stage trap is heavily utilized in this play: it acts as a cave mouth, and Erictho appears and disappears through it. She is a solitary witch with no familiar or magical colleagues, and as such she is unique in the theatre of witchcraft of the seventeenth century. The witch of Sophonisba is, however, typical of theatre witches of the period in two ways. She appears relatively late in the play, and she is first introduced through description. The following chapters investigate what these traits would have meant for those watching the plays.

2.4 William Shakespeare, Macbeth (1606)

Macbeth was probably first performed in 1606. From a diary entry by Simon Forman, we know that it was performed at The Globe in 1611 (Chambers 1930, 337-8). A second, altered version of the play was, according to Gary
Taylor and John Lavagnino, performed in 1616 (Taylor and Lavagnino 2007, 690), perhaps also at Blackfriars. This play, like *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), opens with the words of a witch; both openings refer to the weather and draw attention to the *thunder and lightning* that were standard in the drama of witchcraft. The weird sisters have familiars, Greymalkin and Paddock, who may have been Middleton’s additions. If Taylor and Lavagnino are correct about Middleton’s alteration to add familiars and extra witches, then the only ‘witches’ in the original play are the three weird sisters (Taylor and Lavagnino 2007, 389) who, unlike the Wise Woman or Erictho, speak rhythmically, in verse and in unison. Shakespeare’s source, among others, was Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, in which the witches are described as ‘creatures of the elderwood ... nymphs or fairies’ (Holinshed 1577, 268); this is a far cry from the haggish creatures usually imagined from the First Folio.

Taylor and Lavagnino argue that the hag-like descriptions we find in the First Folio came from the interpolations of Thomas Middleton (Taylor and Lavagnino 2007, 389). The account by Simon Forman certainly attests to the weird sisters of Holinshed as he describes ‘women feries or Nimphes’ (Chambers 1930, 337), although this may simply be a reflection of the Holinshed source. Perhaps, like the fairies of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595) or Joan la Pucelle, the weird sisters of *Macbeth* were alluring and exotic creatures, and the interpolations of Thomas Middleton were what produced the hag-like witches we find in the Folio. However, certain words in
the play that Taylor and Lavagnino attribute to Shakespeare do attest to a witch-like weird sister. The *thunder and lightning* that they appear and disappear amongst was a staple stage direction associated with witchcraft (see section 2.1.5). Macbeth describes the weird sisters as ‘secret, black, & midnight Hags’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm6v), and the weird sisters invite the familiar insult of ‘witch’ (Shakespeare 1623, ll6v) from the sailor’s wife. Although Taylor and Lavagnino attribute the apparitions to Middleton, the cauldron and its gruesome contents were the work of Shakespeare.

Laura Shamas surveys the classical and folk influences on the portrayal of the weird sisters in *Macbeth* which, for Shamas, includes the Fates, the Muses, Medea, Circe and Cassandra (Shamas 2007). Harris claims that the cauldron sequence was borrowed from Lucan and Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* VII (Harris 1980, 36). The familiars, the witches’ beards and the story of the sailor’s wife illustrate how early-modern beliefs about witchcraft also influenced the portrayal of the weird sisters. They were perhaps the most ambivalent witches of the early-modern stage:

Rather than presenting a single discourse as the ‘answer’ to witchcraft, Shakespeare refuses any such direct solution, insisting that the menace and the pleasure of witchcraft as a spectacle lies ultimately in its destabilising inscrutability. At the same time, the witches are an awkwardly compressed mass of diverse stories. (Purkiss 1996, 207)
Much of the information concerning *The Valiant Welshman* is conjecture. It is generally assumed that the play was written by Robert Armin as the title page tells us that it was written by ‘R. A. Gent’ (Armin 1615, A2r). Literary borrowings from the play suggest that it was written and performed between 1610 and 1615 (Nicol 2006, 59). The title page tells us that it was performed by ‘the Prince of Wales His Servants’ (Armin 1615, A2r). Prince Henry was Prince of Wales until his death in 1612; Charles (later king Charles I) did not become Prince of Wales until November 1616 (Foakes 1985, 165). The implication from the title page is that the play would have been performed by The Prince Henry’s Men (formally The Admiral’s Men) some time before Henry’s death in 1612 at their usual venue, The Fortune.

The witch in *The Valiant Welshman* has no name, and, unlike many of the witches found on the stage in previous years, she cannot be seen as a depiction of one of the witches of classic literature such as Medea, Hecate, Erictho or Melissa. Rather, she is an amalgamation of representations of witchcraft appearing on the early-modern stage before her and an epitome of witchcraft belief developed from classical, medieval and folklore sources. She performs her sorcery at night and boasts that she is able to plunge the world into darkness. She is depicted amongst *thunder and lightning*, is visited for counsel and aid and knows her visitor despite his disguise, a trait also found in
the biblical story of the Witch of Endor. The witch’s boast that ‘our skill / Commaunds the Moone drop from her silver sphere’ (Armin 1615, E4v) is a mirror of Dipsas’s claim in John Lyly’s Endymion (1588) that she can ‘darken the Sunne by my skil, and remoove the Moone out of her course’ (Lyly 1591, C2r) and Prospero’s boast in Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1611) that he has ‘bedymn’d / The Noon-tide Sun’ (Shakespeare 1623, B2v). The belief that a witch held power over the moon and daylight had, among other things, classical origins, and these passages may have been inspired by Ovid’s Metamorphoses in which Medea boasts: ‘O moon, I draw down, though Temesaean cymbals seek to ease your struggle. My charms can make the sun turn pale, my poisons bleach the dawn’ (Ovid 2001, 113).

The witch explains that stormy weather is more than a side-effect of her conjuring; it is a direct response to her emotional state: ‘Hell roares, when we are angry’ (Armin 1615, E4v). Reginald Scot, although he treated it with disdain, indicates the popularity of the association of witchcraft with power over the weather: ‘nor anie other indued with meane sense, but will denie that the Elements are obedient to Witches, and at their Commandment; or that they may at their pleasure send Rain, Haile, Tempests, Thunder, Lighting’ (Scot 1665, D5r). In later depictions of witchcraft, thunder and lightning was used to more startling effect; here it seems symptomatic of the clichés Armin draws on in his characterization of the witch. Like those witches in Alphonsus of Aragon (1587) and Orlando Furioso (1591), she appears late in the play and
while the witches in these plays represent plot functions for changing the
direction of the action, in *The Valiant Welshman* the witch personifies
Gloster’s treachery.

This witch abides in a cave with her foolish son, Bluso, who acts as her
servant. Like Caliban of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611) and Firestone of
Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616), Bluso is a cambion: the offspring of a demon
and a mortal. The cambion is used as a figure of comedy in *The Witch* (1616),
but he is also a discomfiting reminder of the incestuous relationship Hecate
has with her son. In *The Valiant Welshman*, Bluso is treated with some
sympathy. Although he never directly expresses reluctance at doing his
mother’s bidding, he is quick to accept the condition of his forgiveness, which
is that he uses his skills for good. The cambion in Kirke’s *The Seven
Champions of Christendom* (1635) is called Suckabus; his father is the witch’s
familiar Tarpax. Suckabus, like Firestone in *The Witch*, takes the role of the
fool, a reference to the belief that cambions were physically or mentally
deficient (Cawley 1926, 721-722).

**2.6 Thomas Middleton, *The Witch* (1616)**

*The Witch* was probably written in 1616 after the convictions of Frances
Howard and Robert Carr for the murder of Thomas Overbury (Fritze, Robison
et al. 1996, 72). This couple were steeped in controversy, and Howard’s
earlier divorce from the Earl of Essex on the grounds of non-consummation
due to magically induced impotence was the likely source of parts of the plot
(Bromham 1980). The characterization of Hecate indicates that the primary
source for Middleton’s witches was Scot’s *Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584).
However, while the playwrights of *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) drew
scepticism from their source, in *The Witch* Hecate and her crew are ‘lecherous,
murderous and perverse in the traditional demonological way, but they are
also funny, vulnerable and uncomfortably necessary to the maintenance of
state power and social position by those who resort to them’ (Gibson 2003, 97).
Marion Gibson’s description of the witches insightfully draws attention
to the relationship between the dominant order and the subculture of witchcraft
in the play, which I explore further in Chapter Five.

*The Witch* was performed by The King’s Men at Blackfriars, but it seems
that the play did not enjoy the performance success of other witchcraft plays as
the epistle admits that the play was ‘ignorantly ill fated’ (Middleton 2007, 1129).
Whether this ill fate was on account of political suppression or
theatrical failure is unclear. In this play, the chief witch, Hecate, performs a
spell which induces impotence in Antonio. This is the first time the belief that
witches could cause impotence was explicitly dramatized. References to this
belief were scattered amongst the theatre of witchcraft. The porter’s jokes and
Lady Macbeth’s rebukes to her husband, Amurack’s unmanly passivity,
Syphax’s emasculating shame and horror after having sex with Erictho, the
popularity of the virgin-wife character and repeated references to Medusa all
allude to the association of witchcraft with impotence. In *The Witch*, and later
in Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), the belief
provides the source for parts of the plot.

*The Witch* is also an important play in the history of witchcraft theatre
because, along with the adapted *Macbeth* (1616), it presents an extensive
coven. Six witches, a spirit like a cat and Hecate’s loutish son Firestone are all
part of Hecate’s illicit community. Even a non-supernatural character is
embraced into the coven when Almachildes feasts with the witches. As
implied by its title, *The Witch*’s leading theme is witchcraft, and it is the first
play of the period in which this happens. Until *The Witch* was taken to the
stage, witches and witchcraft represented an alternative to the dominant
themes of the plot or had provided a minor part or plot function. In *The Witch*,
as in *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), the theme of witchcraft permeates the
whole play. Like *Macbeth* (1606), this play dramatizes the making of a spell.
The witches throw a list of ingredients in their cauldron to make a spell which
will ‘transfër / Our ’nointed flesh into the air’ (Middleton 2007, 1.2.17-18).

Although Hecate does not open the play, witchcraft is first introduced
through her words. Unlike *Sophonisba* (1605), *The Valiant Welshman* (1612)
and *Orestes* (1617), in which the witch is presented through a lengthy
description by another character, here witchcraft is presented on its own terms.
The stage directions make no reference to *thunder and lightning* with her entrance. One might argue that the convention of *thunder and lightning* was so firmly associated with witchcraft that it was implied. However, these witches are beings not of horror but of comedy. While *thunder and lightning* was designed to scare, it was not necessarily appropriate for these witches, who are funny, accessible and carnivalesque. One of the most spectacular moments in *The Witch* is the song the witches perform during which Hecate begins her flight. Using an ascent machine, the flight of the witches was performed on stage; theatre mechanics were employed to present magic. This trait is taken to the extreme in Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire*, which was performed by the same playing company about eighteen years later.

### 2.7 Thomas Goffe, *Orestes* (1617)

*Orestes* was performed by students at the University of Oxford in 1617. Norbert O’Donnell argues that because Thomas Goffe clearly did not share the lofty contempt for the popular theatre that was apparent in much university drama, *Orestes* would, had it have been taken to the public stage, have been a commercial success (O'Donnell 1953, 484). The play draws on a number of classical texts, including Seneca’s and Lucan’s, as well as other drama from the early-modern period, including Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601) and Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (1600). Canidia and her associates Erictho,
Veia and Sagana are drawn from Horace, in which they are described as powerful, ancient and somewhat feral (Horace 1914).

Witchcraft in this play, as in those plays performed in the 1580s and 1590s, serves as a plot function. Orestes visits the witch for information, which, once gained, enables him to take revenge on his father’s murderers at the climax of the play. However, unlike the witches in plays from the Elizabethan period, Canidia is a horrifying witch with potent magical power. She is described with familiar imagery. She lives in a cave in darkness where no sounds can be heard except for those of the ravens and night creatures that she lives amongst (Goffe 1633, D3r). Like Erictho in Marston’s Sophonisba (1605), this witch makes her spells using the parts of bodies she steals from graves and, as in Sophonisba, ‘infernall Musique’ (Goffe 1633, E1r) is used to signify supernatural activity rather than the usual thunder and lightning. She uses devils or familiars ‘To bring her news from earth, from sea, from hell’ (Goffe 1633, D3r) and holds power over the weather. As in Sophonisba, we are first introduced to the witch through a lengthy description by another character that lingers with awe on the witch’s power and the gruesomeness of her activities.
2.8 Thomas Dekker, William Rowley & John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621)

*The Witch of Edmonton* was first performed in The Cockpit Drury Lane in 1621 by Prince Charles’s Company. It dramatizes the execution of the real-life Elizabeth Sawyer for witchcraft in that year. The source for the plot was Henry Goodcole’s account of the trial and execution of Sawyer (Goodcole 1621). Parallels in the language of the two texts imply that some of the scepticism which is apparent in the play was probably taken from Reginald Scot’s *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584). The play was revived in the mid-1630s, and the 1658 quarto would appear to derive from these later performances (Corbin and Sedge 1986, 21). Perhaps the revival capitalized on an interest in contemporary witchcraft trials that Heywood and Brome drew on in their *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), which was performed while the real-life witches of Lancashire languished in jail. *The Witch of Edmonton*, like Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), draws on familiar and contemporary beliefs. The play dramatizes with contempt beliefs about witchcraft when unsympathetic characters claim to have proven Sawyer’s guilt when she runs from her house to which they had set fire (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, F4r). In addition, Anne Ratcliff’s attempt to scratch Sawyer’s face (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, G2r) references the belief that drawing the blood of a witch above her breath (that is her mouth) would annul a witch’s spell.
(Rosen 1991, 18). This belief may also have inspired the passage in *1 Henry the Sixth* in which Talbot goads Joan la Pucelle:

> **Talb[ot]**
> Ile have a bowt with thee:
> Deuill or Deuils Dam, Ile coniure thee:
> Blood will I draw on thee, thou art a Witch.
> (Shakespeare 1623, k4v)

*The Witch of Edmonton* is generally considered to offer one of the most sympathetic portrayals of witchcraft in the period. Jonathan Dollimore argues that the play places an ‘emphasis upon identity as socially coerced’ (Dollimore 1984, 176). *The Witch of Edmonton* offers a unique portrayal of the process of becoming a witch and sealing a pact with the devil. The process had been dramatized in *Doctor Faustus* (1592) and arguably in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), but *The Witch of Edmonton* provides the most intimate and detailed portrayal of the making of the pact by a female character. Elizabeth Sawyer is an old and poor villager, who is persecuted and bullied as a witch on account of her hag-like appearance. Sawyer, believing that ‘’Tis all one, / To be a Witch, as to be counted one’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, C4v), seals a pact with the devil. Sawyer’s contact with the supernatural is facilitated by Tom, her familiar, who appears in the shape of a dog. Despite the clichéd reliance on *thunder and lightning* to indicate supernatural activity, most of the magical powers attributed to Sawyer in the play are unlike those depicted elsewhere in the theatre of witchcraft. Because the play sticks closely to its source, Henry Goodcole’s pamphlet concerning the real-life trial, Sawyer’s magic reflects
local and contemporary beliefs. She has no power over the weather, the heavens or of prophecy as depicted in those plays that draw on classical sources. Even the witches of Middleton and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1616) are answerable to another witch of classical mythology, Hecate. Sawyer, in contrast, is under the tutelage of the Christian embodiment of evil: a devil. Elizabeth Sawyer in the play displays none of the exoticism of the stage witches that preceded her.

2.9 Thomas Heywood & Richard Brome, *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634)

*The Witches of Lancashire* was performed by The King’s Men at The Globe in 1634 and was enormously popular, as indicated by its being performed ‘three days together’ (Tomkyns 2002, 163). A letter that Nathaniel Tomkyns wrote to his acquaintance, Sir Robert Phelips, provides one of the few instances of an eyewitness account of witchcraft on the early-modern stage. Tomkyns lists the magic performed by the witches. Like *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), this play was based on English and contemporary, rather than classical, beliefs about witchcraft. The play was based on current events: the conviction of four women of Lancashire found guilty of witchcraft, who were still in jail at the time of performance. The authors appear to have had access to the trial records as many of the events in the play correspond closely with those
reported in John Webster’s *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677), known to depend on those records.

The witches of this play are unique. In other plays, witches are renowned and revered or are immediately recognized as witches. In *The Witches of Lancashire*, the witches have secondary identities and are able, for the majority of the play, to hide their illicit activities from the community. As in Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616), there is no *thunder and lightning* accompanying the magic. *The Witches of Lancashire*, like *The Witch*, was not designed to frighten, but, as Tomkyns said, ‘it consisteth from the beginning to the end of odd passages and fopperies to provoke laughter’ (Tomkyns 2002, 164). These witches cause impotence, disrupt a wedding feast by stealing the meat and replacing it with a mock feast, transform themselves and their victims into animals and magically cover great distances in little time. They do not claim to have power over the weather or of prophecy, and they do not make spells from gruesome ingredients. Like the weird sisters in Shakespeare and Middleton’s *Macbeth* (1616), Hecate in *The Witch* (1616) and Elizabeth Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), these witches have familiars who do their bidding, transport them to their feast and gain rewards in the form of blood suckling. As in *The Witch* (1616), this play dramatizes a coven. There are five witches in the play ranging from an old ‘Gammer’, Gillian, to a bewitching sweetheart, Moll.
2.10 John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635)

From the title page we know that *The Seven Champions of Christendom* was published in 1638 and performed some time before this at the amphitheatre, The Red Bull, and its indoor counterpart, The Cockpit. The initials on the title page suggest that the play was written by John Kirke. Paul Merchant, giving as evidence a copy of Thomas Heywood’s *The Iron Age* which includes a manuscript list of Heywood’s plays, argues that the author was Heywood (Merchant 1978). John Freehafer, on the basis of a number of topical illusions in the play, dates its composition at 1613-1614 (Freehafer 1969). One reference in the play, however, suggests that it was composed after Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634). The clown asks his mother, Calib, ‘were not you one of the Cats that drunke up the Millers Ale in *Lancashire Wind-mills*?’ (Kirke 1638, B3r). The story of the attack on the mill in *The Witches of Lancashire* has no identifiable source in the records of either the 1612 or 1634 Lancashire witch trials. Its reference to *The Witches of Lancashire* dates composition of *The Seven Champions of Christendom* between August 1634—the date of *The Witches of Lancashire* being performed at the Globe—and 1638. The source for the play, including the witch, Calib, was most likely Richard Johnson’s prose romance *The Seven Champions of Christendom*. In this work, the witch is named Kalyb, ‘the lady of the woodes’, and she is described as a wicked enchantress who kept George imprisoned (Johnson 1596, B2r). The theme of perverse maternity is evident
in Johnson’s work, in which Kalyb is positioned as a supernatural and evil midwife. In Kalyb’s cave, George’s mother is overcome with labour pains and is forced to decide ‘either to the spoyle of her Infant, or decay of her owne life’ (Johnson 1596, B2v). Like Macduff in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), George is born by Caesarean section: ‘this most Noble and Magnanimious Ladie was cast into a dead slepe, her wombe cut up with sharpe razers, and the Infant taken from the bed of his creation’ (Johnson 1596, B3r). There is a sense of power associated with this birth in both plays.

*The Seven Champions of Christendom* is the latest of the plays in my analysis, and Kirke elaborated on the witch of his source by drawing on imagery associated with stage witches throughout the first part of the seventeenth century. As with so many plays in the period that denote the supernatural, *thunder and lightning* accompany the entrance of Calib. Reflecting a trait typical of the early Jacobean witchcraft plays, Calib gives a lengthy description of her home, which is in an isolated cave in a wood. She is accompanied by her familiar and lover Tarpax, her son Suckabus and her nursling George, and with these characters she reproduces the sexual depravity and perverted maternity of Middleton’s Hecate.

In most of the witchcraft plays preceding *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, the witch is introduced through the words of another, a theatrical technique that would have led the imagination of the audience. In this play, in
contrast, the witch opens the play thereby allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions about the witch’s appearance and activities. She describes how she murdered George’s parents and stole the baby with the original intention ‘to bathe my body in his popular gore’ (Kirke 1638, B1v). This is perhaps a reference to the spell, which was believed to make witches fly, referenced in *The Witch* (1616). An ingredient of this spell was the blood of an unbaptized baby. This witch, like Hecate in *The Witch*, has a finite life, and her familiar makes the prophecy of her death:

```
Tar[pax]  Whilst Calib in her powerfull hand
         Holds fast her powerfull art,
         So long may Calib by her power,
         Command Death hold his Dart.
         But when fond Love by dotage shall,
         Blindfold wise Calibs eyes,
         With that great power she did command,
         The great Inchantresse dies.
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(Kirke 1638, B2r-B2v)

Calib, unlike Canidia of *Orestes* (1617) or the witch in *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), displays human qualities that contribute to her undoing. She is desperate for George’s love, and when she hands him her wand she dies in a spectacular descent into hell.

**2.11 Half a Century of Witches**

The witches found on the stage during the 1580s and 1590s did not evoke the horror of the uncanny as later witches did. A number of theatrical techniques,
such as high artifice, comedy or the transfer of transgression onto a non-supernatural character, subdued the potential for terror. When witches were female, witchcraft was never a leading theme of the drama. The insulting epithet of ‘witch’ was used liberally by largely unsympathetic characters. Such use of the term implies, in agreement with Reginald Scot (1584), that the persecution of witches was a symptom of scapegoating and misogyny. In later chapters, I show that the scapegoating of witches reflected an intersection of social and psychical anxiety. In these plays, witches were associated with inversion: ‘it remains clear that the witch was seen as inverting not only the natural order in general but specifically the image of the "good woman"’ (Whitney 1995, 77). As the female witch character developed in the seventeenth century, the witch was constructed as other, but this model was complicated by techniques that undermined an antithetical structure.

Perhaps because of James’s interest in the subject, female witches were depicted far more thoroughly in the early years of the seventeenth century than hitherto. While here I chart first performances, it is probable that the witch plays of the sixteenth century were revived on various occasions throughout later years. As Leggatt argues, ‘a theatre season would mix old and new, so that revivals of, say, Doctor Faustus were as much a part of the Jacobean theatre scene as the first production of new plays’ (Leggatt 1992, 3). Perhaps there were influxes of witch-play revivals which corresponded with contemporary events. It seems likely that The Witch of Edmonton (1621) was
revived in the mid 1630s around the time the *Witches of Lancashire* (1634) was first performed. Similarly, Middleton interpolated additional material into *Macbeth* about the time of the first performances of *The Witch* (1616).

The theatre of witchcraft as a whole was self-referential. Recurring themes and stage directions constructed an identifiable genre. *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634) makes reference to *Macbeth* (1606). *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635) makes reference to *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634). Erictho appears in *Sophonisba* (1605) and *Orestes* (1617). Hecate is a character in *Macbeth* (1616) and *The Witch* (1616). A similar joke appears in *The Witch* (1616) and *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635) regarding the speed of the descent machine. Medusa, although never appearing as a character, is referenced in nearly every play containing a witch. The theme of impotence occurs implicitly or explicitly in every play. The following chapters illustrate the emergence of a genre of horror once James came to the throne. I will demonstrate how this horror was produced through the uncanny.
Chapter Three

The Horror of the Cave

As the previous chapter illustrates, the horror of theatrical witches during the reign of Elizabeth was contained through comedy, their association with white magic, or the highly stylized presentation of their activities. The plays considered in this chapter, Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617) and John Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), construct witches as beings of horror. Anthony Harris identifies a change in the early seventeenth century: ‘just as the tone in the Jacobean prose writings became uniformly more hostile, so the dramas of the later period were considerably more sombre in their portrayals of the practice of witchcraft’ (Harris 1980, 31-2). The ritualistic conventions of witchcraft were accompanied in the plays studied in this chapter with intimate characterization, which somewhat nullified the distancing effect of ceremony. The witches in these plays display human emotions and folly: lust, jealousy, fear, and love of mischief. Although the witches’ activities are still presented through ceremony, the humanization of these witches dominates their portrayal, which perhaps invited empathy and intimacy. The humanization of witches is exactly that which produces horror because, as this chapter will illustrate, witches obscure categories of what is knowable and unknowable.
The evidence provided by the play texts suggests that the ritualism associated with magic found in the Elizabethan period weakened throughout the first part of the seventeenth century. Sawyer’s comical misquoting of Latin in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) illustrates the extent to which the ceremonies typical of Elizabethan stage witches were discarded. The combination of ritual and realism in the plays studied here produced the horror of the uncanny by presenting witchcraft as both familiar and unfamiliar (see section 1.3). This unsettling mixture reflected the ambiguity of the term witch: it could apply to both human and supernatural beings (Harris 1980, 2). In other plays of the period, for example Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) and Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), witches are depicted primarily as human women who practise the occult. The witches of the plays studied in this chapter are less easy to classify because they embody the unsettling ambiguity of witchcraft. In subsequent chapters, I will investigate how the ambivalence instigated by this ambiguity was reflected in the casting of witches.

The witches of these plays practise their spells from their caves, which they describe with pride and detail. This detail draws upon the typical association of the feminine with domesticity in the period (Fitzpatrick 1999) but warps this association into a display of the uncanny when the cave is presented as dangerous and elusive. Although performed in a variety of different theatrical
venues, these plays develop a spectacle of horror which depends, in part, upon the theatrical representation of a cave. Kerstin Shands considers spatial metaphors in feminist discourse and offers a useful distinction between the psychological implications of space and place:

Space is frequently seen as abstract, and place, as concrete and local. While space is associated with the windy panoramas of long-distance travel and the exploration or colonization of unknown worlds, place is cosy familiarity, retreat and rejuvenation. Whereas space flings us into the cosmic, to the edges of the universe, place silently slips us inward to the limitless molecules of infinity. (Shands 1998, 22)

We see this distinction at work in the witch plays. Previous depictions of witchcraft, whether white or black, are generally associated with a feeling of endless power and space: there is no perilous journey to the witch’s abode but either an inclusion of the witch in the political centre (as in William Shakespeare’s 2 Henry the Sixth (1591)) or an appearance of the witch in moments of political or social turmoil (as in Robert Greene’s Orlando Furioso (1591) and Alphonsus King of Aragon (1587)). Joan la Pucelle’s witchcraft in Shakespeare’s 1 Henry the Sixth (1592) allows her to engage in the world of warfare, a masculine and exterior world that involves the power of space and movement. She is a very different character from the isolated and remote witches found in the drama of the Jacobean period who were tied, often possessively, to their abodes. Joan’s witchcraft, in contrast, is an enabler of the power of space.
The difference between the open and spacious power of these earlier conjurers or enchanters and the suffocating interiority of the cave is brought into contrast in John Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635). Here, the witch, Calib conducts her spells from her cave home: ‘Here is my mansion, within the rugged bowels of this Cave’ (Kirke 1638, B1v), and she does not appear in the play in any other setting. There is an abnormal distension of space in Calib’s description of her home. By describing her cave as a mansion, she implies grandeur, but this is juxtaposed with language of the body that implies close interiority. The juxtaposition reveals a relocation of power and grandeur from the dominant order to the witch’s space. This relocation also occurs in *Orestes* when the witch expresses disdain for titles and honour (Goffe 1633, E1v), and in *Sophonisba*, in which Erictho lives in a derelict temple (Marston 1606, E4v). Calib’s departure from the stage and the play occurs as she descends through the rocks into hell (Kirke 1638, C2v). In contrast, the male enchanter Argalio, who appears later in the play, is borne away by magical spirits:

*Arg[alio]*
Seest thou this Throne by sable spirits borne,  
In it wee'le mount, so unbeleev'd a height,  
Earth shall appeare an attome to thine eye:  
(Kirke 1638, I2r)

Here, Argalio’s description of his departure expands the theatrical space as he offers an imaginable viewpoint from which the audience are amongst the things that appear as small as an atom. This would have been especially
effective in an open-air amphitheatre, such as the Red Bull, where the imaginable flight extends into the visible sky.

The contrast represented in The Seven Champions of Christendom draws attention to the gendered implications of space. The male magicians of the early-modern theatre, Friar Bacon of Robert Greene’s Friar Bacon and Friar Bongay (1589), the title character of Christopher Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus (1592), or Prospero of Shakespeare’s The Tempest (1611), are found wielding their power through external modes: space, art and travel. The female witches in the plays studied here are tied to their cave, often meeting their deaths once they stray from it. The typical association of the feminine with interiority is here exaggerated and exploited. In these plays, the cave is figured as a maternal space in which characters experience a symbolic rebirth. The cave is theatricalised as a place of power and danger which participates as a stage in the construction of the subject. It is described in terms of the maternal female body and is a place of horror.

The witches of these plays are associated relentlessly with their abode, a claustrophobic place of interiority: a cave within a wood. While these witches are aware of the goings on in the world of men and can view the effects of their power, they do so from the intimate place of their cave. The association of the witch with a remote place may be derived from Ovid’s Metamorphoses, in which Hecate is described as living ‘hidden away in a sunless grove in a
remote forest’ (Ovid 2001, 111). In the early years of the seventeenth century, stage representations of the witch became increasingly associated with this solitary abode, and theatrical techniques, explored below, were employed with ingenuity to represent the otherness of the abode and the perilous journey that must be undertaken to visit it. Although not found on the stage until the seventeenth century, the association of the witch with ‘elsewhere’ is found in Edmund Spenser’s *Fairie Queene* in Book III, Canto VII:

There in a gloomy hollow glen she found
A little cottage, built of stickes and reedes
In homely wize, and wald with sods around,
In which a witch did dwell, in loathly weedes,
And wilful want, all carelesse of her needs;
So choosing solitarie to abide,
Far from all neighbours, that her devilish deedes
And hellish arts from people she might hide,
And hurt far off unknowne, whom ever she envied
(Spenser 1590, 495)

A gulf of distance is presented as the witch ‘hurt[s] far off unknowne’, which helps to construct the witch as other and her abode as elsewhere. This trait is maintained in the plays of the Jacobean period. The association of the witch with a cave or solitary glen was by no means new, but the early years of King James’s reign saw a new emphasis on the cave in theatrical representation that continued until the latest play of the period covered in this thesis, Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635).
Joseph Campbell surveys anthropological and mythological evidence and concludes that the cave is used generally as a metaphor for both the womb and the tomb (Campbell 2008, 8). In Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), the power of the cave is imagined in terms of the womb: ‘What whirlewind rising from the wombe of earth’ (Goffe 1633, C4v). The image of gestation and birth encourages a focus on the maternal body, and the womb is used as a metaphor in the play for a spatial and ideological conception of hell: ‘hurry her from the wombe of hell’ (Goffe 1633, G3r). I shall demonstrate how the movement to the cave represents an abandonment of the symbolic order and a return to the body of the mother in the plays studied here. A place of death and re-birth, the cave represents a place from which the hero, in the plays studied here and in wider mythologies, emerges with new-found knowledge or foresight (Campbell 1959). The ancient connection of human knowledge with an emergence from a cave is first found in Plato’s allegory of the cave in *The Republic*. In many subsequent stories, the movement to the cave represents a return to the womb and an opportunity for rebirth. Mircea Eliade and William Trask analyse stories of Zalmoxis and Pythagoras descending into caves and returning with inexplicable knowledge: ‘Retiring into a hiding place or descending into an underground chamber is ritually and symbolically equivalent to a *katabasis* or a *decensus ad inferos* undertaken as a means of initiation’ (Eliade and Trask 1972, 261). The descent into the cave involves an abandonment of cultural normality to engage with the drives or knowledge of a force somewhere outside of culture. These plays present a rebirth where a
character entering the cave emerges with new-found knowledge, which in turn contributes to their undoing. By redefining the subject as a product of the witch’s cave and what is encountered within it, these plays figure the witch as a horrific force which contributes to the reformation, or disintegration of subjectivity. This process is gendered. The supernatural force within the cave relocates gendered power by emasculating male victims.

In the plays studied here, the cave lies beyond the stage doors; the stage theatricalises the mouth of the cave. This staging decision engaged the ideological meanings associated with the boundaries of place, which, for anthropologist Mary Douglas, is a transitional place characterized by power and danger. Boundaries bring categories of signification into existence, but the power of the boundary lies in its potential for annihilation because society relies upon ‘form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure’ (Douglas 2002, 141). The association of witches with boundaries continued into the early-modern period, when Jean Bodin in 1580 described ‘such despicable things which are done at night, or in grottoes or secret places ... the first testifies to having seen a witch hollow out and dig beneath the threshold of a door, or at a crossroads, for that is where witches place their spell’ (Bodin 2004, 132). In this chapter, I argue that the witches were figured as other through their association with the cave. However, the dramatization of the mouth of the cave, an ideological and spatial boundary, complicated this structure of antithesis and engaged the spectator in a dialogue of horror.
through the stimulation of fantasy. What occurs in the cave, in these plays, is just beyond the view of the spectator. By figuring the cave as the womb, and by engaging the fantasy of the spectator, these plays opened up a space for horrific imaginings relating to the maternal body, which perhaps divided the audience along gender lines in their reactions.

The plays studied here emphasize the act of looking in the cave. Gloster, of Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), is driven mad by what he sees in the cave, and in Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635) Calibboasts of the horror within her cave: ‘this denne, which to behold / Would freeze to Ice the hissing tramels of Medusa’ (Kirke 1638, B1v). These plays emphasize seeing and yet deny the spectator a view of the cave’s interior. This provides an apparent safety mechanism, so that the audience is not subjected to the horror of the cave as the characters are. However, horror arises from the unknown (Lovecraft 1973). When characters do enter the cave, it leads them to a place of emasculating horror, but the dramatization of the cave’s mouth ensured that the terror of the cave remained unknown, and it was, for the early-modern spectator, a place of fantasy.

3.1 John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635)

In contrast to the other plays studied in this chapter, in which the witch’s cave or cell is constructed as the other place which is visited to gain knowledge and
foresight, in Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), the cave is connected to origins. In this play, there is no return to the cave but an emergence from it: a staging of the ancient association of caves with the birth of humankind (Varner 2004, 144). In *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, the cave, or womb, is figured as an archaic place of origins and dependency.

The play opens at the mouth of the cave of Calib. The cave lies beyond the stage: in the discovery space, tiring house and beyond the stage doors. Her opening words establish her theatrical position at the mouth of the cave:

```
Calib
HA, lowder a little; so, that burst was well:
Agen, ha, ha; house, house your heads you feare·
Stroke mortal fooles
(Kirke 1638, B1r)
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Calib’s words suggest that the accompanying stage effects (thunder and lightning) would have made the audience jump or cower, supporting Leslie Thomson’s suggestion, cited in section 2.1.5, that the general audience belief in the supernatural would have meant that this effect was designed to scare (Thomson 1999, 22). However, the stage direction here is more than just an abstract indication of the supernatural; it also implies that a storm rages in the theatre. Calib’s words are our first indication that she meets the audience at the mouth of her cave; she laughs at the audience, those ‘feare-stroke mortal fooles’ who are left out in the weather. The play was performed at both an indoor and outdoor theatre. Performed at The Red Bull, her words would have
taken on extra significance for the groundlings, who took the risk of exposure to weather. At The Cockpit, the extensive use of *thunder and lightning*—according to Thomson, this play is the greatest user of it in the period (Thomson 1999, 18)—would have produced a startling effect in the comparative intimacy of the playing hall (Smith 1999, 220). The observation that the audience ‘house [their] heads’ is more than an acknowledgement of the fear stimulated by the supernatural; the audience would have been encompassed in the ambience of the play as they covered their heads from the theatrical, and sometimes actual, rain. Tim Fitzpatrick and Daniel Johnston suggest that at times the setting of the stage is brought on with the entering character, which phenomenon they call ‘extrusion’ (Fitzpatrick and Johnston 2009). Here, however, the textual evidence points towards a dramatization of the mouth of the cave, a place which carried strong ideological meaning. I attempt, like Fitzpatrick and Johnston, to identify the fictional placement of the doors and openings to the stage; in an extension of their approach, I consider the ideological meanings of these fictional thresholds.

