

The Lancashire Witch Trials, 1612: Gender and Representation in Historical Record and Historical Fiction

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Abstract

At Lancaster Castle, in 1612, twenty-one individuals were imprisoned and tried for witchcraft, eleven died, one in prison at Lancaster Gaol, and the other ten sentenced by the Assizes Judge overseeing their trials. Nine women and two men died as witches. Everything that we know about these trials comes from the work of court clerk Thomas Potts, who wrote and published the only surviving record of these trials, the 1613 pamphlet *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*. The first argument to be presented within this thesis is that this text was written by Potts with a clear and ambitious purpose. He constructed the victims of these trials as hyperbolic characters, and the women were treated much worse than the men. The pamphlet was designed to be consumed, by both the public and the King, as a sensational tale of evil witches and intrigue, and because of this, the victims of the Lancashire witch trials were carefully constructed as frightening and villainous, and this is how history remembers them. Over the next four hundred years, the accused witches of 1612 became the subjects of several fictional retellings of the Lancashire witch trials, sometimes as villains, other times as protagonists. The second argument within this thesis is that the accused witch-figure became a vessel for a variety of authors to insert their own views and goals into when writing their historical fictions about the 1612 trials. Through a combination of historical record and historical fiction, and with notions of gender and identity in mind, this thesis aims to trace the witch-figure of Lancashire through four centuries, and assess how they have been created, remembered, and represented by their original author, Thomas Potts, and in the fiction written about them between 1612 and 2012.

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Introduction

The Wonderfull Discoverie: Context, Construction, and Close-Reading

In 1613, under the instruction of Assizes Court, court clerk Thomas Potts published the lengthy pamphlet *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, a self-proclaimed *viva voce* reportage of the Lancashire witch trials in 1612.¹ This was one of the largest witch-trials in English history, in which eleven individuals were executed, with another dying in prison before their trial. Prior to their trial, all individuals were examined by their local Justice of the Peace, or JP, arrested, and brought to Lancaster Castle to await trial in the gaol there. Everything we know about these trials comes from the pamphlet produced by Thomas Potts, who provided a carefully constructed account of evidence and events for the public, as a means of justifying what occurred, educating the wider populace about witchcraft and the legal rooting out of such, and to gain the attention and favour of the crown.

This pamphlet has been published, reprinted, edited, and analysed for centuries, with recent scholarship still providing new insights into the 1612 trials and the text that lays them out so dramatically. Almost two centuries after its 1613 publication the Lancashire tale was recreated in a new form, the historical fiction novel. Between 1612 and 2012 authors of historical fiction have been inspired by Thomas Potts' pamphlet and have rewritten this story in new ways. It is here that this thesis places its focus, in the original telling and subsequent retellings of the Lancashire, or Pendle, witch story. Historiography has a lot to say regarding Thomas Potts' pamphlet, and the ground-breaking work that has been completed on the treatise has shaped the way we understand the 1612 trials and the history of witchcraft in general. Whilst a great deal has been said on the evidence presented within the pamphlet, the motivations for its publication, and the events which occurred before and during these trials,

¹ Thomas Potts, *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London: W. Stansby, 1613)

there is another aspect of this text which has not been fully analysed before, and that is the frequent hyperbolic interjections by the author which are dotted throughout the pamphlet. In these interjections, Thomas Potts spends time introducing and describing the key figures featured in the events and evidences to follow. The male figures of authority are overtly positive in Potts' depictions, becoming the heroes of his dramatic story, whilst the accused witches are evil and monstrous, the tale's villains. This is done through a vivid and literary construction of the actors in this historical moment, most especially the accused witches, thus hyperbolising and characterising the Lancashire witch-figure so as to strengthen the intent and motivation behind this pamphlet. I argue that the witch-figure within this pamphlet, then, equates to an ideal vessel for metaphor, and this early modern pamphleteer stuffs this created villain with all of the dramatic biases that he wishes to show his early modern readership how fearsome these Pendle witches are, and how lucky the public is that the legal system is so adept at destroying them.

It is the notion of the constructed, female witch-figure which will drive all of the analyses in this study, for it is she who has been, since 1612, adapted and rewritten in Pendle-inspired historical fiction. The second part of this thesis aims to take the close-reading and analysis of Thomas Potts' constructed witch-figure, and examine how the authors of historical fiction novels have been inspired by Potts' characters in their novelistic retellings of the 1612 trials. The Pendle witch-figure, we will see, begins as a monstrous villain, and is developed over the next four centuries until she is rewritten, indeed reclaimed, as a proto-feminist icon. These new representations, of course, would not have been possible without Potts' initial portrayals of the witch-figure within *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*, and so it is to this pamphlet which we must first turn our gaze.

The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster

There are five editions of Thomas Potts' *The Wonderful Discoverie* which have been examined throughout this work. The first being the original 1613 pamphlet, the key text under analysis, and the work which has been quoted throughout this thesis, unless otherwise specified in order to highlight a key point within these later editions of the pamphlet.

The second copy of Potts' pamphlet to be addressed is an edition published by James Crossley for The Chetham Society in the nineteenth-century, which featured a lengthy introduction, followed by Potts' pamphlet complete with Crossley's observations and historical findings in the form of editor's notes.² This edition is important when considering how Potts' pamphlet was remembered and adapted in the nineteenth-century by author (and close-friend of Crossley's) William Harrison Ainsworth, and will be explored alongside Ainsworth's historical fiction in Chapter 4.

In 1929, a new edition of *The Wonderful Discoverie* was published by G. B. Harrison, an early modern scholar who focused primarily on the life and work of Shakespeare.³ Harrison's edition is a lot less detailed than Crossley's a century prior, with a much briefer introduction and no editor's notes.⁴ Whilst it does not necessarily add to the wider historiography of the Lancashire witch trials, Harrison's introduction does provide some interesting insights into contemporary theories surrounding early modern witchcraft, and has been discussed as a potential influence for Robert Neill's 1951 fictional retelling of the trials in Chapter 5.

² Crossley's edition of Potts' pamphlet in 1845, according to Gibson, 'contains most of the historical discoveries to be made about the case.' - Thomas Potts, *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, ed. by James Crossley (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1845); Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 175

³ See, for example, G. B. Harrison, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Journals, 1591-1610. Volume I: An Elizabethan Journal* (Oxford: Routledge, 1928); G. B. Harrison, *England in Shakespeare's Day* (Oxford: Routledge, 1928); G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare at Work: 1592-1603* (Oxford: Routledge, 1933); G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare's Tragedies* (London: Routledge, 1951)

⁴ G. B. Harrison, Ed., *The Trial of the Lancashire Witches, 1612* (London: Peter Davies, 1929)

The next two editions of Potts' pamphlet, by Marion Gibson and Robert Poole, were published in 2000 and 2011 respectively. Gibson provided a copy of the pamphlet in *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*, with new and useful insights into the structuring and validity of the pamphlet as a source, pointing out inconsistencies in the evidence presented.⁵ Robert Poole republished Potts' pamphlet in modernised language, which had not yet been done, with an extensive introduction, breaking down the pamphlet into manageable sections and attempting to provide a more complete timeline of events to aid in understanding the 1612 event.⁶ Both Gibson and Poole's analyses within these editions have been examined in this introduction, and their arguments have been referred to, when relevant, in the thesis to follow.⁷

'As we read the Potts pamphlet, there are times when we can be overwhelmed by a sense that the accused are caught in someone else's story.'⁸

This thesis aims to approach the construction and remembrance of the key figures within the Lancashire witch trials through three lenses, or by utilising three categories of analyses. The first is through the study of the context surrounding these trials. It is important that, when analysing any of the key texts under examination in this thesis, that we first show an awareness of the socio-political background against which these trials are set, and attempt to gain insight into the key figures and themes which are important to an in-depth reading of this early modern pamphlet. Chapters 1 and 2 of this study will examine the historical context of

⁵ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*)

⁶ Thomas Potts, *The Wonderful Discovery of Witches in the County of Lancaster, Thomas Potts's original account Modernised & introduced*, ed. Robert Poole (Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2011)

⁷ To differentiate between these texts within all future references, they will be footnoted as 'Potts (year of publication), page number'. All quotations taken from the pamphlet itself will be from Potts' original account, and so, unless referring to the whole text, any future references will likely read as "'Editor's name" in Potts (year of publication), page number'.

⁸ Diane Purkiss, 'Charming Witches: The "old religion" and the Pendle trial', *Preternature*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Special Issue: Capturing Witches (2014), 13-31, p. 14

the 1612 Lancashire witch trials more fully, but before this, we must first examine what has already been said of this thesis' key text, the origin story which inspired all of the others, Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie*.

Much of the historiography around the Lancashire witch trials has attempted to unpack what actually happened in the trials, and why these events resulted in the publication of *The Wonderfull Discoverie* in 1613.⁹ James Sharpe has argued that nothing very new actually occurred within the 1612 Lancashire trials, rather, what was novel about these trials was Potts' 'lengthy and apparently officially requested account'.¹⁰ This assertion does not consider some of the more unique aspects of the evidence presented within the trials, for most other treatments of these trials agree that there are several stories and demonological beliefs present here that had not been witnessed before 1612 in English witch trials. Moreover, the Samlesbury witchcraft accusations - featured in the middle of this pamphlet - were allegedly fabricated by Catholic priest-in-hiding, which certainly sets these trials apart from other English cases. Notions of the first recorded English witches' sabbat, treasonous plots, accounts of cannibalism and blood drinking, and anti-Catholic propaganda, all of which have long fascinated researchers of the Lancaster trials, contradict Sharpe's statement. Gibson, for example, likened these anomalies more to Catholic and continental demonologies, calling them 'untypical' and 'unusually florid for an English witchcraft trial.'¹¹ However, it cannot be denied that the *most* remarkable aspect of these trials is the pamphlet which documents them.

Indeed, the more unique evidentiary support within these trials all go to strengthen the pamphlet as a propagandistic text. Recent scholarship around the 1612 Lancashire trials

⁹ Robert Poole and Philip C. Almond have both attempted to reconstruct events through a breaking down of the pamphlet into more manageable sections, in order to further our understanding of the 1612 trials. Poole also published a modernised version of the pamphlet too, to aid in this endeavour. – Poole in Potts, (2011); Philip C. Almond, *The Lancashire Witches: A Chronicle of Sorcery and Death on Pendle Hill* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2012)

¹⁰ James Sharpe, 'Introduction: the Lancashire witches in historical context', in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. by Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 3

¹¹ Marion Gibson, *Rediscovering Renaissance Witchcraft: Witches in Early Modernity and Modernity* (Oxon: Routledge, 2018), p. 15

agrees that there were two main motivations behind the publication of *The Wonderful Discoverie*.¹² The first was to justify their results. Prior to the Lancaster Assize, the Northern circuit was at York and had tried and executed Jennet Preston for witchcraft, utilising much of the same evidence as in the Lancashire trials, and the verdict resulted in public unrest. This, Gibson writes, indicated ‘conflict over witchcraft and its fair trial, and perhaps over the system of criminal justice itself.’¹³ The second motivation behind this publication was to attract favour and patronage, especially of the royal variety.¹⁴ This is all the more apparent when we consider that this pamphlet was requested and sanctioned by the assize judges. As Crossley wrote, ‘[we] have no other report of any witch trial which has an equal stamp of authenticity’.¹⁵ The structuring of the pamphlet seems to echo legal proceedings as a means of emphasising this.¹⁶ For example, on Potts’ presenting a ‘Gaol Calendar’ (a list of those in gaol awaiting trial), Gibson states that ‘[he] apparently intends to represent for us visually the orderliness and official rectitude which he perceived in the conduct of the trial.’¹⁷ These records are incomplete. This ‘gaol calendar’ would have only been a fraction of the real list presented to the judges prior to trial, for there were more than witches being tried at Lancaster Castle in August 1612. Gibson has called Potts’ determination to portray official sanction in the text a way to justify the end-results of these trials, with Poole agreeing that this ‘hints at disquiet over the proceedings’.¹⁸