The first entrance onto the stage is Calib’s; she enters from her cave to its boundary, from where she can laugh at the mortal audience exposed to the weather. Descriptions of nature evoke an external world, filled with ‘withered woods’, ‘sapless trees’, ‘toads’ and ‘ravens’ (Kirke 1638, B1r). This outside world is balanced with interior language of ‘This cragge ... this denne’ (Kirke 1638, B1v). Her introduction to her home, ‘Here is my mansion within the
rugged bowels of this Cave’ (Kirke 1638, B1v), enhances the complacency of her opening words: she is protected from the thunder and lightning by her magic and her abode. While often the supernatural was associated with the vertical axis of the trapdoor and the descent machine, Calib’s first entrance is probably through one of the stage doors or the central opening. The descent machine, employed in the entrance of Tarpax, leads to the world beyond the cave:

*Calib*
What, ho *Tarpax*, obey my charmes,
And with the steele tipt pinions of thy wings,
Cut through the Clowds and flye unto thy *Calib*.
(Kirke 1638, B2r)

Although Calib is firmly and possessively associated with the cave, the world beyond the descent machine is vast and vulnerable to the mischief of Tarpax, Calib’s familiar and lover. While the heavens lead to the world outside the cave, the trap is reserved for hell and is covered by a rock which cleaves for Calib’s eventual death and descent. Noises from *within* often presage the entrances of characters from the cave, perhaps an eerie echo characteristic of the acoustics of caves. Suckabus, the son of Calib and Tarpax, is next to enter, coming from ‘*within*’ (Kirke 1638, B2v) the cave where he has been fighting with George. Whichever entrance he uses, the fictionalization of space beyond the openings onto the stage dictates that it is different from that of his father, who entered a few lines previously via the descent machine.
Suckabus begs for his mother’s protection from George, and Calib sends her son back into the cave with his father:

*Cal[ib]*  Into my Cave my *Tarpax*, take my sonne with thee,  
I'le have a little conference with *George.*  
*Exit.*  
*Enter George.*  
Welcome my *George*, my joy, my love, my life,  
(Kirke 1638, B3r)

No stage direction or dialogue implies that Suckabus and Tarpax meet George at their overlapping exit and entrance. Presumably, different doors were employed to denote an extending labyrinth of cave chambers across the space beyond the stage. A horn sounding from ‘*within*’ (Kirke 1638, B3r) the cave precedes George’s entrance. Whether the musician sounding the horn stood beyond the stage doors in the tiring house or above in the musicians’ gallery, the echoic noise would have extended the cave across the backstage area.

Another over-lapping exit/entrance occurs once George discovers the nature of his birth and vows revenge on Calib:

*Geo[rge]*  No more, no more, revenge like lightning flies.  
*Exit.*  
*A noise within:* Enter Witch, Tarpax, with other spirits arm’d, Clowne with them, Thundring and Lightning.  
*Cal[ib]*  Shield me my *Tarpax* from the furious boy,  
(Kirke 1638, C2r)

A few lines follow in which Tarpax describes the approach of George:
Now arm'd with both, comes to destroy thee.
Fie Calib, fie, could not the Riddle which I read to thee,
When thou desired'st the knowledge of thy doome,
Forewarne thee then? Prepare, he comes.

Hell and confusion.

I, confusion comes.

Oh gentle Tarpax, numbe his sences so,
That he forget the power of his wand, we may be safe.

He comes, he comes.

Tarpax’s description not only heightens the excitement of the chase but, in the fictional world, gives George time to arm himself within the cave. The audience would have been encouraged to recognize the fictional world beyond the stage doors. Again, different openings were probably employed to present a convincing chase. Mariko Ichikawa argues that ‘the overlapping of the exit of a character who runs away and the entrance of a character in pursuit of him would have added to the suspense of the scene’ (Ichikawa 2002, 56-7).

Ichikawa’s reading is of Gloucester’s chase of Edgar in King Lear (1605). In The Seven Champions of Christendom, the chase is enriched by an identifiable fictional offstage location of the cave. The noise from within extends the chase beyond the stage and represents the chaos within the cave in the backstage area. The model we are left with is this: at least two separate entrances lead into the cave, and the stage represents the boundary between the cave and the external world. The space beyond the descent machine leads to the outside world, and the trapdoor, covered by some sort of mechanism
disguised as a rock, leads to hell. This play, along with evidence from Phillip Henslowe’s 1598 inventory of the Admiral’s Men’s properties (Harris and Korda 2002, 3), indicates the use of elaborate scenery and props in the presentation of the supernatural on stage.

3.1.1 Witches and Thresholds

The stage, in its representation of the cave mouth, thus contained entrance ways into both the cave and hell. This configuration reflects the ancient connection of caves with gateways to other worlds; Robert Lima suggests that ‘Evidence from later eras shows that caverns were revered in Western culture since recorded antiquity as entrances to the underworld’ (Lima 2005, 226).

The staging of this play drew on this association of the cave with boundaries and thresholds but presented a slightly more complex model. The stage represented both the mouth of hell and the mouth of the cave. The two locations were, however, kept distinct by the arrangement of the entrances and exits onto the stage. The cave lay behind and beyond the stage, and hell lay below the trap. The stage itself was thus a crossroad and threshold. It lay on the boundary between categories of space and location and as such contained the power and danger associated with this position of liminality.

This staging model supports Fitzpatrick’s assertion that many scenes in early-modern drama took place between private and public places, in a
location from which exits lead inwards and outwards (Fitzpatrick 1999). As he acknowledges, Fitzpatrick’s model genders the playing space because routes to interior spaces (in to the dining room, kitchen, or bed-chamber) are associated with the domestic realm of women while routes to exterior spaces (out to the street, down to the harbour) are associated with the wider world of men. The cave, in its metaphorical and physical connection with the womb, epitomized the association of the feminine with interiority. George’s emergence from the cave sees him embark on a masculine adventure of action, glory and Christianity. The backstage area, the tiring house and the space beyond the stage doors were thus places of femininity: close, claustrophobic and suffocating. The external world of adventure, space and freedom extended beyond the descent machine (from which Tarpax descends) and into the space of the audience, out in the withered woods and rough weather. The stage, however, represented the mouth of the cave, and here the gendered dichotomy of interiority and exteriority was most at risk. The mouth of the cave represented the threshold between categories of interiority and exteriority, the earth and the sky, natural and supernatural, this world and the next; as such it was a place of power and danger.

Mary Douglas considers witchcraft as a structural force as opposed to a psychic one. She argues that individuals who do not fit into a social structure are often regarded as powerful and dangerous: ‘the inarticulate, unstructured areas emanate unconscious powers which provoke others to demand that
ambiguity be reduced’ (Douglas 2002, 126-7). The anxiety inherent to boundary violation is presented in *The Seven Champions of Christendom* in terms of space. The danger of the crossroads—of which Hecate was goddess (Hornblower and Spawforth 2003, 671)—lay with its position on the boundaries of the social structure: it held the power to collapse the structure and merge the dichotomous categories within it. For this reason, Douglas argues that crossroads and thresholds are powerful and dangerous places. The threshold is a tenuous place of uncertainty and at the mouth of the cave George is forced to choose between the phallocentric world outside the cave, or the suffocating, clingy and maternal forces within it.

The spatial dichotomies are threatened in the play by a number of techniques that would have drawn the audience into the maternal space of the cave. The theatrical antithesis of the audience without and the cave within would have been complicated by the tradition of spectators purchasing stools to watch the play from the stage, which, according to Leslie Thomson, occurred in outdoor as well as indoor theatres (Thomson 2010). We know that this happened at The Red Bull, and Andrew Gurr quotes an incident in which a stage-sitting apprentice there was accidentally wounded by one of the actors (Gurr 1992, 113). Had some spectators been watching *The Seven Champions of Christendom* from the stage, they would have been positioned precariously close to the mouth of the cave that presented an irresistible draw and eventual
imprisonment to the champions (Kirke 1638, B4v). Calib, we learn, imprisons those who come too close:

[GEORGE]
she’s cruell unto others,
And few or none, whose foote doe chance to stray
Neare the abiding of this great inchantresse
(Kirke 1638, C1r)

Those sitting on the stage with her were thus positioned in a place of fictional peril. Perhaps the audience were further involved in the supernatural spectacle by some of its members taking the parts of the devils. Samuel Peyps’s diary reported that Thomas Killigrew ‘would go to The Red Bull and when the man cried to the boys “Who will go and be a devil and he shall see the play for nothin?” then he would go in and be a devil upon the stage and so get to see the plays’ (Pepys 1906, 160). This implies that not only was The Red Bull a playhouse popular for spectacular effects, but that the theatrical boundaries were fluid enough to enable the audience to take part in the action.

A final consideration of theatrical space is the discovery space, or what used to be called the ‘inner stage’. Given the large number of plays performed at The Red Bull that included a discovery scene, the theatre may have used a removable curtained booth or a curtain covered recess into the tiring house in the central wall (Gurr 1992, 152). This space was usually employed to signify an internal chamber such as a bedroom, study or tomb (Hosley 1959, 35). Fitzpatrick and Johnston argue for a re-consideration of this space as a
‘concealment space’ rather than a discovery space (Fitzpatrick and Johnston 2009). In their model, this chamber represented a theatrical ‘dead end’ with no access to the offstage area and as such was associated with a sense of foreboding; the example they give is the sense of danger for Polonius when he hides there in *Hamlet* (1601). Calib’s entrance from within this space in the tiring house would encapsulate the suffocating interiority of the tomb. Hilary Nunn provides an alternative reading of the discovery space, which she claims would have led to the space offstage:

... many plays performed in the indoor theatres made more emphatic use of the discovery space – an area that, in the indoor theatre, consisted of little more than a draped doorway that led to the backstage area. The people and objects that occupied this area appeared, in effect, within a frame, and, as audiences peered into this clearly bordered area, they gazed through a doorway. (Nunn 2005, 115)

Whether the discovery space was a theatrical dead-end or led to further offstage spaces, the use of this space would have added to an illusion of depth and the implication that the fictional world led beyond the stage. The fictional space is extended beyond the view of the audience, especially for those in some of the seats in the amphitheatre, but not beyond what it could hear. Throughout *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, sounds from within the tiring house or beyond the stage doors indicate the activities taking place within the cave. This condition, like the cave and its echoic darkness, emphasizes hearing over looking. The audience, to some extent, would have shared in George’s disempowerment in reference to looking. George is
encompassed in the cave and its natural and supernatural blinding properties.

His ignorance of his ancestry is connected to the dismal covering of the cave
and the darkness it implies. An escape from the cave is an escape from ignorance:

[CALIB]
Let day-light shine then, and expell those clouds,
For here I vow, by that infernall power,
By whom I may command to grant what ere it be,
Thy full demand, not dangering of our selfe.
(Kirke 1638, B3v)

3.1.2 The Clingy Mother

In *The Seven Champions of Christendom*, the construction of maternal features
of the body as horrific is achieved not only in reference to staging but also to the plot. George, we learn, was stolen from his parents as a child by Calib,
who had planned to ‘bathe [her] body in his popular gore’ (Kirke 1638, B1v).
Yet some perverse maternal instinct stayed her hand:

[CALIB]
But Dove-like nature favoured so the child, that Calibs killing
Knife fell from her hand, and stead of stabs I kist
I kist there I lipt boy, and since have brought him up,
(Kirke 1638, B1v)
Since this time, Calib has kept George entombed in her cave, her mothering presence causing George some discomfort as he attempts to develop a healthy relationship with his nurse:

_George_ I wish it not, but so much love  
To my kind Nurse, as shews a tender mother  
To her Child, when she first blesses him  
After a long absence.
(Kirke 1638, B3v)

Calib tells George that his mother had sought to kill him and that she herself had saved him from his mother’s murderous intention. Calib instils in George a guilty hatred towards his mother and ensures gratitude towards the surrogate:

_George_ Both Nurse and Mother, my duty,  
With my thankes gives it acknowledgement:  
But could my mother, finding painfull throwes,  
Through which I hastned to give her ease,  
Before my tender eyes did ope to see the world,  
Seeke to intombe me up agen?
(Kirke 1638, B4r)

In her deceit, Calib ensures that George is emotionally, as well as physically, dependent upon and indebted to her. As George’s imagination lingers on his mother’s actions, his language reflects the life he has known: entombment. George’s recollection of the birthing passage reflects the cave’s association with both birth and death. Lima explains that ‘the cavern is a metaphor for life giving and life taking’ (Lima 2005, 226). Calib represents a surrogate mother whose authority over identity is oppressive and clingy: ‘I must not have him wander from my love, further than / Sommons of my eye or
beck can call him back again’ (Kirke 1638, B1v). George’s freedom from the
cave, which is simultaneously a freedom from the ignorance of his ancestry,
represents a re-birth; his emergence from the cave sees an enlightened George
embarking on his adventures in the name of Christianity. His rebirth is
signified by the return of the power of sight:

[GEORGE]
And now those woods that were so long choak’t up
With Hells black sulphur and disastrous fumes,
Give welcome to the golden eye of day
(Kirke 1638, C2v)

Calib describes the horror associated with her maternal place: ‘This cragge,
this Cliffe, this denne, which to behold / Would freeze to Ice the hissing
tramels of Medusa’ (Kirke 1638, B1v). As in Goffe’s Orestes (1617),
considered in section 3.3, the horror of the womb is associated with impotence
and castration through reference to Medusa. While in Orestes castration
anxiety accompanies the separation from the mother, in The Seven Champions
of Christendom, an emasculating impotence is forced on those who draw too
close to the mother’s realm because they are imprisoned and forced into a
position of maternal dependency. It is this that figures the witch’s cave as the
vagina dentata, which in its various forms exists as a representation of the fear
of castration inside the vagina (Otero 1996, 269). Barbara Creed summarizes
the theories behind the vagina dentata:

One approach interprets the vagina dentata as a symbolic expression of
the oral sadistic mother. This is the mother feared by both female and
male infants who imagine that, just as they derive pleasure from feeding/eating at the mother’s breast, the mother might in turn desire to feed on them ... The other explanation interprets the vagina dentata as an expression of the dyadic mother: the all encompassing maternal figure of the pre-Oedipal period who threatens symbolically to engulf the infant, thus posing a threat of psychic obliteration. (Creed 1993, 109)

Calib is a treacherous figure: she ensures maternal dependency and punishes this dependency by emasculating her victims. She punishes for the very thing she invites. The motif of the vagina dentata encapsulates this treachery; it embodies the idea of the consuming mother whose boundaries are blurred with that of the child as well as the horror of castration for the accompanying desire for this state. For George and the champions, the cave is a place of suffocating maternal confinement, the horror of which is only revealed once they are released and enter into the phallocentric world outside the cave. When Calib hands her powers over to George, he is released from the stifling, maternal cave, and he is able to enter the symbolic. The process is symbolized by the wand, which, in the hands of George, takes on the phallic significance of the sword with which he embarks on his adventures and enters patriarchal codes of valiancy.

3.2 Robert Armin, *The Valiant Welshman* (1612)

The witch of this play is visited by Gloster, who is attempting to ruin the reputation of the play’s hero, Carodac. While the witch is eventually killed for
her *maleficium*, her son, Bluso, is spared on the condition that he uses his skills for good:

> Cara[duc] On this condition doe I giue thee life, 
> That first, if such an hellish art as this 
> May serue to vertuous vses, then direct 
> The scope of all thy skill, to ayde poore men, 
> Distrest by any casuality or chance 
> (Armin 1615, G1v)

Bluso is reminiscent of the white witches found on the stage during the 1580s and 1590s; his actions are of use to the dominant order. In contrast, Bluso’s mother is a figure of evil and treachery, and in her depiction the author explores the potential horror associated with witchcraft in specifically feminine terms.

As in John Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605), Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) and Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612) depicts the difficult journey to visit the home of the witch. The witch’s client must make a perilous journey to visit her in her own seat of illicit power:

> Enter Gloster Solus.
> Now, Gloster, in this still and silent wood, 
> Whose vnfrequented pathes do lead thy steps 
> Vnto the dismall caue of hellish fiends; 
> With whom, a Witch, as vgly to confront, 
> As are the fearefull Furies she commaunds, 
> Liues in this solitary vncoth place; 
> Begin thy damned plots, banish that thred-bare thought
Of Vertue,
Which makes vs men so senseless of our wrong,
It makes vs beare the poysone of each tongue.
No, Gloster, no; he, whose meeke bloud’s so coole
To beare all wrongs, is a religious foole:
(Armin 1615, E4r)

The witch in this play is specifically placed at some distance from the political centre. This is a geographical as much as a moral placement and contributes to the figuring of the witch as other.

The journey Gloster undertakes to visit the witch requires him to abandon his connections with the symbolic world from which he came, and he makes a conscious effort to expel moral values: ‘Begin thy damned plots, banish that thred-bare thought / Of vertue’ (Armin 1615, E4r). In this play, the cave is not configured as a space of origin but represents a stage in the process of subjectivity. The idea of the subject-in-process is theorized in post-structuralist theory, in which the subject is a product of a signifying chain dependent on the differences between signs: ‘The subject never is. The subject is only the signifying process and ... appears only as a signifying practice, that is, only when he is absent within the position out of which social, historical, and signifying activity unfolds’ (Kristeva 1984, 215). The subject as a site of perpetual construction is encapsulated in Gloster’s discarding of culture and morality and the manipulation of his body, which is implied when he indicates that he could warm his blood (see section 1.1). The possibility of transformation engendered here points to the vulnerability of the subject in the
signifying process. By centring this vulnerability on the cave, the play points towards a powerful, maternal figure exerting an ever-present lure over the subject.

The witch’s space is described as an alternative to the dominant order, and Gloster is drawn to witchcraft because he believes he has no other option available: ‘since of gods or men no hope I finde / I’ll use both hell and Fiends to ease my minde’ (Armin 1615, E4r). The construction of the witch as other is also found in Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), considered in section 3.3, in which Canidia’s cell is described as ‘A habitation, nor for God, nor men: / Yet an old woman’ (Goffe 1633, D3r). As in Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605), considered in section 4.2, the journey to the cave in *The Valiant Welshman* is accompanied by a painful and lingering description of the visitor’s terror and the horror of the witch. Gloster, like Orestes of Goffe’s play, journeys to the witch in disguise. This disguise indicates shame and the difficulty with which one discards the symbolic structures of the dominant order.

### 3.2.1 The Horror of the Witch’s Space

Gloster not only turns his back on the virtuous plight of Wales but also its invading opponent, Rome. Although enemies, both factions remain within the symbolic order because the honour of their cause depends on the position one takes. Both are, in their own way, honourable, courageous and good. This is
illustrated in the moment of affinity shared between Carodac, the hero of Wales, and Caesar and symbolized in the token of friendship Caesar bestows on Carodac (Armin 1615, D2v). This model of honourable enmity is also captured in William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), in which Norway and Macbeth fight ‘Arme ’gainst Arme’ (Shakespeare 1623, ll6r). These enemies, Norway and Rome, are not the perpetrators of horror because, unlike the witches of each play, they are bound by codes which render them creatures of the symbolic. Once Gloster is captured he has two choices: to promise his allegiance to Carodac and Wales, as his ally Cornwall does, or to abandon such symbolic structures and turn to witchcraft (Armin 1615, E4r). Through Gloster’s decision, an alternative is offered to the dominant order, and the possibility of the alternative points towards the fallibility of the dominant order and the fragility of the law. The difficult journey to the witch’s cave represents the return to a space outside of culture. The dangerous, maternal and illicit other represents a persistent and ever-present lure, captured in the sense of inevitability that accompanies Gloster’s journey. The journey to the cave can be read as a return to the womb, and this journey is rendered horrific as it culminates in the destruction of the subject, emasculated and driven mad by what is encountered in the cave.

The witch in this play, as is typical of witchcraft plays of the period, is introduced through the words and preconceptions of another. Gloster describes the activities of the witch and her son before they appear on stage.
The audience are thus led to expect horror and monstrosity within the cave, and Gloster instructs the audience to unite and compare these preconceptions with the onstage figure of the witch: ‘And see: their monstrous shapes themselues appeares’ (Armin 1615, E4r). Further horror and monstrosity emerge from the cave when the witch agrees to conjure a serpent:

*Witch.* Then *Gloster,* harke: Here in this dismall Groue, By arte I will create a furious beast, Mou'd by a subtill spirit, full of force And hellish fury, whose deuouring iawes Shall hauocke all the borderers of Wales, And in short space vnpeople all his Townes Sonne, to this purpose, stratway to thy booke, Enter the Caue, and call a powerfull spirit by thy skill, Command him instantly for to appeare, And with thy Charmes, binde him vnto the shape Of a deuouring Serpent, whilst without We doe awayte his comming.

(Armin 1615, F1r)

The appearance of a devouring serpent from the vaginal cave constructs the witch as both phallic and castrating. She is a being of horror because she exposes categories of signification as fallible. She is a woman with a metaphorical penis, which emasculates men. The serpent appears from the cave—which is figured in the play as a womb—and so constructs the witch’s genitals as horrific. These images of phallic and castrating maternity are theorized by Freud and Lacan. Freud describes how ‘The woman’s genitalia, when seen later on, are regarded as a mutilated organ and recall this threat [castration]’ (Freud 1959, 217). According to Lacan, the fantasy of the phallic mother stems from the pre-symbolic child’s belief that the mother is
omnipotent and the source of all power. On entrance into the symbolic, this source of power is relocated on to the symbolic father; however, the mother remains as the original source of power (Lacan 1977c, 282). The mother’s phallic power, for the symbolic self, is abject because it represents a threat to identity and a return to a place where meaning collapses. As the witch’s fantastical penis—the serpent—has devouring teeth, it is a warped image of the *vagina dentata*, which, as I illustrate in section 3.1.2, is an image that contains the duplicity of the mother.

### 3.2.2 The Staging of Space and Fantasy

The stage directions in *The Valiant Welshman* detail that the witch enters the stage to meet Gloster from her cave (Armin 1615, E4r), perhaps from the concealment space in the centre of the back wall (see section 3.1.1 for the theatrical implications of this space). Ignoring Gloster’s offer of riches, the witch invites him instead into her cave:

[WITCH]  
*Come, Gloster, in,*  
*And here awhile abide within this Cauce.*  
*Thy eyes shall see what thy vext soule did craue.*  
*(Armin 1615, F1v)*

Encouraged into the womb abode of the witch, Gloster comes face to face with his terrifying desires. It is not stated what Gloster encounters in the cave. It is
possible that the witch shows him their plot unfold through a magical glass such as is found in Robert Greene’s *Friar Bacon and Friar Bongay* (1589) and John Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635). A second possibility depends on the general belief in the insatiable sexual appetite of witches. This belief contributes to the central argument of Henrich Kramer’s *The Malleus Maleficarum*, which was first published in 1484 and went into a further nineteen printings 1569-1669 (Levack 2007, 57). This characterization of witches invites the belief that the payment the witch demands of Gloster is sexual rather than monetary. The emphasis on looking within the cave places the naked body of the maternal witch as the object of the craving of the soul. The cave thus acts as the secret and internal place where illicit fantasies can be re-enacted. Although Gloster believes he will find comfort to ‘ease [his] mind’ (Armin 1615, F1r) in the witch’s realm, Gloster’s journey into the cave leads him to a place of horror. The cave is a place of treachery and, in its signification of maternal features of the female body, constructs and perpetuates an image of horrific maternity.

What occurs in the cave is left to fantasy. The cave and the horrors within it remain elusively beyond the stage doors. The audience did, however, learn of the effects of the journey into the cave. Carodac asks ‘Where that Inventor of mischievous ills / Gloster remaynes’ (Armin 1615, G1r). Bluso’s answer indicates the horror to which Gloster has been subject:
Bluso describes a man who has been subjected to such horrors that he has lost his wits. Gloster’s visit into the cave completes his rupture from the symbolic realm. As Orlando in Orlando Furioso (1591) experiences madness in a chaotic and oppressive wood (Greene 1594b, D4v-E1r), Gloster’s state of mind is reflected in the environment described. The ‘solitary Groues’, like the cave, are elsewhere to the dominant order of society and are representative of Gloster’s distracted state of mind. Again, the emphasis is on what he has seen within the cave. His horror and madness may have been initiated by the sight of the failure of his plot and his imminent downfall. Bluso, however, describes a terror that is so wretched it implies that the source of this horror is psychological and supernatural. Gloster has seen something in the cave that finally renders him incapable of any possible return to sanity and language. What he sees is beyond the view of the audience, and thus the play engaged the fantasizing processes of the viewer.
3.3 Thomas Goffe, *Orestes* (1617)

Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* was performed five years after *The Valiant Welshman*, in 1617 by students at Oxford University, and it too constructs the horror of witchcraft in terms of horrific maternity. The suggestion that the fantasy of witchcraft was articulated in reference to the mother is by no means new (Roper 1991; Willis 1995, ix). In *Orestes*, the presentation of horror is featured interchangeably in reference to Orestes’s mother and the witch, Canidia. Clytemnestra, Orestes’s mother, embodies the monstrosity of witchcraft without performing any magic. Clytemnestra is presented as devilish not because of her supernatural ability but because of the murder she commits and her deceitful and unruly attitude. In contrast, the witch, Canidia, wields extreme supernatural power, although she has no respect for the dominant order that organizes cultural codes of acceptable behaviour. Consequently, she displays none of the deceitfulness or treachery of Clytemnestra. Here I argue that the construction of witch as other is undermined as the play questions the symbolic definition of the witch and manipulates the power associated with looking.

Clytemnestra murders her husband, Agamemnon, in their marital bed on his return from the Trojan War. While Agamemnon sleeps, she and her lover Aegystheus take advantage of his vulnerability to prepare themselves for their treacherous act. Like Lady Macbeth, Clytemnestra offers herself to
supernatural and evil forces to strengthen her natural resolve in order to do the deed:

_Clyt[emn]estra_  See, I’ll turne man too now, and to the hate
Which women beare, I’ll add a manly strength,
My minde does tremble, what I meane to doe
Breath forth your vapors, O ye stygian powers,
And listen to hatefull woman’s prayers.
_Pluto_ stand by me, for to aide my hand,
I may strike home now, and performe an act
May make _Medea_ blush, she thought not of:
Could the old dry bon’d dotard euer dreame,
Now he had drawn forth all his strength abroad,
He could be welcome to lye bedred here
And supple his numbe ioynts in my fresh armes?
(Goffe 1633, B3r)

Clytemnestra’s reference to Medea places her actions in the realm of witchcraft. Although Robert Greene in _Alphonsus King of Aragon_ (1587) treats the character of Medea with sympathy, according to classical mythology she was a scorned woman who practised witchcraft to take revenge on men (Hornblower and Spawforth 2003, 944). Clytemnestra’s characterization in terms of witchcraft strengthens once the murder is discovered, and she pretends to swoon with grief: ‘Come son, we women still know how to curse, [both kneel] / Let him that did it be an Adulterer’ (Goffe 1633, C1r).

Clytemnestra frequently evokes imagery of her ancient foremothers, Circe, Medea and Hecate, and in doing so she calls upon an ancient connection of witchcraft and femininity. Women still know how to curse, despite cultural attempts to civilize them.
Images of the fluid and malleable body occur in Clytemnestra’s speech, which is somewhat reminiscent of Lady Macbeth’s. The hermaphroditical characteristic of witches is captured in her resolve to add masculine power to her constitution. Like Gloster of Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612) and Shakespeare’s Lady Macbeth and Hamlet, Clytemnestra manipulates her body, a tactic that she sees as strengthening her ability to perform the murder. Clytemnestra embraces the elements of femininity she sees as bearing the fury required to perform a sacrilegious and treacherous deed, and to this hatred she adds ‘manly strength’. Hatred is presented as inherent to the feminine body in line with humoral theory, which posited that ‘women are believed to get angry more often and more easily than men because of their physiological, intellectual, and moral inferiority to men’ (Kennedy 2000, 3). Eve Keller describes how dangerous emotional excess was connected to the maternal aspects of the feminine body:

In standard Galenic fashion, womb fury arises when an abundance of seed accumulates and then foments in the womb, overheats, and stirs up lusts in the parts made for generation. Thus the name of the disease has a double significance; it indicates a woman’s fury (caused by the womb) and also the fury of the womb itself. (Keller 2007, 93)

Excessive passion was thought to be intrinsic to women because of their natural inferiority, which it confirmed. Pierre Charron, a sixteenth-century French philosopher whose work was also published in English, attributed anger to ‘weaknesse of spirit, as we see by experience in women, olde men, infants, sicke men, who are commonly more cholericke than others’ (Charron...
1608, G4r). Clytemnestra resolves to turn her natural passion and anger into productivity by adding ‘manly strength’. In Orestes and other early-modern writing, feminine weakness was paramount in producing anger, but it needed to be supported by manly attributes in order to channel this passion into productive action.