Gibson discusses at length the selective, and misleading nature of evidence presented within Potts’ *The Wonderful Discoverie*. Whilst it is, Gibson claims, a unique

¹² This has been the general consensus since the 1999 conference ‘The Lancashire Witches: History, Heritage and Representation 1612-1999’, which was held in St Martin’s College, Lancaster, and resulted in the publication of edited volume *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories* – Robert Poole, Ed., *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. xi

¹³ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, p. 245

¹⁴ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 8

¹⁵ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 120

¹⁶ The pamphlet structure will be discussed more fully in Chapter 2

¹⁷ Marion Gibson, ‘Thomas Potts’s ‘dusty memory’: reconstructing justice in *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches*’, in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. by Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 45; Potts (1613), p. 27

¹⁸ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, p. 173; Poole in Potts (2011), p. 4

insight into the ‘process of a witch-trial’, large areas of procedure have been omitted from Potts’ account, and pre-trial examinations have been presented as *viva voce* court testimony.¹⁹ Almond also states that Potts’ account ‘in part, mirrors actual trial proceedings in part, in part, is selected and constructed by him for maximum dramatic effect’.²⁰ Much of Gibson’s scholarship on the 1612 Lancashire trials examines this in depth, focusing on the evidence selected, omitted, rearranged, and repeated for Potts’ specific purposes, concealing ‘patterns of questioning and storytelling’ as a means of building suspense, encouraging anti-Witchcraft and anti-Catholic sentiment, justifying the end-result, and also attempting to curry favour with the King.²¹ Poole reiterates this analysis, stating that ‘against first impressions, only around half of Potts’s text turns out to consist of witness statements.’²² Within this number, several are repeated, and more than once, and many have been summarised or taken down in legal form, rather than transcribed *verbatim*.²³ As it is unclear where his evidence is often from - it is always presented as *viva voce* testimony even if it is a shorter excerpt from an examination taken months prior - the pamphlet, Gibson asserts, tells us less about procedure and more about what an early modern readership ‘wanted to read’, at least in Potts’ opinion, and therefore what Potts’ aims were in writing this text.²⁴

The dramatisation of the pamphlet too is a clear indication that this text was produced for public consumption. Gibson argues that the ordering of each trial adds suspense for the reader, by building up a sense ‘of each witch’s character and performance at the trial’, combining elements of ‘demonology, propaganda, and deliberate soap-opera drama as well as simple reportage.’²⁵ Whilst Gibson has examined the production and evidence at great length,

¹⁹ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, pp. 173-174

²⁰ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 3, 10

²¹ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, pp. 173-185

²² Poole in Potts (1613), p. 3 3

²³ Almond, too, argues that the selective reportage of the pamphlet was used to strengthen the ‘strategic intention’ of the pamphlet, that being to justify the proceedings and verdicts laid out within its pages.- Philip C. Almond, *The Lancashire Witches: A Chronicle of Sorcery and Death on Pendle Hill* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 2012), p. 4

²⁴ Gibson, ‘Potts’s ‘dusty memory’’, p. 55

²⁵ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, pp. 173-174

there is certainly more to be said about the building up, by Potts, of ‘each witch’s character’, for this is done not solely via the evidence presented, but also by the author’s commentary on each trial, which takes the form of hyperbolic depictions of the accused witches as monstrous villains. That is not to say that Potts’ hyperbole has gone unnoticed, as Gibson and Almond have both pointed out, Potts’ insertions ‘demonise’ the witches.²⁶ Poole too considers how, at the beginning of the final trial detailed in the pamphlet, Potts again enters into a hyperbolic treatment of the accused Margaret Pearson. On this speech, Poole says that he ‘clearly feels that his expertise entitles him to a voice of his own’, therefore including his own lesson toward the end of the text.²⁷ Poole views Potts too modestly here. The author’s voice is in fact quite dominating throughout the pamphlet in its clear opinions and biases, yet these authorial insertions have only been pointed out, without any specificities or deeper analysis. Another example of the same is when Gibson suggests that the vocabulary within Potts’ introductions to accused witch Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, suggests that her examination may have been influenced by her ‘educated examiners (and by pamphleteers)’ rather than in the accused’s own words, without addressing what that same vocabulary does to the deliberate construction of Chattox as a villainous witch-figure.²⁸ Potts, Poole argues, at times hid ‘behind the pretence’ of exhibiting evidence alone, despite other instances in which he made ‘speeches in the manner of a judge at sentencing’²⁹ Certainly, in Potts’ introductory remarks, and in the smaller introductory statements allegedly added by the assize judges, it was determined that nothing had been inserted ‘but matter of Fact’, and yet Potts’ voice is clear and opinionated throughout, despite presenting the pamphlet as simply a reprinting of the evidence presented against each accused witch ‘in order as they came to the Barre’.³⁰ For example, from the

²⁶ Almond stated that the author’s introductions to each witch paints them ‘as if they were the worst of all.’ - Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, p. 174; Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 35

²⁷ Poole also stated that ‘Potts’ own trail of invective flow forth to taint almost every one of the convicted witches.’ Yet this invective, whilst acknowledged, isn’t analysed so much as stated. - Poole in Potts (1613), p. 57, 59

²⁸ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, p. 185

²⁹ Poole in Potts (2011), p. 55 5

³⁰ Potts (1613), pp. 1-10, 29

heading naming the first accused witch - Anne Whittle, alias Chattox - to her indictment, we find almost three pages of text in what we come to know as Potts' hyperbolic fashion.³¹

There is, in fact, more to say about Potts' rhetoric as a whole, for whilst it has been mentioned by many, the linguistic construction of the pamphlet has not truly been analysed in depth. In 'Thomas Potts's 'dusty memory'', Gibson offers a glimpse into what insights a close-reading of this text could offer. Stating that the author 'enjoys the drama' of these trials. In introducing the trials to follow, beginning with evidence against accused witch Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, Potts writes 'wee are now ready to proceed.'³² On this, Gibson says: 'This intimate phrasing (we) and present tense (now) makes it feel as though the reader is actually present at the trial.'³³ This is the kind of close, textual analysis which *The Wonderfull Discoverie* needs more of, for it suggests that Potts used dramatic methods not unlike his contemporary playwrights in order to engage his readership. Such close reading of the pamphlet can tell us more about how and why Potts' pamphlet was written, and what that means for how the key actors in these trials are remembered.

The case of the Samlesbury witches is one which has intrigued many with regards to Potts' rhetoric and the overall motivations for publication. The Samlesbury case relied upon the testimony of a young girl, Grace Sowerbutts, against three accused witches.³⁴ Her testimony was thrown out, amidst many colourful comments from Potts, when it was revealed that she was coached into making it by a known and wanted seminary priest. Sharpe states that Potts was able to both 'enhance' the image of Judge Bromley by emphasising his ability to expose these fraudulent accusations, and to 'score important points against Catholics' by claiming that they were plotted by a Catholic priest.³⁵ Gibson, too, has pointed

³¹ Potts (1613), pp. 30-32

³² Ibid, p. 29

³³ Gibson, 'Potts's 'dusty memory'', p. 46

³⁴ The Samlesbury case will be explored further in Chapter 3

³⁵ Sharpe, 'Introduction: the Lancashire witches', p. 4

out that the Samlesbury section of Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie* is 'pure anti-Catholic propaganda'.³⁶ However, these analyses do not delve into the text itself by attempting to differentiate between evidence and authorial interjections, or identifying the linguistic choices made in the pamphlet to strengthen these notions. Almond stated that the Samlesbury case section of the pamphlet contained Potts' 'most extensive editorialising', and yet the hyperbolic language and characterisation within it has not really been explored.³⁷

The Samlesbury case is arguably one of the ways in which *The Wonderfull Discoverie* might have caught the attention of King James I and VI, who was known not only for his involvement in a Scottish witchcraft trial and writing *Daemonologie*, a treatise for witch-hunting, but also for his anti-Catholic sentiment, especially after the near-miss of the Gunpowder plot.³⁸ So the uncovering of a Catholic conspiracy in Samlesbury would have been seen by the authorities involved in this trial as a story worth publishing for the potential royal favour alone. Yet this was not all. The judges also uncovered another plot, one which was discussed during the already fantastic witches' sabbat in Pendle, and that was the plot by many of the accused witches to blow up Lancaster Castle and kill its gaoler. This plot was a surefire way to gain the attention of the King, because the Castle itself was the property of the Crown. As Poole states, it fit neatly into Potts' narrative, suddenly they had uncovered Lancaster's very own 'gunpowder plot', and it was stopped in its tracks by assize court judges and Sir Thomas Knyvett, the author's patron, all of whom would have 'expected to gain credit from publicising the sensational foiling of this plot'.³⁹ It is interesting that Poole discusses how fitting and beneficial the existence of such a plot would have been to the figures of authority presiding over this case, but does not suggest that parts of this document may have been grossly exaggerated, if not outright fabricated. It is, of course, impossible to

³⁶ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, p. 174, 225, 229

³⁷ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 6

³⁸ King James' views will be explored more in chapters 1 and 2.

³⁹ Poole in Potts (2011), pp. 62-63

ever know how much of this pamphlet, if anything, was untrue to actual events and court proceedings. However, it is useful and interesting in an analysis of this historical text to consider the prospect that, not only was the evidence very carefully selected and edited, but some of it may have been coerced, heavily exaggerated, or even crafted, so as to strengthen the pamphlet's success as a whole.

The anti-Catholic sentiment is not the only way that this pamphlet would have appealed to the King. Pumfrey argues that the evidence and confessions align with James I and VI's *Daemonologie* by associating the witches with continental discourses in demonology via compacts with the devil and sabbats.⁴⁰ Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie* is the first trial record in England which portrayed such continental themes, though it can't be determined whether these themes were encouraged by local JPs, court officials, Potts at the writing stages, or indeed the accused witches themselves, if they had been exposed to such beliefs or ideas prior to their own undoubtedly harrowing experiences during the examination, imprisonment, and trial processes. The more continental aspects of evidence in *The Wonderful Discoverie* have been a source of intrigue for researchers. Gibson traces potential origins for certain demonological and political beliefs present within Potts' text, such as those displayed in the Samlesbury case, wherein the evidence not only differs greatly from the rest of the pamphlet, but also from other cases of English witchcraft more generally: There is no other case of blood-sucking cannibal witches in the English... pamphlets of this period... They probably come from French and German demonology.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Pumfrey called it the 'first successful intrusion of elite demonology into an English trial.' - Stephen Pumfrey, 'Potts, plots and politics: James I's *Daemonologie* and *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches*', in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. by Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 27-28

⁴¹ Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, p. 220

Almond's 2012 treatment does similar, and in even greater detail, aiming to 'bring us as close to the "truth" behind the stories as is possible' by linking evidences to their wider contexts⁴² For example, evidence given by two of the Pendle accused (Elizabeth Device and James Device) stated that a great gathering of witches on Good Friday was initially planned with the intention of hosting a naming or christening ceremony for another's familiar spirit.⁴³ This was an unusual notion, for, in English witchcraft belief, familiars typically came to their alleged witches already named. Almond traces this trope of a christening ceremony for a witch's spirit or devil to the 1591 Scottish pamphlet *Newes from Scotland*, a treatise which has been closely linked with King James I and VI, who was heavily involved in the North Berwick witch trials upon which it is based.⁴⁴ The production of this 1613 pamphlet was undoubtedly aimed towards gaining the attention and favour of the King, yet Almond does not suggest that that the similarities here between a ceremony detailed in the North Berwick trials and the Lancashire ones was included in this pamphlet with that same purpose. JP Roger Nowell, he claims, was unlikely to have been aware of *Newes from Scotland* when examining the accused witches and providing the evidentiary support for their trials.⁴⁵ It is impossible to know for certain what the key actors within this pamphlet were and were not aware of.⁴⁶ Yet, to suggest such a similarity between two pamphlets and then to deny that one may have influenced the other seems contradictory given what we know of the political motivations behind this text. It is certainly worth considering, at least, that the evidence provided within *The Wonderfull Discoverie* was in some way coerced, rewritten, or constructed as a means of furthering the appeal the pamphlet may have held for King James.

⁴² Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 11

⁴³ The ceremony was, they claimed, for Alizon Device's spirit, but she was already in gaol by Good Friday, and so the Christening did not occur.

⁴⁴ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, pp. 65-67

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 67

⁴⁶ Unless a text or treatise has been directly referenced within the pamphlet as Potts does for King James' *Daemonologie*. - Potts (1613), p. 157

Purkiss has inferred as much about certain aspects of Potts' pamphlet, but again the focus is on evidence presented, and not the narratorial comments surrounding this. Purkiss provided an in-depth analysis of the alleged charms used by the accused Lancashire witches and transcribed by Potts.⁴⁷ Whilst Gibson's scholarship has focused on the structure and production of evidence, Purkiss was the first to apply a close reading methodology to that evidence in the text. 'Charming Witches' had particularly interesting things to say on said charms as they related to Catholic practices and anti-Catholic sentiment in early modern England.⁴⁸ This has been a focus of Purkiss' elsewhere, too. For example, in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft* a year earlier, Purkiss drew similarities between Catholic belief and witches in early modern drama (such as Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) in a similar way to this work on *The Wonderful Discoverie*.⁴⁹ This in itself is worth noting because both Gibson and Purkiss introduced these methodologies, which will be expanded upon in this thesis, of reading witchcraft pamphlets the same way we would a literary text, through a process of close reading and analysis informed by contextual understanding. Through this approach, Purkiss identifies wherein these charms are 'garbled' and argues that an investigation into 'who is responsible for the garbling' could prove fruitful in gaining an understanding of the trials.⁵⁰ Potts, Purkiss suggests, may have been a principal agent in said 'garbling' of prayers and charms, pulling excerpts together from other sources in order to 'convince his readers that the [witches'] charming was both papistical and inspired by Satan.'⁵¹ This argument infers that Potts may have had more influence over the evidence than even Gibson has suggested. It is certainly interesting to consider; if Potts could pick and choose what evidence

⁴⁷ This article is part of a special issue of *Preternature*, released following a conference held at Lancaster university for the 2012 quadricentenary of the Lancashire witch trials - Diane Purkiss, 'Charming Witches', pp. 13-31

⁴⁸ Anti-Catholic sentiment, Purkiss writes, often led to the popular process of 'accusing Catholic practices of residual vulgar superstitiousness or even magic.' -Ibid, p. 15

⁴⁹ Diane Purkiss, 'Witchcraft in Early Modern Literature', in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 122-140

⁵⁰ Diane Purkiss, 'Charming Witches', p.20

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 22-23

was printed and what wasn't, and call them all *viva voce* reportage, then why couldn't he have also pulled together some dramatic examples from other sources to bulk up and strengthen the persuasive intent of the pamphlet?

Purkiss said: 'As we read the Potts pamphlet, there are times when we can be overwhelmed by a sense that the accused are caught in someone else's story.'⁵² As will be explored throughout this thesis, the key figures featured in the Lancashire witch trials of 1612 can only be remembered as actors in Thomas Potts' story. It is his authorial voice that describes all of the rest, and thus creates the sensationalised characters which have been remembered by historiography, and indeed by literature. The writing of this Lancashire witch story is, according to Gibson:

[As] much a process of mythologising as it is of documentary reportage, but the lines between actuality and creative writing are inevitably and severely blurred by the fact that we can never know precisely what happened four hundred years ago.⁵³

This is true, but I would argue that there are key points within the pamphlet in which Potts' own creative words are clear and separate from the supposed *viva voce* testimony and reprinting of evidence. It is here, in these moments of authorial ad-libbing, that the 'mythologising' was truly present, for this was where the infamy and versatility of the constructed Lancashire witch-figure began. In Potts' hands, or perhaps more accurately in Potts' pen, the accused witch became an ideal vessel for the insertion of his (and his superiors') socio-political beliefs and motivations. This, in turn, has led to the adoption and re-adaptation of the witch-figure by many authors in their retellings of the Pendle tale.

⁵² Ibid, p. 14

⁵³ Gibson, 'Potts' dusty memory', p. 43

‘Shee was a generall agent for the Deuill’⁵⁴

The second lens through which the key works under discussion within this thesis are to be analysed is gender. This constructed witch-figure within *The Wonderfull Discoverie* is more fearsome when female. Thomas Potts, in his construction of the ideal villain for his readership, depicts the female accused as far more villainous and frightening than the male. Whilst there are male-accused witches in the Lancashire trials, and whilst they will be explored later within this thesis, I argue that they are, in Potts’ narrative, an afterthought. It is the female witch-figure who makes the ideal villain, for she can be embellished in a way which agrees with pre-existing beliefs about witchcraft in this period. This new analysis of *The Wonderfull Discoverie* will therefore read Potts’ authorial interjections through a gender-informed lens, as a means of identifying how it was not merely the witch-figure, but the female witch-figure, who was the ideal vessel for the spreading of popular fears and biases in Potts’ witchcraft pamphlet. Since Thomas Potts’ construction of the accused Lancashire witches is the only way history has ever truly experienced these figures, it is understandable that the historical fiction inspired by the Lancashire story follows that same pattern of gendered witchcraft. This study will examine how the novelists under examination in this thesis have built upon Potts’ female-witch figure in their retellings, again utilising the witch-figure as the ideal vessel, either by depicting her as even more fearsome, or by reclaiming her and developing a new narrative of female power.

In order to understand how these characters were constructed, both initially by Potts and then by fictional authors, we must consider how the Pendle witch-figure aligns with what we know of gender and witchcraft in the early modern period, and why it was the female witches in whom Potts placed the most fear for his readership. Whilst this will be done

⁵⁴ Potts (1613), p. 15

throughout the thesis, for gender will be used as a framework for all of the textual analyses of each key work, it is still worthwhile to briefly consider here how gender has been used as a category for analysis in historiographical approaches to the history of witchcraft more generally.

Levack writes that the ‘subject of gender remains one of the most durable and important topics in the history of witchcraft.’⁵⁵ Whilst exact figures varied between countries and regions, approximately 80% of all those tried for witchcraft between 1450 and 1750 were women, and for years historians assumed that this was due to the inherent misogyny of the judges and the Church. This was strengthened by misogynistic treatises, especially the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum*, which argued that women were weaker in mind and spirit, more susceptible to lust and sin, and therefore more likely to make pacts with the Devil.⁵⁶ From a theological standpoint, the weakness of women was inherent from the first story of Eve, giving into temptation from Satan in the Garden of Eden.⁵⁷

Purkiss details the common belief amongst feminist thinkers in the image of the witch as a single, secluded, powerful woman. A healer or midwife living on the outskirts of society, feared by men for her strength and independence, she is persecuted as a witch. ‘Do you believe this story?’, she asks. ‘Thousands of women do.’⁵⁸ It is a compelling explanation for the large percentage of women tried and charged for witchcraft in the early modern period, though not an accurate one, and it leads, according to Purkiss, to overreaching interpretations of feminist metaphors within the early modern period.⁵⁹ The accused witch-figure became a symbol of the oppressive nature of patriarchal society, and the strong women who were

⁵⁵ Brian P. Levack, ‘Introduction’ in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology*, Ed. by Brian P. Levack (London: Routledge, 2001), p. vii

⁵⁶ Ibid, p. vii; Heinrich Institoris, *The Malleus Maleficarum*, Ed. by P. G. Maxwell-Stuart (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007)

⁵⁷ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 63

⁵⁸ Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early modern and twentieth century representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 7

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 13

determined to defy it. Such notions had been encouraged by feminist writers, beginning with suffragist writings which claimed that some nine million women were burned for witchcraft by fearful men (a grossly inaccurate figure, we now know), and continuing throughout the twentieth-century with feminist writings of the witch trials as ‘gendercide’, rather than genocide.⁶⁰ With some arguments suggesting that it was not just about trying to control unruly women, it was also about fear over women’s transformative bodies. Even in the 2001 *New Perspectives*, Barstow argues that prosecutions were an attempt to take away women’s control over ‘their own sexual and reproductive lives.’⁶¹ Despite the historical inaccuracies often associated with the above arguments, they are important to how we read the literary retellings of *The Wonderful Discoverie*, for especially in the twenty-first century literature discussed, the image of the profeminist witch is prevalent. These later retellings fit in with what Philippa Carter calls the ‘feminist metanarrative’, in which women, historically, had always been victimised by an oppressive patriarchal society.⁶²

Whilst for some scholars, male misogyny was the root cause of early modern witch-hunts, in the last few decades of the twentieth-century, scholarship began to shift towards the ‘charity-refused’ model of witchcraft posed by Thomas, and built upon by MacFarlane.⁶³ This model has been used to explain the higher percentage of females accused, for women, especially old women, were more likely to have to resort to begging than men. As Levack writes, it is now accepted that witchcraft accusations came ‘from below’, and so historians have attempted to quantify why then, female neighbours were accused more frequently than

⁶⁰ Matilda Joslyn Gage, *Woman, Church & State: The Original Expose of Male Against the Female Sex* (Chicago: C. H. Kerr, 1893), pp. 94-128; Andrea Dworkin, *Woman-Hating* (New York: Penguin, 1974), p. 118; Joanne Pearson, ‘Wicca, Paganism, and History: Cotemporary Witchcraft and the Lancashire Witches’, in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. Poole, Robert (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 192

⁶¹ Anne Llewellyn Barstow, ‘On Studying Witchcraft as Women’s History: A Historiography of the European Witch Persecutions’, in *New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic and Demonology*, Ed. by Brian P. Levack (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 8

⁶² Philippa Carter, ‘Work, Gender and Witchcraft in Early Modern England’, *Gender & History* (2023), 1-18, pp. 1-2

⁶³ Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (London: Penguin, 1971), pp. 163-176; Alan Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 658-679

male.⁶⁴ Poor women, it has been argued, often old, perhaps unmarried or widowed, who were forced to rely on their communities for charity, were therefore set apart from their neighbours as a source of resentment, and as such were the more likely to be accused.⁶⁵ Accusations then, have been viewed as a tool that communities could use to quell their sources of resentment.⁶⁶

This debate that witch-hunting must be caused either by intense misogyny or local resentment eased off by the mid-1990s when historiography began to consider the higher percentage of females accused within their socio-political context, rather than their gender alone. Gender, now, is explored not so much as a cause of witchcraft accusations, but rather one factor of several which could lead to a person being deemed a witch. Scholarship has developed in a way which studies not just the events of witch hunts, but also considers the witches themselves, allowing for more agency for the victims⁶⁷ For example, the knowledge that many accusations came from other women (and other accused witches) has led to a discussion around the power that such actions could offer women. The female accuser could gain a sense of power and authority with the attention that being a witness to witchcraft offered, and for the accused, Purkiss argues, claiming the status prescribed to them could provide a sense of freedom or liberation from societal expectations.⁶⁸