Again we see a representation of the subject as a process when Clytemnestra draws attention to the instability of the gender continuum by calling on the powers of witchcraft to manipulate her body. Gail Kern Paster has documented the medical and cultural construction of gender as a continuum: ‘In this body, male and female do not face each other across a binary of opposed differences but occupy different positions along a broad continuum of behavioral and anatomical attributes, with gender extremes contained by determining singleness of flesh’ (Paster 1998, 417). An awareness of the fluidity of the gendered body is evident in the discomfort expressed in the theatre of the period when the categories of sex and gender failed to align. Mark Breitenberg argues that masculine anxiety in the period, engendered by patriarchal assumptions about power, privilege, sexual desire and the body, can be seen as ‘a kind of cultural unconscious that lurks beneath the theoretically placid surface’ (Breitenberg 1996, 1). Contradictions and discrepancies are evident between early-modern depictions of social structures as natural, God-given and secure and a ‘discourse that reveals the volatile lives and practices that such a vision constantly contends with and represses’
The anxiety concerning the potential for transition between the sexes reflects a perceived need to stabilize patriarchal dominance. In Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, Paulina is accused of being a ‘mankinde Witch’ (Shakespeare 1623, Aa4v) when she transgresses the role prescribed to her by standing up to her husband. Paulina threatens the myth of woman set out in and perpetuated by patriarchal discourse, and she is consequently threatened. A mirroring, although perhaps less extreme, intolerance is evident when male characters fail to perform the necessary behaviours to maintain masculine dominance. Claudio in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598), is mocked for his effeminizing desire (Shakespeare 1623, I6r), and Romeo in *Romeo and Juliet* (1596), is scolded for not displaying reason appropriate to his body:

```
[FRIAR]
Art thou a man? thy forme cries out thou art:
Thy teares are womanish, thy wild acts denote
The unreasonable Furie of a beast,
Vnseemely woman, in a seeming man,
(Shakespeare 1623, ff4r)
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Clytemnestra’s resolve to draw on ‘manly strength’ is part of the process that constructs her as devilish. Her crime is certainly phallic in execution. Aegystheus strikes first, but Clytemnestra is overcome by passion and excitement and takes over, pushing Aegystheus to the side. She stabs her husband in the marital bed in which he had excitedly anticipated spending the night with her. The site of the murder emphasizes the reversal of the phallic
role, and Clytemnestra penetrates her husband with an erotic excitement: ‘Doe I count this more then my nuptiall night’ (Goffe 1633, B4r). Clytemnestra’s monstrosity enters the realm of performance when the rest of the royal party discover the murder. Like Lady Macbeth, she swoons at the sight of the murdered king. Goffe is here explicit, where Shakespeare is not. Clytemnestra only pretends to swoon and relies on stereotypes of gender to add legitimacy to her performed innocence: ‘Oh helpe now good heaven to keepe my sex’ (Goffe 1633, C1r). Her hypocrisy points to the performative nature of gender. Her monstrosity lies not only in her act but also in her manipulation of gender codes, indicating the arbitrariness of the categories that the symbolic assigns. Like the witch’s serpent in Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), Clytemnestra’s threat (her dagger) is phallic. Because the phallus is in feminine power, the threat is also to the order of the phallus and the symbolic structures that assign rules of gendered conduct.

Clytemnestra’s association with witchcraft happens at the political centre and is constructed through deceit, performance and manipulation. Clytemnestra represents the shrewish woman who often incited accusations of witchcraft. Robert Schuler argues that ‘as in Shakespeare's plays, so in Elizabethan culture generally, the categories "shrew" and "witch" were often conflated’ (Schuler 2004). *Orestes* offers an image of this unruly shrew in comparison to the actual witch, who conjures spirits and performs magic. In order to discover the identity of his father’s murderers, Orestes starts a rumour
of his own death, and he leaves the court in disguise. Once he has left the constructed realm of society, he learns about the witch Canidia and enters the wilderness of the witch’s realm. The audience are introduced to Canidia through Pylades’s lengthy description, in which he relates her power over nature—‘she sends a spell drowning infernall thunder’ (Goffe 1633, D3r)—and powers of prophecy: ‘in the ayre hath flying ministers, / To bring her news from earth, from sea, from hell’ (Goffe 1633, D3r). Canidia and Clytemnestra become interchangeable as maternal figures for the principal character.

Orestes descends into madness, and as he does he defines witchcraft according to shrewish behaviour rather than magical power. Here we see a critique of the correlation that Schuler suggests exists in the plays of Shakespeare. Rather than reproducing the association of the shrew with the witch, the play interrogates it by presenting it through the words of a mad character. Describing his young half-brother, Orestes’s language reveals his disgust with the mother:

\[
\text{Orest}[es] \quad \text{Like my mother, O most execrable} \\
\text{Hadst rank’d the confus’d } \text{Chaos} \text{ of all sins} \\
\text{Thou couldst not haue found out a fault more blacke,} \\
\text{More stinking, more infectious to my heart} \\
\text{(Goffe 1633, G2v)}
\]

As the play runs to its bloody climax, Orestes fails to distinguish between his mother and the witch: ‘Mother I see you, O you are a whore, / Did I kill you witch, dost thou lash, dost thou?’ (Goffe 1633, H4r). The two women, like the principal female characters in John Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605) considered
in section 4.2, are positioned in antithesis because of the figuring of the witch as other, but they share a relationship with Orestes that undermines this dichotomous structure.

3.3.1 The Witch’s Space as Elsewhere

Despite the elements of witchcraft that are found within the court, Canidia’s space—a place of banishment, disguise, nature and femininity—is set in opposition to the symbolic order of the court as a constructed seat of manly justice through an emphasis on the journey to the witch’s cell. In Chapter Four, I argue that witches are associated with the other, presenting a category that the legitimate social order could define itself against. Here, witches are associated with elsewhere, a shadowy place removed from the social centre, which in this play is symbolized by the court. Visiting the witch is associated with a symbolic and literal journey away from the political and cultural centre. The witch abides ‘Not distant farre from this place where we live’ (Goffe 1633, D2v), meaning somewhere close to Orestes’s place of exile but distinctly separate. Orestes abandons the symbolic order and finds guidance and concern in Canidia. By handing his father’s bones to her, he abandons the phallocentric symbolic and places authority over identity in the hands of the witch, who takes the place of the lost parent: ‘Here, take them Mother’ (Goffe 1633, E2r). The maternal relationship is reciprocated as the witch offers
advice and guidance: ‘O sonne, remember what I told you sonne’ (Goffe 1633, E3r).

As Orestes and Pylades journey further away from court and closer to the witch’s space, their earlier disgust and horror with her is replaced with respect. In this other place, authority lies with nature and femininity: ‘Great feare of earth, and governess of nature’ (Goffe 1633, E1v). Canidia abuses the King’s bones as she erotically smells them and employs them in her spells. Her actions represent a symbolic dismissal of the powers of the court; here, nature governs over constructed power of kingship, symbolized in the worms that indiscriminately devour dead bodies (Goffe 1633, E2v). Orestes reveres the bones he carries to Canidia as relics of his father, but such reverence is somewhat undermined when Orestes admits that he cannot be sure that he has the right bones: ‘This was my Fathers scull; but who can know / Whether it were some subjects scull, or no’ (Goffe 1633, D4v), just as Hamlet observes of the skull thrown up by the gravedigger in Shakespeare’s play (Shakespeare 1623, pp5r). Canidia does not mind whether the bones she works with belong to a king or a subject because, like the processes of nature, she has no respect for titles or honours: ‘dost thynke that I respect / A Kings dead bones, more than any other mans; / O they smell rankly’ (Goffe 1633, E2r). Her first words to Orestes are sarcastic and dismissive, and they belittle his identity as a prince: ‘Ho, ho, ho, I tell thee fond young Prince’ (Goffe 1633, E1v). Canidia’s repetition of the titles points to their insignificance and
powerlessness in this place of nature and femininity. The witch’s cave offers a space from which to review the processes of the symbolic from outside it, and here Orestes is provided with the clarity to identify his father’s murderers and understand the hypocrisy at work at court.

As in Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), the dichotomy of court and elsewhere is constructed through the representation of theatrical space. Place is endowed with ideological meaning from the prologue. The play is considered as a building, the foundation of which lies with ancient Greek mythology: ‘*So from an old foundation we have ta’n / Stones ready squar’d for our new aedifice*’ (Goffe 1633, A3v). The space of the play, a university hall, is intrinsically connected to the fabric of the play as the author, speaking the prologue, draws attention to ‘this well furnish’d roome’ in which they perform. Metatheatricality throughout the play encompasses the audience within the drama and extends the boundaries of the fictional space into the space of the audience. On his return to court, Agamemnon speaks directly to the audience and gives them specific roles within the drama:

[AGAMEMNON]
How all my Grecians with vnsatiate looks [Turnes to the spectators]
And greedy eyes doe bid mee welcome home
(Goffe 1633, B1r)
Agamemnon’s address makes the act of looking part of the dramatic action by pushing the physical boundaries of the dramatic space backwards to encompass the whole of the university hall.

Canidia’s theatrical space is ideologically and physically constructed as elsewhere for both the audience and the characters on stage:

[PYLADES]
A habitation, not for God, nor men:
Yet an old woman, who doth seem to striue
With the vast building for antiquity,
In whose rough face time now hath made such holes,
As in those uncouth stones she there hath made
Her selfe a cell, where in to spend her age.
(Goffe 1633, D3r)

Canidia lives in a derelict temple to the gods. Her space is defined by otherness and difference, and it is described initially in terms of what it is not. As an old woman, she is the other to the legitimate order of God and man, and her supernatural ability is connected to her gender and age. She is inhuman and unnatural, especially if ‘men’ means humankind. In Pylades’s description, Canidia’s body is intimately aligned with the landscape that surrounds her, and it is ambiguous whether the ‘holes’ are on the building or her face. Description of the witch’s cave in corporeal terms also occurs in The Seven Champions of Christendom (1635) when Calib describes her ‘mansion, within the rugged bowels of this Cave’ (Kirke 1638, B1v). The merging of the body and the cell is supported by the language of burrowing. Both Calib and
Canidia make themselves caves amongst ancient stones so that their space is internal and claustrophobic and a reflection of their aged and barren bodies.

As is typical of witchcraft plays from this period, the audience are first introduced to the witch through a lengthy description by another person. Canidia’s reputation, formulated through fantasies of witchcraft, precedes her. An important scene at court is inserted between this introduction and the scene in which the audience actually encounters the witch. This structure juxtaposes the ideology associated with each place and signifies time passing for the terrible journey of Orestes and Pylades. In Tim Fitzpatrick’s terminology, the scene is wiped and reset (Fitzpatrick 1995, 207); there is no spatial continuity only a highlighting of difference. In the next scene, we see Orestes at the end of his journey carrying the bones of his dead father. Close to his wits end, Orestes becomes increasingly distanced from the symbolic order (represented at court) and engages with the wildness of the other. His final abandonment of the symbolic order comes when he hands the bones, symbols of his father, over to the witch.

3.3.2 Staging of Space and Fantasy

The association of the witch’s space with the other would also have been achieved through the staging of the play. While the audience are forced to sit within the symbolic court, the witch’s cell remains shadowy and inaccessible.
The cave is introduced to the audience through Pylades’s horrific description, which lingers on the elusive nature of her cell:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Pylad[es]} & \quad \text{Neare to this shady groue, where never light} \\
& \quad \text{Appeares, but when } \text{tis forced with som charm,} \\
\text{Canidia} & \quad \text{dwells, in such a dusky place,} \\
& \quad \text{That the night goblins feare to come too neare it} \\
& \text{(Goffe 1633, D4v)}
\end{align*}
\]

Orestes and Pylades do not enter her cell but hover on its boundaries. They knock at the entrance to her abode where she meets them to perform her ceremonies. Despite the lengthy description of her cell, the audience are forced to engage their theatrical imagination as it remained elusively just beyond the stage doors. Orestes and Pylades thus meet Canidia on the boundary between their world and hers. Tim Fitzpatrick and Daniel Johnston argue for a more permeable onstage/offstage dividing line than I have implied here (Fitzpatrick and Johnston 2009). They explain that entering characters could bring a sense of place on with them, as when a bed being thrust on stage would construct the playing space as a bedroom. The knock is what constructs the sense of place in this scene, since it specifies that the characters meet the witch on a boundary. The witch’s cell, unlike the rooms at court or the wilderness to which Orestes is banished, sits beyond the stage doors, beyond the greedy look of the spectators, where fantasy must fill in the gap.

Fitzpatrick and Johnston might argue that when Canidia enters from her cell, she brings the fictionalized setting on stage with her, turning the stage into her abode. However, the association of witches with boundaries, crossroads and
doorways was perhaps reflected in the staging of witchcraft. Canidia’s cell, like the cave of the witch in *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), symbolizes a category of difference, representing all that the court is not. The boundary between these places is where we see the witch at work and as such is a place of power and danger.

Clytemnestra also draws on the power found at boundaries when she summons strength from the River Styx. Found on the boundary between Earth and the Underworld, the Styx was associated in Greek mythology with great power. It represented the source of Achilles’ strength and a place of binding oaths (Hornblower and Spawforth 2003, 1450). Once Orestes has learnt the identity of his father’s murderer, he describes the feminine horror unleashed at the Styx:

> Orest[es]  O, hell it selfe has not the patterne to’t:  
> Some stench, some fogs, vapours stop their breath,  
> Exhald from out the dampish wombe of Styx,  
> Did ever foule, disastrous, friendlike hands,  
> Cast vp so huge a heape of hell-bred mischief  
> (Goffe 1633, F2r)

The boundary is described as a place of horror where knowledge ends and fantasy begins. Canidia practises her witchcraft at the very edges of society, and within her cave lies the other place of fantasy. The imagery that connects Canidia and Clytemnestra threatens this boundary and suggests that the horrors that lie within can be unleashed into society.
Like Elizabeth Sawyer of Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) considered in Chapter Four, Canidia reveals how the real villains lie within the dominant order. On the request of the young men, Canidia conjures a dumbshow that reveals the identity of the murderers. As in ancient stories of the cave, our hero emerges with newfound knowledge and clarity. The dumbshow represents a visage of earlier events and may have been performed by the original actors, perhaps with grey cloaks—which were conventionally used to represent invisibility (Palmer 2008)—as the characters are part of a vision, and these cloaks would signify the supernatural gulf that separates this action from the events of earlier in the play. Alternatively, Sagana, Veia and Erictho, three other witches Canidia calls to her, may have re-enacted the original murder, which would explain the otherwise unnecessary inclusion of these characters in the play. This version allows for the possibility of the same actor performing Canidia and Clytemnestra, a casting decision that would have strengthened the links between the two characters.

The dumbshow is metatheatrical because it involves a performance within the drama of the play. The focus on performance draws attention to the duplicity of the actions at court. The audience, who had been privy to its deceitfulness from the start, would have been able to sympathise with Orestes as the hypocrisies of court are revealed to him. He returns to the court in
disguise in order to enact his revenge on his mother and step-father, and he is increasingly infuriated by Aegystheus’s references to the court as a civilized and manly world of reason: ‘To doe a haynous murder, and i’th court; / I’th place of Justice’ (Goffe 1633, G4v) and ‘now doth manhood and civility / Stand at the bar of justice’ (Goffe 1633, F4v). Aegystheus’s move is a political one in that he insists publicly that the symbolic space of the court is one governed by authoritative conditions, legitimizing his position at its head. This strategy is exposed as a performance that disguises the violence lying at the origin of this royal family. Performance and deceit in the play point towards the fragility and the arbitrariness of the symbolic structures of court, and from this point Orestes goes on a path of revenge that represents a re-enactment of the original split from the mother.

Orestes, armed with his newfound knowledge, returns to the court in disguise as a physician and is admitted to the royal couple’s private chambers to administer medicine:

[ORESTES]
Appoint the secrets of the safest roome,
To let me shew my selfe to none but you;
Though Nature dried vp with too much time,
Deny to spring in fruite from forth your loynes
(Goffe 1633, G1v)

Orestes’s suggestion that he will administer fertility medicine is particularly appealing to Clytemnestra and Aegystheus, who are keen to secure their
lineage on the throne. It also mirrors Orestes’s painful preoccupation with his mother’s sexual relations, something that becomes apparent in the ensuing scenes. In order to complete his revenge, Orestes enlists the help of his sister to gain access to the couple’s child, whom he plans to murder. In a moment of compassion he contemplates sparing the child but is visited by the ghost of his father, who insists that he ‘Looke on these wounds, as on the Gorgons head, / And turne thy heart to stone’ (Goffe 1633, G3r). As in the scene in which the Ghost of Hamlet Senior appears in Gertrude’s chamber in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1601), the return of the father adds theatrical sensationalism and horror to Orestes’s eradication of his mother. The ghost insists that Orestes must dispel his attachment to his mother and reject her as other. ‘By all the rites of Father, I conjure thee’, Agamemnon demands, ‘forget all, mother, in that disloyall witch’ (Goffe 1633, G3r).

Within the innermost chambers of the court, Orestes enacts his revenge on his mother, step-father and half-brother. He stabs the child and forces the parents to drink its blood before stabbing them. The emphasis on place continues through a scene in which two servants carefully arrange the ‘privat’st’ rooms for what is expected to be the administration of medicine (Goffe 1633, G2r). While the witch’s cell is constructed through spectator fantasy, the stage in this case is carefully set out to represent the private and internal rooms at court. Each place, however, shares a distinct association
with the feminine body. Clytemnestra explicitly draws attention to her body in
terms of buildings and space as she begs Orestes:

*Clyt[enestra]*  O turne thy bloody weapon on my brest,
’Twas this wombe that brought forth this Babe and thee.
If that be guilty, I have made it so.
Rip vp this place which first did bring thee forth,
’Tis I intreat thee, ’tis the mother, she
Which gaue thee house-roome here within this brest
Vpon whose dugs thy infant lips did hang.
(Goffe 1633, G4r)

Like Canidia’s cell, this private and internal place is imagined in terms of
maternal features of the feminine body. Clytemnestra’s language is violent—
‘weapon’, ‘rip’, ‘hang’—so that the womb is associated with horror.
Clytemnestra forces Orestes to recall his infantile relationship with the mother,
and the guilt and disgust he experiences culminates in the violent murder of
his mother.

The emphasis on intimate and private space represents a mirror of the
opening scenes, in which Agamemnon is murdered in his bed. Orestes’s
insistence that the murder should take place in their private chambers reveals
not only a practical concern for secrecy but also an obsession with the parents’
relationship in the bedroom. Orestes’s cruel murder of his half-brother reflects
this preoccupation, and although Orestes is securing his position as sole heir,
the brutality with which he murders the child reflects his need to eradicate the
visible result of his mother’s sexual relationship. The scene mirrors the earlier
murder scene by merging images of sex and violence. Orestes painfully positions himself as a spectator to the bedroom scene: ‘So now I’ll stand and looke, and on hell call’ (Goffe 1633, H1r). His preoccupation with the bedroom scene of sex and violence is manifested in scopophilia. Freud, in the twentieth century, theorized such preoccupations as relating to the primal scene, in which a child witnessing or fantasizing their parents having sex misunderstands this as a scene of violence (Freud 1953, 220-2). Barbara Creed describes how ‘The primal scene represents to the child its own origins in its parent’s love-making’ (Creed 1993, 17) and is invested with the desire and anxiety intrinsic to the oedipal complex. In these terms, Orestes’s murder of his mother represents a revival of his original castration complex, a rupture he processes according to the demands of the father and at the site of the primal scene.

Clytemnestra forces Orestes to recall the original rupture from the mother, a violent and bloody separating tear: ‘Looke on thy mothers teares’ worse then those grones, / And pangs she had, when she first brought thee forth’ (Goffe 1633, G4v). According to Imogen Tyler, the birthing scene is inherently abject because it is concerned with secretions, borders of the body and the confusion of self and other in the prenatal dyad: ‘Any subsequence ‘abjections’ must ... be understood as repetitions that contain within an echo of this earlier cathartic event – the first and primary abject(ion) – birth and the human infant’s separation from the maternal body/home’ (Tyler 2009, 79).
private chamber presented in *Orestes* takes on the abject horror of the witch’s
cave and the mother’s body. The re-enacted rupture from the mother is
symbolically represented as Orestes stabs his mother in the name of the father:
‘stab, and wound, and still I’ll thinke on thee [Agamemnon]’ (Goffe 1633, G3r).

Following the Freudian trajectory, Orestes resolves to undertake separation
from the mother: ‘I now would dare out-looke / Ranks of Medusa’s’ (Goffe
1633, G3r). Forced voyeurism—‘Looke on these wounds, as on the Gorgon’s
head, /And turne thy heart to stone’ (Goffe 1633, G3r)—recurs throughout the
play for the audience. From the opening scenes, *Orestes* makes uncomfortable
the act of looking. The audience are made aware of their position as
spectators, at times sharing reciprocated looks with characters, for example
when Agamemnon demands ‘with unsatiate looks / And greedy eyes doe bid
mee welcome home’ (Goffe 1633, B1r). Here the audience are positioned as
Grecians and are invited to view events through the eyes of the symbolic. As
the play progresses, the discomfort of looking is developed as more
voyeuristic, stimulating the desire and discomfort of viewing someone in a
moment of privacy. The symbolic is revealed to be deceitful and hypocritical,
and the audience are forced to re-evaluate their own position within the
structures of looking and the legitimacy of the gaze. Agamemnon continues to
insist that the audience acknowledge their voyeuristic position throughout his
murder scene:
Aegystheus also denies the audience the secrecy and distance normally associated with voyeuristic looking: ‘come, be spectator now, / And see revenge for Athens bloody feast’ (Goffe 1633, B3v). Witnessing the deceitfulness and violence of court proceedings, the audience are invited to align themselves with the antithesis of the court, with the realm of the witch mother. This is also developed in terms of the gaze: ‘And now yee fiends of hell, each take a place, / As ’twere spectators at a first daies play’ (Goffe 1633, G3v). Here the audience are aligned with fiends and thus the realm of the supernatural.

3.4 Coda

The plays in this chapter represent witches through images of maternity which construct her as clingy, phallic and emasculating. These features are theorized by twentieth century psychoanalysts who argue that the oedipal relationship with the mother is characterized by desire and anxiety (see Chapter One) and that symbols relating to this infantile relationship recur in later life. These symbols are evident in the witch plays considered in this chapter. Horror is
constructed by aligning the witch’s space with maternal features of the body. The dramatization of the witch’s cave introduced to the theatre of witchcraft the theme of the uncanny by presenting the cave as elusive and dangerous, despite the familiarity invoked by the maternal connection. In these plays, and most especially in Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), the cave can be read as chora, a non-verbal space of receptivity and disempowerment. As Luce Irigaray defines it, chora constitutes an ‘invisible, formless being, a mysterious, intelligible but most incomprehensible receptacle of all things’ (Irigaray 1974, 56). Chora is intrinsically maternal because it constitutes a pre-linguistic container (Kristeva 1977, 14). Chora represents the maternal space, particularly associated with the womb, which underlies and sits in opposition to the symbolic order.

These plays dramatize the necessity of expelling and rejecting the body of the mother because the cave is associated with danger and the disintegration of the subject. Images of horrific maternity may have been uncomfortable for some female audience members because they may have recognized the problematic position of the mother in patriarchal ideology. Kristeva explains that ‘The difficulty a mother has in acknowledging (or being acknowledged by) the symbolic realm—in other words, the problem she has with the phallus that her father or her husband stands for—is not such as to help the future subject leave the natural mansion’ (Kristeva 1982, 13). The persistent othering of witches encapsulates the sense of the mother’s lack in the
symbolic, which, according to Kristeva, resists her acknowledgment. These
plays, however, imply a fascination with the mother; although she is rejected
as other, she is fantasized as a histrionic picture of maternity.

By focusing on the witch’s space, this chapter contributes to the body of
work on stage witches by examining staging from a theoretical perspective,
and it illustrates how staging techniques enriched the narratives’ production of
horror. The consideration of staging illustrates how witchcraft plays drew on
the ancient association of witches with thresholds. The staging techniques
employed to denote the witch’s space encouraged an active audience. The
enlisted pleasures and horrors associated with voyeurism contributed to a
particularly metatheatrical genre, and this chapter illustrates how such
metatheatre contributed to the uncanny horror of witches. The following
chapter considers metatheatre and staging conditions in relation to the body.
Chapter Four

The Horror of the Body

The plays considered in Chapter Three construct the witch as other through the dimension of space. In the plays studied in this chapter, the witch is constructed as other through an interrogation of the body. Here, as in Chapter Three, I argue that the antithetical structure often offered by the dramatization of witches was violated by staging techniques that stepped outside the text to engage the spectator in a dialogue of horror. We shall see how these plays set up a structure of difference, yet the texts undermine this structure by inviting their audience members to align themselves and define themselves against characters and structures from each side of the binary. While the placement of the witch’s space just beyond the stage doors engaged the fantasy process of the spectator in those plays studied above, the witches in the plays studied in this chapter engaged the fantasy process in relation to the body of the actor performing the part.

These plays cast bodies as fluid and the boundaries of the subject as unstable, and in doing so they reveal a threat to autonomous identity. The witches of these plays are surrounded by death and decay in the concrete form of corpses and gore. They employ signifiers of death in their spell-making and in doing so force their audience to confront ‘the border that has encroached upon everything [that is the annihilation of the subject]’ (Kristeva 1982, 3).
Erictho of John Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605), like Canidia of Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), violates bodies to extract ingredients for her spells. She sucks blood and marrow out of corpses, an uncanny version of medicinal practices meant to reorder the balance of fluids in the body for health. The witches here are motherly despite being aged and barren. They are motherly when they should not be: Elizabeth Sawyer of Thomas Dekker, John Ford and William Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* has a maternal relationship with her dog-like familiar, and Erictho yearns for life in her barren womb. This displacement of motherhood reveals anxiety regarding maternal power exerting influence over the subject beyond childhood. The plays stage a difficulty of separating from the mother. Macbeth witnesses a birthing scene and is consumed by the maternal influences of the witches. Syphax, Erictho’s victim, travels along a vaginal passage to the witch’s lair because he feels that he has no choice. Images of stifling maternity and disgusting borders are theorized by Julia Kristeva. As well as the dangerous world of animalism, Kristeva relates the horror of abjection to the separation from the mother:

> The abject confronts us, on the other hand, and this time within our personal archeology, with our earliest attempts to release the hold of maternal entity even before ex-isting outside of her, thanks to the autonomy of language. It is a violent, clumsy breaking away, with the constant risk of falling back under the sway of a power as securing as it is stifling. (Kristeva 1982, 13)

The constant risk of returning to the mother is captured in witchcraft plays, and it is figured as a source of danger. These plays, however, complicate this
picture of maternity as motherhood is blurred with sexual activity. The body of the mother, while horrific, is a site of perverse sexuality, and there is a blurring of horror and desire that exceeds Kristeva’s category of the abject.

Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton*, performed in 1621 at The Cockpit and at court in that same year, drew the fantasy of the spectator to the body of the mother in terms of perverse sexuality. Elizabeth Sawyer makes a pact with the devil when she allows her familiar, Tom, to suckle from her in an obscene distortion of the familiar mother-child union. In the first instance, when the dreadful pact is sealed, Tom suckles from Sawyer’s arm, presenting on stage the belief that witches nourished their familiars with blood. The play was based on a real trial, which is covered in a pamphlet by Henry Goodcole, and the play followed hard on the actual events. In his summary of the legal trial, Goodcole opened his account with a description of the ‘Publike and private markes on her body’ (Goodcole 1621, A4v) for which investigators were paid to search:

And they all three said, that they a little above the Fundiment of *Elizabeth Sawyer* the prisoner, there indited before the Bench for a Witch, found a thing like a Teate the bigness of the little finger, and the length of halfe a finger, which was branched at the top like a teate, and seemed as though one had suckt it, and that the bottome thereof was blew, and the top of it was redde. (Goodcole 1621, B3v)

Frequently, in English witchcraft trials of the early-modern period, marks or ‘teats’ found on the body of the accused constituted proof of their guilt.
One seventeenth-century handbook for English justices of the peace advised close sexual inspection of the accused body: ‘these the Devils markes be insensible, and being pricked wil not bleed; and be often in their secret parts, and therefore require diligent and carefull search’ (Anon 1645, A2v). This mark tended to be found in ‘private’ parts of women; King James’s Demonology insisted that the mark would be found ‘upon some secreit place of their bodie’ (Stuart 1597, F1r). Joseph Klaits draws on contemporary evidence and convincingly argues that the prosecution of women in this way was a symptom of naiveté and anxiety concerning female anatomy (Klaits 1985, 81). The simple exposure of a woman’s genitalia, perversely misrecognized as a witch’s teat, served as sufficient evidence to condemn her, often to death (Macfarlane 1970, 18; Klaits 1985, 56). The judicial procedure thus provided a context for intimately investigating women’s bodies, interrogating them about their erotic experiences and speculating about their deviant sexual activities. This procedure at once reveals the anxiety stimulated by female sexuality, an attempt by patriarchy to control it, and a projection of the cultural fascination with the seductive and bewitching powers of women. The female body, persecuted by patriarchal procedures, was turned into ‘the uncanny stranger on display’ (Cixous 1975, 165). The dramatization of the phenomenon in The Witch of Edmonton may have been uncomfortable for female spectators because of the implication that all women are witches because of the clitoris. Depending on awareness of female anatomy, women
may have recognized patriarchal ignorance about the female body or have been confronted with the possibility of their own teat.

John Marston’s *Sophonisba* was performed at Blackfriars in 1605 by The Children of the Queen’s Revels. The employment of children in the presentation of witchcraft encouraged a focus on the body because of the obvious fissure between the actor and the role. This focus provided a context for an interrogation of the body and highlighted the fluidity and instability that was characteristic of early-modern understanding of the body (Paster 1998). *Sophonisba* is concerned with femininity and the female body, and it presents witchcraft through an exploration of feminine behaviour and its relationship to the body. In the play, Sophonisba’s maid, Zanthia, draws attention to the feminine body represented on stage and contained within the body of the boy actor:

[ZANTHIA]
We things cal’d women, onely made for show
And pleasure, created to beare children
And play at shuttle-coke, we imperfect mixtures
(Marston 1606, B1r)

Zanthia’s comments, which ask the audience to reflect upon women and their role in society, draw attention to humoral theories of the body, which she employs to legitimize the subjugation of women. The suggestion that women are ‘imperfect mixtures’ relates to the belief that a person’s constitution depended on the balance and mixture of four fluids in the body: black bile,
yellow bile, phlegm and blood (Paster 2004, 373). Zanthia implies that women are imperfectly constructed, their humoral balance flawed, and consequently they are biologically deficient in intellectual matters. The description of the feminine body as imperfect aligns the character with the boy actor who played her. Studying the depiction of boys in drama of the period, alongside the practicalities of boyhood in early-modern England, Ian Moulton suggests that ‘The figure of the boy is doubly marked as effeminate first, in Renaissance England young boys were not simply considered young men but were in many ways treated as figures of indeterminate gender’ (Moulton 2000, 159). The boy actor is in a state of transition where boundaries between male and female and youth and age are unsettled; this condition underlies any discussion of femininity in the play.

Lucy Munro argues that ‘the adult companies ... could set up a clear distinction between male adults and “women”, [and] Jacobean Children’s Company plays were capable of creating a slippage between boys and adult men, between “male” and “female”’ (Munro 2005, 49). The lengthy description of Erictho’s horrific appearance in Sophonisba (1605) was perhaps necessary to contribute to the horror associated with the aged female body, which would have been difficult to present by a child actor, since ‘A loathsome yellow leanness spreades hir face, / A heavy hell-like paleness loades hir cheeks’ (Marston 1606, E4r). A similar tactic is employed in the description of the aged Gisco:
The look of the audience was manipulated through language to generate what the play presented: age and horror in the body of the child actor.

By drawing specific attention to the distinction between the character and the actor, the play highlights the untrustworthy nature of the theatrical look. Munro emphasizes the importance of dialogue in creating the impression of age in plays which were performed by boy actors (Munro 2005, 47). In *Sophonisba* (1605), the language of the play directs the spectator’s interpretation of the character on stage. John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (1591) also contains a witch-like character, who would have been performed by a boy amongst a company of boy actors. The character is repeatedly described as old or aged (Lyly 1594, D2r, E1r, F1r, G4r). Bombie first enters the play when Silena, a young and foolish girl, calls on Bombie to know whether she ‘be a Maid or no’ (Lyly 1594, D2r). Silena highlights the antithetical relationship between the two women:

*Silena:* I thanke you for nothing, because I vn-derstand nothing: though you be as olde as you are, yet am I as younge as I am, and because
that I am so fayre, therefore are you so fowle,
(Lyly 1594, D2r)

Antithesis is contained within the dialogue, which was perhaps a necessity when such difference in age was not embodied in the actors performing the roles.

Similarly, in Lyly’s *Endymion* (1588), another play performed by a company of boy actors, the age and physical grotesqueness of the witch, Dipsas, is described in detail:

[TOPHAS]  O what a fine thin hayre hath Dip-sas, what a prettie low forehead? What a tale and state- lie nose! What little hollowe eyes? What great and goodly lyppes? Howe harmelesse shee is beeing tooth- less, her fingers fatte and short, adorned with long nayles like a bytter. In howe sweete a proportion her cheeks hang downe to her brests like dugges, and her pappes to her waste like bagges. What a lowe sta- ture shee is, and yet what a great foote she carryeth?
(Lyly 1591, E2r-E2v)

Although this speech is a source of comedy (see section 2.1.1) rather than horror, it reveals the necessity of dialogue in producing the impression of the witch’s appearance and creates a theatrical palimpsest, where the boy actor is over written by the dialogue. When witches featured in plays performed by a boy company, much detail can be found in the dialogue regarding the physical appearance of the witch because the actors would have access to a narrower spectrum of embodied difference. Such detail is not found in the plays.
performed by adult companies. In such plays witches are invariably described as old, but the impact of the physical impression of the witch was left to the appearance of the actor rather than the dialogue of the play. The differences between witches found in plays performed by boy companies and those performed by adult companies suggest that, when available, an adult actor, rather than a boy, would have performed witch characters.

The argument that adult actors would have performed some of the female roles on the early-modern stage has been the subject of much recent critical debate (Rutter 1999, 124-5; Kemp 2010, 114). This debate, however, is often concerned with the question of whether boy actors had the skill and experience to carry the ‘weightier’ female roles such as Lady Macbeth or Cleopatra (Rosenberg 2001; Kathman 2005; Winkler 2006, 20; Wells 2009), and rarely are witches, with their uncanny challenge to gendered categories, considered. Amanda Ewbanks Winkler is a notable exception, arguing that witches were typically performed by adult men. For Winkler, this casting decision provides a physiological factor which contradicted Jacobean ideals of femininity (Winkler 2006, 20). David Kathman’s approach draws on concrete evidence provided by playlists, noting that ‘of the forty-plus named actors known to have played female roles for adult companies those whose age we can determine were all between twelve and twenty-two years old, with the normal range being roughly thirteen to twenty-one’ (Kathman 2005, 244). The key point for my analysis is not the actual age of the actor but whether or not they
embodied the physical characteristics required to signify or subvert early-modern notions of femininity; one of the most important of these signifiers was facial hair (Fisher 2001, 180). An actor of twenty-one or twenty-two, still considered a ‘boy’ (which simply meant apprentice), would have been physically closer to an adult actor than the boys employed in children’s companies. The casting of these older boys in the roles of witches or hag-like characters would have challenged the dominant assignment of sexual desire in the theatres and, as Winkler argues, embodied the subversive elements of witchcraft in terms of gender and licit desire. Of course, heterosexual desire was not the only form of desire available in the theatres (Bray 1982; Orgel 1996), but the witchcraft plays insist that desire for the aged and barren witch is illicit.

My interest lies in the potential for the grotesque and the uncanny in the cross dressing of adult men. Jean Howard and Phyllis Rackin argue that the beards of the witches in Macbeth are a sign of the uncanny which associates ‘sexual ambiguity with the dangers that lurk at the boundaries of the known, rationalized world of sexual difference and sexual exclusion constructed by patriarchal discourse’ (Howard and Rackin 1997, 46). The gruesomeness of the stage witches and the horror of their activities may have been reflected in the casting of these witches as adult actors endowed with real facial hair. This process would have warped the eroticism of the character into an exhibition of the uncanny in sexual relations. While the grotesque is reported in dialogue
when no adult actors were available, it remained implicit in the body of the actor playing the part when they were. I do not suggest that all witches were performed by adult men—Mall Spencer, in Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), almost certainly was not—but the casting of adult men as witches would have inhibited masculine privilege in the relationship of desire and the gaze at work in the playhouse and perpetuated anxiety regarding the possibility that sexual identity was a performance in itself (Hirsch 2008, 102). In Chapter Five, I argue that the casting of adult actors as witches exploited the carnivalesque condition of subverting the dominant order; the plays of this chapter explore the perverse maternal body, and the casting of the witch enlisted the horror of the uncanny. *Macbeth*, with its two distinct performance texts, marks a transition between the themes explored in Chapters Four and Five.

The lengthy description of Erictho in *Sophonisba* is brought into contrast in this chapter with the brevity of the indications of how the weird sisters of *Macbeth* would have appeared. *Macbeth* was probably first performed around 1606 and a second, altered version of the play was, according to Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, performed around 1616, which is the version that survives in the First Folio. The most significant difference in the productions, according to Taylor and Lavagnino, is that adult actors played the witches following the interpolations, which occurred around 1616 (Taylor and Lavagnino 2007, 389). Stanley Wells suggests that ‘In *Macbeth*, which can be
played with four boys, Shakespeare actually draws attention to an apparent breach of convention by giving the weird sisters beards, so indicating that characters whom the audience might have expected to be played by boys are in fact played by grown men’ (Wells 2009, 175). In this chapter, I consider what effect casting decisions would have had on the dramatization of witchcraft.


Thomas Dekker, William Rowley and John Ford’s *The Witch of Edmonton* was first performed in The Cockpit Drury Lane in 1621 by Prince Charles’s Company. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the witch’s body enlists the horror of the abject because she embodies perverse maternity and exists on the borders of symbolic identity. Conversely, however, the play also offers one of the most sympathetic portrayals of witches in the period (Dollimore 1984, 176). Witchcraft is presented as a construct that originates within the community. I suggest here that such discontinuity is inevitable because abjection takes place simultaneously in the psychical and social realms.

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, Elizabeth Sawyer is a scapegoat, marked and persecuted as a witch before any pact with the devil is made. Julia Garrett, drawing on the work of deviancy theorists (Erikson 1966; Durkheim 1984; Girard 1986), argues that the marking of Sawyer is presented in the play as a
strategy of ordering the community, and as such it is a construct which originates in the community and is in no way intrinsic to Sawyer’s person:

In the cycles of ‘hostilities and resentment’, we see that even the preliminary sign of her deviance, her deformed body, is produced by others in the community, specifically Old Banks, whose beatings have transformed her body into ‘a bow buckled and bent together’. (Garrett 2007, 346)

Scapegoating is presented in *The Witch of Edmonton* as a strategy of channelling into a marked other those aspects of the community which threaten its harmonious facade. This process can be read as a reflection of the abjection of the mother, which, according to Kristeva, ensures the stability of individual psychical identity. Kristeva explains that ‘by way of abjection, primitive societies have marked out a precise area of their culture in order to remove it’, and that this is a reflection of that which occurs ‘within our personal archeology’ (Kristeva 1982, 12-13). Abjection thus can explain the structural and political acts of inclusion/exclusion which establish the foundations of social existence. [Kristeva] ... asserts that the abject has a double presence: it is both within ‘us’ and within ‘culture’ and it is through both individual and group rituals of exclusion that abjection is ‘acted out’. (Tyler 2009, 79)

The theatrical Edmonton is a duplicitous community. In the subplot of the play, Frank Thorney bigamously marries in order to secure the dowry of Old Carter’s daughter and save his family from poverty. He lies and deceives in an attempt to maintain a public image of legitimacy. Frank’s first wife, Winifred, is in a tenuous position which is potentially as dangerous as Sawyer’s. She is
pregnant, although the father, unbeknownst to Frank, may be Sir Arthur
Clarington. Helen Vella Bonavita argues that unlike Sawyer, Winifred shows
‘anxiety throughout the play to achieve a secure position within society’
(Bonavita 2006, 75); she displays anxiety regarding ‘tattling gossips’ (Dekker,
Rowley et al. 1658, B1r) and a wish to maintain a legitimate position in the
community. The subplot of The Witch of Edmonton reveals the duplicity of
the community and the instability of the appearance of harmony. Similar
revelations about hypocrisy occur in Thomas Goffe’s Orestes (1617), in which
Clytemnestra’s actions draw attention to the duplicity of the dominant order.
In The Witch of Edmonton, almost every character in the play performs deviant
behaviours: Winifred cross-dresses, Old Carter is uncharitable, and the mob
sets fire to Sawyer’s house. Sawyer is unconnected to the hypocritical goings
on of the village, and with the power of alterity she poses a threat to its
harmonious facade.

Part of Sawyer’s peripheral power is in her awareness of the scapegoating
process, which she shares with the audience. Drawing on the work of Peter
Glick and René Girard, Garrett describes how, despite their vulnerability and
marginalization, scapegoats were often believed to be powerful and dangerous
(Glick 2002; Garrett 2007; Girard 1986). Sawyer’s subversive potential is
developed through her relationship with the audience, and she forces audience
members to acknowledge the scapegoating process by soliloquizing:
Sawy[er]  And why on me? why should the envious world
    Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?
’Cause I am poor, deform’d and ignorant,
And like a Bow buckl’d and bent together,
By some more strong in mischiefs then myself?
Must I for that be made a common sink,
For all the filth and rubbish of Men’s tongues
To fall and run into?
(Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, C3r)

Sawyer appeals to the audience to consider why she is marked and persecuted
while deviant behaviour is also performed by nearly every other character in
the play.

Significantly, Sawyer understands her status as a scapegoat in terms of
pollution, sewers and disease. This contributes to the focus on the body by
constituting the community in corporeal terms. Sawyer is marked as other,
persecuted and purged like a disease that threatens the body of the individual
and the community: ‘I am shunn’d / And hated like a sickness’ (Dekker,
Rowley et al. 1658, C4r). Disease is dangerous and powerful, and although
powerlessness drives Sawyer to accept her position as a witch, ironically she
harbours the power and danger that Mary Douglas associates with a peripheral
position (Douglas 2002). Her power is in the threat she poses to the
apparently harmonious community; being outside it, she can reveal the
falsehood and the unstable and arbitrary traditions on which the community is
established. Sawyer is the ‘sink / For all the filth and rubbish of Men’s
tongues’, the scapegoat on to which all the hypocrisy, gossip, weakness and underhandedness of the community can be transferred.

Outside the symbolic community of Edmonton, Sawyer is best positioned to reveal its failures, and she is most articulate when doing so. ‘A Witch! who is not?’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, G1r) she asks, and she proceeds to point out the hypocrisy at work in the dominant order, thus threatening its legitimacy. Sawyer highlights the shortcomings of the legal system which condemns her, sarcastically identifying witchcraft in the cunning with which lawyers take advantage of their clients:

[SAWYER]

The Man of Law
Whose honeyed hopes the credulous Client draws,
(As Bees by tinkling Basons) to swarm to him,
From his own Hive, to work the Wax in his;
He is no Witch, not he.
(Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, G1v)

Sawyer accuses ‘Men in gay clothes, whose Backs are laden with Titles and Honours’, ‘painted things in Princes Courts’, lechers, bawds and scolds of a kind of witchcraft (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, F4v-G1v), drawing attention to the hypocrisy and arbitrariness of the dominant order, which marks her as other.

Anne Ratcliffe is Sawyer’s victim and counterpart in her peripheral position. Ratcliffe, who is ‘run mad’ by Sawyer, describes how ‘All the
golden meal runs into the rick knaves’ purses, and the poor have nothing but bran’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, G2v-G2r). Both Ratcliffe and Sawyer, linguistically marked as other, as ‘witch’ or ‘mad’, harness the power which exists at the edges of the community. They are able to critique the dominant order from outside its parameters.

4.1.1 Perverting the Maternal Body

It has been argued that Sawyer’s relationship with her familiar represents a disappointing withdrawal into superstition following the promising scepticism of the earlier scenes (Wright 1996, 228) and is perhaps a symptom of weak dramatic collaboration. Sawyer comes to epitomize and perpetuate the horror of witchcraft and the anxieties relating to witches that are evident in preceding witchcraft plays; she performs acts of powerful malice and exhibits a disturbing relationship with her familiar. The transformation of Sawyer from a sympathetic figure to one of maternal horror is consistent with theoretical approaches to abjection. The exploration of social abjection in the opening scenes is transformed into a display of the uncanny, and Sawyer comes to embody horror relating to monstrous maternity. David Nicol argues that the contradictory presentation of demonic and social influences on the construction of witchcraft in the play in fact reflects scholarly debate on the subject. While scepticism existed concerning the existence of malevolent witches, early-modern commentators rarely made the case for the non-
existence of devils (Nicol 2004). Rather than a symptom of collaboration, the apparent discontinuity presented in the play supports the notion that abjection occurs both within ourselves and within culture (Tyler 2009, 79). The focus on the maternal body in the play indicates that Sawyer’s abjection from the community is a reflection of the psychical abjection of the mother.

Sawyer’s pact with the devil is sealed as a rite of passage that allows Sawyer to leave behind her old life of persecution:

Dog. Seal’t with thy blood. Sucks her arm, thunder and lightning
See, now I dare call thee mine;
For proof, command me, instantly I’ll run,
To any mischief, goodness can I none.
(Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, D1r)

The blood sucking, the thunder and lightning and Tom’s rhyming couplet emphasize the ritualistic nature of Sawyer’s engagement with the supernatural. I argue in section 2.2 that ritual acted as an inhibitor of the horror of witchcraft in plays of the 1580s and 1590s. In The Witch of Edmonton, ritual is a producer of horror because it depends upon a transaction of bodies. There are no candles, magic circles or magic books, artefacts that associate magic with learning. In desperation Sawyer asks ‘What is the name? where and by what Art learn’d? / What spells, what charms, or invocations? / May the thing call’d Familiar be purchas’d’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, C3v). Sawyer, however, is ‘ignorant’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, C3r), and she is not empowered by culture or scholarship but by her body. The thunder and lightning draw
attention to the significance of the bodily transaction occurring between Sawyer and her familiar, which is suckling. An antithetical structure emerges across the theatre of witchcraft with Doctor Faustus and Elizabeth Sawyer representing the extremes. The power of witchcraft could originate with masculine learning and culture, facilitated by books, letters and candles, or with the feminine body and nature, where suckling and sexual frolicking enable supernatural power.

Ironically, before Sawyer’s pact with Tom, her body was the root of her torments. She claims that she is persecuted because she is ‘deform’d’ and ‘like a Bow buckl’d and bent together’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, C3r). The transformation of her body into a producer of power occurs through a perversion of the maternal body. The second time Tom demands his nourishment, Sawyer delays the suckling:

[SAYWER]
    thou shalt have the Teat anon ... 
    I am dri’d up 
    With cursing and with madness; and have yet 
    No blood to moysten these sweet lips of thine. 
    Stand on thy hind-legs up. Kiss me, my Tommy, 
    ... Let’s tickle 
    (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, G1v-G2r)

The tantalizing prospect of witnessing the perverse suckling from Sawyer’s ‘private parts’ is abandoned to the imagination of the audience. It is not stated in the play that the teat is found in her genitals; earlier in the play was
dramatized suckling from Sawyer’s arm. However, those in the audience who were aware of Goodcole’s account or the demonological discourse which located the mark or teat in the accused’s genitals would have had the imagination drawn to an image that combined maternity, bestiality (Tom is shaped like a dog) and oral sexuality. Perhaps the interruption of the suckling occurred as it would have been too obscene to represent on the early-modern stage. Replacing the suckling with sexual frolicking allowed the imagination of the audience to construct the image for themselves. Sawyer fills the role of both mother and lover and represents the uncanny condition of the maternal body made perverse and unfamiliar.

An interesting relationship between the body and language is presented in Sawyer’s speech. The outpouring of language dries out her body. This observation perhaps reflects an anxiety relating to female speech, which was associated in some strains of thought in the period with the dangers of gossip (as we shall see in Chapter Five) and cursing. Witness statements relating to the prosecution of the Pendle witches in 1612 indicate that the threatening activities of supposed witches were often verbal in nature:

Chattox did fall out with one Hugh Moore of Pendle, as aforesaid, about certaine cattell of the said Moores, which the said Moore did charge the said Chattox to haue bewitched: for which the said Chattox did curse and worry the said Moore, and said she would be Reuenged of the said Moore: whereupon the said Moore presently fell sicke, and languished about halfe a yeare, and then died. Which Moore vpon his death-bed said, that the said Chattox had bewitched him to death. (Potts 1613, F1r)
The danger of Chattox’s behaviour needs to be understood in the context of the period, in which ‘to curse’ and ‘to wish’ referred to a belief that speech acts had a manifest result on the body: ‘In the witchcraft context ... these verbs were used to refer to a speech act that was believed to result inevitably in some misfortune befalling the target’ (Culpeper 2010, 82). Sawyer’s cursing has a manifest result on her own body: cursing dries her up so she is unable to provide her familiar with blood. The possibility of sympathy for Sawyer is maintained in this speech, perhaps reflecting the idea offered by Jean Bodin in 1580 and cited in section 1.1 that witchcraft takes revenge on the body of the witch (Bodin 1995, 173).

Michael Goldman argues that the theatrical form was dependent on a unique relationship between the bodies of the actors on stage and those in the audience (Goldman 1972, 4). The focus on the perverted maternal body in *The Witch of Edmonton* may have evoked a memory of a dependence on the maternal body, which, according to Tyler, is ‘deeply etched within the bodily and psychic lives of each of us’ (Tyler 2009, 80). The perversion of the maternal body in *The Witch of Edmonton* was therefore intrinsically uncanny in that it transformed the familiar act of maternal suckling into the unfamiliar performance of the suckling of familiars. The horror of the maternal body is presented in this play in terms of a warped relationship between the infant and the mother. The familiar replaces the child in the act of suckling. Horror is
evoked through the imagination of the audience, and the substitution of the
infant for a supernatural being enlists the early, pre-language dependence on
the mother’s body. For Lacan, sexual difference was learnt through the
dynamics of language and identification (Lacan 1977, 65). The theatrical look
at images of perverse maternity would not have been gendered in the same
way it might have been in response to Winifred’s pregnancy or Sawyer’s
poverty because the uncanny suckling enlists fantasy relating to a time prior to
language and gender difference.

Barbara Creed’s description of the witch in patriarchal discourse sums up
the horror of this image, which is that it ‘sets out to unsettle boundaries
between the rational and irrational, symbolic and imaginary’ (Creed 1993, 76).
Sawyer’s threat to the symbolic order of the phallus is represented as she is
endowed with an imaginable penis: a teat the ‘bigness of a little finger’
(Goodcole 1621, A4v) found within her genitals. She represents a threat to
phallic heterosexuality in her bestiality and oral sexuality, and this threat is
centred on the body of the mother. Freud suggests that the infant misinterprets
the mother’s body as having a penis and that a fetish is a substitute for this
imaginary phallus (see section 1.8). The play constructs Sawyer as a fetish by
encouraging its audience to imagine the possibility of a penis under her skirts.
4.1.2 Horror and Desire

Linda Williams argues that ‘There is not that much difference between an object of desire and an object of horror as far as the male look is concerned’ (Williams 1984, 88). The crucial point for Williams is that desire and horror are constructed on (often gender) difference, and it is this power in difference that creates affinities between the monster and the woman. Although the play points towards the dissolution of gender difference by enlisting the pre-symbolic dyad, we see a potential for feminine empowerment when feminine sexuality is constructed as threatening to patriarchy. The interchangeability of desire and horror is manifested in the play in stories of illicit sexual conduct which trouble the assumption of male power. Because Sawyer, being old, infertile and deformed, is not a valid object of desire, the fantasies that surround her construct desire as illicit. Freud argues that the mother’s breast is the ‘first object of the sexual instinct’ (Freud 1963, 314) and that desire is essentially mobile because it depends on substitution. The image of the suckling of familiars was returned to frequently across the theatre of witchcraft. As well as being dramatized in The Witch of Edmonton, it is referred to in Shakespeare’s 1 Henry the Sixth (1592), Middleton’s The Witch (1616), Heywood and Brome’s The Witches of Lancashire (1634) and Kirke’s The Seven Champions of Christendom (1635). It is an image that perhaps evoked the desire instigated at the mother’s breast and which went into a structure of substitution. The Witch of Edmonton presents desire for the
mother as taboo and explores the transformation of desire into fantasies of sexuality that are illicit and humiliating. Old Banks recalls a story of his inexplicable behaviour since he crossed Sawyer:

\[\text{Old Banks} \] So, Sir, ever since, having a Dun-Cow tied up in my Back-side, let me go thither, or but cast mine eye at her, and if I should be hang'd, I cannot chuse, though it be ten times in an hour, but run to the Cow, and taking up her tail, kiss (saving your Worship's Reverence) my Gow behinde; That the whole Town of Edmonton has been ready to be-piss themselves with laughing me to scorn. (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, F4v)

In the play, witchcraft creates behaviours which disconcertingly unsettle the boundaries of ‘normal’ sexuality. Old Banks is subject to an impulse that forces him to perform sexual acts that overturn the position of male sexual supremacy. His behaviour leads to him becoming a laughing stock; he loses authority in the social realm as well as the sexual. Sexual misconduct is reported or interrupted in The Witch of Edmonton presumably for practical reasons of staging and censorship. As in representations of the cave, illicit sexual behaviours in the play ignite the imagination. Desire presented in the play is thus directly involved in the subjectivity of the spectator.

The discussion of the three countrymen in The Witch of Edmonton extends the fantasy of illegitimate sexuality to a threat particularly directed at patriarchy:

\[I:\text{ I took my Wife and a Servingman in our Town of Edmonton, thrashing in my Barn together, such Corn as Country-Wenches}\]
carry to Market; and examining my Polecat why she did so, she swore in her conscience she was bewitch’d: and what Witch have we about us, but Mother Sawyer?

2: Rid the Town of her, else all our Wives will do nothing else but dance about other Country May-poles.

3: Our Cattel fall, our Wives fall, our Daughters fall and Maid-servants fall; and we our selves shall not be able to stand, if this Beast be suffered to graze amongst us.

(Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, F3v)

Here, subversive feminine sexuality, emanating from witchcraft, poses a direct threat to the signifier of masculinity – the penis. Witchcraft is imagined as a force that induces impotence, which theme is taken up in the plays studied in Chapter Five. The bawdy euphemism ‘to stand’ merges the social, physical and psychical threat that witchcraft poses to masculinity. The fantasy of witchcraft overturned the normal position of masculine supremacy in the social realm and perpetuated horror relating to the fallibility of the penis. The fantasy of sexual licentiousness, spreading because of witchcraft, is explored further in Chapter Five.

*The Witch of Edmonton* produces horror through a distortion of the body. Sawyer’s sorrowful description of her body is mirrored in the morris dancers, who mock her by contorting their bodies into strange positions (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, E4r). She is endowed with a fantastical penis-like part, from which she suckles her familiar. The distortion of the female body was perhaps reflected in the casting of the play, since an older actor playing Sawyer would breach dramatic convention and draw attention to the distorted
circulations of desire at work in the play. If this was the case, the power in
difference would have been transformed into the power of sameness for male
audience members. The male look at the monster would perhaps recognize the
horror of the witch, not as other, but as disconcertingly embodying the male
privilege in sexual relations.

More than any other dramatic witch of the period, Elizabeth Sawyer incites
an intimate response. Anthony Harris notes that *The Witch of Edmonton* ‘is
the first play to contain a fullscale portrayal of a witch where the protagonist is
treated with any measure of sympathy or understanding’ (Harris 1980, 90).
Her articulate opening speech appeals to the intelligence of an audience
prepared to investigate witchcraft from a challenging perspective. Drawing
attention to the lack of choice for some factions of society, she would most
likely have invited the sympathy and empathy of those watching. Edmonton
would have been, for many of the audience, a familiar kind of environment,
and Sawyer describes familiar complaints: she is poor, she is mistreated by her
neighbours and she has physical imperfections. As Sawyer embraces the
supernatural by allowing her familiar to suckle from her, the familiarity of her
plight is transformed. The sympathies of the audience are manipulated as she
becomes a being of horror, epitomizing the terror and anxiety of the uncanny.
Sawyer’s trial and execution represent a reassertion of patriarchal law and a
containment of her phallic power. She is absorbed by the dominant order by
being executed, and when she is forced to repent her sins, she symbolically
submits to the religious doctrine of the dominant order. ‘The Witch must be beaten out of her Cock-pit’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, H3r) Tom triumphantly asserts before Sawyer is taken away for execution. The Cockpit, according to the title page, was the theatre in which the play was performed, and such metatheatricality acknowledges that Sawyer is abjected from the space of the audience as well as the theatricalised space of the stage. The term is also phallic; cock was a euphemism for penis as early as 1618 (OED “cock” n. 1). Sawyer’s execution represents the comforting discovery that Sawyer cannot sustain her phallic power.

4.2 John Marston, Sophonisba (1605)

John Marston’s Sophonisba, first performed in 1605 at the Blackfriars, interrogates structural categories that organize experience. Distinct prescriptions of gender, bonds of honour, biological descriptions and the binary of good and evil are held up for inspection and revealed, through the process, as artificial, unstable and penetrable. From the outset, Sophonisba encourages the audience to examine categories presented in the play and the rituals and ceremonies that organize these categories. The play opens with a dumbshow, in which the opposing factions in the war take position on opposites sides of the stage. This staging technique contributes to the process of categorization in the play: different ideological positions are represented in the binary presented on stage. The play recalls the morality tradition, and an
extreme dichotomy of good and evil is presented. Sophonisba’s ‘goodness’ is glorious, self-sacrificing and wondrous; Syphax’s evil is stomach-churning, perverse and explicit. Erictho problematizes the categories laid out by the play. She is figured as the other, yet she is a central figure for the definition of both Sophonisba and Syphax.

The play interrogates the mechanisms and symbolic processes that organize the division of behaviour according to categories of gender. These mechanisms include ceremony, custom and understanding of the body. The alternative title of the play, The Wonder of Women, and the flattery in the prologue, ‘And now, ye worthier minds, / To whom we shall present a female glory’ (Marston 1606, A3r), encourage the audience to examine femininity and the actions that patriarchal discourse circumscribed for it. The examination of these mechanisms reveals the category of woman to be somewhat unstable, penetrable and artificial. As Sophonisba prepares for the consummation ceremony, she ponders the artificiality of the customs that contain and attempt to organize her desire:

_Sophonisba_ I wonder Zanthia why the custome is To vse such _Ceremonie_ such strict shape About vs women: forsooth the Bride must steale Before her Lord to bed: and then delaies Long expectations all against knowne wishes I hate these figures in locution These about phrases forc’d by _ceremonie_. We must still seeme to flie what we most seeke And hide ourselues from that we fain would find us. (Marston 1606, B1r)
Sophonisba’s analysis of the ceremony is brought into relief by the entrance of

Four boyes antiquely attired with bows and quiuers
dauncing to the Cornets, a phantastique measure, Massinissa in his night gowne led by Asdruball and
Hanno followed by Bytheas and Iugurth
(Marston 1606, B1v)

Sophonisba’s desire for her husband is managed by custom and the patriarchal
gaze. The lords of the court act as an audience that polices and regulates
desire. Sophonisba’s speech indicates that sex is more than an ingredient in
the traditions of marriage. She desires and anticipates sex, irrespective of the
custom that requires it of her. In this speech, desire is bound up in language—
about phrases—and by other symbolic forms, such as ceremony, but is
superseded by lust for her husband, which exposes the artificiality of these
symbolic mechanisms.

Before consummation, the ceremony is interrupted by Carthalo, who
reports that soldiers of Rome are descending upon Carthage. The opulent and
ritualistic scene of consummation is replaced with a gory description of battle,
which draws on imagery of the body:

Car[thalo]. Scipio advanced like the God of blood
Leads vp grim war, that father of foule wounds
Whose sinowy feete are steeped in gore, Whose hideous voice
Makes turrets tremble
(Marston 1606, B2v)
The consummation scene represents an attempt to police and organize the body and its sexual activity. The report of war and the disruption of the ceremony abruptly remind us that bodies are gory, fluid and violent; they cannot be efficiently policed by custom. Sophonisba is left behind as her husband, Massinissa, heads to war. The play returns repeatedly to the instability of her position, especially when rumour has it that Massinissa has been killed: ‘A maide, a widow, yet a haplesse wife’ (Marston 1606, C3r).

Her position, like that of the women in Thomas Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604) explored in Chapter Five, highlights the fallibility of the usual course patriarchy prescribed for women: she is left behind, paradoxically, a maid and a wife.

Although Sophonisba appears to be frustrated with the ritualistic nature of her wedding night, in public matters she performs the role set out for her by patriarchy and her position in society:

[SOPHONISBA]

I intreat
That you'le collect from our loose form’d speach
This firme resolue: that no loe Appetite
Of my sex weaknes, can or shall orecome.
Due gratefull service vnto you, or virtue.
(Marston 1606, B3v)

By drawing on stereotypes of her gender, Sophonisba is able to manoeuvre within the political and patriarchal world of Carthage and gain an audience
with the lords at court. Sonia Hernandez Santano notes that Sophonisba ‘shows a conscious awareness of being playing [sic] the role patriarchy has designed for women; she becomes a metacharacter, fully conscious of the need of representing herself as the chaste wife’ (Santano 2001, 285).

Sophonisba is prostituted by her father and the senators of Carthage to appease Syphax, who has joined forces with the enemy. Sophonisba is a married virgin, and the instability of this position makes her available to be bartered in this way. Again, Sophonisba performs the role patriarchy sets out for her in order to avoid rape:

[SOPHONISBA]
For (O my sex forgiue) I must confesse,
Wee not affect protesting feeblenes,
Intreats faint blushings, timerous modesty,
We thinke our louer is but little man,
Who is so full of woman ...
Our noble sex was onely born t’obay
To him that dares commaund.
(Marston 1606, D3r)

Her words, like Lady Macbeth’s jibes concerning manliness (Shakespeare 1623, mm2r), highlight the instability of the gender hierarchy (see section 4.3.1). Like Lady Macbeth, Sophonisba is able to manipulate the men in her life, but this is presented as ‘wondrous’ rather than demonic. Sophonisba is able to buy the time she needs to escape and thus remain faithful to her husband by acting as the obedient and subservient woman and by insisting that men should be ‘manly’. Sophonisba is ultimately a creature of the symbolic—
her ultimate aim, to remain a faithful and chaste wife, lies within patriarchal discourse—but she deconstructs the gendered ceremonies, expectations and customs of the symbolic and exposes them as artificial.

Sophonisba and Erictho are characterized according to a familiar antithesis of the perfect woman and the witch. The focus on the body in the play takes a perverse turn with the entrance of Erictho:

[SYPHAX]

she bursts vp tombes,
From halfrut searcloaths then she scrapes dry gums
For hir black rites: but when she finds a corse
New graud whose entrailes yet not turne
To slymy filth, with greedy hauock then
she makes fierce spoil: & swels with wicked triumph
To bury hir leane knuckles in his eyes.
(Marston 1606, E4r)

Syphax’s description of Erictho is perversely detailed. He lingers on details of Erictho’s horrific penetration of the dead, in a reflection of his own, earlier, threat to Sophonisba:

Sy[phax] Doe strike thy breast, know being dead, Ile sve,
With highest lust of sense thy senselesse flesh,
And euen then thy vexed soule shall see,
Without resistance, thy trunke prostitute,
Vnto our appetite.
(Marston 1606, E3v)

Images of desire, appetite and death in both speeches align Syphax and the witch. Erictho is uncanny because she holds a metaphorical mirror up to
Syphax, whose own insatiable and perverse lust is reflected back to him. In Michael Scott’s reading of the scene, Syphax’s description of Erictho tells us more about him than it does her:

His imagination is captivated and dwells therefore on her nature with an enthusiasm and a leering sensuality ... The effect is to horrify and repulse the audience. We are simultaneously presented with a verbal portrait of the foul witch and made fully aware of how the illusion of lust can cause a man to fall under her spell. (Scott 1978, 82)

Syphax turns to witchcraft when Sophonisba continues to flout his attempts to bed her and because ‘A wasting flame feedes on my amorous bloud / Which wee must coole or dye’ (Marston 1606, E4r). As in Goffe’s Orestes (1617) and Armin’s The Valiant Welshman (1612), there is a difficult journey to undertake when visiting the witch, which represents a return to a place removed from the rituals, ceremonies and politics of the dominant order.

Erictho’s lair lies beyond a ‘vault with hideous darkenes and much length / stretcheth beneath the earth into a groue’ (Marston 1606, D4v). The journey is long and claustrophobic: ‘the huge longe vaultes close vaine / What dumps it breathd’ (Marston 1606, E2v). As in the plays studied in the previous chapter, the journey to the witch’s realm contributes to the figuring of the witch as other. She is removed from the politics, rituals and ceremonies of the dominant order. The entrances to the two worlds contrast the distinct ideologies. The dumbshow, which opens the play, had characters enter ceremonially from opposing sides of the stage. When characters enter the
stage to Erictho’s lair they do so ‘as out of a caues mouth’ (Marston 1606, E2r) or ‘Through the vaultes mouth’ (Marston 1606, E3r), a somewhat less ritualistic, ceremonial and dignified entrance. The dank and shadowy tunnel contributes to the othering of Erictho. It references the difficult process of abandoning the symbolic order. In Sophonisba, the frequent descriptions of the tunnel and its atmosphere indicate that this journey relates to the body and represents a return through the vagina to the womb abode of the mother.

The witches’ realm is one without shame, boundaries or order: it is a place where necrophilic satisfaction and gory spell-making are possible (Marston 1606, E3v, F2r, E4r). Here Erictho has sex with Syphax when, disguised as Sophonisba, she lures Syphax into her bed (Marston 1606, E1v). The audience are encouraged to compare this bed scene with the scene of Sophonisba and Massinissa’s wedding night. No ceremony or ritual accompanies Erictho’s bed scene. There is no political dimension; this scene is about Erictho fulfilling her lust and punishing Syphax for his. She has sex with him and symbolically castrates him when she thrusts him back into the phallic order, where he experiences the shame that the symbolic order enlists to repress unacceptable desire:

Sy[phax] Can we yet breath? is any plagued like me?
Are we? let’s thinke: O now contempt, my hate
To the, thy thunder, sulphure, and scorn’d name.
(Marston 1606, F2r)
Syphax’s horror is expressed in terms of plague and disease. He has become contaminated by his sexual encounter with the witch. His symbolic castration, brought about by Erictho’s treachery, is imagined in terms of a physical attack on the body.

Despite the construction of Erictho as other, an affinity exists between her and Sophonisba. It is the intervention of Erictho that saves Sophonisba from Syphax’s aggressive lust. They both partake in bed scenes, and these scenes confirm the women as the linchpin that holds together patriarchal definition in the play. When Massinissa heads off to war, Sophonisba gives him her blessing when she refigures his masculine authority in the bedroom onto an authority on the battle field: ‘Fight for our country, vent thy youthfull heate / In fields, not beds’ (Marston 1606, B4r). Massinissa’s authority is channelled by his wife, who ultimately sacrifices herself:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{And now with vn dismayed resolue behold,} \\
\text{To save You, you, (for honour and just faith,} \\
\text{Are most true Gods, which we should much adore)} \\
\text{With euen disdainfull vigour I giue vp} \\
\text{An abhord life} \\
\text{(Marston 1606, G2v)}
\end{align*}
\]

Erictho also participates in the construction of the subject when she symbolically castrates Syphax. Santano explains that Erictho ‘is Sophonisba’s opposite; however, their acts seem to flow along parallel paths’ (Santano 2001, 288). Both women, in their own way, are the wonder of women.
The affinity developed between the principal women in the play constructs a particular focus on gender. This focus may have spoken to some female audience members who, recognizing the power in difference harboured by both Sophonisba and Erictho, may have been included in the same paradigm of power. Erictho’s habit of referring to herself in the plural, ‘Know we, Erictho, with a thirsty womb / Have couerted full threescore Suns for bloud of kings’ (Marston 1606, F2r), indicates that her agenda is not exclusively her own, but rather she represents to some degree all women, including those in the audience. This contributes to the feeling of the uncanny in the play: the feeling that what is occurring on stage is somehow intertwined with the identity of the spectator. Alternatively, or additionally, Erictho may be usurping the majestic plural to connote her self-perception as omnipotent and authoritative.

4.2.1 The Audience as Voyeurs

The vaginal passage, which leads Erictho’s victims to the maternal space, is rendered horrific when perverse lust is realized. The witch is also figured as maternal through the process of looking. As Chapter One claimed, looking is an important part of the construction of subjectivity. For Freud, it participates
in the castration complex when males view female genitalia as a castrated version of their own (Freud 1961, 154). Although psychoanalysis has been overwhelmingly concerned with the male look, *Sophonisba* disrupts the gendering of the look with the entrance of Erictho, who is removed from the symbolic mechanisms of the dominant order.

In Blackfriars, the audience would have experienced a different type of viewing to that in the amphitheatres. Light in the indoor theatres may have been manipulated using window shutters (Graves 2009, 175) thereby creating atmospheric conditions not possible in the amphitheatres. The darkened auditorium would perhaps have eliminated distractions from other playgoers, disabled reciprocated looks between audience members, and between spectators and those on stage. Artificial light, smoke and perfume would have created an unrealistic and romantic atmosphere (Stern 2006b, 46), where looking would have been more secret and thus voyeuristic than in the open-air theatres. *Sophonisba* capitalizes on the voyeuristic position enabled by Blackfriars. In the opening scene, the audience are invited to gaze upon Sophonisba in bed awaiting her husband. The scene is injected with excitement when systematically the layers enclosing Sophonisba’s body are removed: the curtains surrounding the bed, then the ribbon which holds her nightgown closed (Marston 1606, B1v). This scene, however, is constructed on the patriarchal, controlling gaze. The ceremonial nature of the procedure contains Sophonisba’s body within structures of control. Staging techniques
enrich the consideration of the female body as passive, disabled and inferior: in short, the perfect early-modern woman. The scene is endowed with the voyeuristic excitement of the feminine body open for spectatorship and passive to the controlling patriarchal gaze of the symbolic. In this scene, the character of Sophonisba connotes ‘to be looked-at-ness’ and thus offers a binary that Laura Mulvey theorizes in her influential essay ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (Mulvey 1975). In this model, the female is passive while the male is active and looking. This binary is problematized by the fact that the play was performed by boy actors. A narrower spectrum of difference in the cast would have meant that the binary proposed by the opening bed scene would have appeared somewhat fluid.

The gendered gaze is also deconstructed with the entrance of Erictho. The scene in which the audience witness Erictho and Syphax in bed abandons the symbolic gaze and is more archaic and anarchic. The play’s extensive music cues suggest that time would have elapsed between acts for the musicians to perform (Corbin and Sedge 1986, 10). The time between the two acts may have provided a realistic time for Syphax and Erictho to have sex within the canopy of the bed as it remained on the stage. Only a small act of imagination on the part of the audience would have been required for the voyeuristic anticipation of the opening act to be fulfilled. While Sophonisba’s lust is contained by the public and patriarchal gaze, Syphax’s is associated with the private discomfort and excitement of eavesdropping: ‘Not thou shalt hear; all
stand without eare-reach / Of the soft cries nice shrinking brides do yeeld’ (Marston 1606, E1r). On his second attempt to rape Sophonisba, the association is repeated: ‘This forrests deafe / As is my lust’ (Marston 1606, E3r).

A woman attending the theatre drew contempt from some. This contempt was often connected to the position women put themselves in when attending the theatre: they became additional performers to be gazed at by men (Gosson 1579, F2r) (see section 5). The voyeuristic look of Blackfriars gave power to female spectators in particular: they would have been empowered by looking without being looked upon as they would have been in the amphitheatres. The affinity which I have proposed between Erictho and Sophonisba, in which both are powerful as distinct characters against whom symbolic manliness is defined, would also have placed female spectators in the same paradigm of power. In Linda William’s analysis of the horror film, this power in difference is connected to the look:

So there is a sense in which the woman’s look at the monster is more than simply a punishment for looking, or a narcissistic fascination with the distortion of her own image in the mirror that patriarchy holds up to her; it is also a recognition of their similar status as potent threats to a vulnerable male power. (Williams 1984, 90)

This potential for feminine empowerment occurs throughout the theatre of witchcraft. Sophonisba’s subtitle, *The Wonder of Women*, would perhaps have
appealed to female spectators and included them in the exploration of femininity presented on the stage.

4.3 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (1606)

*Macbeth* was first performed only a year after *Sophonisba*, although the script for this performance was probably significantly different from the text we find in the First Folio, which most likely reflects performance around 1616. The weird sisters share many similarities with Erictho: they revel in abject gore, use corpses in their spell-making and embody patriarchal anxieties regarding the feminine. *Macbeth* was originally performed at The Globe by The King’s Men. A performance at The Globe is recorded in 1611 (Chambers 1930, 337-338), and the play may have also been taken to Blackfriars.

The two principal characters in *Macbeth* have provided fascinating case-studies for psychoanalysts, and many critics, including Freud, have attempted to find motive for their behaviour in their repressed oedipal concerns as if they were real people (Freud 1957b; Holland 1966; Lesser 1976). I explore the oedipal imagery that is unleashed following Macbeth and Lady Macbeth’s actions and consider how the real people watching the drama might have responded to these images. I show that the binaries developed throughout the play – of good and evil, maternal and paternal, masculine and feminine – are ultimately undermined. The structure that organized categories of difference
is subverted, and horror is produced when the other that constructs and also threatens autonomous identity is located within.

*Macbeth* is a play about identity that questions what it is to be a man (in the gendered and general senses). The play explores whether humankind is a product of interacting corporeal fluids, or whether we are subject to some other external or internal power. When Macbeth mirrors the language of the weird sisters in his opening words, ‘So foule and faire a day I have not seen’ (Shakespeare 1623, ll.6v), it is clear that ‘we are in a realm that questions the very possibility of autonomous identity’ (Adelman 1992, 131). Macbeth is introduced to us before his entrance onto the stage. In the captain’s speech, Macbeth is referred to as Bellona’s bridegroom and Valour’s minion (Shakespeare 1623, ll.6r). Harald William Fawkner notes that ‘all these beings are presented as being not only socially dependable but ontologically dependable’ (Fawkner 1990, 65). These descriptions introduce an implication that recurs throughout the play: just as the bridegroom requires Bellona for definition, and the minion Valour, identity depends on an (often removed or abstract) other. Norway, or Rebel’s whore (Shakespeare 1623, ll.6r), is also described through the same structure, in which identity is deferred because it is dependent on an other.

The witches of *Macbeth* are ambivalent. Banquo is unsure about their identity when he first encounters them on the heath: ‘Are ye fantasticall, or
that indeed / Which outwardly ye shew?’ (Shakespeare 1623, ll6v). In

*Macbeth*, the identity of the witches is also constructed through a relationship of otherness. They are at the beck and call of their familiars; Gray-Malkin and Padock call to them and they hastily leave the stage (Shakespeare 1623, ll6r). They are subservient to Hecate, who calls herself the ‘Mistres of [their] Charmes’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm6r), who is, in turn, called away by her spirit: ‘Hearke, I am call’d: my little Spirit see’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm6r). The first sister calls the apparitions ‘our Masters’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm6v).

Identity is constantly deferred in this play so that a distant, shadowy and threatening other persistently looms over the subject. This structure offers a hierarchy of power, which points to a potentially worrying lack of autonomy. The play repeatedly points to a split in the subject and so is persistently uncanny. For psychoanalysts, this split occurs for both male and female children at castration when the original relationship with the mother is abandoned and when desire is organized by symbolic structures. Manliness is threatened in the play through images of the incompetence of the phallus, impotence and useless swords. This threat may have been particularly discomforting for male audience members. Castration is brought about in the play by female characters: the weird sisters and Lady Macbeth, who unman the title character. *Macbeth*, therefore, invites a split in its audience; female members may have recognized, reflected to them, their own power over male potency.
A bi-stable structure which flips between scenes dominated by witchcraft imagery and those depicting the masculine world of war and kingship is developed in the first act of the play. This structure sets up an antithetical relationship of categories of good/evil, natural/supernatural, matriarchal/patriarchal. These categories are aligned, and the witches occupy the negative side of the binary. As the play progresses, the antithetical structure is revealed as arbitrary and dissolves, leaving an image of Scotland at war with itself rather than the treacherous other so that chaos reigns: horses turn on their masters and eat each other and darkness swallows light (Shakespeare 1623, mm3v). The body emerges in the play as the entity that contains both sides of the binary. Unseamed and bloodied in war or childbirth, imagined in phallic terms or in feminine fluidity, used as a metaphor for both the mind and the state, the real and the symbolic, the body holds within it the potential to obliterate the binaries and the repressive processes of the symbolic.

The opening scenes of war describe blood, violence and valour. Images of blood define Macbeth as an honourable and loyal subject within the patrilineal structure of kingship. The blood of the captain’s wounds is distinct from the blood found in later scenes since it denotes the violence of war and is acceptable and honourable within the symbolic structure of enmity. As with the wars depicted in Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), the enemy remains within the symbolic structure, and the careful description of Cawdor’s
redeeming execution indicates that horror in *Macbeth* will not be produced by
the enemy (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r). Duncan’s words to his captain mark
blood as a signifier of distinction: ‘So well thy words become thee as thy
wounds, / They smack of Honor both: Goe get him Surgeons’ (Shakespeare
1623, ll6r). The blood of these scenes can be tended to and cleaned up. In
contrast, the blood following the murder of Duncan signifies rebellion against
the dominant, patriarchal order of the play. It is abject because it is outside the
symbolic order and denotes an encounter with the stranger within. This blood
references a psychological state, and as such it cannot be washed off
(Shakespeare 1623, nn2v). I.ii sets up a symbolic structure of manliness,
honour and bloody aggression. At the head of this structure is King Duncan,
who presides over the patriarchal symbols that organize symbolic identity.
Handing out punishment and reward, Duncan represents a father figure,
cultivating and harvesting his symbolic and actual offspring (Shakespeare
1623, mm1r). Janet Adelman argues that these early scenes of reported battle
represent an assertion of the Law of the Father through the violent, masculine
terms of war. She figures Macbeth’s victory over Macdonalwald as ‘a bloody
rebirth, replacing the dangerous maternal origin through the violence of self-
creation’ (Adelman 1992, 130). In these terms, the bloody images of bodies
‘unseamed’ (Shakespeare 1623, ll6r) represent the psychological split from the
mother to enable realization of the subject through symbolic forms organized
by the Law of the Father.
The scenes of witchcraft supply the symbolic and psychical alternative. While witches of the Elizabethan period often appeared in the political centre, the weird sisters, like most other witches of the Jacobean period, are kept on the fringes. Again, place plays a part in the representation of the witch as other. The heath is the other place, distinct and separate from the primary, social and patriarchal world of war. In *Macbeth*, the weird sisters operate on the geographical and supernatural boundary of the world of the play. While the heath symbolizes the other side of the binary of social definition, it exists geographically on the edges of the scenes of war. In Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612) and Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), characters have to take a long and difficult journey to visit the witch, and the staging of this journey contributes to the figuring of the witch as other. By contrast, in *Macbeth*, the witches make the journey and meet on the heath, which is located on the edges of the scenes of war. Tim Fitzpatrick’s analysis indicates that the staging of *Macbeth* locates imaginable theatrical settings beyond the stage doors (Fitzpatrick 1995). Theatrical noises, including an alarm and thunder, bridge the two distinct worlds of the early scenes (Shakespeare 1623, ll6r). Hovering on the fringes of Duncan’s patriarchal world, the eerie physical closeness of the witches represents the threat of the other invading the primary world of war and men. The power of the witches of *Macbeth* hovers on the boundaries of the theatrical geography, and this position reflects the threat they pose to autonomous identity.
The weird sisters only ever appear as a collective. They speak in unison and finish each other’s thoughts and sentences. A paradoxical sense of multiplication and division arises from the witch scenes:

_All._ The wayward Sisters, hand in hand,
Posters of the Sea and Land,
Thus doe goe, about, about;
Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine,
And thrice againe, to make vp nine
(Shakespeare 1623, ll6v)

The witches speak ‘Two Truths’, and their words shake Macbeth’s ‘single state of Man’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r). Macbeth confronts the other when he meets the witches for the first time. Banquo’s reaction provides an illuminating point of contrast to Macbeth’s. Banquo recognizes the witches as something evil and threatening but outside of himself: ‘What! Can the Deuill speake true’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r) and ‘Are ye fantastical, or that indeed / Which outwardly ye show’ (Shakespeare 1623, ll6v). Banquo’s words reflect the scholarly debate regarding the realities of witchcraft summarized in _The Malleus Maleficarum_ (1486) as ‘one school holding that a witch can truly bring about certain effects, yet these effects are not real but phantastical, the other school allowing that some real harm does befall the person or persons injured’ (Sprenger and Kramer 1928, 3). Banquo’s response exists within the Law of the Father, which identified, condemned and persecuted witches as the other. In contrast, Macbeth’s response is more primitive and corporeal. The witches’ influence is internalized; his fixed hair and seated heart are shifted
His very identity as a brave man loyal to the king is thrown into flux as he is offered an alternative channel for his ambition and bloodthirstiness.

The witches melt into thin air, and Macbeth regrets their exit: ‘would they had stay’d’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r). The irony of his words is that they have stayed in that he has internalized their influence. When Macbeth advises that his wife should ‘lay it to thy heart’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1v) in his letter, he suggests that she too should internalize the influences of witchcraft. In 1593, George Gifford wrote a tract which advised caution when determining the guilt of witches. He suggested that ‘the power of Deuils is in the hearts of men’ (Gifford 1593, C2r), meaning it is something internal to the self with the power to influence and manipulate identity. Macbeth’s advice to his wife implies secrecy and repression: internalize the witches’ words and do not let them see the light of day. Macbeth’s immersion in the psychical world of the other has not yet been realized. The image is reused later in the play, as the power of the devil is released into society, when Macbeth asserts that ‘The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand’ (Shakespeare 1623, nn1r). (In section 4.3.2 I address Taylor and Lavagnino’s attribution of these words to Thomas Middleton). In Macbeth, it is through terms of the corporeal that witchcraft exerts its influence.
4.3.1 Poisonous Breasts and Penises on Fire

Through its structure and imagery, the first act of the play simultaneously establishes masculine authority and the instability of its structural dominance. Consequently, the images by which masculine authority asserts itself, through swords and blood, decapitated heads and smoking steel (Shakespeare 1623, ll6r), hold within them the potential for anxiety. A decapitated head is an image from which no one is safe; it recalls the mortality of the subject and the thin, unreliable line that separates life from death. The smoking steel is the weapon with which Macbeth carves his way to victory. The image evokes the steam rising from the battlefield as blood and gore are released into the cold, Scottish air. This image is one of power and brutality, but it also contains the horrible stillness after battle, of decapitated bodies in the cold light of day. The smoke evokes decay and human life dissolving into the post-battle fog and filthy air. The image of Macbeth’s smoking sword, therefore, holds within it the anxiety of decay, the potential for self annihilation: a penis on fire. Swords were traditionally thought to be useless against witches, an idea which was theatricalised in Marston’s Sophonisba (Marston 1606, F2r) and in Shakespeare’s The Tempest when Prospero charms Ferdinand’s sword down (Shakespeare 1623, A3v), and the image connotes the fallibility of the phallus when met with witchcraft.
The images of masculine assertion in the early scenes are histrionic and mark the instability of the sex/gender system. Macbeth’s ‘I dare do all that may become a man, / Who dares no more, is none’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm2r) implies that gender is a process of performance, which needs to be maintained and nurtured by carrying out daring acts. Since Nicholas Rowe’s edition of 1709, editors have overwhelmingly replaced ‘no’ with ‘do’, an editorial decision that is based in part on Lady Macbeth’s next words:

La[dy Macbeth] What Beast was’t then
That made you breake this enterprize to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man:
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man.
(Shakespeare 1623, mm2r)

This edited version draws upon the histrionic images of manliness depicted in the description of the battle. When manliness pinnacles, it dissolves into irrationality and femininity. A penis on fire will eventually disintegrate.

Macbeth becomes increasingly irrational once the power of the witches has consumed him, somewhat fulfilling the concern that there is a limit beyond which masculinity is no longer manly. After Duncan’s murder, Lady Macbeth notes that ‘Nought’s had, all’s spent, / Where our desire is got without content’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm4v). D. F. Rauber argues that ‘the “all’s spent” operates both on the levels of failure to accomplish purpose and of sexual impotence’ (Rauber 1969, 62). This reading gives a sexual element to the
gender spectrum presented in the play, so that the discharge of semen represents the dissolution or expenditure of manliness. Lady Macbeth’s comments mirror a threat embodied by the witches. The first witch announces that she plans to drain one of her victims ‘drie as Hay’ (Shakespeare 1623, l16v). This comment is most likely a reference to the belief that witches visited men while they slept in order to have sex with them in the form of a succubus, an idea referenced in Thomas Middleton’s The Witch (see section 5.2.1).

Despite internalizing the witches’ influence and dissolving the boundary between self and other, Macbeth is still a creature of the symbolic until his second meeting with the witches, for, as Lady Macbeth knows, he is ‘too full o’th’ Milke of humane kindnesse’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1v). Macbeth’s soliloquies, like the perilous journeys of Gloster and Orestes in the plays considered in Chapter Three, reveal the difficulty with which he divorces himself from society and the restraints of King Duncan’s paternal law. The play’s emphasis on performance references the two parts of Macbeth’s identity battling for dominance of the subject. G.K. Hunter notes that ‘Macbeth's "Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more'" , his "There's one did laugh in's sleep" his "But wherefore could I not pronounce 'Amen'?" and so on are like cries of terror from one side of his nature to the other, from the new Macbeth to the old’ (Shakespeare 1995, 16). The emphasis on doubling and performance points to the split in the subject and the indistinct line that
separates the two sides of identity. Macbeth shows insightful self awareness when he admits that the thought of the murder of Duncan, implanted by the weird sisters, ‘shakes so my single state of Man’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r).

In *Macbeth*, as in Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), we witness a woman embracing witchcraft; Lady Macbeth makes a more immediate and definitive divorce from the symbolic than her husband when she calls on familiars to seal a pact with the devil. As with Clytemnestra in Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), Lady Macbeth’s alignment with the witches is manifested through imagery of the body and maternity. Lady Macbeth adapts her body to enable the influences of witchcraft to consume her:

```
 Lady [Macbeth]
      Come you Spirits,
       That tend on mortall thoughts, vnsex me here,
       And fill me from the Crowne to the Toe, top-full
       Of direst Crueltie: make thick my blood,
       Stop vp the access, and passage to Remorse,
       That no compunctious visitings of Nature
       Shake my fell purpose, nor keepe peace between
       Th’effect, and hit. Come to my Womans Brests,
       And take my Milke for Gall, you murth’ring Ministers,
       Where-euer, in your sightless substances,
       You wait on Nature’s Mischiefe. Come thick Night,
       And pall thee in the dunnest smoake of Hell,
       That my keene knife see not the Wound it makes,
       Nor Heauen peepe through the Blanket of the darke,
        To cry, hold, hold.
       (Shakespeare 1623, mm1v).
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Some modern editions gloss ‘take my milk for gall’ as ‘take my milk in exchange for gall’ (Shakespeare 1974). Adelman argues that ‘here the milk
itself is the gall; no transformation is necessary’ (Adelman 2010, 40). These interpretations depend upon the horror of the maternal body. Images of bodily transformation to enable characters better access to the supernatural occurred in Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), and Hamlet indicates that he could alter the temperature of his blood (see section 1.1). For a spectator with an interest in corporeal manipulation, Lady Macbeth’s speech may have been interpreted as containing images of bodily transformation.