Yet these lines of questioning tend to view the witch as predominantly female, despite the fact that there *were* male witches accused in the early modern period. Scholarship only truly began to explore the male accused from the early 2000s, and these new studies interpreted gender and male witches in novel ways, with Apps and Gow arguing that male-accused witches were feminised and therefore suspect, and Kent countering that male witches

⁶⁴ Levack, 'Introduction', *New Perspectives*, p. vii

⁶⁵ Orna Alyagon Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch: Evidentiary Dilemmas in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), p. 21

⁶⁶ Levack, 'Introduction', *New Perspectives*, p. viii

⁶⁷ Laura Kounine, *Imagining the Witch: Emotions, Gender, and Selfhood in Early Modern Germany* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2018), p. 3; Levack, 'Introduction', *New Perspectives*, p. ix

⁶⁸ Purkiss, *Witch in History*, p. 100

were the result of existing anxieties around the ‘exercise of male power’.⁶⁹ As Kounine states, witchcraft was not solely attributed to women in the early modern period. There were male witches, and as such, belief and fear ‘cannot simply be explained through... fears about women’s bodies.’⁷⁰ Certainly, recent scholarship on masculinities and male witches has examined the early modern witch trials in a new light, considering ‘how and when differences came into play’, instead of simply viewing the genders as different, with witches as female and their judges as male.⁷¹

More recently still, debates on the early modern witch trials have considered why an individual may have been accused, using gender as a tool for an analysis, but not as the guiding factor. Carter’s 2023 work focuses on the gendered divide through the lens of work, and attempts to discern how ‘women’s work’ made women more likely to be accused than men, whilst still acknowledging that both genders were susceptible.⁷² Carter’s study utilises casebooks kept by Richard Napier, of Buckinghamshire, who was a medical practitioner and astrologer, and noted reports of bewitchment in over 1700 consultations, and among the 960 suspects of witchcraft identified by this study, an overwhelming 855 of them were female.⁷³ Yet this, Carter argues, could be due to the occupations which these accused women held: dairying, cooking, caring and healing, midwifery and childcare, and so on. Meaning that the occupations which required the handling of corruptible substances, or the power over bodies, were female ones.⁷⁴ Studies such as this one can certainly provide new insights into the early

⁶⁹ Lara Apps and Andrew Gow, *Male Witches in Early Modern Europe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003) pp. 127-137; Elizabeth Kent, ‘Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593-1680’, *History Workshop Journal*, 60 (2005), 69-92, p. 86; See also:- Alison Rowlands, Ed., *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Malcolm Gaskill, ‘The Devil in the Shape of a Man: Witchcraft, Conflict and Belief in Jacobean England’, *Historical Research*, 71:175 (1998), 142–171

⁷⁰ Kounine, *Imagining the Witch*, p. 5

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 5; Charlotte-Rose Millar, ‘Diabolical Men: Reintegrating Male Witches into English Witchcraft’, *The Seventeenth century* 36.5 (2021), 693–713, pp. 693-694

⁷² Carter, ‘Work, Gender and Witchcraft’, pp. 2-3

⁷³ Ibid, pp. 3-4

⁷⁴ Moreover, female-led occupations were often social, and male work was more solitary, which too could induce resentments, suspicions, and rumours abound.- Ibid, pp. 7-13 ; Millar, ‘Diabolical Men’ pp. 697-699

modern witch trials which are informed, but not led, by gender when considering why more women were suspected of witchcraft than men,

Yet, despite these new studies, as we will see throughout this thesis, in both the historical record published by Potts and the historical fiction which it inspired, the male witches of Pendle are more of an afterthought in the construction and retelling of this tale. As such, it is important to pay closer attention to the construction of the female witch-figure, and examine how she has been developed to align with early modern beliefs about witchcraft, with external factors which influenced authors, and with developing ideals surrounding the witch-figure over time. In the literature being discussed, witchcraft, whether it is presented as real or not in each individual text, is a female affair. Two of the accused Pendle witches, Demdike and Chattox, were the matriarchs of their alleged witch-families, and ‘within these two families the descent was predominantly matrilineal’.⁷⁵ This was a female-centric story, and for the authors of the historical fiction to follow, these themes are still important. This historical fiction, for the most part, adopts Potts’ witch-figure as a woman who stands outside of society, as a presentation, in some form, of gender transgression. This is a common theme when assessing how the witch-figure is depicted in literature. As Larner articulated, the early modern witch was often viewed as such until more recent scholarship:

The cursing and bewitching women were the female equivalent of violent males. They were the disturbers of social order; they were those who could not easily co-operate with others; they were aggressive.⁷⁶

Whilst there are exceptions in these novels, for the most part the authors of these historical fictions developed this in their characterisations of the Pendle witch-figure, some in a similar fashion to Potts’ portrayal, whilst others took this othered witch-figure and reclaimed her as

⁷⁵ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 35

⁷⁶ Christina Larner, *Witchcraft and Religion: The Politics of Popular Belief* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984)

someone who stands apart purposefully, who rebels against the society which attempts to oppress her, thus developing her as a protofeminist figure.⁷⁷

In both Potts' pamphlet and the Pendle retellings, the female witch-figure is constructed in a way which aligns with popular fears of the witch. As Purkiss wrote, witchcraft is practiced in secret, in the private, female realm, which further genders the act, it was the 'sphere of witchcraft... that marked the witch as feminine.'⁷⁸ The matriarchies presented in Potts' pamphlet fit this narrative, for they do not have a patriarchal male figure to assert control over them, as befitting of the social order. This theme is expanded upon, both negatively and positively, by the authors under examination, and the written witch-figures are frequently associated with their female-led households, thus setting them apart from the patriarchal social norm.

Literary critics very often associate the witch-figure in literature with gender transgression, posing her as a threat to patriarchal society. She is often viewed as a female isolated and independent, dangerous to a patriarchal society because of her ability to survive without reliance on a male figure.⁷⁹ *Malevolent Nurture* admits the presence of unruly femininity in witchcraft literature, but calls this theory a 'generalisation' which does not reveal much about the reasoning behind witchcraft accusations in the period. This argument takes issue with the widely held view of feminist literary critics that the early modern witch-figure was a protofeminist, fighting against an oppressive society.⁸⁰ As the book title suggests, Willis' argument favours a more focused area within the wider sphere of gender,

⁷⁷ Purkiss, *Witch in History*, p. 7

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 191

⁷⁹ Justyna Sempruch, *Fantasies of Gender and the Witch in Feminist Theory and Literature* (Indiana: Perdue University Press, 2008); Richard Hillman and Pauline Ruberry-Blanc, Eds., *Female Transgression in Early Modern Britain: Literary and Historical Explorations* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014); Bridget Sandhoff and Manon Hedenborg-White, Eds., *Transgressive Womanhood: Investigating Vamps, Witches, Whores, Serial Killers and Monsters* (Leiden: Brill, 2019); Amanda Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England* (Martlesham: Boydell Press, 2007)

⁸⁰ Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-hunting and maternal power in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 6

that of motherhood and maternity, or rather, contemporary fears of such. Roper acknowledges this theory, claiming that the witch represented deep social anxieties regarding monstrous maternity, because the witch had the capacity and magical ability to ‘devour children and destroy fertility.’⁸¹ Breuer too sees importance in the connection between witchcraft and maternity. Both scholars track the process of this negative maternity through witch-lore; the witch attends a sabbath in which she has intercourse with a devil or demon, she signs a pact, she gains (almost births) a familiar. The witch’s familiar suckles at her witch’s mark or teat, subverting the natural image of breastfeeding to become something sinister.⁸² Then, in her actions, the witch works her malefic magic against neighbouring families, and most notably, children. Such themes which are so closely aligned with how the witch-figure has been represented across art and literature are, I argue, present within both the historical record *and* the historical fiction under examination here.

The constructed Pendle witch-figure, as the ideal vessel for metaphor, tends to echo contemporary beliefs about gender and witchcraft, and so she has been written and rewritten with a variety of ideals in mind since 1612. It is within his narrative constructions of the key figures involved that the motivations of Potts’ pamphlet become clearest. In the same way, it is within the constructions of these figures in the historical fictions to follow which can tell us more about specific authorial beliefs and motivations behind the writing of these Pendle retellings. As Sempruch has said, over time, the witch-figure has become ‘far more metaphorical, increasingly symbolizing areas of social dissonance and transgressive behaviour of women and men who rebel against the society.’⁸³ In the earlier historical fictions, these rebellions are depicted negatively, the witches are women who defy social

⁸¹ Lyndal Roper, *The Witch in the Western Imagination* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2012), p. 17

⁸² Heidi Breuer, *Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009) p. 110

⁸³ Justyna Sempruch, ‘The Witch Figure in Nineteenth and Twentieth-Century Literature’, in *The Routledge History of Witchcraft*, Ed. by Johannes Dillinger (London: Routledge, 2019), p. 370

order for nefarious means, and it is those characters who thwart them who are the heroes of the texts. Then, in the three twenty-first century retellings, the transgressive witch-figure becomes the symbol of female transgressive strength amidst an oppressive and patriarchal society. As such, all must be explored with gender in mind if we are to learn anything about how the Lancashire witch-figure has been constructed and remembered over time.

'Reading with special attention'⁸⁴

Finally, the third lens or category of analysis which is to be utilised within this study is a textual one. The aim is to examine all of the key texts in question with a similar methodological approach. That is, to undertake something of a new historicist approach to the analysis of each, utilising a historical awareness of not only the Lancashire witch trials, but of the time in which each key text was written, whilst delving into a close reading of each text. The aims of this are, primarily, to examine both the historical record and historical fiction as constructed or created texts, in which the author's aims in writing them are evidence of said author's own contexts and ideals. Moreover, with this textual approach, this study hopes to uncover the differing ways in which the Lancashire witch-figure has been recreated and remembered over time through a treatment of these fictional accounts as new modes of historical remembrance.

In *Close Reading: The Reader*, Andrew DuBois attempts to quantify the term, for it is often very simply assumed to mean, 'reading with special attention'. This is not inaccurate, but perhaps requires a little more expansion. Quoting Paul de Man, who explained close reading as a method of study:

⁸⁴ Andrew DuBois, 'Introduction', in Frank Lentricchia and Andrew DuBois, Eds., *Close Reading: The Reader* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 1

Students... were not to say anything that was not derived from the text they were considering. They were not to make any statements that they could not support by a specific use of language that actually occurred in the text.⁸⁵

Close reading, as a practice of literary study, falls under the New Criticism school of thought and methodology, and it means that critics were to pay a close and special attention, displaying ‘depth, precision, acuity, and patience’, to literary art.⁸⁶ Criticism then developed further to consider biographical material in a study of literary work, but as DuBois asserts, ‘any advances that occurred depended in part on New Critical lessons.’⁸⁷ For if a critic moved towards external contexts and away from textual evidence, they risked disregarding the literary work in their critique. As such, it is important to utilise contexts, both temporal or historical and biographical, *alongside* an analysis of the text, as a means of close reading the text itself in a more complete way, informed by an awareness of the authorial motivations behind it.

New historicism, then, is another practice of literary criticism which treats literary texts as historical artifacts of the time in which they are written, as products of their author’s personal and cultural contexts and ideologies. This is certainly a very basic summary, for it is vast in practice and difficult to theorise. In fact, in *Practicing New Historicism*, Gallagher and Greenblatt admit to avoiding being locked into any theoretical definitions.⁸⁸ However, in essence, this thesis is based upon the practice of close reading a text through a historical lens (and indeed, a gendered lens), and also a new historicist lens. Meaning, to assess a text via both the history of the Lancashire witch trials, and the socio-political context in which each author is writing their Lancashire story, and always with gender in mind. Historical fiction is an ideal candidate for such an examination. As Bickmore has argued, whilst historical fiction

⁸⁵ Paul de Man, quoted by DuBois, *ibid*, p. 2

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, p. 4

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5

⁸⁸ Neema Parvini, *Shakespeare and New Historicist Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 5; Catherine Gallagher, and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 3-19

authors attempt to capture a version of the past, in doing so they ‘comment on current events, ideologies, and social beliefs’ of the time in which they are living and writing.⁸⁹ Therefore, it is this methodology which has been applied to the historical fiction under examination within this thesis.⁹⁰ This can then introduce new ways of thinking about the Lancashire trials, the key figures within them, and historical fiction as new forms of remembering this historical moment.