Catherine Belsey argues that Lady Macbeth’s speech displays the contradictory nature of the subject in the early seventeenth century:

> the subject of the enunciation ... is divided into crown, toe, cruelty, blood, remorse, nature, breasts, milk. The speech concludes with the opposition between heaven and hell, reproducing the morality pattern of the human being as a battleground between cosmic forces, autonomous only to the point of choosing between them. (Belsey 1985, 47-48)

*Macbeth* continuously questions the possibility of autonomous identity. When Lady Macbeth gives herself over to the forces of witchcraft, she acknowledges that she must abandon her sense of self, managed by the body, and subject herself to familiars and witchcraft. The perversion of nursing milk is an image that connects her unequivocally with witchcraft. Lambert Daneau wrote in 1574 that ‘I have seen them [witches] who, with only laying their hands upon a nurse’s breasts, have drawn forth all the milk and dried them up’ (Daneau 2004, 74). The image in both Daneau and *Macbeth* is one of an attack on the
maternal body and a perversion of maternal functions. As in Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) and Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), the presentation of witchcraft in terms of the perversion of the maternal body reproduces the repressed relationship with the mother and embodies the oedipal disgust and aggression enlisted by the abjected (m)other. Lady Macbeth invites familiars to suckle from her in order to seal her pact with the devil. The image makes explicit the connection of maternity and witchcraft, which was contained in the belief that witches provided nourishment to their familiars through the suckling of teats, not necessarily on their breasts but often in a secret and sexual place.

The image of the violent, horrific mother continues:

*Dy Macbeth*

I have giuen Sucke, and know

How tender ’tis to loue the Babe that milkes me,

I would, while it was smyling in my Face,

Haue pluckt my Nipple from his Bonelesse Gummes

And dasht the Braines out

(Shakespeare 1623, mm2r)

Taking us from nurturing and comforting images of maternity to horror and violence, the image indicates a preoccupation with the dangers of maternal power. Adelman describes how ‘This image of murderously disrupted nurturance is the psychic equivalent of the witches’ poisonous cauldron’ because ‘both function to subject Macbeth’s will to female forces’ (Adelman
The possibility of autonomy is questioned through horrific maternal imagery. Lady Macbeth’s stark injection of humanity concerns the relationship with the father, and secretly she admits that ‘Had he not resembled / My Father as he slept, I had don’t’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm2v). Her one point of hesitation reflects the horror of destruction of the symbolic father.

The murder of King Duncan represents the violent rejection of the symbolic self, an inversion of the psychical abjection of the mother and the removal of the paternal structure that requires the rejection of the engulfing, maternal influence of the witches. At the sight of the murdered king, Macduff expresses his horror in terms of the gaze: ‘Approch the Chamber and destroy your sight / With a new Gorgon’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm3r). Feminine power and horror are unleashed on those who see Duncan’s body and come face to face with the death of the Law of the Father. Macduff’s invitation to look upon a ‘new Gorgon’ acknowledges the power and danger of the gaze, for to do so would mean being turned to stone: to be vulnerable to vengeful and punishing femininity. Images of the failure of the eyes and the treachery of the look are repeated following Macbeth’s encounter with the witches. His ‘eyes are made the fools o’the other senses’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm2v) as he hallucinates the dagger that draws him to Duncan’s chamber. His mind is playing tricks on him, but the image is of corporeal failure and draws attention to his eyes as distinct from the other body parts. The image continues at the
sight of blood on his hands, which Macbeth cannot bear to look on: ‘What hands are here! hah: they pluck out mine Eyes!’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r). There is a conflation of the literal and metaphorical here. While it is the sight of his hands that ‘pluck[s] out’ Macbeth’s eyes, the image is again more corporeal and violent: of Macbeth plucking out his own eyes with his own hands. Freud argued, through his analysis of E. T. A. Hoffmann’s The Sandman, that the fear of losing one’s eyes is analogous to castration anxiety (Freud 1955b). In the tense and disjointed atmosphere of this post-murder scene, the image solicits a bodily response; sickening and skin crawling, the image is of the most extreme force of self mutilation, no longer by the punishing father but by the self.

Images of castration, which have hovered on the edges of the play’s imagery, are finally made explicit directly after the murder of Duncan in the Porter’s scene. Here, Lady Macbeth’s earlier rebuke to her husband, ‘Art thou afear’d / To be the same in thine owne Act, and Valour, / As thou art in desire?’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm2r), is unequivocally connected to images of impotence—and by association, castration (Cotton 1987)—in the Porter’s mirroring ‘it prouokes the desire but it takes away the performance’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm3r). The comedy of this scene contains the discomforting suggestion that the phallus is fallible. J. H. Walter sums up the tension of this scene, where ‘comedy does not bring relief, its laughter vibrates the nerves almost to breaking’ (Shakespeare 1962, 16). The emphasis on the
phallus, transmitted before the murder of Duncan in images of war, bravery and violence, transforms into images of impotence and castration. Masculine bravery and violence dissolves into feminine hysteria and irrationality.

4.3.2 Staging Horror

As we have seen, autonomy is threatened when identity is subjected to feminine will. When masculine identity is most potently questioned, the imagery is maternal. Nowhere are images of feminine power over male potency more blood-curdling than in the witches’ cauldron. The scene in which Macbeth seeks out the witches is analogous to the terrible journeys of Orestes and Gloster because it represents retreat to the womb and an inversion of the masculine rebirth of the early scenes. The witches are no longer connected with the boundary between the world of the symbolic and the frightening other. This scene distinctly belongs to the witches; it is set in their space, which is maternal, internal and stifling. The line ‘Open Lockes, whoever knockes’ (Shakespeare 1623, nn1v) is an assertion of the interiority of their meeting place and represents a barrier between the two worlds of the play, through which Macbeth is invited on their terms. This model is different from that found in Goffe’s Orestes (1617), Armin’s The Valiant Welshman (1621) and Kirke’s The Seven Champions of Christendom (1635); in these plays the characters and the audience meet the witches on the threshold of their space. Whereas these plays enlist fantasy to stage the witch’s lair,
Macbeth is more explicit. Macbeth stages the horror of the witch’s space and employs theatrical apparatus to encompass the audience in the coven. The cauldron, emitting smoke and strong sulphurous smells (Harris 2007), would have added to the suffocating and airless atmosphere of the witches’ space and drawn focus inwards. In such a claustrophobic atmosphere, Macbeth is dependent on the maternal voice of the witches for direction, and his word choices indicate how entirely the forces of witchcraft have consumed him: ‘I conjure you, by that which you Professe’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm6v).

The preoccupation with failing and dismembered bodies gains momentum in this scene:

3[rd witch]
Liuer of Blaspheming Iew,
Gall of Goate, and Slippes of Yew,
Sluer’d in the Moones Ecclipse:
Nose of Turke, and Tartar’s lips:
Finger of Birth-strangled Babe,
Ditch-deluer’d by a Drab,
Make the Grewell thicke, and slab.
(Shakespeare 1623, mm6r-v)

The witches throw entrails, organs and other body parts into their cauldron, which offers up images that evoke the fallible and uncanny boundary between life and death. The ingredients of the cauldron combine to animate the dead: corpses of babies and decapitated heads. Combining grotesque signifiers of death, the witches oversee the birth of apparitions from the cauldron/womb. This scene represents another rebirth, and from this point Macbeth abandons
symbolic identity. When Macbeth announces that ‘The very firstlings of my heart shall be / the firstlings of my hand’ (Shakespeare 1623, nn2r), he is giving himself over to forces of witchcraft and the body. Lavagnino and Taylor’s attribution of these words to Middleton means they would not have occurred during the first performances of the play between 1606 and 1616 (Middleton and Shakespeare 2007). If these words are Middleton’s, he was alert to his predecessor’s attention to the significance of the heart as a supposed producer of behaviour. The witches make Macbeth’s heart knock against his ribs, a response that ‘shakes so [his] single state of Man’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r). The mirroring ‘Lay it to thy heart’ (Shakespeare 1623, mm1v) in Macbeth’s letter to his wife, implies secrecy and repression, and the significance of the repeated image in this scene is that Macbeth overcomes this repression.

The witches’ spell attests to the indefinite borders of the subject. It combines ingredients ripped from within bodies (gullets, fillets, entrails) with those shaved off its boundaries (scales, tongues, lips), attacking the concept of the complete and realised self contained within the body. These images of abject horror are presented with an immediacy which may have been a source of discomfort for an early-modern audience, especially those leaning against the stage in the yard of The Globe and potentially splattered by the animal entrails and concealed bladders used to depict human blood and entrails (Owens 2005, 31). There is also the potential for a pun on the line ‘Slippes of
Yew’, so the audience may have felt themselves vulnerable to the witches as they looked out to the audience for their ingredients. These images of bodies decapitated, alongside the claustrophobic atmosphere of the scene, invite a response of abject terror as the audience were forced to acknowledge the vulnerability of the signifying structures anchored in the body. These images point to a subject in process, always at risk of encountering the stranger within. This threat to the traditional notion of the autonomous, masculinistic identity may have spoken to the gender differences located in the theatre. We can locate here a previously undetected feminism; the threat to autonomous identity unleashes an alternative to the dominant, patriarchal, order, creating an empowering link between woman and monster.

First to emerge from the cauldron is an armed head. As the witches oversee and encourage the birth of the second apparition, they assume the identity of midwife. Surrounded by blood and gore, they draw a bloodied child from their cauldron/womb. By warping the scene of birth into an image of terror, the witches draw attention to the anxiety and uncanniness of birth and pregnancy. Birthing was a secret and dangerous process in the early-modern period, which men were forbidden to witness, and witches were often associated with it (Ehrenreich and English 1976; Roper 2004, 33, 70, 187). In section 2.1.3, research was cited that refuted the connection of witches with midwifery and healing (Harley 1990; Davidson 2008), arguing that a number of plays of the 1580s and 1590s presented the association of witches with
healers as a belief of the foolish. If we accept that this scene is a kind of birthing scene, or might trigger the same responses that a birthing scene would, then it follows that the horror of *Macbeth* is produced by giving the audience access to a secret and uncanny process, fraught with danger and potential, where bodies and selves are torn open and separated. The staging of this scene posits the witches as both mothers and midwives and produces a sign of the infantile relationship with the mother, when the baby was physically separated from the body of the mother but identity was psychically dependent and organized by maternal rhythms. The play offers an image of the birthing scene as horrific, supernatural and dangerous. For women, the abjection of the mother is complicated by a sense of identification through which the woman recognizes her own maternal function reflected to her (Kristeva 1989, 28). Given the diversity of the composition of the audience which, as we know, included mothers, fathers, virgins, bachelors and prostitutes (Gurr 2004a, 224-246), there would have been a diverse range of potential responses to this scene. Those who had experienced the birthing chamber may have been reminded of the pain and blood associated with the scene. They may also have recognized the fear and horror harboured by patriarchal discourse through the association of birthing with the supernatural.

It has been argued by Taylor and Lavagnino that up to 11% of the Folio text of *Macbeth* was posthumously interpolated into the play. Analysis of tone, rhythm and language, supported by the testimony of Simon Forman, who
watched the play in 1611 but did not mention her, has implied that the Hecate scenes were among those scenes interpolated, probably sometime after composition of Middleton’s *The Witch* and Shakespeare’s death in 1616 (Middleton, Taylor et al. 2007, 1165-1169; Taylor and Lavagnino 2007, 383). The added scenes may have been occasioned by a revival of the play and the commercial requirement to keep audiences coming back. The Hecate scenes, with their songs, dances and spectacular stage effects, bring the play closer to a masque, and perhaps, as Inga-Stina Ewbank suggests, the dance in IV.i was taken from Jonson’s *The Masque of Queens* (Ewbank 2007, 1167). Claiming that the addition of the Hecate scenes made impossible demands upon boy actors in The King’s Men, Taylor and Lavagnino argue that the weird sisters would have been performed by men in later revivals and that Middleton’s additions made the sisters more sexually ambiguous (Taylor and Lavagnino 2007, 388-390). Taylor and Lavagnino quote Middleton’s *Patient Man*, ‘Fear he should be a woman, for some women have beards; marry they are half witches’ (Middleton, Taylor et al. 2007, *Patient Man* 10.193), arguing that Banquo’s ‘you should be women and yet your beards forbid me to interpret that you are so’ (Middleton, Taylor et al. 2007, *Macbeth* 1.3.43-45) is a Middletonian interpolation. It would be untrue to say that Middleton alone dramatized the sexual ambiguity of witches. The myth is taken up in William Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597), in which Falstaff’s disguise as a woman causes him to be mistaken for witch because of his beard (Shakespeare 1623, E4r), and in *The Winter’s Tale* (1609), in which Paulina is
accused of being a ‘mankinde Witch’ (Shakespeare 1623, Aa4v). Brett Hirsch surveys the theatrical association of witches with beards and concludes that the beard was a ‘token’ of the witch (Hirsch 2008).

Banquo has difficulty in interpreting the weird sisters. He asks:

BANQUO what are these
so withered and so wild in their attire
that look not like th’inhabitants o’th’ earth
and yet are on’t live you or are you aught
that man may question you seem to understand me
by each at once her chappy finger laying
upon her skinny lips you should be women
and yet your beards forbid me to interpret
that you are so
(Middleton and Shakespeare 2007, Macbeth 1.3.37-45, emphasis added)

These words are the only direct indication in the text as to how the weird sisters would have appeared, and Taylor and Lavagnino attribute the words here italicized to Middleton. Beyond the text, indications of how the weird sisters would have appeared are few and far between. Forman describes the weird sisters he saw on stage in 1611 as ‘three women fairies or nymphs’ (Middleton, Taylor et al. 2007, 1172), a comment which lends support to Taylor and Lavagnino’s attribution of the words above to Middleton. Hirsch, however, remains unconvinced by this logic, arguing that Forman’s account of the play differs markedly from the play text in the Folio in other ways as well and ‘That his account of the play does not describe the Sisters as bearded does not of itself prove that this was the case, since it appears that Forman’s
account of the performance has been corrupted by his recollection of Shakespeare’s sources’ (Hirsch 2008, 93). The other reference to the appearance of Macbeth’s weird sisters is found in another witchcraft play of the period, Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s The Witches of Lancashire (1634). In an argument with her mother, Winny makes reference to the appearance of the weird sisters:

"Ioan. Daughter I say, I wil take any course so thou wilt leave thy patron; indeed it hurts thee childe, I’le sing and be merry, weare as fine clothes, and as delicate dressings as thou wilt have me, so thou wilt pacifie thy selfe, and be at peace with me. Win[ny] O will you so, in so doing I may chance to looke upon you. Is this a fit habite for a handsome young Gentlewo- mans mother, as I hope to be a Lady, you look like one o’the Scottish wayward sisters (Heywood and Brome 1634, C2v)

The reference to the weird sisters in The Witches of Lancashire is a very human one; Winny is indignant at her mother’s attire, which is presumably more suited to someone of a lower social status such as Elizabeth Sawyer of The Witch of Edmonton. This passage suggests that the wild attire of the weird sisters was a signifier of rural poverty.

The beards Middleton gave the weird sisters brought metatheatricality to the role in a time when beards, natural or artificial, were important indicators of age and manliness in the theatre and perhaps the most significant distinguisher between men and boys (Rycroft 2009, 218). Subversive gender assignment would have been literalized if adult men performed witchcraft
since this negated the need for the lengthy descriptions found when boys were assigned the roles. To ‘interpret’ (Banquo’s word) witchcraft therefore depended on the body of the performer rather than the text. Metatheatricality regarding the beards would have encouraged a focus on subversion and the body. This carnivalesque condition, supplementing Macbeth in its later performances, was characteristic of the plays considered in Chapter Five: Heywood’s The Wise Woman of Hoxton (1604), Middleton’s The Witch (1616) and Heywood and Brome’s The Witches of Lancashire (1634).

Edward Thompson highlights the comedic elements of some of the interpolated material (Thompson 1993). The song of V.i was indicated in the First Folio simply by its title (Shakespeare 1623, mm6L) but was written out in full in The Witch:

[STALDLIN]
Here’s the blood of a bat
HECATE
Put in that, O put in that.
[HOPPO]
Here’s libbard’s bane.
HECATE
Put in again.
[STALDLIN]
The juice of toad, the oil of adder.
[HOPPO]
Those will make the younker madder.
HECATE
Put in. There’s all, and rid the stench.
FIRESTONE
Nay, there’s three ounces of the red-haired wench.
(Middleton, Taylor et al. 2007, The Witch 5.2.70-77)
Of course, Hoppo, Stadlin and Firestone are not named characters in the First Folio, and Taylor and Lavagnino’s edition divides the lines between a number of unnamed witches on the stage. The passage is clearly comedic. Edward Thompson notes that ‘The rhythm and implicit timing of the material make it clear that this is farce—the scene is evidently intended to be played for laughs, with the Fourth Witch, who acts as head chef and master of ceremonies, posturing and holding her nose’ (Thompson 1993). In Thompson’s reading, the part of Hecate is taken by Fourth Witch. Joan Fitzpatrick argues that the bubbling cauldron of *Macbeth* suggests a brewing scene and notes that ‘double double’ was a type of beer (Fitzpatrick 2007, 50). The comedy of this scene depends upon the foul smells of brewing or cooking. Providing comment on the theatrical techniques employed in staging, the cauldron scene encompassed the audience in a metatheatrical way. Jonathan Gil Harris draws attention to the foul smells abounding in the theatre during a production of *Macbeth* in the early-modern period (Harris 2007). Hecate’s impatience to add the ingredients to the cauldron and ‘rid the stench’ engaged the audience in the coven’s activities: they too may have been disgusted by the stench of the sulphurous brimstone, coal and saltpetre used to produce the spectacular effects associated with the supernatural. The supernatural elements interpolated into the play (whether by Middleton or another author) add comedy and spectacle to the horror of the play.
4.4 Coda

As with the witches considered in Chapter Three, the witches of these plays, Elizabeth Sawyer, Erictho and the weird sisters, are represented through imagery of the horrific mother. Other critics argue that witches were presented through images of inverted maternity (Jackson 2008), but the picture is more complex than this. Motherhood is displaced, substituted, exaggerated and perverted. Sawyer takes the role of mother and lover to her familiar, the infant substitute. Macbeth offers a kind of birthing scene in which the weird sisters bring forth supernatural apparitions. These apparitions provide horrific infant substitutes that blur categories of life and death and animate and inanimate. Lady Macbeth, like Sawyer, warps the maternal body into a supernatural facilitator when she calls to familiars. The characterization of Erictho indicates anxiety relating to aged feminine sexuality when she has sex with Syphax in the hope of falling pregnant. The association of witches with maternity points towards a cultural anxiety relating to the power of the mother. The horror of the body links the plays of this chapter, and by considering the critical implications of casting, this chapter contributes to the debate on the performative significance of the age of actors taking female roles. The liminality of the witches, both in terms of space and the body, encouraged the audience to review the symbolic order and opened up a space for horrific imaginings relating to the mother, fear and desire. These plays illustrate how the fantasies of witchcraft transformed the feminine body into a fetish, and the
following chapter considers how the witch as fetish disrupted the usual circulations of power associated with viewing in the theatre.
Chapter Five

The Uncanny of the Carnivalesque

The witches of this chapter, like those studied in previous chapters, invite an exploration of drives deemed illicit by the dominant order. While the effect remains uncanny, the vehicle is not horror but carnival. The comedy of these plays depends upon a manipulation of the power structure usually attributed to gender and sexual relations. An investigation of misrule and inversion presupposes the rule and depends upon an antithetical structure which precedes the carnivalesque condition. Academic interest in the carnivalesque has been largely concerned with the debate over whether carnival subverts or legitimizes the dominant order (Underdown 1985; Chedgzoy 1993). In this chapter, I illustrate how images of inversion, which were regularly found in the presentation of witchcraft, undermined and threatened the structure that preceded it by presenting the boundaries which separated categories of identification as flexible. This occurred in consort with theatrical techniques which engaged the audience in the fantasy of the carnivalesque. The plays in this chapter, Thomas Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) and Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), span three decades and, as we have seen, the conventions associated with the presentation of witches changed markedly across this period. This chapter groups plays thematically rather than chronologically because this ordering best demonstrates that witches were a
popular subject of comedy throughout the whole of the period and reveals shared features not easily seen in a chronological approach.

The plays studied in Chapter Four illustrate how fantasies of witchcraft transformed the feminine body into a fetish by encouraging the audience to imagine the mother having a penis. This fantasy mirrored medical discourse which laid claim to the ‘discovery’ of the clitoris and produced a series of debates concerning its function. Katharine Park surveys these debates which reveal anxiety and disgust at female genitalia: Jacques Dalechamps in 1570 associated the clitoris with female homoeroticism, Carles Estienne in 1546 described the clitoris as a woman’s ‘shameful member’ and Andreas Vesalius in 1564 asserted that the clitoris was only to be found in female hermaphrodites and unhealthy women (Park 1997). Perhaps because it was associated with female sexual pleasure rather than reproduction, the clitoris was associated with deviant lusts and untrustworthy women. Anxieties associated with feminine sexual enjoyment were projected onto fantasies of the body. These fantasies, as I illustrated in Chapter Four, were shaped through metaphors of witchcraft and at times led to the misidentification of female genitalia as the witch’s mark. The witches of Chapter Five resist the regulation of feminine sexuality and champion sex for pleasure’s sake.

The discomfort associated with feminine sexuality reveals the threat it posed to male identity. Mark Breitenberg argues that ‘the anxiety and
violence engendered in men by a patriarchal economy that constructs masculine identity ... [was] dependent on the coercive and symbolic regulation of women’s sexuality’ (Breitenberg 1993, 377). The belief in the insatiable and dangerous nature of feminine sexual appetite is identifiable in much early-modern literature, which perhaps took as its source medical belief and religious opinion (Wiesner 2000, 56-59). Old women and widows were particularly associated with predatory sexuality because, it was assumed, they were sexually experienced, often infertile and, in the case of widows, independent of the patriarchal governance provided by the husband. Lisa Jardine identifies the stereotype of the early-modern lusty widow (Jardine 1983, 68-98), and a well-known Elizabethan proverb warned that ‘he that wooeth a maid must go trick and trim and in fine apparel; but he that wooeth a widow must go stiff before’ (Panek 2004, 3). Fantasies of witchcraft often represented an extreme embodiment of anxieties relating to feminine sexuality: ‘the mythology of witchcraft was at its height at the time when women were generally believed to be more sexually voracious than men’ (Thomas 1971, 679). As we saw in Chapter Four, explicit horror was produced when Erictho, aged and barren, expressed and acted on her lust. In these plays, female sexual pleasure is presented as dangerous because it poses a threat to the system of patriarchy.

*The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) asserted that ‘All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable’ (Sprenger and Kramer 1928, 47),
and imagery of dangerous and insatiable feminine sexual appetite lurked behind the story of Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616). Frances Howard’s notorious divorce from the Earl of Essex due to non-conssummation on account of witchcraft gained her a reputation as lustful and insatiable; this scandal was probably the source of much of *The Witch* (Bromham 1980). One ballad from 1615-1616 drew on and perpetuated Howard’s reputation:

3
The Punk and the Maid they swear & they said,
That Marriage was servility:
If Marry you must, for changing of Lust,
O well fare a trick of nullity

5
Her Earle did appoint her, she said, such a Jointure
As was no validity
Above twice in a Night, he did her no right,
Oh there was a strange frigidity
(Anon 1661, H3r-H3v)

David Lindley argues that this ballad should be read as reproducing ‘stereotypical frames and misogynist character types’ that were projected onto a woman who challenged social orthodoxy by seeking an annulment (Lindley 1993, 194). By deconstructing such stereotyping and misogyny in the plays studied here, I reveal anxiety regarding the instability of symbolic masculine dominance. The belief in the lusty predisposition of women, like the preoccupation with the character type of the cuckold, represents a fantasy that reveals anxiety relating to the instability of symbolic masculine dominance. As is evident in the story recounted by the countrymen in Thomas Dekker,
John Ford and William Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), the fantasy of unrestrained female sexual appetite accompanied the social, psychical and physical disempowerment of the men in the community (see section 4.1.2).

The fantasy of sexual contagion is evident in the plays studied here when witches cause impotence in bridegrooms and new brides are left sexually unsatisfied on their wedding night. Although preventing sex, the spell releases illicit desire in women because they do not experience legitimate sexual fulfilment in consummation. Lawrence’s magically induced impotence in *The Witches of Lancashire* leads to gossip about his wife’s sexual desire, and Parnell is accused of having ‘a greedy worme in her’ (Heywood 1634, H3r), meaning to have greediness or lustfulness as an itching passion (OED ‘worm’ n. 11c). Similarly, in *The Witch*, the comedic potential in Isabella’s reply to Francisca’s enquiry on how she slept relies upon the assumption that she is sexually frustrated: ‘More than I thought I should; I’ve had good rest’ (Middleton 2007). Firestone, in the same play, makes explicit the fantasy of contagion: ‘I’m sure they’ll be a company of foul sluts there tonight. If we have not mortality after it, I’ll be hanged, for they are able to putrefy it, to infect a whole region’ (Middleton 2007, 3.3.16-19). Middleton perhaps took as his source *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), which insisted that agents of the devil, incubi, ‘try with all their might, by means of witches who are bawds or hot whores, to seduce all the devout and chaste maidens in that whole district or town’ (Sprenger and Kramer 1928, 114). The language of infection
and disease reveals the threatening nature of the witches’ sexual appetite, which belongs to a realm of pleasure, rather than reproduction. The contagious nature of witches’ sexuality represents an extreme fantasy of feminine sexual appetite, and the coven of witches in Middleton’s play, removed from the patriarchal governance of the symbolic order, embody this perceived insatiability.

Frances Howard’s divorce hinged upon the importance of consummation in the marriage ceremony. Because no consummation occurred, the marriage was invalid (Rickman 2008, 74). The theme of unconsummated marriages appeared often in the theatre of witchcraft. The vulnerability of the women in *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), the prostitution of Sophonisba by her father in Marston’s play and Sebastian’s plan to trick Isabella into bed in the belief that this would render their betrothal legally binding in *The Witch*, all indicate the importance of consummation in the marriage process. In *The Witch*, the Duke teases his new son in law with ‘a boy tonight at least’, implying that once the consummation process is complete he will have entered sexual maturity and manhood. The witches prevent consummation and in doing so prevent masculine sexual and social control. Their female victims are consequently locked in a transitional state, in which the transaction between the old generation of patriarchy (the father) and the new (the husband) remains incomplete. The instability of this position is magnified since the woman remains sexually unsatisfied; in the patriarchal fantasy,
feminine sexual appetite is a dangerous force that requires taming, and in this scenario women do not have the sexual fulfilment required to satisfy, and so legitimately tame, their sexual appetite.

While in the plays studied in the previous chapters the disempowerment of men was referenced in images of useless swords, failing eyes and the power of Medusa, the plots of Middleton’s *The Witch* and Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* draw on the belief that witchcraft could cause impotence. This, like the cuckoldry anxiety evident in Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), was equivalent to what Coppelia Kahn called ‘psycho-social castration’. Kahn argues that cuckoldry placed men in a position of vulnerability that made them psychologically like a castrated man (Kahn 1981, 132). Kahn’s neologism is useful because it reinforces a relationship that has emerged throughout this study: the inseparability and interdependency of social and psychical anxieties. What is apparent is that the anxiety stimulated by witches, with their liminal power to critique social structures, reflects deeper and repressed anxieties relating to the need to separate from the power of the mother and reject her body. Like the witch of Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), the witches of these plays are both castrating and phallic. Barbara Creed identifies a specific distinction between these images (Creed 1993, 127), but my reading of the plays here challenges this distinction because the empowerment of femininity
was presented as leading to and being dependent on the disempowerment of masculinity.

This symbiosis was contained in the motif of the *vagina dentata*, which represented the fear of castration inside the vagina (Otero 1996, 269). For a woman to obtain a penis meant she must have removed a man’s, generating an anxiety evident in the much cited passage from *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), in which witches are described as stealing penises and collecting them in a bird’s nest. This idea, also found in Reginald Scot’s *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (Scot 1665, E4r), is subtly alluded to in Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634) during the bullying of Whetstone:

*Whetstone*  
I knew  
a hare close hunted, clime a tree.  
*Bantam* To finde out birds nests  
( Heywood and Brome 1634, D4v)

Helen Ostovitch notes that this passage may be a reflection of the story told by Reginald Scot, in which a witch who has stolen men’s ‘privy parts’ and kept them in a nest in a tree challenges any man missing a penis to climb up and retrieve it (Brome 2010). The passage can also be read as a series of puns on pubic hair (Heywood and Brome 2002, 135); this interpretation is also found in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, where female pubic hair is referenced by ‘we must have your doublet and hose pluckt over your head, and shew the world what the bird hath done to her owne neast’ (Shakespeare 1623,
This interpretation, which may have been more accessible to the audience, reinforces the association of castration anxiety with female sexuality and the fantasy that a woman’s power to castrate lay in her genitals. The reference to witches physically stealing penises is supported in *The Witches of Lancashire* by the more familiar belief that witchcraft could cause impotence, which is the subject of the Lawrence and Parnell plot. These images construct the witch as both castrating and phallic. The sharp distinction made by Creed is unnecessary and misleading (Creed 1993, 127). To follow my argument through to conclusion, one condition (having a penis) was dependent on the other (castrating someone to obtain this penis).

Diane Purkiss is wary of constructing twentieth-century myths which place too much emphasis on various aspects of the witch’s experience in order to advance historical or feminist agendas. She argues, for example, that ‘passages are quoted [from *The Malleus Maleficarum*] not for their centrality to witch-beliefs, but for their striking qualities, hence the more or less constant reiteration of the passage about the stolen *phalloi*, a belief rarely recorded elsewhere but striking as an illustration of rabid misogyny’ (Purkiss 1996, 11). However, as I have illustrated (see section 1.4), there was a particular narrative of anxiety regarding the fallibility of both the phallus as signification and the genital organ in the fantasy of witchcraft. Reconstructing the myths of this period gives us a tool for recovering the psychological concerns of the community. Freud argues that literature offers a forum for the expression of
repressed impulses: ‘While the poet, as he unravels the past, brings to light the
guilt of Oedipus, he is at the same time compelling us to recognize our own
inner minds, in which those same impulses, though suppressed are still to be
found’ (Freud 1953, 262). Although there is a problematic universality to
Freud’s assertion, we can see how myths relating to witches reveal
preoccupations relating to maternal power, the fallibility of gender categories
and the vulnerability of the penis.

What emerges is an oscillating condition of feminine empowerment and
masculine disempowerment; witches castrate, obtain the power of signification
afforded by the phallus, and cause sexual and social impotence in men. This
power of signification is played out as witches adjust the meaning-bearing
categories of the symbolic by drawing supernatural power from language in
their spell-making and altering the parameters of sexual relations when they
champion sex for pleasure’s sake. Perhaps it was this condition of fluctuating
power relations that has led critics to highlight the inversions at work in the
theatre of witchcraft (see section 1.2). In the readings that follow, I illustrate
how witchcraft threatened the antithetical structure that inversion depended
upon. While this threat is explored in reference to horror in the plays studied
above, here the carnivalesque exposes the liberation of desire that occurs when
the organizing principles of the symbolic order are transcended or subverted.
Gary Taylor notes that castration not only infringes upon the categories of
gender but ‘also threatens the very category of “category”’ (Taylor 2000). In
the plays studied in this chapter, witches symbolically castrate; the resulting threat to categorization poses a threat to the symbolic order of the phallus. Desire is subsequently released from the shackles of symbolic organization, which is why we see fantasies of abundant, disordered and predatory sexuality.