Historical fiction tends to look at a past event in a new light. It is less about the event than it is about personal responses to events, for historical fiction is almost always an exploration of an historical event from the narrative viewpoint of a single individual. Therefore, this mode allows an author to portray detailed experiences, reconstructing the subjectivity of the past in a way that historical study cannot.⁹¹ These new explorations, in their ability to create narratives somewhat outside of the realm of historical fact, have the potential then to engage a wider span of the population in the memory of a historical moment. Historical understanding, Bemben states, has evolved. When before the twentieth-century a collection of historical data was deemed to be sufficient means for the understanding of history, scholarship has developed a new approach which recognises the ‘tenuous relationship between historical accuracy... and understanding the past.’⁹² Historical fiction then, whilst it may involve a large amount of historical research and factual awareness – as it should – remains a created work, influenced by an author’s own imagination and aims in the writing of it. Despite this, I argue that historical fiction, with its capacity to present a historical moment to a wider audience, can become a form of historical remembrance in its own right. Bemben

⁸⁹ Steven Bickmore, ‘Historical Fiction and its Critics: From Sir Walter Scott to Contemporary Young Adult Literature’, in *Historical Fiction*, Ed. by Virginia Brackett (Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press, 2018), p. 16

⁹⁰ The same approach has been applied to Thomas Potts’ pamphlet too, but as this author was writing at the time of the trials, any close reading of this text is informed by a historical awareness, rather than a new historicist practice of contextualising works.

⁹¹ Danielle Barkley, ‘More than Sixty Years Hence: Historicizing the Historical Novel’, in *Historical Fiction*, Ed. by Virginia Brackett (Ipswich, Massachusetts: Salem Press, 2018), pp. 5-8

⁹² Alicja Bemben, ‘Historical fiction: From historical accuracy to prosthetic memory’, *Neohelicon*, 51 (2024), 207-222, pp. 207-210

has associated historical fiction with the historiographical theory, first posed by Landsberg, of ‘Prosthetic memory’.⁹³ Prosthetic memory, Landsberg suggests, emerges from an individual’s (or group’s) emotional attachment to a historical narrative which they did not directly experience, thus it becomes a collective memory adopted by many.⁹⁴ Interestingly, the aforementioned ‘Myth of the Burning Times’ posed by Purkiss could certainly fall under the category of prosthetic memory, for it is a historical memory which, despite or regardless of inaccuracies, was adopted by feminist thinkers as part of their own pasts as women. Whilst Landsberg’s study focuses on historical narratives around race and immigration, the same theory could certainly be applied to witchcraft history. Then, as Bembien suggests, the same theory could be applied to historical fiction, where the author, and arguably the reader, of a fictional retelling has prosthetically attached their invented narratives to a historical moment, or in the case of this thesis, a historical figure, thus resulting in a new collective memory based on their own emotions and ideas. Marler-Kennedy considers historical fiction to be a means of connecting history and memory, thus encouraging readers to consider and identify with figures from the past.⁹⁵ Historical fiction has the advantageous ability to give voice to the voiceless in history, and so its readership has the chance to connect with the history of people and events that they would not have experienced otherwise.⁹⁶

Gender and Representation in Historical Record and Historical Fiction

⁹³ Ibid, pp. 207-222

⁹⁴ Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic memory: The transformation of American remembrance in the age of mass culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 1-3

⁹⁵ Kara Marler-Kennedy, “‘The Painted Record’ in George Eliot’s Historical Novel *Romola*”, in *Reading Historical Fiction: The Revenant and Remembered Past*, Ed. by Kate Mitchell and Nicola Parsons (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 110-113

⁹⁶ As Mitchell and Parsons discuss, women writers, for example, have used historical fiction to write ‘feminine pasts’ of times when ‘historiography privileged... the deeds of men.’ – Kate Mitchell and Nicola Parsons, Eds., in *Reading Historical Fiction: The Revenant and Remembered Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 7

This thesis will examine both the historical record on, and historical fiction inspired by the Lancashire witch trials of 1612 through the three lenses, or categories of analysis indicated here. The first being a historical awareness of the trials and their context; the second, a gender-informed reading of the constructed female witch-figure; and the third, a textual analysis which utilises both close-reading and contextual awarenesses befitting of a new historicist approach, as a means of analysing the key texts to discern how the telling of the Pendle story, and the constructing of the witch-figure, reflects the author's views and the text's socio-political background.

Gibson writes that it is 'important to analyse not just the content of the story of the Lancashire witches, but also how that story has been transmitted to us, by whom and why'.⁹⁷ This witch-story has been told and retold a great many times, but there is still more to understand about how it has been transmitted, and why. In order to consider this, we must first understand the context surrounding the 1612 Lancashire witch trials. Chapter 1 of this thesis will therefore explore what was happening in the lead up to these trials, taking into account the key themes which become apparent when reading the pamphlet presented by Potts, and developing a solid foundation of contextual awareness before looking at the text itself. This chapter will, as such, draw upon wider historiographical research on topics such as charity and economy, Catholicism and anti-Catholicism, witchcraft, demonic possession, and justice, as a means of strengthening the analyses to follow.

It is not possible to wholly understand what happened during these Lancashire witch trials, but historians have attempted to reconstruct events in various ways as a means of gaining further insights. Both Poole and Almond, for example, in their 2011 and 2012 works, did so via a deliberate deconstructing and reordering of events, which is enormously helpful

⁹⁷ This is a key focus of Marion Gibson's analyses of the Potts' pamphlet, and this work, both in *Early Modern Witches* and in a chapter within *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, has informed our understanding of the production of Potts' pamphlet. - Gibson, 'Potts' dusty memory', p. 42

in understanding a more complete timeline of the evidence and examinations documents, from initial arrest to trial and execution.⁹⁸ Though, of course, as Potts' account was carefully selected and much of the evidences and processes were repeated or omitted, such efforts can still not paint a completely clear picture. Chapter 2 does not attempt to discern why these trials occurred, thus repeating the efforts of these historians, but instead aims to build upon the work of Marion Gibson in analysing how the Pendle story was constructed by providing a full, succinct analysis of how the pamphlet was produced and structured. Once more, this will be done with the same aforementioned key themes in mind, which have been identified as crucial to our understanding of the constructed Pendle witch-figure and subsequent literary depictions of them over the next four centuries.

Chapters 1 and 2 of this thesis are a means of drawing a picture of what happened before and during the 1612 trials, and why this resulted in the publication of *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*. These contextual chapters are crucial to developing the historical insight required for any close reading of the Pendle witch story, both in terms of the original pamphlet and its fictional retellings. Then, in Chapter 3, this analysis begins with Thomas Potts' text. As has been determined, scholarship has not yet paid close attention to the language and biases of this author specifically in those moments of narratorial interjection, in introducing and adding to evidence, rather than the evidence itself. Gibson does mention that Potts added 'distorting comment[s]' to the evidence presented, but that the account is 'apparently honestly meant... [and] certainly meticulous.'⁹⁹ There is no disagreement here, but there is certainly more to be said regarding Potts' 'distorting' commentary. In Chapter 3, Potts' rhetoric is explored in more detail, showing that Potts' commentary on the key actors within this pamphlet is as meticulous as his reportage, and is

⁹⁸Poole in Potts (2011); Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*

⁹⁹ Gibson, 'Potts' dusty memory', p. 44

used as a means of constructing the accused witch-figure as guilty villain, and the male authoritative figure as the Godly hero. Such notions have not been examined with regards to early modern witchcraft pamphlets, and *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, with its clear authorial voice, is an ideal case-study for an examination of the deliberate construction of characters by pamphleteers.

The authors of the Pendle-inspired historical fiction have built upon Potts' constructions of these key actors, and especially the female witch-figure in order to suit their own socio-political views and motivations for writing these novels. The historical fictions which will be examined within this thesis are all fictional retellings of the 1612 Lancashire witch trials. Chapter 4 will focus on the 1854 novel *The Lancashire Witches: A Romance of Pendle Forest*, a Gothic retelling of the 1612 trials by William Harrison Ainsworth. This text follows one of Pendle's accused, Alizon Device, who has been rewritten as a delicate heroine, who works against the accused witches instead of with them. This novel features haunting landscapes, Royal hunts, and battles between good and evil in a way befitting of the author's own interests, his nineteenth-century readership, and the beliefs of his dear friend (and the historical mind behind the text) James Crossley.¹⁰⁰

Chapter 5 looks at Robert Neill's retelling, *Mist Over Pendle*. This novel, published in 1951, is a new take on Potts' text and indeed on Ainsworth's interpretation. The hero is Potts' favourite local JP Roger Nowell, who is progressive and fair and works alongside a young heroine who has been entirely invented by Neill. This novel contains many of the events detailed within the evidence presented in the pamphlet, all of which, it is revealed, have been plotted by the novel's villain, accused witch Alice Nutter. Whilst magic isn't real in Neill's retelling, the villainous female witch-figure certainly is.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ William Harrison Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches, A Romance of Pendle Forest* (California: CreateSpace, 2017)

¹⁰¹ Robert Neill, *Mist Over Pendle* (London: Hutchinson, 1951)

Finally, Chapter 6 examines three female-authored texts. The first is Mary Sharratt's 2010 novel *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, which goes back decades before the 1612 events depicted by Potts and follows the narrative journeys of two accused witches, Elizabeth Southernes, alias Demdike, and her granddaughter Alizon Device right up until their imprisonment and deaths at Lancaster Castle.¹⁰² The second text is Livi Michael's 2012 novella *Malkin Child*, which is a children's book written from the perspective of child witness Jennet Device, and offers a new perspective from her eyes in which she was a poor, innocent girl who was tricked and corrupted by patriarchal figure Roger Nowell to testify against her own family.¹⁰³ Finally, the third retelling under examination is *The Daylight Gate*, which is another 2012 novella by Jeanette Winterson.¹⁰⁴ This final text is a queer, gothic retelling in which accused witch Alice Nutter is developed as a transgressive, feminist icon, punished for her power, and the villains here are almost all of the male characters in Pendle.

¹⁰² Mary Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill* (New York: Mariner Books, 2011)

¹⁰³ Livi Michael, *Malkin Child* (Lancaster: Foxtail, 2012)

¹⁰⁴ Jeanette Winterson, *The Daylight Gate* (London: Windmill Books, 2012)

Chapter 1

Lancashire, 1612: Framing Potts' Pamphlet

In order to analyse Thomas Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* - to consider how and why it was written, by whom, and how present the author's biases are in its textual construction - it is important to first understand what was happening in the lead up to the events recorded. In 1612, during the August Assizes at Lancaster Castle, before Judges James Altham and Edward Bromley, nineteen individuals were tried for witchcraft, with one other having died in prison prior to trial. Out of these twenty in total, eleven were from Pendle, eight were from Samlesbury, and only four were men. Ten individuals were sentenced to death. All of these accused witches, prior to their imprisonment to await trial, were examined by a local (and male) JP.¹ The only surviving record of these trials, the 1613 pamphlet *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster*, was written by the male court clerk, Thomas Potts, under the instruction of the aforementioned judges.² Thus we have a clear, masculine system of authority in which a gendered divide is undeniable. It would therefore be easy to assume that these Lancashire witch trials were a patriarchal eradication of transgressive or threatening women. As has been discussed, the 'Myth of the Burning Times' is an appealing explanation for more modern, feminist-informed readings of early modern witchcraft tracts.³ Certainly, the constructed, female witch-figure in Potts' text has been written in a way which aligns with popular fears of witchcraft.⁴ However, whilst an important factor, and crucial to understanding not only the Pendle witch trials but also the constructed witch-figure in Pendle-inspired literature,

¹ For the Samlesbury witches, this was Robert Houlden, and for the Pendle witches, this was Roger Nowell, who was often joined by Nicholas 'Nick' Bannister.

² Potts (1613)

³ Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, pp. 7-13; Christine L. Krueger, *Reading for the Law: British Literary History and Gender Advocacy* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010), pp. 45-46; Jane P. Davidson, 'The Myth of the Persecuted Female Healer', in *The Oxford History of Witchcraft and Magic*, Ed. by Owen Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 291-294

⁴ The construction of these witch-figures will be explored in Chapter 3.

historiography has moved away from the notion that femininity was the catalyst for the early modern witch hunts, considering instead why an individual's gender may have placed them in a variety of social situations which could lead to accusation.⁵

There were in fact many contextual factors which influenced the events of August 1612, and all must be considered if we are to gain enough historical understanding of the trials before analysing the text itself. 1612 was a time of economic and social strain, and religious tension, and these tensions were often seen with particular intensity in Lancashire. As such, a close reading of *The Wonderfull Discoverie* reveals the existence of many key factors which impacted 1612 society within the trials, and within the construction of the text which detailed them. Whilst several of the depictions of the witches and witchcraft acts within the pamphlet adhere to pre-existing English witchcraft beliefs, others do not, and are in fact more representative of continental witchcraft beliefs, of the influence of King James I and VI, of religious fears, and of societal strain. Before an in-depth analysis of said pamphlet can be attempted, it is vital to gain a better understanding of these key factors and why they may have influenced the Lancashire trials, and how the trials have been represented since.

Lancashire: Localism and Charity

Early modern England has been described as a country full of partially-independent counties, not in the sense that they had a self-governing independence from the Crown, but that these counties were areas in which localism was often more common than national pride. Local interests tended to dominate public business, and while some historians have argued that Englishmen were very aware of national affairs, others claim that even the gentry were

⁵ Carter, 'Work, Gender and Witchcraft', pp. 1-18; Owen Davies, 'The World of Popular Magic', in *The Oxford History of Witchcraft and Magic*, Ed. by Owen Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), pp. 275-280

distracted by localism and knew little of wider political issues.⁶ This separated counties from the capital, making each region seem further away and less accessible to those in London. Lancashire,⁷ was viewed by contemporaries as inaccessible, with poor roads, remote parishes, and wild and uninviting rural areas. Moreover, those far away in London viewed its inhabitants as poor, uneducated, and suspect. It was viewed as a dark place, full of superstition and recusancy.⁸

Leading up to 1612, Lancashire, and especially the Pendle area, experienced substantial population growth, with Swain comparing the ‘twenty-four tenants’ living in Pendle Forest in 1443 with around 1,620 living in the area by 1650.⁹ This rapid growth placed pressure on the economy, one which was already strained and predominantly rural.¹⁰ However, Swain has discussed the fact that the 1612 trials did not occur in a period of particular economic crisis or ‘crisis mortality’, despite the fact that crop prices were found to be ‘higher than usual’ in 1612-1613.¹¹ It is difficult to say whether this would have escalated tensions enough to have caused the Pendle witch accusations, but the majority of the accused Pendle witches would have made a living through either infrequent, casual work, or by begging.¹²

In the Pendle region, clothmaking was one of the primary sources of income and trade, most notably the production of kersey, a coarse woollen fabric.¹³ A collection of around

⁶ Clive Holmes, ‘The County Community in Stuart Historiography’, *Journal of British Studies*, 19:2 (1980), p. 54; G. C. F. Forster, *The East Riding Justices of the Peace in the seventeenth century* (Leeds: East Yorkshire Local History Society, 1973), p. 5

⁷ Lancashire has a population somewhere between 105,000 and 120,000 in 1600, in comparison to London’s 200,000 – B. G. Blackwood, *The Lancashire Gentry and the Great Rebellion, 1640-60* (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1978), p. 5

⁸ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 7; Christine Goodier, *1612: The Lancashire Witch Trials* (Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2014), p. 2

⁹ J. T. Swain, ‘The Lancashire Witch Trials of 1612 and 1634 and the economics of witchcraft’, *Northern History*, Vol. 30 (1994), 64-85, p. 70

¹⁰ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 17

¹¹ Swain, ‘The Lancashire Witch Trials’, p. 74

¹² In contrast, in her 2022 study of the St Osyth witch trials, Marion Gibson argues that witchcraft accusations came about during a time of economic tension, and in the middle of a ‘bitter, hungry winter’.- Marion Gibson, *The Witches of St Osyth: Persecution, Betrayal and Murder in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 33

¹³ That and cattle rearing – Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 17; Swain, ‘Lancashire Witch Trials’, p. 74

100 'supra' inventories from the area between 1559 and 1640 indicated that around seventy per cent of households, where the personal estate was more than £40 in value, listed clothmaking tools.¹⁴ This, of course, more clearly reflects the inventories of the middling class, but we know from the 1612 Lancashire trials that at least some of the accused witches were involved in the clothmaking process. In the evidence against Anne Whittle, James Robinson stated that his wife had hired her to 'card wooll... upon a Friday and Saturday [and] Munday'.¹⁵ Pendle was not a prosperous area, many families were forced to rent or squat in poor conditions and 'very small holdings',¹⁶ and the infamous Malkin Tower may well have been one such residence for the accused Demdike clan. The majority of the accused witches would have likely lived in a state of poverty, forced to beg or rely on charity for survival. The Thomas-Macfarlane hypothesis, or the 'charity-refused' model, is the theory that early modern witchcraft accusations were the direct result of one person refusing charity to another.¹⁷ It was this hypothesis in the 1970s which instigated a shift in thinking when it came to witchcraft scholarship, encouraging an analysis of early modern witchcraft from below. This means that fear of witchcraft existed in local communities, resulting in accusations, oftentimes from neighbours, instead of belief being an elite idea only. However, as Suhr and Borman have discussed, witchcraft treatises and pamphlets were always written by the learned, to spread elite views to the unlearned masses. Despite this shift in the late twentieth-century to a new focus on the perspectives of the majority, there are no comparable sources for this class of peoples, and therefore, their views can only be guessed at or reconstructed from 'shards of evidence'.¹⁸ This is especially true for the perspectives of

¹⁴ Swain, 'The Lancashire Witch Trials', p. 72

¹⁵ Potts (1613), p. 38

¹⁶ J. T. Swain, 'Witchcraft, economy and society in the forest of Pendle' in *Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. Robert Poole (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2002), 73-87, p. 78

¹⁷ Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor*; Thomas, *Religion and Decline*

¹⁸ Tracy Borman, *Witches: James I and the English Witch-Hunts* (London: Vintage Books, 2014), p. xvii; Carla Suhr, 'Publishing for the Masses: Early Modern English Witchcraft Pamphlets', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 113:1 (2012), 118-121, p. 118

women, whose voices have always been somewhat absent in historical record. The charity-refused model was the first to truly attempt incorporating the lives, fears, and emotions of those directly involved, either as accuser or accused, rather than those prosecuting, or indeed those writing detailed witchcraft treatise within the period.¹⁹

Charity had been an important concept in Catholic belief and teaching, a clear path to grace and salvation for the giver or carer. The Protestant Reformation began the process of altering this concept, and these alterations were aided by the Elizabethan Poor Laws in 1598 and 1601.²⁰ Whilst charity was still viewed a necessary cause, it became less of a clerical focus and was instead placed on local communities. This naturally changed how the needy were viewed within society, not as a means by which to achieve salvation, but as a burden. This burden could cause unrest, and at times the poor were actually driven out of a community and across its borders into another so that that burden could be passed off.²¹ In Pendle, those individuals or families in need of aid would have been heavily resented by their already struggling neighbours, and such resentment coupled with popular belief in witches could develop into fear or loathing, where the blame for any local misfortunes could be placed upon the needy, those financial burdens who were easy scapegoats. Some of the accused and executed Pendle witches were viewed in this way, as burdens on the community, and it was in fact an instance of a local individual's refusal to offer charity to a young girl which was the catalyst for the witch-hunt which was to follow, and so this first case fits well in the 'charity-refused' model of accusations.²² Many of the accused would have earned a living predominantly by begging, And the 1612 trials notably saw two feuding families who accused

¹⁹ Jonathan Barry, 'Keith Thomas and the problem of Witchcraft' in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, ed. by Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1-4

²⁰ The burden of raised rates, treatment of the ill, injured, or disabled, feeding of the poor, and putting the able-bodied to work, including offering apprenticeships to poor children, were among the new laws passed by these Acts in 1598 and 1601. – Paul Slack, *The English Poor Law, 1531-1782* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 10-11

²¹ Such was the case at times with poor, pregnant women, because another child meant only another mouth to feed - Goodier, *1612*, p. 3

²² This case of accused witch Alizon Device will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 2 and 3 - Potts (1613), pp. 142-151

each other, as initiated by Alizon Device, thus emphasising the village-level origins for these accusations. Swain has argued that these families, the Demdike and Chattox broods, would most likely have been rivalled due to their own economic status and the fact that they were competing for the charity and favour of their neighbours.²³ Yet refusal of charity was not the only reason for or cause of witchcraft accusations in the early modern period, and certainly not in the case of the 1612 Lancashire trials.

A County of Jesuits

A new approach to charity was certainly not the only change brought about by the Protestant Reformation. Post-Reformation England saw changes in how religion was viewed by the populace, it became at once a way-of-life and an obligation, with Church attendance and practices more regulated, and the old ways of Catholicism being seen as wrong and even diabolical. Although officially Anglican, Lancashire continued to be, at least in contemporary opinion, a county strongly shaped by Catholicism. It had a history of local actions in favour of the restoration of Catholicism. For example, after the county's significant involvement in the 1536-7 Pilgrimage of Grace, John Paslew, the last abbot of Whalley was tried and executed for high treason, his remains returned to the abbey only to be hung in chains.²⁴ After this, the county remained in a demoralised state, with no strong spiritual guidance. The Anglican Church failed to rectify this, and without clerical influence many still relied upon memories of Catholic teachings for guidance, or remained entirely loyal to the Catholic faith.²⁵

²³ Swain, 'The Lancashire Witch Trials', p. 80

²⁴ Whalley Abbey in Clitheroe is in fact very close to the Pendle region of Lancashire where the bulk of the 1612 witches were from. - Goodier, *1612*, pp. 2-3

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 16

At the beginning of Elizabeth I's reign, attendance at one's parish church was compulsory, and failure to attend could result in a fine, but belief was not truly enforced, and there was no law against the gentry following the 'old Faith' in the privacy of their own homes and chapels.²⁶ The 1559 Act of Uniformity targeted recusancy in particular, with those found to be attending Catholic Mass liable to large fines, and the Priests delivering said Masses as well as the laity who organised them, could face the death penalty.²⁷ However, many prominent families still secretly defied the new religion. They were, for the most part, tolerated by the authorities. It was not until the 1569 'Rising of the North' that Elizabeth I was forced to take a harsher view on Catholicism in the country.²⁸ Whilst primarily limited to the north of England, this was a clear rebellion against the monarchy and the Protestant church. The earls of Northumberland and Westmoreland gathered their followers and launched an attack on the Protestant church, thus encouraging a brief reversion to Catholicism for many in those parts. They proclaimed their aim to remove those 'disordered and evil disposed persons' who rejected Catholicism, the true faith, and hindered the rightful succession in England.²⁹ For a time, many in the north embraced a return to Catholicism, some fervently. However, Kesselring has suggested that others did so out of fear or 'the same spirit of conformity they had always shown to whoever might be in power at the time',³⁰ and several church papists did not openly embrace a return to the old faith for fear of being penalised. Yet, Walsham suggested, they experienced great inner crises of conscience for their outward conformity to the Church of England.³¹ In Post-Reformation, this time of religious tension, the north of