The witches here are rather less threatening than those found in the plays studied in previous chapters. These plays are concerned with mirth and merriment and engage the spectator in a culture of the carnivalesque. By engaging the theatrical gaze, which Barbara Freedman defines as a deflection of the look so that the spectator is made aware of their own position of looking (Freedman 1991, 1), these plays expose the uncanny at work within the carnivalesque and investigate the potential for a subversion of the symbolic order. Even the laughter instigated by these plays is presented in terms of an uncanny control over the subject so that the potential for autonomy is, once again, inhibited. In *The Witches of Lancashire*, the witches laugh at the misfortune of their victims: ‘Our sides are charm’d, or else this stuffe / Would laughter-cracke them’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, D1r). The image is later repeated by Arthur, who admits that ‘My sides eene ake with laughter’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, F2v). Like the beliefs about illicit sexuality, merriment is contagious and the carnivalesque engaged the spectator in the witches’ subculture. These plays transform the horror of witchcraft into comedy by encompassing the audience in the processes of fantasy and by exposing the stereotyping that the structures of common ideology initiate.
Repeated images of fluid bodily boundaries and fluid categories of identification occur in these plays. These things fall under Bakhtin’s definition of the carnivalesque (Bakhtin 1984). There is a particular focus on bodies, which may have contributed to a dissolution of the boundary that maintained the binary of actors and audience: ‘All kinds of aesthetic distance may be established in the theater, but it will always manifest itself with a special tension because the interplay between live actor and bodily sensitive audience is constantly breaking the distance down’ (Goldman 1972, 6). As we saw in section 4.3.2, Middleton’s adaptation of *Macbeth* (1616) introduced the carnivalesque to Shakespeare’s play of horror, and the recasting of the weird sisters as older actors in Middleton’s version would have introduced carnivalesque metatheatricality regarding beards and celebrated the subversive potential of the body.

Stephen Orgel argues that both boys and women were ‘treated as a medium of exchange within the patriarchal structure, and both are (perhaps in consequence) constructed objects of erotic attraction for adult men’ (Orgel 1996, 103). An older actor playing a female character would therefore have appeared more in ‘drag’ than a youth, who was thought of as somewhat androgynous. To attempt to consider the psychosexual implications of adult drag is of course problematic as one can never step outside sexuality to consider it objectively (Taylor 2000, 129), and we must beware of
anachronistically projecting nineteenth and twentieth-century imagery of drag and pantomime onto the seventeenth century. Images associated with pantomime dames include rampant sexuality, contemporary references, metatheatre, physical comedy and grotesque bodies. These characteristics are abundant in the plays studied here. Although pantomime is generally thought to develop out of the music halls of the Victorian era, early ancestors of the pantomime dame have been identified in the miracle plays of the Middle Ages, particularly the character of Mrs Noah (Taylor 2007, 107). Millie Taylor’s summary of the comedy of pantomime highlights some of the crossovers with the comedy of the plays studied in this chapter:

> The ritual and the participation of pantomime involve the audience in seemingly subversive activity, while the laughter at physical comedy and the grotesque body as well as at topical and political humour allows the audience to laugh at the joke while becoming aware of its own subjectivity and complicity. (Taylor 2007, 17-18)

The plays studied here relentlessly encourage the audience to review their own subjectivity in reference to the theatrical experience. This was achieved through employment of the theatrical gaze, and it was this that evoked the uncanny.

The physical characteristics and play-going traditions of early-modern theatres are central to my investigation of the uncanny gaze. Andrew Gurr describes how in the indoor theatres men could pay to place a stool on the stage from which to watch the play (Gurr 1992, 154-164). In a reflection of
the tradition which discouraged women from acting on stage, women, as far as we know, did not watch plays from the stage. The gaze was therefore entangled in gender etiquette, and in the theatre it seems that it was the male who invited the gaze. Gurr reviews a fictional story, published in 1657, of a young apprentice who came into some money in the 1620s and purchased a stool on the stage to watch a play, dressed in all the finery he could now afford (Gurr 2004b, 37). Gurr uses the story as a sub-plot for the energies at work in the theatre. The apprentice’s purpose was to be seen and desired by a rich woman in order to secure for himself a future of wealth. The young gallant, Nim, sat on the stage and was careful to stretch out his legs and stand up between acts to draw the eyes of the women in the audience. The story continues as he spotted a woman watching him. Her face was hidden by a fan from behind which she could watch and desire Nim without revealing her unattractive face. In this story, the emphasis is on the commodification of the male body; the gaze belonged to the woman, who was able to divert the gaze of others by hiding her face.

Such a story is an inversion of the model of the gaze forwarded by Laura Mulvey, who argues that in twentieth-century cinema at least, the gaze is always constructed as masculine, with the feminine as passive object of desire and voyeuristic satisfaction (Mulvey 1989). While this is considered to be ‘right’ spectatorship for a twentieth and twenty-first century audience, gaze was bound with rather different narratives of anxiety in the early-modern
period. This condition is illustrated in the tradition of boy players performing female parts, for a woman performing on stage would have attracted the gaze of many and invited associations of illicit sex. Even women attending a play became the subject of the disdain of anti-theatricalists who characterized female spectators as additional performers to be gazed upon. Stephen Gosson argues that ‘Thought is free: you can forbidd no man, that vieweth you, to noate and that noateth you, to judge you, for entring to places of suspicion’ (Gosson 1579, F2r). Jean Howard observes that Gosson dwells less on the possibility that the gentlewoman citizen may go away to sleep with a fellow playgoer and more on the danger posed to her by being gazed at by many men in the public space of the theatre. ... In Gosson's account the female playgoer is symbolically whored by the gaze of many men. (Howard 1994, 77)

In the plays studied here, witchcraft constitutes a fantasy that embodies anxiety about the contagious nature of feminine sexuality and the potential power of the female gaze. The performance of witches by adult men would have exposed the fissure at the heart of theatrical representation and drawn attention to the construction of the female as a ‘man-made sign in her absence’ (Aston 1995). These witches, however, are not necessarily ‘female’ in the traditional sense. As ‘stereotypical frames and misogynist character types’ (Lindley 1993, 194), these witches reflect and produce anxieties about women not adhering to the constructed sign of woman. In the deconstruction of gendered roles, the witch offers an avenue of empowerment for the feminine spectator.
5.1 Thomas Heywood, *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604)

Thomas Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* was performed by The Queen Anne’s Men in the early years of the seventeenth century at The Red Bull or The Curtain. *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* relentlessly draws attention to the transitional body of the boy actors and offsets the erotic potential of these parts with the grotesque hag, the Wise Woman. Like John Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (1591), *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* presents a cunning woman who occupies a central position in urban life. She has made no pact with the devil, but she is renowned in the community as a witch, earning herself a reputation for palmistry, psychic powers and healing. She is a charlatan and, unlike many of the other supposed witches found on the stage during the period, she has no magical powers. Clues, which are not necessarily gleaned from witches themselves, can be gathered from the plays of period regarding the presentation of witchcraft. The play-within-a-play in Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597), which is considered further in my conclusion, illustrates the theatrical expectations and conventions employed in the presentation of the supernatural. *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* can be read as an extended play-within-a-play in that the Wise Woman presents herself as witch and is unashamedly theatrical in doing so.
This play exposes the stereotyping which occurred in the characterization of witches because the Wise Woman gains her reputation by skill and manipulation rather than magical power. She invites the reputation by feigning the power of prophecy. The play interrogates the stereotype of the witch and so provides us with insight into theatrical expectations and conventions in the presentation of witches. When attending a play that included a witch, the audience often had little indication as to whether accusations of witchcraft from other characters are true: Joan of Arc, for example, is not revealed to be a witch until the end of Shakespeare’s *1 Henry the Sixth* (1592). The Wise Woman, however, quickly stems any audience suspicion that the title character has magical power. She repeats the information given to her by her clients back to them under the illusion that she gained this knowledge by magic:

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Wisewoman. And where doth the paine hold her most?
Countryman. Marry at her heart forsooth.
Wisewoman. Ey, at her heart, she hath a griping at her heart
Countryman. You have hit it right.
Wisewoman. Nay, I can see so much in the urine.
(Heywood 1638, B3v-B4r)
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Here, comedy relies upon the audience being more intelligent than the Countryman. By appealing to the intelligence of the audience, the play interrogates stereotyping. The Wise Woman does not occupy an other place, but her house is the focal point for much of the play’s action. She provides a service for the community, which enables its members to fulfil their
illegitimate desires, and she removes problems that arise from such desires. Additionally, she administers her own justice when libertine culture threatens her position in the community.

### 5.1.1 Playing Witches and Playing Girls

The young men of the play take sport in provoking the Wise Woman. Despite being repulsed by her, they cannot seem to leave her alone. Her age and hag-like appearance make her exotic, and characters are drawn to her while they find her abhorrent:

_Chartley_ Come _Haringfield_, now wee have been drinking of Mother Red-caps Ale, let us now goe make some sport with the Wise-woman.  
_Haringfield_ We shall be thought very wise men, of all such as shall see us goe into the Wise-womans.  
_Chartley_ See, heere shee is; how now Witch? How now Hagge? How now Beldame? You are the Wise-woman, are you? and have wit to keepe your selfe warme enough, I warrant you.  
_Wisewoman_ Out thou knave.  
2 _Luce_. And will these wild oates never be sowne?  
_Chartley_ You Inchantress, Sorceresse, Shee-devill. you Madam _Hecate_, Lady _Proserpine_, you are too old, you Hagge, now, for conjuring up Spirits your self; but you keepe prettie yong Witches under your rooфе, that can doe that.  
(Heywood 1638, C1r)

Textual clues to the appearance of the Wise Woman are plentiful. Chartley later calls her a ‘Dromedary’ (Heywood 1638, C1v), a term which, as early as 1567, meant ‘a stupid, bungling fellow’ (OED “dromedary” n. 3), and Boister
asks ‘had the devill never any thing to do with thee? thou look’st somewhat like his damme’ (Heywood 1638, C2r). The term ‘dromedary’ exploits the comedic potential of having an older actor playing the part of the Wise Woman.

The play continuously steps aside from itself to make reference to theatrical traditions, a technique by which some of the comedy of the play is produced. Alexander Leggatt argues that in early-modern drama, there are three distinct personas at work within a specific part: the character, the performer’s own private identity, particularly significant if the actor was popular, and finally, the persona that steps outside the boundaries of the character and comments on it, ‘describing and presenting rather than impersonating’ (Leggatt 1992, 84-85). Chartley’s words, ‘you are too old, you / Hagge, now, for conjuring up Spirits your self’, offer the potential for the actor to make jokes outside the boundaries of the play. An older actor could not convincingly play a subject of desire; romantic female roles would call for the soft voice and complexion of young boy actors. Chartley is perhaps teasing the older actor performing the Wise Woman for being at the end of his career as an apprentice.

Although the Wise Woman was probably performed by a senior boy actor on the cusp of adulthood, there are plenty of ‘prettie yong’ women in the play who would have been performed by younger boys. First Luce, Second Luce and Grace, all referred to as the Wise Woman’s ‘daughters’, are victims of
Chartley’s ‘wild oates’ (Heywood 1638, C1r). He betroths each of them but is able to defer the responsibilities of marriage through deceit and brazenness. Each of these young women is, in contrast to the Wise Woman, described in terms of the young adolescents who would have taken the parts. Boister describes First Luce as ‘A Rattle-Baby, Puppet, a slight toy’ (Heywood 1638, E4r). Chartley’s description of First Luce particularly speaks of the supernatural allure of the adolescent body: ‘There is a faire sweet modest rogue, her name is Luce: with this Dandiprat, this pretty little Apes face, is yon blunt fellow in love; and no marvell, for shee hath a Browe bewitching, Eyes ravishing, and a Tongue enchanting’ (Heywood 1638, A4r). The OED records ‘dandiprat’ as ‘Said of a young lad, little boy, urchin’ (OED “dandiprat” n. 2.b). Chartley repeats the image of apes later, when he speaks of his disdain for marriage: ‘It makes a man forfeit his Freedome, and makes him walke ever after with a Chaine at his heeles, or a Jack-an-Apes hanging at his elbow’ (Heywood 1638, B2r). His contempt for women is revealed as he compares his wife to a performing monkey. However, the term also draws attention to the youth of the actor and the skill of mimicry required by the theatre, again enlisting Leggatt’s third persona to step outside the boundaries of the play and comment on theatrical tradition.

The body of the adolescent actor is particularly exploited in the figure of Second Luce. Having been abandoned by Chartley on their wedding night, Second Luce cross-dresses, follows Chartley to Hoxton and finds work under
the assumed name ‘Jack’ with the Wise Woman. The Wise Woman instructs ‘Jack’ to dress as a girl and marries her to Chartley in a complicated plot of revenge. Second Luce defers understanding of gendered differences until these differences are blurred and obscured. Layers of gender signifiers suspend identification with the gendered subject. Like the Wise Woman, Second Luce defies subjectivity and, unable to fit into the gender system, she is

[2 Luce]. Both, and neither; I was a Ladd last night, but in the morning I was conjured into a Lasse: And being a Girle now, I shall be translated to a Boy anon. Here’s all I can at this time say for my selfe: Farewell.

(Heywood 1638, D4v)

Cross-dressed and hermaphroditical individuals expose gendered categories because understanding of the authentic gender of the individual is deferred. Second Luce becomes a ‘jack of all trades’ in terms of gender, and the play explores the erotic fascination of cross-dressing and the stage convention of boy actors. We see an intervention in the gaze as the play interrogates and deconstructs the desire associated with looking; this is what Elaine Aston refers to as ‘looking-at-being-looked-at-ness’ (Aston 1995, 95). The allure of cross-dressers is apparent in Boister’s choice of language. He calls Second Luce a hobbledehoy as she runs on stage ‘halfe ready’ (Heywood 1638, D4v), for which word the OED records: ‘A youth at the age between boyhood and manhood, a stripling; esp. a clumsy or awkward youth’ (OED ‘hobbledehoy’
In line with the general self-referentiality of the play, the term may therefore refer to the transitional state of the boy playing the part of Luce.

The term ‘hobbledehoy’ holds within it the suggestion of illicit sexual practice, of which anti-theatricalists accused boy players (Prynne 1633, 47; Northbrooke 1843, 59-61). The term certainly speaks of Boister’s sexual confusion as it is used in response to the half-dressed and ambiguous figure tantalizing him with sexual availability: ‘you have no reason, but to injoy both them / and me too’ (Heywood 1638, D4v). ‘Hobble’, Anatoly Liberman writes, may be derived from a pet name for Robin, a popular name for a demon as in hob-goblin and Robin Goodfellow (Liberman 2008, 101); perhaps significantly, Robin is Chartley’s first name. Liberman also notes that the term is reminiscent of the lusts of the devil. He quotes Thomas Tusser’s 1557 book, *Five Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie*, in which human life is divided into 12 periods, each lasting 7 years:

> The first seuen years, bring vp a childe;  
> The next, to learning, for waxing too wilde;  
> The next, keepe under Sir Hobbard-de-hoy  
> (Tusser, quoted in Liberman 2008, 102).

Liberman argues that in this passage ‘it can hardly be doubted that Sir Hobbard de Hoy is the Devil, the call of the sex, for Tusser had a clear notion of when lust should be satisfied’ (Liberman 2008, 102). Neither boy nor man, man nor woman, the boy player, and the character of Second Luce who

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references the boy player when, as Jack, she poses as a girl, exist on the edges of the categories which organize society. The threat s/he poses to symbolic codes of understanding mean that she is a subject of supernatural allure.

The Wise Woman is fooled by Second Luce’s masculine disguise; similarly, the characters who take part in the wedding ceremony are fooled by Jack’s parody of femininity. The interchangeability of the two Luces highlights the uncomfortable condition that the audience, too, were fooled, to some extent, by First Luce, who was not a beautiful young girl but a boy actor dressed up as a girl. This theatrical labyrinth drew the audience into the carnivalesque. Signification was suspended, desire disordered and difference deferred. The play points towards the illusion at the heart of the theatre and the heart of sexual difference itself: that gender is performative. It insists that the audience reassesses their position in relation to the theatrical world. This condition was uncanny because without anchors of reference the symbolic order could not be sustained. Barbara Freedman explains that

For Lacan, the assumption of a sexual identity is accompanied by the sacrifice of free libidinal energy necessitated by signification itself, which demands that we be one thing and not another. What Lacan refers to as “castration” is the loss in sexuality resulting from the inevitable mediation of desire by signification. (Freedman 1990, 56)

This play reverses this process of castration. Signification loses points of reference, and so desire and sexual identity are emancipated from symbolic organization. This uncanny release of sexual identity and desire is enriched by
the pleasures of voyeurism. Second Luce draws attention to her own androgyny, and the staging of the scene ensures that the audience dwell on the eroticism of this androgyny. Second Luce, in this scene, is ‘half ready and maskt’ (Heywood 1638, D4v), and the gaze of the spectator would have been drawn to the body. Second Luce represents a fetish because the body contains two incompatible ideas: the simultaneous absence and presence of the penis.

5.1.2 Looking at the Witch

Michael Goldman argues that ‘Part of the delight of the theater is that it recaptures the terror and pleasure of children spying on their elders’ (Goldman 1972, 6). First Luce and Second Luce both enlist the pleasures and anxieties of looking. Like their names, First and Second Luce are interchangeable as subjects of voyeurism. First Luce is required by her father to sit in public and tend the shop, and in this position she is gazed upon and desired by Chartley and his friend Boister. Luce is aware of the complexities of the position she is put in by her father and is made uncomfortable by the gaze and desire her father invites for her:

_Luce._ I doe not love to sit thus publickely:
And yet upon the traffique of our Wares,
Our provident Eyes and presence must still wayte
Doe you attend the shop, Ile ply my worke.
I see my father is not jealous of me,
That trusts meet to the open view of all.
The reason is, hee knowes my thoughts are chast
And my care such, as that it needes the awe
Leggatt argues that in this example First Luce steps outside the role to comment on it: ‘She is indeed in “open view”, goods in her father’s shop; but she is also on display as a type-figure of chastity, who formally announces her own role’ (Leggatt 1992, 82). First Luce sits in public among the wares she tends in her father’s shop and symbolically presents herself to be viewed and desired like the objects that surround her. The connection is made explicit by Chartley, who speaks of her as ‘property’ and ‘meat’ to be acquired and consumed. First Luce’s predicament also acknowledges the connection of desire and the gaze. Luce’s position in the public eye leads to her being courted by Chartley and visited by her secret fiancé, and at this point she becomes a whore in the eyes of her gossiping neighbours. When her father exclaims that he has become a ‘broker to lewd lust’ (Heywood 1638, E3r), he refers back to the metaphor of his daughter as merchandise, as a passive object to be chosen and lusted after. Luce’s symbolic whoredom is thus connected to her position in the public eye, rather than her behaviour.

Luce’s predicament reflects the views of Edmund Tilney, Master of the Revels at the time of performance, who argues that ‘the cheifest way for a woman to preserve and maintaine this good fame is to bee resident in her own house’ (Tilney 1587, E2v). By commenting on the complexities of women’s movement in public, the play makes reference to the reputation of women in
the audience. Early-modern women drew contempt from some by attending a play as they became spectacles in the audience amongst the reciprocal gaze of the theatres. However, *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* is a subversive play, and I argue below that commentary on the feminine as a passive object of the gaze paradoxically reveals the potential empowerment of women. *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* constantly steps outside the boundaries of fiction to engage the audience in the fantasies at work on stage.

Second Luce, in contrast to First Luce, is empowered by her position as a commodity of the male gaze. Second Luce’s mask ensures that the audience’s gaze was diverted from the actor’s face and drawn to the half undressed and androgynous body. She stands among the pictures of the prostitutes which adorn the walls of the Wise Woman’s house, and like them she, and the boy player playing her, are offered up to be gazed at and lusted after by Boister and the audience alike. Second Luce, half unready and face veiled, draws attention to the androgynous and transitional body of the boy actor. Rather than being silent and passive, she eroticizes the body by tantalizing with the suggestion of consummating this false marriage: ‘you have no reason, but to injoy both them and me, too’ (Heywood 1638, D4v). The eroticism of the situation is twofold. Second Luce is offering herself to Boister, and the boy actor playing the character hinted at a similar offering to the audience. John Rainolds argued that cross-dressed boy actors, adorned with feathers and silks, ‘doe it with a lewde intent of commiting whoredome, beguiling and decyving’
and condemned cross-dressing as ‘an occasion for wantonness and lust’. In this context, Heywood’s play seems deliberately subversive; Luce’s veil seems almost an ironic response to Rainolds’s insistence that women should wear veils when praying (Rainolds 1599, C4r).

Like John Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605), this play draws upon the viewing experience of female spectators. The play repeatedly returns to the ‘problem of determining a woman’s moral worth and her social status solely with respect to her sexual relations with men’ (O’Connor 2007, 1128), and this occurs in relation to the tensions between public and private experiences. A pun on maid-as-servant and maid-as-virgin runs throughout the play:

2: *Luce*. But I see comming and going, Maids, or such as goe for Maids, some of them, as if they were ready to lie downe, sometimes two or three delivered in one night, then suddenly leave their Brats behind them, and conveigh themselves into the Citie againe.

(Heywood 1638, D2r)

One such woman is the kitchen-maid who visits the Wise Woman to find out whether she is ‘a Maid or no’ (Heywood 1638, B4r). While her question contains an acknowledgement of the two parts of the pun, Heywood alludes to the ambiguity of linguistic categories in denoting identity. The kitchen maid’s query, which is also asked of the wise woman in Lyly’s *Mother Bombie* (1591), is not necessarily as strange as it may seem and reflects an ignorance concerning what constituted loss of virginity. This question would have had
severe implications for early-modern women, for as Fiona McNeil asserts, 'between 1600 and 1624, early modern England saw an explosion of convictions for bastardy in which women were either hanged or imprisoned' (McNeill 2007, 48). In the opening act of the play, Chartley draws attention to the worrying discrepancy between feminine sexual identity in the public and private spheres: ‘Shee hath, as other women have; / That she goes for a Mayd, as others doe’ (Heywood 1638, A3v). This comment, along with the later observation that ‘it is a common thing in this age to goe for a Mayde, and bee none’ (Heywood 1638, B3r), illustrates an anxiety that virginity in a woman was a state beyond regulation and acknowledges that the categories through which women were expected to progress through life could not be efficiently policed by men. Such comments may have had a chilling effect on the husbands and fathers in the audience accompanying their wives and daughters to the theatre.

5.1.3 Looking Back at the Audience

Pregnant maids and virgin wives appear often in the theatre of witchcraft. Whether witches cause or solve these problems, they work at the points where the categorization process of the symbolic order fails, and they draw attention to a worrying conflict between feminine sexual identity in the public and private spheres. Heywood’s depiction of the plights of the two Luces engages with the anti-theatricalist debate. First Luce, a passive symbol of feminine
chastity, is labelled a whore by her gossiping neighbours. In contrast, Second Luce is empowered by her active choice to cross-dress and follow her love to Hoxton. Her positive choices and the intervention of the wise woman lead to Second Luce’s empowerment in marriage:

\[\text{Wisewoman} \quad \text{I have conceited, to have Luce married to this blunt gentleman; shee mistaking him for Chartley, and Chartley shall marry thee, being a Boy, and take thee for Luce. Wilt not be excellent?} \]
\[\text{2. Luce.} \quad \text{Oh super, super-excellent!} \]
\[\text{Wisewoman} \quad \text{Play thy part, as Ile act mine, Ile fit him with a Wife Ile warrant him.} \]
\[\text{2. Luce.} \quad \text{And a Wife, I warrant him.} \]

(Heywood 1638, C2v)

A similar kind of feminine empowerment is found in Heywood’s *The English Traveller* (1627):

\[\text{Wife.} \quad \text{How, now, Sister,} \]
\[\text{This is a fashion that’s but late come up,} \]
\[\text{For maids to court their husbands} \]

(Heywood 1633, B2v)

Paul Merchant argues that these lines ‘no doubt contain a general observation true enough to be amusing; yet they are at the same time an invitation to greater independence, or even boldness’ (Merchant 1996, 4). Although Heywood acknowledges the problems associated with women being gazed upon in the public sphere, he, like Marston in *Sophonisba* (1605), offers a structure of empowerment in *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* that may have included the early-modern female spectator.
The carnivalesque dissolution of the power structures associated with looking and being looked upon reaches its climax at the house of the Wise Woman. Here, pictures of the Wise Woman’s prostitutes or ‘daughters’ adorn the walls so that customers can browse before choosing. These women are commodified objects of the male gaze with the promise of physical satisfaction to come:

Wisewoman Ile tell thee, Boy; marry thou must be secret. When any Citizens, or yong Gentlemen come hither, under a colour to know their Fortunes, they looke upon these pictures, and which of them they best like, she is ready with a wet finger: here they have all the furniture belonging to a privat-chamber, bedde, bed-fellow and all; but mum, thou knowest my meaning, Jacke.
(Heywood 1638, D2r)

Also held within these walls is the threat of venereal disease. Sir Harry is well aware of the gamble he takes when he visits the Wise Woman’s house and refers to the dangers of desire: ‘At the Wisewomans house I know it well: / Perhaps shee knowes some danger touching mee.’ (Heywood 1638, H2v). This threat offers a punishment for excessive desire.

In the final act of the play, Chartley is drawn to the Wise Woman’s house on the day of his marriage to Grace, believing that here he may finally consummate his false marriage with First Luce. Here he is symbolically castrated: he is punished for his excessive desires, and his unbounded lust is
organized into the symbolic structure of marriage. Grace, First Luce, Grace’s father, Luce’s father, Boister and even Chartley’s own father are also invited to the Wise Woman’s house and hidden so that they can witness Chartley’s behaviour. They individually reveal themselves to Chartley, to the latter’s increasing dismay and confusion. He begs to be taken back by First Luce and Grace, and his attempts to talk his way out of his predicament leave him a confused, silent and broken man. Chartley becomes the passive and optionless subject, the position he would have left his three fiancées in had it not been for the Wise Woman’s intervention. Chartley no longer has control over whom he marries or has sex with. His humiliation is complete when he is forced to accept the wife chosen for him by Second Luce and the Wise Woman, and the marriage with his original fiancée, Second Luce, is publically acknowledged. Chartley comes to occupy a feminine position of passivity and silence. He is unable to express himself and is humiliated by his attempts to control language. Eventually, he gives up and is forced into silence and subservience: ‘I had best bite out my tongue, and speake no more’ (Heywood 1638, L2v), as prescribed for ideal femininity in many of the conduct pamphlets of the period.

This final act is characterized by the controlling and punishing gaze and female power and male powerlessness. The staging of this act requires five separate hiding spaces from where characters can observe Chartley in his central position and can deliver their asides to the audience. While there is no evidence to suggest that there were as many as five doors leading on to the
early-modern stage, perhaps five separate stools, or similar portable properties demarcating the stage's regions, placed in different parts of the open stage would have established the hiding spaces from where the characters could play their reactions in full view, while invisible to Chartley. Alternatively, the characters perhaps placed their stools alongside the spectators seated on the stage area, the stage balcony, the Lords rooms or gentlemen’s rooms and could disappear amongst the crowd (Egan 1997). In this scenario, the audience would have merged with the characters in the performance space and shared the voyeuristic pleasure and discomfort of witnessing another’s humiliation. The line between beholder and beheld would have been blurred as those who had been watching the play with the illusion of distance became merged with those beheld on stage. In this act, the audience would have been made aware of the act of looking and the position from which they looked.

The play dissolves boundaries between the erotic world of the Wise Woman’s community and the erotic world of the play-house. The Wise Woman lists a number of contemporary women who, like the Wise Woman, own illicit businesses:

[Wisewoman]

You have heard of Mother Nottingham, who for her time, was prettily well skill’d in casting of Waters: and after her, Mother Bombye;

…

Mother Sturton inGoulden-Lane, is for Forespeaking: Mother Phillips, of the Banke-side, for the weaknesse of the backe: and
then there’s a very reverent Matron on *Clarkenwell-Green*,
good at many things: Mistris *Mary* on the *Banke-side*,
for recting a Figure:
(Heywood 1638, B4r)

As well as being the site of several theatres, Bankside appears to have been
notorious for fortune-tellers and quacks: Ben Jonson in *Every Man Out of His
Humor* (1599) refers to ‘some Cunning woman here o’ the *Banke-side’
(Jonson 1600, P4r). The Wise Woman dissolves boundaries between
theatricality and reality by making reference to her occupation in the world
outside the play. Boundaries between the theatre and the world outside are
blurred, something the Wise Woman notes: ‘Here were even a Plot to make a
play’ (Heywood 1638, D4r). Many of the subversive and dangerous
ideologies at work in the Wise Woman’s house, a place of feminine duplicity,
lust and deception, are therefore dissolved into the theatre.

*The Wise Woman of Hoxton* may have been particularly infuriating for the
anti-theatricalists who wrote so fervently against the theatre, since the Wise
Woman embodies their anxieties. While she displays her prostitutes or
‘daughters’ for male viewing pleasure, the theatre paraded actors in a space
caught up in a sub-culture of eroticism. The lust and desire which runs
throughout the play is reminiscent of the dangerous lust that many anti-
theatricalists associated with the theatre. The pictures on the walls of the
stage, which advertise the Wise Woman’s wares, may mirror the playbills
which were dotted among the streets of London advertising a popular actor
appearing on the stage that evening (Stern 2006a), again aligning player and prostitute. Theatre historians have long identified the potential for dissolving theatrical boundaries and including audience members in the dramatic action during the performance of early-modern plays. Sir Alexander’s invitation to Sir Davy Dapper to ‘looke into my galleries’ (Middleton and Dekker 1611, B3r) in Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl* (1611) is an oft cited example. Mark Hutchins insists that Sir Alexander’s remarks ‘bring the audience into the play’ as he likens playgoers’ faces to portraits (Hutchings 2007, 90). Paul Yachnin agrees that in *The Roaring Girl*, ‘the public space of the playhouse is folded outside in so that the audience members themselves become a decorative feature in the imagined interior space that is the object of their looking’ (Yachnin 2012, 39). Perhaps a similar dissolving of theatrical boundaries occurs in *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* when the Wise Woman describes the pictures adorning her walls and advertising her prostitutes (Heywood 1638, D2r). These strategies allow the play to look back at the audience in the theatre and look outwards to those writing about the theatre. If the actor playing the Wise Woman gestured out towards the audience, its members would have taken the place of ‘these pictures’ and would have been reminded of the erotically charged position they put themselves in when visiting the theatre.

Ironically, the Wise Woman follows Tilney’s prescription and is ‘resident in her own house’. However, this putatively private place becomes the public
area of much of the play’s business. The Wise Woman is known to all the characters in the play and has business dealings with most of them. Much of the action of the play takes place in her house, a feminine space shrouded in an uncomfortable tension between private and public affairs. Secrecy and duplicity are practised in this house, which acts as a public area where many characters congregate, others drop by on their way home from the pub and the very theatrical staging of Chartley’s final come-uppance is enacted. The house is a place of business, but it is private and secret business such as visiting prostitutes or disposing of unwanted babies. Dealings take place with the illusion of privacy, which the Wise Woman undermines by hiding in her secret closet to eavesdrop. The privacy which patriarchy prescribed for women is used by the Wise Woman to gain control in a distortion of patriarchal prescriptions.

5.2 Thomas Middleton, *The Witch* (1616)

Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* was first performed at Blackfriars in 1616, and it was first printed in 1778. A surviving manuscript from around 1778 forms the basis of Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino’s edition in their collected works of Middleton, upon which this reading is based. Taylor and Lavagnino present this play as a companion piece to *Macbeth* (1606), and the movement from the horror of *Macbeth* to the comedy of *The Witch* is charted by the Middletonian interpolations in *Macbeth*. Carnivalesque metatheatricality in
The Witch has the potential to dissolve the relationship of alterity between the audience and the action on stage. The carnivalesque, by its very nature, breaks down barriers of otherness in the theatre since it ‘does not acknowledge any distinction between actors and spectators. ... [it] is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it’ (Bakhtin 1984, 7). I consider how the carnivalesque manipulated the collective identity of the audience and encompassed them within the subversive realm.

Women in The Witch have a bad time of it. Francisca gives birth to an illegitimate baby; the Duchess is periodically forced by her husband to drink from the skull of her dead father; Isabella is forced into a marriage which is unconsummated. By contrast, the witches are merry, sexually satisfied and free of patriarchal dominance. When the Duchess finally resorts to sexually manipulating Almachildes into murdering her husband, she is somewhat aligned with the witches. Her empowerment is achieved, in part, through her sexuality. The Duchess leads Almachildes on stage blindfolded and tied up, promising him sexual fulfilment if he performs her will in murdering her cruel husband. The scene is erotically charged, and Almachildes expresses his sexual excitement when he alludes to his erection: ‘Then by all / The hopeful fortunes of a young man’s rising’ (3.1.48-49). The Duchess is empowered by her sexuality, and Almachildes expresses anxieties regarding inverted patriarchal control: ‘This’s you that was a maid? How are you born / To deceive men?’ (3.1.1-2). The scene represents a fantasy of inverted sexual
control. Almachildes’s exclamation could be on behalf of patriarchal discourse in general. The shock evident in his opening question is balanced by the sense of inevitability implied as she is fulfilling what she was born to do. Again, we see an anxiety that the picture of femininity constructed by patriarchal discourse and set out in the period’s conduct pamphlets is fraught with contradictions that reveal its fragility.

The inverted model of sexual empowerment is mirrored in the fantasy of the coven of witches and imagery of impotence and venereal disease. Hecate’s spells, which empower feminine sexuality and cause impotence in men, employ ingredients which vividly evoke her power over the phallus: ‘I may fall to work upon these serpents / And squeeze ’em’ (1.2.12-13).

Almachildes’s position, tied up and vulnerable to the Duchess, mirrors the sexual disempowerment experienced by Antonio, who, made impotent by the witches, is unable to consummate his marriage. The manly teasing Antonio is subject to on his wedding night can be read as revealing the expectation to perpetuate patriarchal cycles of dominance: ‘A boy tonight at least: I charge you look to’ t, / Or I’ll renounce you for industrious subjects’ (1.1.146-147). Antonio is teased for being a ‘boy’ despite the illegitimate sexual experience provided by his whore. Antonio’s identity as a man depends on him consummating his marriage. An alternative reading of these lines is suggested by Elizabeth Schafer; she argues that these would-be parents are being encouraged to conceive a boy (Middleton 1994, 12). When the witches
prevent consummation, they disrupt patriarchal dominance. The witches, who represent unrestrained lust and appetite, delay and defer the fulfilment of Isabella’s lust by calling on their ‘best powers’ to ‘starve up generation’ and ‘strike a barrenness in man or woman’ (1.2.149-151). Antonio’s servant, Gaspero, imagines that his master’s impotence is a consequence of venereal disease caught from visiting prostitutes. Gaspero’s reading of the situation reveals a fear of male sexual disempowerment emanating from contact with the vagina:

GASPERO

This is a cullis
For a consumption; and I hope one night
Has not brought you to need the cook already,
...
Pray heaven the surgeon and the 'pothecary
Keep out, and then 'tis well.
(2.1.13-19)

While Gaspero believes that medical practitioners will cure the problem, the audience would have been aware that the impotence is supernaturally induced. This places control over the body in the hands of the witches and highlights the discomfating vulnerability of science and medicine to supernatural influence.