²⁶ The existence of these 'church papists', who attended church whilst practicing Catholicism in private, were according to Walsham, evidence of the 'unwelcome event' that the Reformation posed for many. – Alexandra Walsham, *Church Papists: Catholicism, Conformity and Confessional Polemic in Early Modern England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 1993), pp. 6-7

²⁷ William Sheils, 'Catholics and Recusants', in *A Companion to Tudor Britain*, ed. by Robert Tittler and Norman Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 254

²⁸ Jane Sterling, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Lancashire* (Burnley: Hortus Printing Co. Ltd., 1973), p. 4

²⁹ K. J. Kesselring, *The Northern Rebellion of 1569: Faith, Politics, and Protest in Elizabethan England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 1

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2

³¹ Walsham, *Church Papists*, pp. 7-11, 73-80; Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 130

England was viewed as loyal to Catholicism and more rebel-filled than elsewhere.³² One of the key figures in the 1569 rising was Sir John Southworth, who is remembered for having housed and supported the infamous ‘Foremost of the Jesuits, as they are usually called... Edmund Campion’.³³ Campion, a member of the Society of Jesus, was hunted and eventually arrested and executed following his travels through the North of England, and the release of his *Decem Rationes*, ‘ten reasons’, denouncing Catholicism.³⁴ Gillow, quoting Henry More, stated that even as late as 1660, ‘Campion’s memory was popular in the North’, and that his sermons were strongly remembered. In the late sixteenth-century Jesuit preaching such as this incited in the English government a more severe outlook on the treatment of Catholic prisoners and the apprehension of those still at large, and both Campion and Southworth were apprehended within the same month of 1581.³⁵ As such, in seventeenth-century Lancashire, the name Southworth undoubtedly associated itself with recusancy. In this period, it was common for the sons of prominent families within the Lancashire gentry to be sent overseas to train and become ordained as priests, particularly via the English Jesuit College of St. Omers, before returning to the county to minister to the faithful in secret.³⁶ Such was the case for Christopher Southworth of Samlesbury Hall, who was known in the area prior to the August 1612 trials, and whose name alone likely would have solidified him as an enemy of

³² See, for example, the anti-Jesuit discourse published by John White in 1608, which indicated in the title that it was aimed especially at his Lancashire countrymen - John White, *The Way to the True Church Wherein the Principall Motiues Perswading According to Romanisme and Questions Touching the Nature and Authoritie of the Church and Scriptures, Are Familiarly Disputed, and Driuen to Their Issues, Where, This Day They Sticke Betweene the Papists and vs: Contriuied into an Answer to a Popish Discourse Concerning the Rule of Faith and the Marks of the Church. And Published to Admonish Such as Decline to Papistrie of the Weake and Vncertaine Grounds, Whereupon They Haue Ventured Their Soules. Directed to All That Seeke for Resolution: And Especially to His Louing Countrimen of Lancashire. By Iohn White Minister of Gods Word at Eccles. For the Finding out of the Matter and Questions Handled, There Are Three Tables: Two in the Beginning, and One in the End of the Booke* (London: R. Field, 1608)

³³ The Southworth family of Samlesbury hall were known recusants, and John was well-known as unfavourable to the English Church for his refusal to abandon the Catholic faith, and his close ties to other well-known recusants.- Sterling, *Elizabethan and Jacobean*, p. 8

³⁴ Michael A. R. Graves, ‘Campion, Edmund [St Edmund Campion] (1540–1581), Jesuit and martyr,’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (3 January 2008) <<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-4539>>

³⁵ Joseph Gillow, *The Haydock Papers: A Glimpse into English Catholic Life under the shade of persecution and in the dawn of freedom*. (London: Burns & Oates Ltd., 1888), pp. 22-23

³⁶ The college was established in 1593 and located in St Omers, in the Spanish Netherlands, under the patronage of Philip II of Spain - Sterling, *Elizabethan and Jacobean*, p. 6; T. E. Muir, *Stonyhurst College, 1593-1993* (Lancashire: James & James, 1992), p. 55; ‘Stonyhurst History’, *Stonyhurst* <<https://www.stonyhurst.ac.uk/about-us/timeline>>

the Protestant church.³⁷ Moreover, the presence of a wanted Priest within a witchcraft pamphlet has a lot to do with England's new King, James I, and his fears of both witchcraft and Catholicism in the lead up to the trials.

James I: King and Witch-Hunter

When James I and VI came to the English throne in 1603, he was already renowned for his ties to witch-hunting, which Peel called an 'abnormal interest'.³⁸ In 1590, whilst he was the King of Scotland the country experienced one of the most notorious witch-hunts in its history when James became personally and zealously involved in the North Berwick trials, which Borman called a 'personal crusade'.³⁹ James believed that a group of witches had made attempts on both his and his Danish bride's lives by using weather magic to try to sink their ship, and as such felt determined to oversee the trials and prosecution of those deemed guilty of attempting such a treasonous crime. He was so determined, in fact, that he personally interviewed (and perhaps witnessed the torture of) one of the suspects, Agnes Sampson.⁴⁰ Before its end, this hunt resulted in over 100 people being implicated, and the notoriety of these trials was widespread, even more so when the King oversaw the publication of the pamphlet *Newes from Scotland*.⁴¹ The pamphlet was produced in London, and given its design and detailed woodcut on the front, it is clear that this was published for the masses, to educate the public on the damnable practices of witches. As Goodare stated, James'

³⁷ Walsham claims that he was known to have supervised 'a wave of dispossessions' in Lancashire county in 1612 - Alexandra Walsham, 'Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England', *The Historical Journal* 46:4 (2003), 779-815, p. 803

³⁸ Edgar Peel and Pat Southern, *The Trials of the Lancashire Witches: A Study of Seventeenth-Century Witchcraft*, illustrated by Pat Southern (Nelson: Hendon Publishing Co. Ltd., 1985), p. 144

³⁹ Borman, *Witches*, p. xv

⁴⁰ Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts, Eds. *Early Modern Scotland: James VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000), pp. 1-6

⁴¹ *Newes from Scotland, declaring the damnable life of Doctor Fian, a notable sorcerer, who was burned at Edenbrough in Januarie last, 1591*. (London, 1591)

involvement in these trials ‘politicized witchcraft.’⁴² *The Wonderfull Discoverie* too was claimed to be written as a means of educating the masses, and it is very likely that the ambitious court officials of the Lancaster Assize would have been familiar with *Newes from Scotland* prior to the Lancashire trials and wanted to produce something that would please the King.⁴³ Moreover, following the North Berwick trials, the Scottish King worked hard to familiarise himself with the topic of witchcraft, studying demonological treatises and biblical texts, and the beliefs and concepts commonly associated with a more continental view of witchcraft as treasonous and heretical, such as demonic pacts, witches’ Sabbats, and conspiracies to overthrow Christianity. James’ studies culminated in his writing *Daemonologie*, which was published in 1597, popularising more elite, continental views on witchcraft and warning against its diabolic practices.⁴⁴

In *Daemonologie*, James stated that witches ‘ought to be put to death according to the Law of God, the ciuill and imperial law, and municipall law of all Christian nations’,⁴⁵ and after a year on the English throne, one such law was passed. James’ 1604 ‘Acte against Coniuration Witchcrafte and dealinge with euill and wicked Spirits’ repealed the 1563 statute decreed by Elizabeth I, in favour of this one, ‘for the better restraining of said offences, and more severe punishing the same’.⁴⁶ With the 1604 Act in effect, and a fervently paranoid monarch on the throne, the 1612 Potts’ pamphlet should not be examined without careful

⁴² Julian Goodare, ‘Witchcraft in Scotland’ in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. Brian P. Levack (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) pp. 300-317 (p. 305)

⁴³ They ‘thought it necessarrie & profitable, to publish to the whole world, their most barbarous and damnable practices’. – Potts (1613), p. 14

⁴⁴ Goodier, *1612*, p. 6; Normand and Roberts, *Early Modern Scotland*

⁴⁵ Howell V. Calhoun, ‘James I and the witch scenes in Macbeth’, *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Folger Shakespeare Library, 1942) 184-189 (p. 185)

⁴⁶ Its full title was ‘An Act against coniuration witchcraft and dealing with evil spirits’. In short, this statute stated that any person or persons found guilty of invoking or consorting with wicked spirits (for any purpose), of grave robbing, or of using any other forms of witchcraft, charms, enchantments, or sorceries which may do harm to another person (their physical body, household, or livestock), ‘shall suffer paines of death as a Felon or Felons, and shall lose the benefit and privilege of Clergy and Sanctuary.’ This same act goes on to determine that even those types of magic typically associated with cunning folk, such as love charms or finding lost and stolen goods, are crimes punishable by a year’s imprisonment. If these lesser crimes of witchcraft are repeated after the fact, then the offender shall suffer the pains of death. In the Elizabethan decree, a second offence of this nature would lead not to execution, but to life imprisonment. – John Newton and Jo Bath, Eds., *Witchcraft and the Act of 1604* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 237-238

consideration of the impact that fear from above may have had on the Lancaster Assize and its ambitious court officials, especially Judges Bromley and Altham, who commissioned Potts to produce *The Wonderfull Discoverie*.

The new King could very easily have seemed to be a fierce advocate of witch hunting. He was, after all, the only monarch to publish a treatise on witchcraft, and it is highly likely that most learned men in the country had read this text prior to or upon his accession to the English throne.⁴⁷ Yet, by 1612, the King was actually more determined to prove his expertise on witchcraft by exposing imposter witches, rather than simply being determined to prosecute witches out of fear.⁴⁸ He was sceptical of those who confessed to crimes of witchcraft, for they may not have been true witches but tricksters, and *Daemonologie* could actually be read as a guide on how to root out religious imposters to find the real (and perhaps rarer) servants of the devil amongst the false confessors.⁴⁹ It could be assumed then that those court officials examining and prosecuting witches under James' rule would be well aware of the King's scepticism in certain cases, and yet *Daemonologie* was utilised as a witch-hunting tool and a source of reference for prosecutors in witch trials. This is evident within Potts' pamphlet, which is unsurprisingly full of adulation towards the King and at one point makes direct reference to *Daemonologie* within the text.⁵⁰

More important than this, however, are the indirect references to the concepts within the King's treatise. Whilst these trials contain elements typical of English witchcraft, such as the keeping and feeding of familiars, and a focus on *maleficium*, the pamphlet also details

⁴⁷ Pumfrey, 'Potts, plots and politics', p. 23

⁴⁸ In 1605, the King exposed a false prophet named Haydock at Court, and in 1616, James was celebrated for saving 5 falsely accused witches by discovering that their accuser's evidence was false - James Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunter: A horrible and true story of deception, witchcraft, murder, and the King of England* (New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 174-178

⁴⁹ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 9; Goodier, *1612*, p. 14