There are two feasts in this play: a wedding feast and a supernatural feast. Both focus on fluid bodies and leaking boundaries. An explicit image occurs when Francisca fears that the toast from a skull will bring on a miscarriage:
FRANCISCA [aside]
This’s the worst fright that could come
To a concealed great belly. I’m with child,
And this will bring it out, or make me come
Some seven weeks sooner than we maiden reckon.
(1.1.133-136)

There is a threat here to both Francisca’s body and to her identity. She fears
that the skull will bring about a miscarriage or premature birth, and there is an
uncomfortable link between symbols of death and birth in her speech. The
actor playing Francisca might have been wearing a small prosthetic bump and
employed gestures such as resting a hand on the bump to perform pregnancy
(Moncrief and McPherson 2007, 37). Such signifiers of pregnancy draw
attention to and widen the gap between performer and role. Representing an
extreme version of performance embodied, the character of Francisca would
have invited laughter and discomfort. Also held within the image are the
dangerous social implications of her condition. The threat is not only to the
body but also to her identity. To publicly give birth to an illegitimate child
would ruin her identity as a maid at court and thrust her into the outcasts of
society. Her condition merges the dangerous implications of carnivalesque
sexual liberty with those of feasting and drinking. Her confidence in the
audience specifically ensures that they are enveloped by the theatrical arena in
reference to the tense duality of carnival and the hypocritical performance of
cohesion it often entailed.
The sexual insatiability of the witches is expressed through the theme of erotically-charged feasting. When Gaspero promises to bring Antonio’s whore, Florida, food from the feast, his sexual excitement at the prospect of their secret liaison is evident in the innuendos throughout:

[GASPERO]
Please you withdraw yourself to yond private parlour.
I'll send you ven'son, custard, parsnip pie;
For banqueting stuff—as suckets, jellies, syrups—
I will bring in myself.
(1.1.65-68)

Taylor and Lavagnino note that ‘parlour’ is a reference to female genitalia and that the utterance of ‘sucks’ ‘carries an easily audible innuendo’ (Middleton 2007, 1131). The syntactical ambiguity of ‘For’ implies that Gaspero will offer himself up for desert.

Excessive sex and feasting are fraught with danger and anxiety, and the carnivalesque in this play is represented by juxtaposing images of birth and death, feasting and wasting, fertility and impotence and sex and violence. The melancholic opening scene of the play, in which Sebastian returns from war to find his fiancée engaged to Antonio, is contrasted with the bustle and merry-making as the Duke’s household prepare for the wedding. Sebastian’s friend Fernando uses the language of carnival when he expresses his pity for his friend and alludes to the degenerative potential for carnival: ‘His sighs drink life blood in this time of feasting’ (Middleton 2007, 1.1.31). Fernando refers
to the humoral body and the disordered fluids of melancholy. Sebastian’s excessive sighs and blood imply a disordered, and they lead him to visit the witches. Excessive food, sex and fluids are dangerous to the body and to identity, and Fernando appears to foresee the influence of the witches:

[FERNANDO]
A banquet towards too? Not yet hath riot
Played out her last scene? At such entertainments still
Forgetfulness obeys and surfeit governs.
Here's marriage sweetly honoured in gorged stomachs
And overflowing cups.
(1.1.32-36)

Fernando’s anticipation of chaos and anarchy highlights the subversive potential of carnival, which is connected to both witchcraft and the theatre. The image of ‘gorg’d stomachs, / And overflowing cups’ implies the excessive eating and drinking of the feast as well as the secret sexual liaisons and consequences of such liaisons. The dangerous and subversive carnivalesque is firmly gendered as feminine and is overseen by the coven of witches and the Mistress of Misrule, Hecate.

The parallel feast prepared by the witches emphasizes both the wasteful and the transient nature of festival. Almachildes visits the witches to obtain a love charm. In thanks for the ingredients he brings her, Hecate makes spirits prepare a banquet for Almachildes: ‘She conjures and enter [Malkin,] a Cat, (playing on a fiddle) and Spirits (with meat)’ (1.2). This visual spectacle is a clear mirror of I.i, in which noises offstage denote a banquet being prepared.
for the wedding feast. The familiar bustle of the kitchens is warped by the spectacle of witchcraft. Almachildes admits that it was his carnivalesque disposition that drew him to the witches:

ALMACHILDES
What a mad toy took me, to sup with witches!
Fie of all drunken humours! By this hand,
I could beat myself when I think on’t.
And the rascals made me good cheer too
And to my understanding then
Eat some of every dish and spoiled the rest.
But coming to my lodging, I remember,
I was as hungry as a tired foot-post

(2.2.1-8)

Feasting is here presented in terms of sin and fulfilment. Even though Almachildes has eaten excessively and wastefully with the witches, he remains unfulfilled. Food that gives the pleasure of taste but not the comfort of sustenance is particularly treacherous, and this is directly indicative of the sinful, subversive and unreliable nature of the witches.

5.2.1 The Theatrical Gaze

The language of theatre is used to describe the feminine chaos abounding in the play: ‘Not yet hath riot / Played out her last scene?’ (1.1.32-33). This question would have encompassed the audience within the subversive field and perhaps engaged with anti-theatricalist discourse which, as we saw in section 5.1.2, expressed concern regarding contagious licentious behaviours
within the theatres. The anxiety relating to the excessive, contagious and encompassing nature of immoral behaviour is specifically connected to feminine sexuality in the image of ‘overflowing cups’ (1.1.36). *The Witch* plays out a fantasy of infectious feminine sexuality spreading outwards from the coven.

The subversive potential of feasting, theatre and sex climaxes with the witches. They represent an extreme misogynist fantasy of female sexual appetite. Providing a terrifying image of inverted sexual control, they use and discard men as they do food. When Hecate takes a boy’s virginity through an incubus, he is spoken of as decayed food: ‘Last night thou got’st the Mayor of Whelpley’s son: / ... I think thou’st spoiled the youth: he’s but seventeen’ (1.2.30-32). Here the term ‘spoiled’ is active in two possible senses. Given the abundance of feasting in the play, the witches may be demeaning men by treating them as the food they wastefully consume and that fails to satisfy them. The second sense suggests that the witches believe that their victims gain pleasure from their night-time escapades. Such an implication may have offered a challenging implication for the audience because some of the people in the theatre may have feared a visit from a succubus. When Almachildes enters the coven, Hecate makes little attempt to contain her lust:

HECATE [*Aside*]
'Tis Almachildes! Fresh blood stirs in me –
The man that I have lusted to enjoy!
I have had him thrice in incubus already.
(1.2.195-197)

As Hecate confides in the audience, she invites its members into her realm of surfeit and desire. Her lustful musing, ‘What young man can we wish, to pleasure us’ (1.2.27), invites the actor playing Hecate to gaze into the audience to locate her next victim. Her words would have positioned audience members as potential victims of her predatorial appetite and abruptly drawn individuals out of the safety of the collective identity of the audience. Such instances undermine the scopophillic power usually attributed to the audience. Male audience members might have felt early-modern patriarchal norms undermined because here a woman is making the sexual decisions.

The fantasy of feminine promiscuity is developed through the horror of the uncanny, but it also contains the excitement and desire of sexual liberty. Lust leads Almachildes to visit the witches:

ALMACHILDES
  Sweet venery be with thee, and I at the tail
  Of my wish! I am a little headstrong, and so
  Are most of the company. I will to the witches.
  They say they have charms and tricks to make
  A wench fall backwards, and lead a man herself
  To a country-house some mile out of the town,
  Like a fire-drake: there be such whoreson kind girls
  And such bawdy witches, and I'll try conclusions.
(1.1.88-95)
Almachildes admits that his sexual desire overcomes his will so that his actions make him subject to his ‘tail’, the location of desire. Almachildes is able to act on this desire in the illicit and maternal space of the witches’ coven. The carnivalesque enables him to overcome the constraints of the dominant order and act out a fantasy of excessive sexuality that would otherwise remain unacknowledged.

Given the festivities surrounding him, Almachildes’s confession that he is ‘headstrong’ may refer to him being drunk, especially as later Firestone, Hecate’s son, observes ‘How apt and ready is a drunkard now to reel to the devil!’ (1.2.233). The implication that drink weakens resistance to witchcraft invokes the threat that the carnivalesque posed to the symbolic order. Drunkenness represents a submission of will and social expectation, and in the play it leads characters to the coven of witches and to fantasies of sexual licentiousness, revenge and aggression. Falstaff’s musings on wine in 2 Henry IV (1597) illustrate how alcohol entered into the subjectivity debate:

[FALSTAFF]
A good Sherris-Sack hath a two-fold operation in it: it ascends me into the Braine, dryes me there all the foolish, and dull, and cruddie Vapours, which enuiron it: makes it apprehensiue, quicke, forgetiuue, full of nimble, fierie, and delectable shapes; which deliuer’d o’re to the Voyce, the Tongue, which is the Birth, becomes excellent Wit. The second propertie of your excellent Sherris, is, the warming of the Blood: which before (cold, and setled) left the Liuer white, and pale; which is the Badge of Pusillanimitie, and Cowardize: but the Sherris warmes it, and makes it course
from the inwards, to the parts extremes
(Shakespeare 1623, gg3v)

Hamlet and Gloster choose to alter their bodies, and consequently their resolve, by drinking hot blood (see section 1.1). The temperature of bodily fluids comes into play again here as Falstaff describes how sack warms the blood, which in turn alters the constitution. In Shakespeare’s Othello (1604), Cassio likens wine to the devil in that it produces behaviours beyond the control of the individual: ‘Oh thou invisible spirit of Wine, if thou hast no name to be knowne by, let vs call / thee Diuell’ (Shakespeare 1623, tt3r). The uncanny influence of witchcraft emerged in the elusive nature of autonomy in the period.

The carnivalesque atmosphere embodied by Almachildes is contagious. Referring to those around him at the wedding feast, he extends his drunkenness to ‘most of the company’. The comment is also theatrically self-referential. It continues the association of witchcraft and the theatre introduced by Fernando, who described the carnivalesque as a play, thus involving his fellow actors and the audience in the subversive carnivalesque. Almachildes’s fantasy merges the witches’ coven with the brothel; sexual depravity is infectious, and women succumb easily to their inherent lust due to the charms and tricks of the witches. Firestone later repeats the sentiment: ‘I’m sure they’ll be a company of foul sluts there tonight. If we have not
mortality after it, I’ll be hanged, for they are able to putrefy it, to infect a whole region’ (Middleton 2007, 3.3.16-19).

The infectious nature of feminine lustfulness is represented in the love charm that the witches give to Almachildes in the form of a ribbon to plant on Amoretta. Rather than making her submissive to his sexual advances, the charm makes her lustful and predatorial: ‘I’ll take him when there’s time’ (2.2.50). This supernaturally induced lust is spread through the contact of feminine characters. An exchange between Sebastian and Florida reveals how anxiety concerning contagious feminine licentiousness and deceitfulness is transferred onto a fantasy of the supernatural:

FLORIDA What need you urge that
Which comes so naturally I cannot miss on’t?
What makes the devil so greedy of a soul
But ‘cause he’s lost his own, to all joys lost?
So ’tis our trade to set snares for other women
’Cause we were once caught ourselves. [Exit]
SEBASTIAN A sweet allusion!
Hell and a whore, it seems, are partners then,
In one ambition.
(4.2.48-55)

Again, prostitution and witchcraft are linked through an image of feminine licentiousness and vindictiveness, and this is threatening to patriarchy in its contagious and polluting nature.
The witches’ coven represents an active community of women; their subversive nature lies in the communal and contagious nature of the group. The fantasy contains anxieties articulated elsewhere about the danger of women meeting. Bernard Capp has accumulated extensive evidence of a collective feminine sub-culture and the misogynist anxieties that arose from it (Capp 2003). In much of the period’s literature, anxiety that particularly related to feminine sexuality was connected to women congregating. This anonymous ballad, for example, expressed anxiety regarding the behaviour of women when removed from male observation and authority:

When these good Gossips meet,
In Alley, Lane, or Stréet,
Poore men we doe not sée't,
with Wine and Sugar swéet,
They arme themselues, and then beside
their husbands must be hornify'd
(Anon 1638)

The sexual licentiousness of the women is presented as particularly threatening to male identity as their husbands lose their position as authoritative patriarchs and become ridiculous cuckolds, signalled by the term ‘hornify’d’. In another example, a community of women gossip about the shortcomings of their partners and the ways in which they control their husbands. Anxiety is again connected to sexuality as the fourth wife criticizes her husband’s impotence:
He is a Gamester, though no Cocke of game,  
For I doe finde he doth his businesse lame,  
In things (you know my meaning) scant worth prayse  
(Rowlands 1613, C2v)

These examples highlight a general anxiety about subversive feminine communities, and the fantasy of the coven represented an expression of it.

The term ‘gossip’, as well as referring to the idle chat of mostly women (OED, “gossip” n. 3), was a term for women attending a midwife in birthing, and although not necessarily a derogatory term, it was often used as such (O'Malley 2004, 13). Arguing that the birthing chamber was a site of temporary but genuine female empowerment, Kirstie Rosenfield identifies the source of the hostility that was often directed towards it (Rosenfield 2002, 98). Caroline Bicks outlines the general use of the term ‘gossip’ across the Middle Ages and into the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and she illustrates how the term became specifically associated with women, maternity and subversive social and sexual behaviour (Bicks 2003, 27-28). The witches’ coven in The Witch is a specifically maternal space; Hecate refers to her client the Duchess as her ‘daughter’ (5.2.28) and harbours a sexual and aggressive relationship with her son and servant Firestone (1.2.98). Sharing intimate sexual details, subversive knowledge and encouraging laughter at the expense of men, the coven represents a supernatural community of gossips. It is possible that the actor who played the small part of the old woman who disposes of the illegitimate baby in II.iii would also have played one of the witches, perhaps
Hecate. The association of witches and midwives is taken up in Thomas Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), in which the Wise Woman not only delivers illegitimate babies but offers to dispose of them ‘abroad’ (Heywood 1638, D2r). David Harley argues that this connection has become overstated in historical accounts and that midwives largely held a position of respect in the early-modern period (Harley 1990). However, it seems likely that Middleton’s source for some of his material was *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) particularly the connection of witchcraft with impotence and infectious sexuality. In this text, a whole chapter, Part Two Chapter XIII, is dedicated to the connection of witches with midwives. If the actor playing the old woman also played one of the witch parts, the coven would have been further connected with dangerous maternal imagery and illicit feminine power in a metatheatrical way.

The witches’ habit of confiding in the audience about their sexual adventures positions audience members as gossips within the theatrical world. By encouraging laughter at the expense of male characters, the witches align the audience with their subversive agenda, especially as their victims are largely unsympathetic characters. The meticulousness with which Hecate describes her spells enriches with supernatural danger her intimacy with the audience. This potentially reinforced the relevance of the anxiety expressed in pamphlets and ballads that feminine circles of knowledge were threatening and dangerous.
5.2.2 Spectacle and Offstage Activity

The carnivalesque in *The Witch* does not simply offer a mode of spectacle, often underestimated by scholars as cheap crowd-pleasing tactics employed at the expense of the poetry of the text (Gurr 1992, 175; McDonald 2001, 167), but it encodes the play’s larger meaning. Like ritual and processes of abjection, the carnivalesque can give coherence to a community and legitimize the position of a ruler (Tennenhouse 1986). In *The Witch*, its foremost function is to give access to the supernatural. Through spectacle the supernatural is intrinsically bound to the uncanny because it presents the familiar world in new and emotionally provocative ways. In this way, spectacle is connected to the other, and this relationship is exploited in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606). Here the spectacle of the decapitated head and the witch’s cauldron denote the horror associated with the abjected other. Spectacle, with its reliance on props, stage action and sensory reaction, should not be underestimated in its ability to excite mob mentality and emotional contagion. Edward Muir’s analysis of ritual in early-modern Europe may be applicable to spectacle: ‘Rituals give access to emotional states that resist expression in language, which is why they have become so desired and yet distrusted in our logo-centric culture’ (Muir 2005, 2). Spectacle and carnival not only appealed to but helped to construct a communal consciousness within the theatre.
The staging of the feast scenes illustrate how spectacle might have incited emotional contagion, broken down theatrical boundaries and encompassed the audience within the subversive potential of carnival. Noises offstage, presumably made within the tiring house, denote the preparation of the banquet for the wedding feast. Tim Fitzpatrick and Daniel Johnston argue that there was a ‘general spatial geography’ beyond the stage doors (Fitzpatrick and Johnston 2009, 2). This encouraged audience involvement by inviting the imagination to construct identifiable fictional spaces offstage. The nature of this area is shaped by onstage cues. In response to the noises offstage, Fernando draws attention to the surfeit of the feast—overflowing cups and gorged stomachs—thereby encouraging the audience to imagine the bustle and effort of preparing such an excessive meal. These cues directed the audience’s imagination, encouraged a similar mental picture and allowed at least some of the audience—those members willing to give themselves over to the effect—to identify collectively with the onstage community.

The witches’ feast is more explicitly spectacular. Offstage spaces denote a supernatural community that enters at Hecate’s bidding:
HECATE
    Titty and Tiffin, Suckin
    and Pidgen, Liard and Robin!
    White spirits, black spirits, grey spirits, red spirits!
    Devil-toad, devil-ram, devil-cat, and devil-dam!
    Why, Hoppo and Stadlin, Hellwain and Puckle?
STADLIN [within]
    Here, sweating at the vessel.
HECATE
    Boil it well.
HOPPO [within]
    It gallops now.
HECATE
    Are the flames blue enough
(1.2.1-7)

The conversation takes place across the boundaries of the stage thereby
leading the theatrical imagination to a dangerous and subversive place. The
speech draws on a series of literary techniques: rhyme, alliteration and
assonance. The chant gains in momentum, denoting a foreboding of danger
and an endless supernatural community. Two separate spirits answer Hecate,
and they presumably speak from two separate offstage positions. This adds to
the impression that the supernatural community surrounded the theatre and its
audience. This would have inverted the power normally attributed to the
audience as they would have been aware of a supernatural presence without
being able to see it. Firestone continues to ensure that the offstage
supernatural community remained within the imagination of the audience by
describing Almachildes’s entrance into the coven (which is significantly
distinct from his entrance onto the stage):
FIRESTONE There’s the bravest young gentleman within, and the fineliest drunk. I thought he would have fall’n into the vessel! He stumbled at a pipkin of child’s grease, reeled against Stadlin, overthrew her, and in the tumbling cast struck up old Puckle’s heels with her clothes over her ears.

(1.2.183-188)

The picture is vivid and carnivalesque; it encompasses the audience by engaging the theatrical imagination in the subversive realm.

The audience are told what to imagine between this witch scene and the next in which they appear: ‘When hundred leagues in air we feast, and sing, / Dance, kiss and coll, use every thing’ (1.2.25-26). The witches explicitly describe their offstage activity: they plan to fly, rape, exact revenge on a farmer and his wife and fornicate with their familiar, the ‘great cat’ Malkin. Such description extended the theatrical imagination further than the immediate space beyond the boundaries of the stage. Supernatural dominance over the landscape is detailed in the description of the witches’ flight:

[HECATE]

Our ’nointed flesh into the air
In moonlight nights, o’er steeple-tops,
Mountains, and pine-trees, that like pricks or stops
Seem to out height; high towers and roofs of princes
Like wrinkles in the earth.

(1.2.18-22)

Hecate’s description indicates power over nature, a domain typically associated with witchcraft and femininity. The audience may have recognized
a demeaning of the phallus in the potentially bawdy image of mountains reduced to ‘pricks’.

The witches’ flight would presumably have been staged using the descent machine. Perhaps the witches’ song, with voices coming from offstage and above, was useful for covering up the clumsy noise of the machinery (Shakespeare 2008, 257):

HECATE
I come, I come, I come, I come
With all the speed I may,
With all the speed I may.
(3.3.41-43)

The song contains a theatrically self-referential joke, perhaps excusing and so drawing attention to the time in which the descent machine takes to lift the actor, revealing and inviting laughter at the nature of theatricality and perceived magic. The Witch highlights the boundaries that organize symbolic categories as permeable. The boundaries between onstage and offstage theatrical activity, the boundary that separates the drama and the audience, the boundaries that maintain gender hierarchies are all exposed and manipulated. The play draws on a wide range of spectacular techniques which merge theatricality and magic.
5.3 Thomas Heywood & Richard Brome, *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634)

Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* appeared in print in 1634 as *The Late Lancashire Witches*, and much criticism of the play employs this title. The discovery of Nathaniel Tomkyn’s letter in 1984, in which the play is referred to as *The Witches of Lancashire*, and the running header of one of the British Library’s copies of the 1634 quarto, confirm the play’s title at the time of performance. The play was performed in 1634 at The Globe by The King’s Men. As with plays studied elsewhere in this thesis, in *The Witches of Lancashire*, the fantasy of witchcraft is developed through the realm of the mother. Such fantasy requires a manipulation of the power structure typical of early-modern symbolic structures and points to a liberating, threatening and subversive potential of transcending the dominant order.

This play, like Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), investigates the fantasy of witchcraft and interrogates the myths that shape the representation of the witch. Whetstone, a character bullied by other characters who find his frank statements and brutal self-awareness discomforting, is most insightful in regards to the fantasy of witchcraft. He explains to his peers that his mother was a witch:
Whetstone’s only evidence for the claim that his mother was a witch lies with his mother’s proclamation that in her youth she was a beauty and was able to control and seduce men. Whetstone reveals discomfort with his mother’s sexuality and the empowerment she enjoyed on account of it. Such discomfort informs much of the play and culminates in the maternal coven of witches and the supernatural revelation that many of the male characters are the bastard sons of women who cuckolded their husbands. The self-proclaimed witches of Heywood and Brome’s play make a positive choice to embrace empowering witchcraft. These witches challenge the fantasies that produced the stereotype of the haggish, hermaphroditical witch that we encountered in many of the earlier witchcraft plays.

Whetstone notes a change in the fashionable image of the witch. He implies that the bewitching, lusty witch is an out-dated characterization and has since been replaced by the more familiar hags and bedlams such as those found in Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605) or Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606). Rather than offering an accurate reflection of the changing representations of witches on the early-modern stage, Whetstone provides comment on the process of fantasy that determines the image of the witch. The fantasy is
revealed as unreliable as the witches of this play adhere largely to the allegedly outdated image: they are bewitching, merry, lustful and accessible. These witches, unlike witches elsewhere in theatre, have secondary identities: Mistress Generous is a wife in addition to a witch, Moll a popular sweetheart.

Rather than referring to some perceived fashion, Whetstone’s distinction between how witches are ‘nowadays’ and how they used to ‘go’ may reflect his developing attitude towards his mother. Throughout, Whetstone reveals a preoccupation with his own origins and his parent’s sexual experience:

‘However I was begot, here you see I am, / And if my parents went to it Without feare or wit, / What can I helpe it’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, B2v). The witch of ‘nowadays’ is the fantasy of the ugly hag, who is a projection of male anxieties about age, maternity and female dominance. The void which lies between fantasy and reality is investigated in *The Witches of Lancashire* and leads to the delay in recognizing the witches in the community. Unable to marry the multiple identities of Mistress Generous and Moll Spencer, members of the community either refuse to believe in the existence of witches at all or furiously hunt for their existence elsewhere. A particularly significant moment of comedy involves the elderly Master Doughty, who frantically searches for the witches that caused the havoc at the wedding feast and meanwhile falls in love with one of those very witches (Heywood and Brome 1634, F3r - F3v). Here the witches are not ugly, haggish or hermaphroditical, but they stimulate desire and excitement. Their mischief is less threatening.
than the activities of witches found elsewhere, and characters tend to respond to them with childlike fascination or festive abandonment rather than aggression or terror, at least until the end of the play when they are hauled off to likely execution.

The letter Nathaniel Tomkyns wrote to Sir Robert Phelips provides one of the few pieces of direct evidence regarding how an audience member responded to an early-modern performance. The letter, which Gabriel Egan includes in the appendix to his edition of the play, indicates that Tomkyn’s main response to the play was delight: ‘It consisteth from the beginning to the end of odd passages and fopperies to provoke laughter, and is mixed with diverse songs and dances, it passeth for a merry and excellent new play’ (Heywood and Brome 2002, 164). The world of the play imposes a power inversion, which is most explicitly presented in the story of the Seely family, usually attributed to Brome (Egan 2009, 66). The members of this household have been supernaturally manipulated to behave ‘unnaturall[y]’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, L1r), so that ‘The wife the husband check and chide’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, C4v) and the servants of the household dominate their employers.

The presentation of their story relates particularly to Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque because it is temporary (Bakhtin 1984, 10). Their predicament does not threaten the existence of the power structure, nor the boundaries of the
categories within it, but rather presents a fantasy of the world turned on its head. The inversion maintains structural integrity, and thus subversion is limited. The definitions for the word ‘Seely’ recorded by the OED indicate the potential range of responses to the plight of the Seely family. The senses ‘happy’, ‘harmless’ and ‘silly’ confirm Tomkyn’s response to the play as merry and frivolous, and the story of the Seely family offers a version of the carnivalesque where subversion is limited. Another definition reads ‘Innocent, harmless. Often as an expression of compassion for persons or animals suffering undeservedly’ (OED ‘seely’ n. 6). In contrast to the victims of witches in other witchcraft plays, the Seely family invite sympathy. They are victims of the puppeteer witches. Their plight, while a subject of hilarity, also contains the unhappy flipside of the carnivalesque; the potential for sympathy points towards the discomfort of the bullying at work in the carnivalesque. The potential for discomfort is expanded upon in other cases of power inversion in the play. These are less rigid and we are offered the possibility of a continuum. In these cases, power cannot be neatly flipped back into its proper place once the supernatural influence is expelled because boundaries which separate categories of signification within the hierarchy are exposed as permeable. Hunting and equestrian imagery in particular toy with the categories of human and animal, active and passive, licit and illicit, natural and supernatural and controller and controlled in terms of the power structure.
5.3.1 The Permeable Hierarchy

The hunting theme that runs throughout provides a context for investigating the relationships of power in the play. Hunting preserves the symbolic order because it performs hierarchical prominence and plays out the domination of the privileged group. Helen Ostovich explains that ‘In The Late Lancashire Witches, men hunt and gamble to satisfy their appetite for dominance; the witches hunt for ways to upset that dominance by means of various pranks that trivialize male sport and give women the advantage in domination’ (Brome 2010, 17). Arthur, Shakestone and Bantham enter the play ‘as from hunting’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, B1r), just as the men in The Wise Woman of Hoxton enter ‘as newly come from play’ (Heywood 1638, A2r). These stage directions provide a particularly masculine context for the opening of the plays: hunting, as Edward Berry explains, was almost exclusively a male recreation (Berry 2001, 31), and gaming was associated with young, flashy gallants. This masculine context is quickly disrupted as the women are revealed to hold the power in the plays. The men are upset that their hunt was ruined by the sudden and inexplicable disappearance of the hare. Arthur’s comment that this represents ‘things transcending Nature’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, B1r) illustrates the way in which the symbolic hierarchy is imagined to be natural and the disruption of it supernatural. The young men are divided on their opinion as to whether the sabotage was the work of
witches. However, the event acts as a prototype for a series of supernatural manipulations of power structures that occur throughout the play.

The hunting theme is taken up later as a young boy stumbles across two hounds and beats them when they fail to chase a hare. The boy is quickly served a taste of his own medicine as the hounds transform into two human characters: a demon child and Gillian, the boy’s ‘Gammer’ (meaning grandmother and used loosely of old women), who seizes him and drags him away for her own amusement (Heywood and Brome 1634, E1v). Gillian transforms the demon child into a horse to transport her and the frightened boy to the witches’ feast. In each situation, the dominator becomes the victim, their authority is exposed as an illusion and strategies of control are ridiculed. The boy, resigned to his complete lack of control over his situation, begs to know what Gillian plans to do with him. Her sinister reply implies that the boy will become sexually, as well as socially, subservient to her: ‘To hugge thee, stroke thee, and embrace thee thus, / And teach thee twentie thousand prety things’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, E1v).

The paedophilic connotations of their journey to the feast on horseback were explored in the staged reading of the play recorded in 2006 for the Richard Brome Online project (Brome 2010), in which the riding motion of Dickinson and the boy illustrate how the horse in the play script represents the enabler of feminine phallic power. Gillian has power of movement and travel,
and this socially phallic power is embodied when she takes the male sexual position:

\[\text{Dicks[on]}\] And thats the horse we must bestride,
On which both thou and I must ride,
Thou boy before and I behinde,
The earth we tread not, but the winde,
For we must progresse through the aire,
And I will bring thee to such fare
As thou ne’re saw’st, up and away
(Heywood and Brome 1634, E2r)

In the staged reading, the mature actor playing Gillian Dickison manoeuvred the younger boy into position on the horse. The movement implied by horse riding and the bawdy emphasis on ‘up and away’ illustrated, when staged, that the travel on horseback also represented a display of perverse and aggressive sexual empowerment.

The above example illustrates how equestrian imagery enabled a physical investigation of sexual power. Such imagery is employed throughout the play as a metaphor for the supernatural manipulation of the symbolic order. Traditionally associated with masculine grandeur, authority and productivity (Edwards 2007, 27-28), the image of riding is manipulated in the play to reference the gendered power associated with sex and the liberating excitement of transcending the repressive forces of the symbolic order. The image of horse riding is found both today and in the early-modern period as men boast of their sexual conquests and imply that their partner was sexually
passive and under their control. Linda Boose describes the sexualized use of equestrian imagery as preserving the gendered hierarchy: ‘to “mount” and “ride” a woman works both literally and metaphorically to exert control over the imagined disorder presumed to result from “the woman on top”’ (Boose 1991, 146-147). While the metaphor of riding contained implications of rampant sexuality, the bridle symbolized the restraint of this sexuality, its use a punishment particularly directed towards women (Burford and Shulman 1992, 52). In this play, a magic bridle capable of subduing men—making them as obedient as tamed horses—is one of the witches’ tools for reversing the usual power relations.

The skimmington scene in *The Witches of Lancashire* recalls this cultural context for riding and bridles. Here the skimmington acts as a punishment for Parnell, for her unruly behaviour, and for Lawrence, for allowing such an inverted power relationship to develop in his family (Heywood and Brome 1634, H3r). Lawrence and Parnell are made into spectacles as effigies of the couple are paraded on horseback, probably staged using a hobby-horse (Egan 2009, 65). Skimmingtons, often employed to punish occurrences of inverted authority between a husband and wife (Mellinkoff 1973), illustrate that horses, riding and bridles were commonly associated with gender transgression and spectacle. Robert Schuler investigates how feminine transgression in the early-modern period was often imagined in terms of witchcraft: ‘For early moderns, these categories of female deviance (shrew, mannish diabolist, scold
or callet, hag or witch) were conceptually rooted in a scheme of moral and social inversions that overlapped and often converged’ (Schuler 2004, 387). Following Schuler’s model, the scolding Parnell would have been conceptually imagined in cohort with the witches that surround her, despite having no magical power. The skimmington ritual contributes, both in the play and in wider social mores, to this converging of ‘categories of female deviance’ because images of inversion, riding and sexual transgression were motifs common to both witchcraft and the skimmington (Zika 2003, 305-332). The witches’ discussion of their journey to the coven, only two scenes before the skimmington, is explicitly bawdy:

_Meg._ What Beast was by thee hither rid?
_Mawd._ A Badger nab.
_Meg._ And I bestrid
A Porcupine that never prickt.
_Mal._ The dull sides of a Beare I kickt.  
(Heywood and Brome 1634, G2r)

Although bawdy riding links witchcraft and the skimmington, the play complicates the simple model of convergence suggested by Schuler. Parnell, as we have seen, is a victim of the witches, and the audience may have sympathized with her. The play complicates, rather than contributes to, the converging of female categories of deviance.

Horses in _The Witches of Lancashire_ are enablers of feminine power; Mistress Generous uses the household horse as transport to the witches’
meetings. Her transgression of social codes of gender—her travel, independence and power—is coupled with sexual transgression through the image of riding, which is explicitly bawdy in the play. Master Generous is reluctant to be jealous of his wife, but the suspicion that she has cuckolded him occurs to him when he finds that she has not slept at home:

[GENEROUS]
Should there be any contract betwixt her
And this my Groome, to abuse my honest trust;
I should not take it well
(Heywood and Brome 1634, G3v)

Transgression of social codes is imagined as sexual. Generous’s words here draw on male anxieties regarding the sexual virility of horse keepers and the idea embedded in folklore that upper class women were sexually attracted to working class men, particularly grooms because they were physical, animalistic and primitive (Levin 2005).

The scene in which Robin drops in on his sweetheart Moll explicitly links riding and travel with illicit sex. Moll uses her sexual charms and knowledge of witchcraft to delay his leaving so that he can sexually satisfy her. She transforms his horse into a magical beast that enables them to travel at supernatural speed thereby giving them time to do ‘something else too’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, F1v). As they leave the stage together, Robin’s excitement at the prospect of his journey is expressed by a reference to his erection: ‘hey for Lancaster: stand up’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, E2v).
Robin later describes the journey in an aside to the audience, and he makes apparent the illicit connotations of his journey:

Robin. Yes Sir. I think I have netled him now, but not as I was netted last night, three hundred Miles a Night upon a Rawbon’d Divell, as in my heart it was a Divell, and then a Wench that shar’d more o’ my backe then the sayd Divell did o’ my Bum, this is ranke riding, my Masters. (Heywood and Brome 1634, F2r)

Moll entirely controls the relationship between herself and Robin and uses her bewitching powers to manipulate Robin into performing her will. Beside her, Robin appears like a stuttering idiot:

Rob[in] Nay but, nay but. Mal. Nay, and you stand butting now, I’le leave you to look your horse. (Heywood and Brome 1634, E2v)

Not only emasculated by his desire for Moll, Robin is also dehumanized. He begins to develop the characteristics of a horse, the enabler of feminine power and control in the play, and performs the fluid boundaries of embodied identity. The scene anticipates Robin’s later transformation into a horse at the hands of Mistress Generous, who uses him to transport herself to the witches’ feast. Furious that Robin should imagine himself able to control her, Mistress Generous turns the bridle (the symbol of feminine restraint) on Robin and uses a charm to transform him into a horse (Heywood and Brome 1634, F2v).
The inverted state of social and sexual control is noted by Robin: ‘(a pox take you for a jade). Now I bethinke my selfe how damnably did I ride last night, and how divellishly have I been rid now’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, G1v). The implication is that Mistress Generous has not only used him for transport but sexually abused him as well. She is in a position of sexual and social control. Mistress Generous’s empowerment is imagined in turn as sexual promiscuity:

\[ \text{Rob[en]} \quad I \text{ pray Mistresse ride me as you would be rid.} \\
\text{Mrs [Generous]} \quad \text{That’s at full speed,} \\
(\text{Heywood and Brome 1634, G3r}) \]

Mistress Generous implies that if she were in the position of the horse, sexually passive, she would enjoy it. Not only this, but if she were used as a horse for transport, she would go quickly and productively. Robin’s plight highlights the ideological distinction between riding and being ridden. He rides out on errands for Master Generous and readies the horses for his master’s business trips abroad. This is riding that is licit and acceptable within the symbolic order. When he is ridden, however, the world is turned on its head and witchcraft governs. Boundaries between human and animal disintegrate, and he becomes an unwilling enabler of feminine power: ‘I was rid thither, though I rid home againe as fast without switch or spur’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, L2v). The implications of equestrian imagery are mutated in the play; no longer signifying masculine authority, horses and riding come to signify supernatural travel and women usurping the power of the phallus. The
theme is also employed in Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s *The Roaring Girl* (1611) when Moll collapses a number of categories of feminine deviance and uses equestrian imagery to eroticize the inversions she practises: ‘doe you thinke I cannot ride a stone horse, unlesse one lead him bith snaffle’ (Middleton and Dekker 1611, D2v). Her boast that she can ride a stallion (stone meaning testicle, hence uncastrated) not only endows Moll with sexual authority, but belittles the men in the play who lack the stones to preserve the gender hierarchy. Moll’s phallic authority is offset by the emasculation of the men in the play, suggested by the name Laxton, which, as Sir Alexander’s pun in I.ii makes clear, implies inadequate genitals (Middleton and Dekker 1611, B3v).

Moll Spencer of *The Witches of Lancashire* embodies the type of bewitching witch mentioned by Whetstone in the opening scene. Her flirtatious behaviour and lusty appearance charms most of the men in the play; she is empowered by her sexuality and knowledge of witchcraft. An enticing and seductive woman, Moll poses an emasculating danger to the men who fall for her captivating wiles and sexual charms. The allure of such women lies with the invitation for the male to return to a time of dependence and wish fulfilment. Action and decision-making is taken away from the man who is invited by the woman to temporarily abandon responsibility and find pleasure. Such festive abandonment is, however, dangerous and unsustainable, and Moll is amongst those who are tried and taken away to likely execution. The danger
of such alluring women lay, in part, with the construction of the original
dependence on the mother as unacceptable by the Law of the Father and the
onset of castration anxiety.

The witches of Lancashire exert an influence which forces their victims to
abandon their will and identity. The witches are puppeteers who make people
act in strange and seemingly unaccountable ways. The witches’ omnipotence
is reflected in their position on the stage balcony, from where they can direct
action (Heywood and Brome 1634, E3v-E4r). Their influence extends to those
on the edges of the theatrical action. The stage hands act as spirits as they
clear away the supernatural feast (Heywood and Brome 1634, G2v). The
theatre’s musicians are also brought in on the chaos as they play at the
witches’ command and their music is warped by the witches’ spell: ‘What do’s
the Divell ride o’your Fiddlestones’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, F4r).
Following a suggestion from Doughty, the musicians unaccountably break
their instruments (Heywood and Brome 1634, F4v). In these instances, the
will of the individual is transferred onto the puppeteer witch-mother,
signifying her omnipotence. The ongoing influence of the mother’s sexuality
over masculine identity is played out in the scene in which Whetstone
supernaturally reveals to his bullies that they are bastards because their
mothers cuckolded their fathers. Humiliated, the men re-evaluate their
identity and self-worth; the sexuality of the mother continues to haunt
symbolic identity.
As we have seen, the empowerment of women is dependent on the disempowerment of men, and the realm of the mother provokes a reversion into a state of infantile dependency. When Mr Generous discovers that his wife is a witch, he responds with childlike wonder and bewilderment:

*Gen*[erous]* My blood is turn’d to Ice, and all my vitals
Have ceas’d their working! dull stupidity
Surpriseth me at once, and hath arrested
That vigorous agitation; Which till now
Exprest a life within me: I me thinks
Am a meere Marble statue, and no man;
Unweave my age O Time, to my first thread;
Let me loose fiftie years in ignorance spent:
That being made an infant once againe,
I may begin to know what? or where am I
To be thus lost in wonder.
(Heywood and Brome 1634, G4v)

As I argued in the Introduction, this speech merges themes of the uncanny, castration and illicit desire. The belief that Generous is ‘no man’ implies a reversal to infancy as well as a compromise of his masculine authority.

5.3.2 Supernatural Spectacle

The early remark concerning witchcraft from Bantham, ‘It seemes then your Mother was rather a yong wanton wench, than an old wither’d witch’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, B2v), provides a clue as to how the witches of Lancashire may have appeared. The play is concerned with the blinkering effect of stereotyping, and it presents a community whose preconceptions
mean that they are oblivious to the supernatural goings on that happen under
their noses. Far from the haggard beldams that the characters in the play and
the audience may have come to expect, these witches are at times bewitching
and alluring; they embody the temptation to return to the mother’s realm of
dissolved identity and authority. The omnipotence of the witches is played out
in the connection developed between the theatre and the supernatural. The
theatre provided an encompassing arena for an exploration of the supernatural.
Once they walk through the theatre doors, the audience accepts, for a short
time, the conventions of the theatre as offering a representation of the world
they live in. The principles that apply to everyday existence are temporarily
suspended, and ideology is provided with a new symbolic referent. *The
Witches of Lancashire* presents the supernatural as intrinsically connected to
the space and mechanisms of the theatre. This strategy would have
encompassed the audience in the supernatural realm and was perhaps
deliberately designed to antagonize those that believed that the theatre
represented the Devil’s house, which sat in ideological opposition to God’s
house, the church. For Heywood, such criticisms were personal. John Greene
wrote a tract specifically as an attack against Heywood concerning a Christian
woman who visited the theatre:

> She entered in well and sound, but she returned and came forth
> possessed of the Diuell. Wherevpon certaine Godly brethren demanded
> Sathan how he durst be so bould, as to enter into her a Christian.
> Whereto he answered, that hee found her in his owne house, and
> therefore took possession of her as his own. (Greene 1615, 44)
The theatre was specifically located by its opponents as the devil’s house, and Heywood, with Brome, elaborated this association in *The Witches of Lancashire*.

An emphasis on meeting in *The Witches of Lancashire* grounds the sense of supernatural within the space of the theatre. A coven is theatrically developed as the witches enter separately to one location from where they plan their activities and celebrate their achievements. This location is a place of magic and feminine power. Once Robin breaches its boundaries, he is charmed to remain within its limits: ‘theres no running away, for I neither know how nor whether, besides to my thinking theres a deepe ditch, & a hye quick-set about mee’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, G1v). This magical space is reminiscent of the magic circles found in the early witch plays explored in Chapter Two. The emphasis on meeting not only constructs the theatrical space as a site of supernatural activity but also implies that the witches have full access to the theatre. They practise their witchery from all possible corners of the playing space: the balcony, musicians’ gallery descent machine, trapdoor, tiring house and the offstage spaces beyond each of the stage doors. Their full employment of the theatrical space placed them in a position of power over not only the characters on stage but also the audience, who laughed at the misfortunes of these characters.
In V.ii a soldier sleeps in a mill in order to protect it from the persistent threat of witchcraft. As the soldier sleeps, witches enter from all sides, surround him and terrorize him. The sense of encirclement is repeated throughout the play as witches enter from multiple locations, and perhaps this contributed to a sense of foreboding for the audience. Mawd announces at one point that ‘O’th’Steeple-top; Ile sit & see you play’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, D1r). She implies that she will watch the mischief from somewhere beyond the boundaries of the physical theatrical space. The multivalent word ‘play’ places Mawd as a spectator along with the audience and positions her outside the boundaries of the fiction as well. This condition inverted the power usually attributed to the spectator. They no longer would have inhabited the privileged position of viewer but become that which is viewed. The fluidity of the theatrical boundaries metatheatrically placed the audience in danger of the witches’ influence, so that Doughty’s comment that ‘the house is full of witches’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, E4v) includes the theatre audience in the panic. In addition to the physical space, the theatre’s mechanisms were also constructed as a site of supernatural influence and feminine power. The theatre’s winches and pullies enabled conjuring tricks for the amazement of characters on stage and the audience. Such tricks included the inexplicable movement of Moll’s milk pail and the seemingly magical disappearance and reappearance of the feast. Magic is explicitly linked to the processes of the theatre, and this connection is acknowledged as the theatrical form is employed to convey the witches’ intent: ‘Now spirits fly
about the taske / That we projected in our Maske’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, C4r).

_The Witches of Lancashire_ encourages a focus on the body, and its power inversions are played out in the physical representations of the characters. Gillian is presented in the text as an old woman and would most likely have been performed by a senior boy or adult man in order to embody the difference between the old witch and the boy she plays against. After chasing the boy who later comes to accuse her and the other witches, Gillian catches him and drags him to the coven with her. She admits that she is old, but her actions defy expectations of an aged body: ‘Nay, sirra, though you be yong, and I old, you are not so nimble, nor I so lame, but I can overtake you’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, E1v). Helen Ostovich deals with the problem by inventing the stage direction ‘she reels him in on an invisible line’ (Brome 2010). Here magic is used to fill the gap of theatrical expectation: an old woman could have out-maneuved a young boy only with the use of magic. A different interpretation would have required an unexpected burst of agility from the actor, briefly stepping out of the role of an old woman and engaging the physical capabilities of the actor. This interpretation would encourage a focus on the theatrical representation of the body and the illusion of theatre. This illusion is connected throughout the play to the supernatural. As the inexplicable movement of Moll’s milk pail connects magic to the mechanisms of the theatre, so the unexpected nimbleness of Gillian is connected to the
conventions of theatrical representation: an old woman could not move as quickly as the relatively young actor that played her.

The supernatural relationship between the witches and their familiars is developed through maternal imagery. The spirits are described as playing pranks and suckling on dummies, perhaps to indicate that the spirits were performed by particularly young boys. Certainly, the androgynous body of a child actor would represent the fluid and category-defying spirits. As discussed in section 5.1.1, the youthful body was connected to instability and the fluid boundaries of youth/age and male/female and would ideally embody the magical boundaries of natural/supernatural and animal/human. The spirits in *The Witches of Lancashire* flow easily from human to animal form, perhaps indicating that the flexibility and nimbleness of a young actor would have been exploited to the full. One boy describes the appearance of the devil as a warped mirror of himself: about his own age and stature, the spirit uncannily resembled him but for his cloven feet (Heywood and Brome 1634, 14v). However, one piece of evidence complicates this picture. The stage direction, ‘enter an invisible spirit. J. Adson’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, D4r), has been taken to mean that the spirit who accompanies Gillian was performed by John Adson, known to be one of the company’s musicians of that name (Heywood and Brome 2002, 135). This provides the only extratextual evidence as to the age of the actors performing these supernatural characters; John Adson would have been 46 or 47 in 1634 (Gurr 2004b, 217). If Adson at this age played a
spirit, we must consider the possibility that they were not all small and childlike. The personification of the supernatural may be contained in the uncanny mirror through which the boy perceives the devil as a warped reflection of himself. Perhaps Gillian, one of the old witches of the coven, has an old familiar.

This embodied relationship may reflect the fluid boundaries of identity contained within the witch/familiar relationship. An interesting point of interpretation lies with the scene in which the soldier wounds Mistress Generous. The witches send their familiars to terrorize the soldier in the enchanted mill:

*Mrs [Generous]* Then to work, to work, my pretty Laplands: Pinch, here, scratch, Doe that within, without we’ll keep the watch. (Heywood and Brome 1634, K1r)

Tormented by what he assumes are hell-cats, the soldier is able to cut off ‘a foot or ear’ when he follows the spirits offstage. On further investigation, the soldier, Master Generous and Arthur find a hand dismembered by the soldier’s sword: ‘What’s here? is’t possible Cats should have hands And rings upon their fingers’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, K3r). The hand they find is Mistress Generous’s, and it leads to her prosecution. One could argue that the soldier wounds Mistress Generous in the offstage melee. Ostovich extends the stage direction, ‘Beates them off, followes them in, and Enters againe’
(Heywood and Brome 1634, K1r), by adding ‘carrying something furry’ (Brome 2010). This interpretation relies upon fluid boundaries between the bodies of the witches and their familiars; the soldier wounds Mistress Generous’s familiar, and the mistress suffers the same wound. Alternatively, the soldier wounded Mistress Generous herself, who has taken the shape of a cat.

Fluidity characteristic of the witch/familiar relationship is contained in the suckling image as the witches share their blood with their familiars. In earlier witch plays, the witches’ victims or clients experience a threat to autonomy when decision-making is taken away from them. In The Witches of Lancashire, the witches lack autonomy as they share body parts and blood in a perverse distortion of the mother/child relationship: ‘As tender as Nurse over Boy / Then suck our blouds freely’ (Heywood and Brome 1634, L4r). There exists a fluid bodily relationship between the witch and her familiar. This relationship perhaps also embodies an anxiety relating to maternal power and recalls a time before an existence of corporeal selfhood. This fluidity was apparent in the staged reading of the play recorded for the Brome Online project. During the dance in IV.v, the witches and their familiars converged and their bodies remained constantly entwined. In a series of strange and fluid movements, the bodies of the witches and their familiars became indistinguishable in a representation of the uncanny link the witches share with their spirits.
The Witches of Lancashire presents witchcraft through metaphors of inversion, where the hierarchy of power relating to class, gender and animals is overturned. However, there is no rigidity to the structure within which categories are inverted. Rather, difference is expressed in terms of a continuum in which categories flow into one another and merge. This model is spectacularly presented in the transformation of humans into animals and animals into humans. Evident in some writing in the period was the belief that the relationship between humans and animals was a continuum and that men could descend into bestial behaviours and women could reproduce with animals (Bach 2003). Because the early-modern body was a fluid and malleable entity, the possibility of human to animal metamorphosis was considered a real one. Erica Fudge argues that Robert Burton’s The Anatomy of Melancholy (1621) draws attention to the difference between humans and animals:

An animal follows its passions (it has no choice as it has no reason) whereas a human can deliberate and decide whether to act or resist acting. Yet this process of deliberation is not as straightforward as Burton and Wright would seem to suggest. There was always a possibility that the passions could overwhelm reason; that, like an animal, a human can merely follow his or her desires. (Fudge 2003, 41)

The witches of early-modern theatre appeal to the passions and disorderly fluids of the body, which, as we have seen, often override reason and will. In John Lyly’s Mother Bombie (1591), Dromio and Halfpenny fear that Bombie
will turn them into apes through the power of her look (Lyly 1594, E4r). Anxiety relating to the instability of the corporeal continuum is expressed through metaphors of witchcraft and would have been particularly disconcerting for an early-modern audience if such power of metamorphoses was transmitted through the power of the gaze. The metamorphoses of humans into animals in *The Witches of Lancashire* represents more than supernatural spectacle. It references, and so elaborates upon, anxieties regarding the instability of the body.

### 5.4 Coda

This chapter shows that the uncanny was not exclusively concerned with horror. The plays of this chapter, which are concerned with frivolity and merriment, enlist the uncanny by manipulating the power structure associated with sexual relations. Although the witches of these plays are comedic, they evoke, and thereby reveal, a communal anxiety relating to maternal power, the emasculation of men and lack of autonomy. These plays reveal that the boundaries that construct categories are unstable and so dilute the anxiety-taming property of polarization. By drawing on theatre-historical knowledge, this chapter illustrates how early-modern theatres provided an arena for mobile subjectivities. The theatrical environment elaborated upon the subversion of the witch produced by the text. By examining the power associated with the
gaze at work in these plays, this chapter suggests that theatrical witches spoke to the repressed desires and anxieties of the community.
Conclusion

This thesis has considered in detail nine witch plays from 1604 to 1635, performed at venues as varied as The Cockpit, The Globe and The University of Oxford by at least five different playing companies. Across this range of authors, players, venues and audiences, we have discovered a number of common factors, including the depiction of the witch through imagery associated with the mother, the association of the witch with liminality and the presentation of physical, social and theatrical boundaries as fluid and malleable. By comparing these plays with those featuring a female witch before the accession of James I, we have discovered the emergence of an early supernatural horror genre.

The Fluidity of the Theatre

Witchcraft as a topic for drama particularly celebrated the fluidity of the theatrical form. As we have seen, female witches were a popular character type on the stage, and theatrical techniques and apparatus were employed with ingenuity to produce the magic of witchcraft in the theatre. In the 1580s and 1590s, rituals and theatrical ceremonies characterized the presentation of witches. Conjuring was presented according to theatrical convention and was dependent on candles, books and other props. In the early years of the seventeenth century, theatricality was employed to scare. Effects simulating
thunder and lightning using fireworks supported the presentation of witches as powerful beings and perhaps heightened the emotional response of the audience to what was presented on stage. At times the omnipotence of witchcraft was extended to the theatrical backstage workers. Calib’s opening words in John Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), ‘HA, lowder a little; so, that burst was well’ (Kirke 1638, B1r), seems addressed to the stage hands. The presentation of witchcraft and magic pushed theatrical apparatus to produce the most spectacular of effects (Wright 1927; Butterworth 2005), including Hecate’s ascent in Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) and the adapted, post-1616, production of William Shakespeare and Thomas Middleton’s *Macbeth* (1616), and the witch’s magical serpent in Robert Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612). In Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), the stage hands act as spirits when they clear away the supernatural feast, and the theatre’s musicians are brought in on the supernatural chaos when the witches distort their music.

Witchcraft was most explicitly presented in terms of theatre direction in Thomas Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604), and for Jean Howard, the power of the Wise Woman lies with theatricality itself (Howard 1994, 84). Early-modern theatrical production was a collaborative project between the author and the actors (Orgel 2002, 1-6), and in *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* this process is dramatized with the Wise Woman overseeing the project, directing her actors on how they should perform, where they should stand and what they should say.
Reginald Scot described the fluidity between witchcraft and spectacular theatricality. In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), he connected the theatricality of illusionists with the supernatural in the minds of those that persecuted witches:

What wondering and admiration was there at *Brandon* the Jugler, who painted on the wall the picture of a Dove, and seeing a Pigeon sitting on the top of a House, said to the King, Lo now your grace shall see what a Jugler can do, if he be his Crafts-master; and then pricked the picture with a Knife so hard and so often, and with so effectual words, as the Pigeon fell down from the top of the House stark dead ... when you are taught the feat or sleight (the Secrecy and Sorcery of the matter being bewraied, and discovered) you will think it a mockery, and simple illusion ... If this or the like feat should be done by an old Woman, every body would cry out for fire and faggot to burn the witch. (Scot 1665, Q3v)

Theatrical magic was socially sanctioned; male actors and theatrical systems provided a buffer for the dangers of magic. As Scot argued, the removal of this buffer would have led to persecution and punishment. However, the witchcraft of the theatre was dangerously unstable and theatrical boundaries were malleable. Sigmund Freud offers a distinction between the uncanny of real life and the uncanny of literature (Freud 1955b, 249), and the witches of the early-modern stage attest to the haziness of this distinction, for an early-modern audience would have included members who believed in the existence and power of witches. The uncanny produced by the literature through imagery of suffocating wombs and violated eyes would have encroached on the uncanny of real life when the theatrical symbol appeared to produce
genuine results, such as when an actual devil seemed to appear during a performance of Christopher Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* in Exeter (Chambers 1923, 424). Lyndal Roper argues that ‘Demonology from its inception was obsessed with the boundaries between illusion and reality; and the very same issues were raised by the spectacle of the theatre’ (Roper 2006, 132).

In many of the plays studied in this analysis, the threat of witchcraft lingered beyond the boundaries of the plot. Erictho of John Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605), the weird sisters of Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606), Hecate of Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) and Canidia and her associates in Thomas Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617) all escape punishment and other containment techniques of the dominant order, and a modern-day production of *The Witch of Edmonton* indicates how this condition may have been reflected in staging. A production in 2000 of *The Witch of Edmonton*, directed by Simon Cox, theatricalised the discomforting idea that supernatural characters could break out of the enclosure imposed by the play:

> Cuddy resolves to beat the Dog "beyond the bounds of Edmonton", and Cox illustrated this with a splendid coup de theatre: the Dog kicked open the fire exit and stepped out onto the courtyard outside the Playhouse. He had left the bounds, not only of Edmonton, but also of the theatre itself, and was now standing in our world – the den of iniquity that is London. (Nicol 2001, 11)

The whole theatrical space was employed in the staging of witchcraft. This condition both contributed to and violated the binary structure often associated
with witchcraft. Alexander Leggatt argues that ‘The popular imagination needed strong contrasts of good and evil, heroes and villains, angels and devils; the theatrical language embodied in the stage trap and the flying machinery fed that appetite’ (Leggatt 1992, 51). Although Leggatt usefully draws attention to the theatrical associations of the trap and the heavens, this vertical theatrical axis visually slashes any ideology constructed on the horizontal. Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605) illustrates the point. The play opens with the opposing factions in the wars of Carthage entering from opposite sides of the stage. The extensive use of the trap in the witchcraft scenes undermines any horizontal binaries, visually illustrating how the powers of witchcraft were unregulated by symbolic categories. Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), a play full of supernatural characters, particularly encompassed the whole theatrical space in the drama, including the tiring house, trap, flying machinery, discovery space and balcony. Such staging produced spectacle and at times reflected the perceived omnipotence of the witches. In Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), for example, the witches’ position on the balcony helps to present them as if puppeteers, controlling the actions and behaviours of other characters on stage. Although witchcraft often transgressed theatrical boundaries, elsewhere the apparent omnipotence of witches is curbed. Elizabeth Sawyer in Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) and the witches in Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634) are prosecuted. Calib in Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635) is taken down to hell. It is the
familiars of these witches who pose a threat to the world beyond the stage. Tom in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) leaves the stage to go to London where he will serve ‘greatness now, corrupted greatness’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, I1r), and Tarpax of *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), much like the fairies of Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595), appears and disappears from the stage to conduct his mischief around the globe.

**The Casting of Witches**

Female witches on the early-modern stage were characterized across a spectrum which subverted, distorted and elaborated upon gendered expectations. This range was reflected in the casting of witches and the associations the differently aged actors would bring to the part. If, as David Kathman argues, all female parts were taken by boy actors, we need to ask whether the witches of these plays were always considered to be women or whether witches could represent supernatural beings, not gendered according to the usual dichotomy but occupying a monstrous gender somewhere between categories of identification. The gender indeterminacy of witches provides a theatre-historical indeterminacy to solve: could witches, who defied usual categories of identification and challenged notions of subjectivity, have challenged normal theatrical conventions? As I argued in section 3, the term ‘witch’ could refer to a human or a supernatural being. In the early-modern period, supernatural beings were generally played by children.
The supernatural play-within-a-play in Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1597) particularly explores the association of youthful bodies and the supernatural. Here the children of Windsor are dressed as spirits to trick Falstaff:

[MISTRESS PAGE]

... my little sonne,
And three or foure more of their growth, wee’l dresse
Like Urchins, Ouphes, and Fairies, greene and white,
With rounds of waxen Tapers on their heads,
And rattles in their hands
(Shakespeare 1623, E4v)

In this play, the children offer a physical contrast with Falstaff, who unwittingly plays Herne the Hunter. Old, fat and bearded, Falstaff had previously been mistaken for a witch. *The Merry Wives of Windsor* depicts a supernatural play-within-a-play, giving us an insight into the theatrical embodiment of supernatural beings. Sprites, familiars and hobgoblins are childlike and mischievous in contrast to the old, grotesque Herne the Hunter. Here the supernatural children are said to be like ‘Jack-an-Apes’ (Shakespeare 1623, E4v), a term which referred to the mimicry of theatricality and the mischievousness of children (OED “jackanapes” *n. 2.c*), and a term which is used to express Chartley’s disdain for women in *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604).
According to theatrical convention, male youths were valid subjects for stimulating desire in men (Jardine 1996, 68). An adult actor may have possessed gendered signifiers which would, had they played a female character, have subverted the usual erotic relations in the theatre. The actual age of the actors is less important to this study than the question of whether the actors possessed, among other things, beards or deep voices. Had an adult actor performed the witch, the subversive characteristics of witches would have been reflected in casting. The adapted *Macbeth* (1616), which was probably significantly more comedic than the original, illustrates how the casting of adults in the parts of witches contributed to the carnivalesque. It is possible, therefore, that the carnivalesque witches found in Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616), Heywood’s *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604) and Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634) were performed by men or senior boys. By offsetting these characters against childlike familiars and sprites, the plays generate a focus on the body. This focus and the sprite-like names directed towards Second Luce in *The Wise Woman of Hoxton* (1604) position her as the Wise Woman’s familiar. The metatheatre characteristic of these carnivalesque plays also suggests that adult actors would have performed the parts of the witches because of the comments about witches and beards found throughout. As I argued in section 5.1.1, comedy allowed characters to step aside from their roles to comment on theatrical convention, and at these moments the text provides clues to the appearance of witches. One such moment is found in Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), in
which the witch’s son Suckabus plays the clown: ‘Pray father, pray the devill to blesse me, and make me a man like my mother’ (Kirke 1638, B3r).

Although some of the witches in *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634) may have been performed by men, others certainly were not. Moll Spencer and Mistress Generous do not subvert ‘normal’ erotic relations and would have been performed by boy actors. Joan la Pucelle in Shakespeare’s *1 Henry the Sixth* (1592) would also have been performed by an adolescent actor since she is a subject of desire and fascination. The witches of Robert Greene’s *Alphonsus of Aragon* (1587) and *Orlando Furioso* (1591) are not subjects of erotic desire in the play, but equally they do not subvert gender relations; they most likely would also have been played by youths. The plays in which we know children performed the parts of witches, and indeed all other parts too, John Lyly’s *Endymion* (1588) and *Mother Bombie* (1591) and Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605), rely on dialogue to produce age and horror. An adult actor could literalize an horrific appearance that otherwise had to be evoked verbally. When witches subverted erotic or gendered relationships, as in Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) and Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), it seems likely that this was reflected in the casting of adult actors in these parts.
Appetite and Identity

H. W. Herrington notes the frequency with which supernatural characters are depicted bringing on and clearing away banquets (Herrington 1919, 452). This illustrates the conventional blurring of theatrical boundaries with reference to the supernatural and highlights the appetite of the witches. In Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) and Heywood and Brome’s *The Witches of Lancashire* (1634), witches enjoy feasting. Such appetite for food and merrymaking is mirrored in a perverse and insatiable sexual appetite such as that of Marston’s Erictho or Kirke’s Calib. My analysis reveals how stage witches of the early-modern period were often connected to the appetite and the lower bodily parts: the stomach, genitals and womb.

The battle between reason and appetite was a central concern of Robert Burton’s *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), one of the most comprehensive studies on the connection between identity and the body in the period. Burton offered a lucid model of interaction between the body and mind; for Burton, the mind, imagination and reason should regulate the body’s production of passions. This process was complicated because the body’s production of humors, forever imbalanced and in conflict, was considered to be universal and inevitable. Witches of the early-modern stage appealed to the appetite, and they intersected with the non-supernatural characters of the plays when bodies were excessive or disorderly. Stuart Clark explains that ‘witchcraft is
also irrational, in the sense that it subverts reason’s governing influence over behaviour’ (Clark 1997, 11). Sebastian’s excessive sighs, Lady Macbeth’s displaced gall and Gloster’s heated blood draw these characters towards, and make them susceptible to, witchcraft thereby subverting the reason that should have prevented such behaviour. When we see characters discarding culture and turning their back on society, they also turn their backs on reason and succumb to appetite and passions. As we have seen, the abandonment of culture enabled a return of the repressed.

Removed from the constraints of real life, the theatre presented a sub-culture in which anarchic and repressed affect could be explored and expressed. The collective nature of this process heightened the subversive potential of the theatre, and much anti-theatrical discourse was concerned with the threat the theatre posed to stable identity. Howard explains that

From Northbrook on, antitheatrical tracts connect the theatre with social subjects who by being out of their appropriate places of work and worship have lost their proper social identity and become dung (inhuman) or counterfeits (mannekins falsely occupying another’s proper place). (Howard 1994, 27)

Heywood engaged in the anti-theatrical debate and defended the theatre on the very grounds that Northbrook and others wrote against it:

A description is only a shadow, received by the eare, but not perceived by the eye … but to see a soouldier, act like a soouldier … so bewitching a thing is lively and well-spirited action, that it hath power to new-mould the harts of spectators. (Heywood 1612, C4r)
Witches in the theatre particularly elaborated upon this uncanny loss of identity, particularly with reference to gender and the body. Humoral drives were presented as producing behaviours which overrode symbolic identity. The affinity often developed between the female spectator and the witch disrupted the social construction of femininity. This disruption removed the linchpin that secured symbolic categories. Symbolic manliness depended on female lack, and the construction of witches as phallically powerful and harboring the power to emasculate disrupted the symbolic system through which manliness was defined.

**The Fall of the Penis**

Witchcraft plays constructed the witch as other to symbolic identity. An exploration of the space from where witches performed their magic, particularly in Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617) and Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), reveals that witchcraft was constructed in antithesis to the dominant order. This other was endowed with horror. The cave was often constructed as womb-like, and a movement to the cave encapsulated the lure and horror of the maternal body. The emphasis on the difficult journey required in visiting the witch and the necessity for disguise indicates the difficulty with which the symbolic order is
abandoned. The witch’s space was endowed with horror. The caves in which the witches live were dry and cold, a spatial reflection of the witch’s womb:

The most common nightmare vision of the witch became that of a ‘dry’, cold, sterile woman without any fat on her body. She was perfidious … and so obsessed with her own deficiencies and disappointments that only bitterness remained. Her breasts were slack. … Witches were old and no longer menstruated. The blood in their bodies was not fresh and red, but black and putrid. (Rublank 2002, 6)

Staging techniques required that spectators imagined the cave of the witch. In these plays, the cave mouth was theatricalised, leaving the interior of the cave to fantasy. The fantasy of the cave was led by the text which lingered, often, on feminine reproduction: ‘within rests barren darknesse; fruitlesse drough’ (Marston 1606, F1r). Sex for these barren women belonged to a realm of pleasure and appetite, what Gary Taylor calls ‘the rise of the penis’ (Taylor 2000, 105). Taylor argues that castration challenged the binary categories of human thought. Although resistant to some psychoanalytical approaches in his survey of the historical meanings of castration, he identified a rise of a philosophy concerned with sex for pleasure around the early-modern period and illuminated much of the misogyny and anxiety we see in witchcraft drama. Taylor’s pun on tumescence places the realm of pleasure in the hands (or codpiece) of the man; he identified a cultural shift in the early-modern period regarding attitudes that enabled men to enjoy sex for pleasure’s sake rather than for reproduction. The witches of the early-modern stage exploited this rise in the pleasure regime and did so in a way that exhibited the
dangers to masculinity posed by feminine sexuality. Hecate of Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616) takes her pick of men to pleasure her as a succubus (Middleton 2007, 1.2.27). Her sexual partners are victims, and they are rendered powerless in the sexual arena by her appetite. In Armin’s *The Valiant Welshman* (1612), Gloster’s—presumably sexual—encounter with the witch renders him ‘frantike with the horrid sight’ (Armin 1615, G1r). Perhaps an audience would have been reminded of the horrific eye gouging of Gloucester in Shakespeare’s *King Lear* (1605), especially as this play seems to have been revived (with revisions) for fresh performances around 1610-1611.

The image of failing or violated eyes was taken up again and again in the witchcraft plays. Erictho buries ‘hir leane knuckles’ (Marston 1606, E4r) in her victim’s eyes, and the image of Macbeth’s bloody hands ‘pluck[s] out’ his eyes (Shakespeare 1623, mm1r). The repeated images of violated eyes and the fallibility of the penis lends support to Freud’s assertion that fear of losing one’s eyes is analogous to the fear of castration (Freud 1955b), and the construction of witches as phallic oscillated with the construction of witches as castrating.

The witches’ ability to cause impotence in their victims was a thinly veiled manifestation of phallic anxiety. It also, ironically, referred to anxieties regarding the contagious nature of female sexuality. According to Scot, witches could cause impotence in two ways:
the virtue of Generation is impeached by Witches, both inwardly, and
outwardly: for, intrinsically they repress the courage, and they stop the
passage of the man's seed, so as it may not descend to the vessels of
generation: also they hurt extrinsically, with images, herbs, &c. (Scot
1665, E4r)

By preventing the release of semen, witches contributed to Taylor’s ‘fall of the
scrotum’, that is sex for reproduction, and contributed thus to the

By preventing the release of semen, witches contributed to Taylor’s ‘fall of the
corresponding ‘rise of the penis’, or sex for pleasure. By championing sex for
women’s pleasure, the fantasy of witchcraft contributed to cuckoldry anxiety.

The discussion of the countrymen in Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s The Witch of
Edmonton (1621), quoted in section 4.1.2, illustrates how the empowerment of
feminine sexuality leads to the disempowerment of its male counterpart. The
fear of being cuckolded and the fear of impotence are interchangeable in this
story and indicate a cultural anxiety relating to male sexual and social potency.

Erictho in Marston’s Sophonisba (1605) complicates the model of sex for
pleasure emanating from witchcraft. Her lust for Syphax is expressed in

Erictho in Marston’s Sophonisba (1605) complicates the model of sex for

Erictho takes pleasure in the potential pregnancy and the

obtaining of genetically desirable seed:

[ERICTHO]
Know we, Erictho, with a thirsty womb
Have courted full threescore Suns for bloud of kings,
... We in the pride and haight of couetous lust
Haue wisht with womans gredines to fill
Our longing armes with Syphax well strong lims:
(Marston 1606, F2r)
The image of the thirsty womb reflects a passage in *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), which paraphrased Proverbs 30 and asserted that ‘There are three things that are never satisfied, yeah, a fourth thing which says not, It is enough; that is, the mouth of the womb’ (Sprenger and Kramer 1928). If the ‘mouth of the womb’ referred to the vagina, the passage revealed anxiety relating to women’s appetite for sex for pleasure’s sake. The term ‘mouth’ endowed the vagina with the dangers of teeth and constructed the vagina as horrific and castrating, revealing how female lust was imagined as disempowering for men. The ‘mouth of the womb’ may, however, have referred to the cervix and relate to the type of thirst displayed by Erictho, who expresses woman’s drive to obtain the best genes, or as the period would have it, ‘blood’, for her offspring, regardless of the desires of the father. Although Erictho’s sexual desire is legitimized in biological terms, this does little to subdue the horror. Erictho, like her cave, is old and barren, and her desire for pregnancy is dangerous because it is deluded. Like Hecate of Middleton’s *The Witch* (1616), with her insatiable sexual appetite, Erictho will never gain satisfaction and will continue to sexually abuse men because her desires are biologically unachievable.

**The Failure of the Antithesis Model**

The model of antithesis offered in critical responses to stage witchcraft highlights how witches were constructed as a warped mirror of the ‘good’
woman as set out in patriarchal discourse. Louise Jackson argues that the activities associated with witchcraft constructed the witch as the antithesis of the good mother. Witches, according to Jackson, were found killing babies instead of protecting them and harming rather than healing (Jackson 2008). This model is too simplistic. In Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1635), Calib’s maternal instinct and her protective love for George produce the most explicit horror. Rather than being the antithesis of the good mother, Calib is a grossly exaggerated model of maternity. In Goffe’s *Orestes* (1617), maternal imagery breaks down any binary relationships within the play. Imagery that constructs the maternal as horrific disrupts binaries of good and evil and symbolic and real. The interchangeability of Clytemnestra and Canidia draws attention to the hypocrisy, deceit and artificiality of the dominant order. In this play, as in Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), the real villain is located within the dominant order. The antithetical structure that constructs the witch as other fails.

Stuart Clark argues that the language of binaries was paramount in constructing witchcraft beliefs and imagery. Drawing on Saussurian philosophies of language as a self-referential signifying system, Clark argues that binary thinking constructed witchcraft activities as truths that had no reference outside the system he describes. Clark acknowledges that ‘these patterns of meaning were also subject to internal instability and artificiality’ (Clark 1997, 10), but nevertheless, he insists that ‘demonism became so
dependent on particular linguistic strategies – particularly, binary oppositions – that it came to be seen as a product, rather than the subject-matter, of its own language’ (Clark 1997, 10). The theatre was the place where this ‘internal instability and artificiality’ could be exploited and explored. Marston’s *Sophonisba* (1605) breaks down a structure of binary antithesis by drawing out the similarities between Sophonisba and the witch Erictho. Both ‘the wonder of women’ (Marston 1606, A1r), Sophonisba and Erictho represent the category against which symbolic manliness is defined in the play. In a subversive way, the failure of binary categories is presented in the play as dependent on biology. Sophonisba dies a virgin:

[SOPHONISBA]
I blesse your goodnes, that with breast vnstaind,
Faith pure: a Virgin wife, try’d to my glory,
I die
(Marston 1606, G2v)

Her body to the end is unpenetrated so that she dies enclosed and immaculate. Her death, however, is tragic, not triumphant. It is Erictho who, having gained the seed she desired, leaves the play triumphant.

**Fantasy, Fetish and the Feminine Gaze**

An almost constant characterization of witches in this thesis is that they enter the play through a smokescreen of fantasy. Kirke’s *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (1636) and Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* (1606) are the only
exceptions; in these plays witches enter on their own terms. More frequently, a character from the dominant order of the play provides a lengthy description of the appearance and activities of the witch before she enters. Although in Dekker, Ford and Rowley’s *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) Sawyer offers a description of herself, it is clear and tragic that this description is constructed through the mouths and actions of other villagers. The beatings from Old Banks contribute to her ‘buckl’d and bent’ appearance (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, C3r), and her perception of herself as ugly and deformed is produced through the insults of others. This play particularly illustrates the destructive nature of fantasy. In other witchcraft plays, the audience are encouraged to fantasize.

The introduction of the witch through the words of another would have fired the imagination of the audience. Such dialogue was particularly important in *Sophonisba* (1605) because a young boy would have played Erictho. Syphax’s words, ‘A loathsome yellowe leannesse spreades hir face, / A heauy hell-like palenes loades hir cheekes’ (Marston 1606, E4r), prepare the audience to see age and horror in the body of the boy actor. The audience encounters the witch through the stereotyping process and through preconceptions fed to them by a character from the dominant order. Syphax of *Sophonisba* (1605), Gloster of *The Valiant Welshman* (1612) and Pylades of *Orestes* (1617) offer a version of witchcraft constructed by social perceptions. In *Orestes*, the witch breaks down these preconceptions and points to horror
within the dominant order. In Sophonisba and The Valiant Welshman, the lengthy descriptions by largely unsympathetic characters reveal more about their own perversities than those of the witch.

The entrance of the witch represented a fetishization of femininity. The witch invited the projection of anxieties regarding feminine sexuality, the feminine body, the horror of difference and the perversion of ‘normal’ sexual relations. The feminine spectator may have been empowered by the recognition of the threat femininity posed to the dominant order: the power in difference. Howard identifies an anxiety for and more importantly of the early-modern female spectator (Howard 1991); perhaps this anxiety was connected to the potential for feminine empowerment through spectatorship. These witches frequently hold a metaphorical mirror up to the character that visits them or to the community that they live on the fringes of. This mirror is often constructed by the lengthy description of the visiting character. Syphax’s description of Erictho encapsulates his own perversions. The Wise Woman provides practical solutions for the problems arising from the illicit activities of the community. Elizabeth Sawyer, as she acknowledges, is the ‘sink, For all the filth and rubbish of Men’s tongues To fall and run into’ (Dekker, Rowley et al. 1658, C3r). This tendency to reflect a distorted image of the dominant order may have produced different responses in the audience according to gender division. Female audience members may have recognized the power enabled by the metaphorical mirror, for women, in psychoanalytical
theory, occupy a position of lack and alienation. This negative position is warped into an empowering one in these plays, as, with the power of liminality, female witches can critique and alter the happenings of the dominant, patriarchal world.


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