⁵⁰ 'What hath the Kings majestie written and published in his *Damonologie*, by way of premonition and preuention, which hath not here by the first or last beene executed, put in practise or discovered?' - Potts (1613), pp. 157-157

elements which can be considered more ‘continental’, and more in line with James’ work, like a gathering of the witches on Good Friday. Of course, the lines between English and continental witchcraft are, at times, blurred. Millar questions the common notion that continental beliefs were absent in England, arguing that English witchcraft was not just *malefic* but often a diabolic crime, too. In an in-depth study of sixty-six English pamphlets, Millar found diabolic notions such as sex with the devil (or demonic spirits) present in almost 50 per cent of seventeenth-century pamphlets, thus disproving the common assumption that English witchcraft was an asexual practice.⁵¹ The Good Friday gathering featured in *The Wonderful Discoverie* also, Millar finds, begins a trend of witch gatherings of varying sizes throughout the seventeenth-century.⁵² Whilst not directly named a Sabbat in Potts’ text, this is ultimately what such a gathering represents, especially given the fact that it was on such a Holy Day, thus making it an unholy gathering. Satanic, heretical witchcraft more akin to continental trials, as identified by James I in *Daemonologie*, had at last been proven to exist in James I and VI’s England.⁵³

Just as James I and VI had been fearful of witches as a result of an attempt made on his life in the early 1590s, so too was he fearful of Catholic conspiracy. The 1605 Gunpowder Plot, in which a group of Catholic gentlemen from recusant families around England (as far south as Essex and as far north as Yorkshire) placed barrels of gunpowder in a storeroom under parliament in an attempt to blow it up (along with the King and all but one member of his family), left the Kingdom suspicious of Catholics.⁵⁴ This plot was foiled in large part by Sir Thomas Knyvett, Baron of Escrick in Yorkshire and Gentleman of the Privy Chamber,

⁵¹ Charlotte-Rose Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), pp. 116-140, 183-184

⁵² For example, Millar identifies six pamphlets published in the 1640s which report ‘regular and secret’ meetings of witches. – Ibid, pp. 152-160

⁵³ James claims that witches make ‘diuers formes of circles’ and ‘conuentions... to the adoring of... Sathan’. - King James VI and I, *Daemonologie, in forme of a dialogue, divided into three Bookes* (London: 1603), p. 25; Pumfrey, ‘Potts, plots and politics’, p. 22

⁵⁴ Mark Nicholls, *Investigating the Gunpowder Plot* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), pp. 12-15

who was charged with the search of the cellars underneath Parliament, and who subsequently discovered the conspiracy and arrested Guy Fawkes. His success naturally carried immediate favour with the King.⁵⁵ By 1612 however, the Gunpowder plot had passed, that favour may have begun to wane, and it is highly likely that Knyvett sought a way to reelevate himself in the King's eyes.⁵⁶ He was a patron of Thomas Potts, and as such became a patron of *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, in which Potts wrote a large and flattering dedication to him and his wife. This arrangement had the potential to be mutually beneficial for both the Assize Court officials and for Knyvet. If this lengthy pamphlet were to reach, and impress, King James, then not only would its patron regain favour, but he could in turn raise up those involved in the Lancaster Assize, offering opportunities for royal patronage and promotion in the future.

The aftermath of the Gunpowder Plot saw the arrest and torture of Catholic conspirators for confessions of guilt and of co-conspirators, and in this purging of the King's enemies many Catholic plotters fled north. Upon his arrest, Guy Fawkes confessed that the aim of he and his co-conspirators, if the plot were successful, was to encourage all of the discounted people of England to rise up against Protestant England and its authorities. Despite the failure of the Gunpowder Plot, it is likely that the Plot's investigators feared that the second part of this plan could still be achieved. If these plotters were all Catholic gentry from recusant families and they felt that fleeing north may lead them to safety, then the northern counties of England would have seemed a hotbed of recusancy, and threat to the Crown. In November 1605, almost immediately following the discovery of the Gunpowder Plot, a list of Catholic recusants in Lancashire was sent to the Privy council in London in a show of support from local justices and other crown officials, for there were still Catholic

⁵⁵ Mark Nicholls, 'Knyvett [Knyvet], Thomas, Baron Knyvett (1545/6–1622), courtier', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 Sept 2004) <https://0-www-oxforddnb-com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-15800> [accessed 7th Sept 2019]

⁵⁶ Almond, *Lancashire Witch Craze*, p. 9

priests performing secret rites across Lancashire.⁵⁷ Given Lancashire's history of Catholic Uprising, and a known network of recusancy in this high-tension period post 1605, Lancashire was viewed as a suspect county.

Diabolic Catholic Witches

The Gunpowder Plot, although a failure, led to a period of paranoia towards Catholics, and according to Borman, this paranoia, given the already existing links between Catholic practices and witchcraft, meant that James I's 'war on witches' had been reinvigorated alongside the new war on 'papists'.⁵⁸ With an aim of Protestant thought being to realign the Christian church with biblical teachings and more humble, pure forms of practice came a denial of the more elaborate practices of the Catholic Church; the sacraments, the selling and purchasing of indulgences, key elements of a Catholic Mass, and the power of the clergy were all rejected by Protestant thinking.⁵⁹ While Protestant reformers placed little emphasis on witchcraft and magic (though the concept was not ignored), they did write often of their concerns over satanic power and its links to heresy, making many of their followers determined to take action against witches as a means of eradicating the threat of heretical action and conspiracy. Most accusations of witchcraft were based on local fears of maleficium, however once an accused witch was in the hands of the ruling authorities, there was an eagerness to prosecute the accused as a servant of the devil, perhaps as a result of the learned elite's greater awareness, and fear, of diabolic conspiracy.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ John Harland, Ed., *The Lancashire Lieutenancy Under the Tudors and Stuarts* (Manchester: The Chetham Society, 1859), pp. 251-252' Goodier, *1612*, pp. 18-19

⁵⁸ Borman, *Witches*, p. 58

⁵⁹ Brian P. Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013), p. 109

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, pp. 113-114

Witch hunting occurred most often in areas like Pendle, that had experienced such religious upheaval,⁶¹ and witchcraft, Borman argues, filled the ‘void created’ by the abolishment of Catholicism in the early modern period.⁶² This is, naturally, due to the tensions and fears that any form of social upheaval may bring, but as we know, lines were often blurred in post-Reformation thought between Catholicism and witchcraft, which therefore would have had a part to play in this correlation. For example, the sacrament of the Eucharist and teachings of transubstantiation, in which it was believed that the supplied bread and wine actually became the body and blood of Christ, was deemed a form of necromancy for its dealings with dead flesh in the same way as the Catholic celebration of holy relics, including bones and teeth of Saints could be.⁶³ In early modern witchcraft trials, it was not uncommon to read of accused witches performing similar rites with parts of corpses in order to perform malefic magic. This can be seen too in Potts’ pamphlet, for example, James Device accused Anne Whittle, alias Chattox of taking ‘three scalpes of people, which had been buried... and took eight teeth’.⁶⁴ Catholic reverence for holy relics and icons, such as the worshipping of the remains of a saint and the belief that they could perform miracles, was also deemed idolatry and was feared for how closely connected it was to the diabolic spells and practices of witches.⁶⁵ It is no surprise then that English witchcraft cases often included an accused witch’s reciting of ‘charms’ which very closely resembled Catholic prayers. Several of the Pendle witches did just that, which immediately associates them both with

⁶¹ Valetta identified a similar trend between 1640 and 1670, linking witchcraft belief with sectarian feeling. - Frederick Valetta, *Witchcraft, Magic and Superstition, 1640-70* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 30-47

⁶² Borman, *Witches*, p. 184

⁶³ Moreover, in the Witchcraft Act of 1604, King James I prohibited against those who would ‘take up any dead man, woman, or child... or the skin, bone, or any other part of any dead person, to be... used... in an manner of Witchcraft’ – King James I, quoted in Daniel Harms, ‘“Thou Art Keeper of Man and Woman’s Bones”: Rituals of Necromancy in Early Modern England,’ *Thanatos*, 8.1 (2019), 62-90, p. 65

⁶⁴ Potts (1613), p. 42

⁶⁵ Diane Purkiss, ‘Witchcraft in Early Modern Literature’, pp. 125-126

witchcraft and with Catholicism, two practices or systems of belief which went against God and King.⁶⁶

Demonic Possession

Catholic practices were certainly present within the evidence against the accused Pendle witches, and as discussed, in the peculiar case of the Samlesbury witches, so too was a villainous and scheming Catholic Priest. It is in this case that we also witness accusations of malefic magic which more closely resembled cases of demonic possession than they did witchcraft.⁶⁷ Whilst possession is not a term used within the pamphlet, the symptoms described by a young witness against the accused suggests that the witnesses believed that she had possessed in some way at their hands. Though it is easy to view witchcraft as entirely separate from demonic possession, in the early modern period the lines were often blurred. Exorcism was practised within the period, and demonic possession existed in much the same way as a modern reader would understand it. Clerical members of both Catholic and Protestant churches utilised the rite of exorcism as a means of discovering the existence of, and then expelling demons from a possessed person's body. Where the distortion lay, however, was in where a possessing demon came from, or how it came to be in the body of the possessed. It was widely held at the time that demonic possession could be caused by a witch as another form of *maleficium*.⁶⁸ Therefore, many cases of demonic possession called for an exorcist to not only expel the demon, but also to discover the identity of the witch who had coordinated the possession. That clergy members felt they had the power to exorcise

⁶⁶ Peter Elmer, *Witchcraft, Witch-Hunting, and Politics in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 16

⁶⁷ For textual analysis of the Samlesbury case, see Chapter 3.

⁶⁸ Whilst early modern society did not believe that witches had the ability to control and command demons at will, they did accept that certain tokens or charms could be used to direct a demon towards a specific victim. - Sarah Ferber, 'Demonic Possession, Exorcism, and Witchcraft' in *The Oxford Handbook of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe and Colonial America*, ed. by Levack, Brian P. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 575-580

these demons was one thing, but the notion that they could so easily converse with a demon and utilise its power to discover a witch (or a group of witches) was something that often caused a great deal of discomfort within the Church. Exorcists were at times viewed as no different than magicians or sorcerers, and as such faced condemnation by other Church officials.⁶⁹

There was a clear distinction within the period made by demonologists between witches and the possessed, or ‘demoniacs’,⁷⁰ since witchcraft was, at its core, a diabolic pact with the devil, and possession was an involuntary condition in which a demon or demonic spirit entered the victim’s body against their will. This meant that the victims of possession were deemed not responsible for their own actions, and could therefore behave in ways which subverted societal norms. This, Levack argues, is why so many victims of possession were members of subordinate societal groups, young women in particular, for possession explained away their rebellious behaviours.⁷¹ Moreover, a victim of possession arguably may have enjoyed all of the attention they received, the sense of importance gained, as a result of their actions. That demonic possession was oftentimes seen as a direct result of witchcraft was even more problematic because these possessed victims could then begin to make accusations of witchcraft against neighbours and even family, and thus cause the arrest and potential prosecution and execution of those accused. Such was the case in Salem, Massachusetts at the end of the seventeenth-century, which became so sensationalised that a total of ‘78 possessed persons’, only twelve of them male, sent nineteen people to their deaths.⁷² The alleged possession of Anne Gunter occurred much closer in time to the Samlesbury case, in which

⁶⁹Ibid, pp. 575-580

⁷⁰ Brian P. Levack, ‘Possession, witchcraft, and the law in Jacobean England,’ *Washington and Lee Law Review*, 52.5 (1996), p. 1614

⁷¹ ‘They could shout and scream, disobey their superiors, and exhibit sexually immodest behavior’ - Ibid, p. 1615

⁷² Ibid, p. 1615

she, in 1604 claimed to experience visions,⁷³ which led to her accusing three women of malefic witchcraft against her.

The Church of England rejected the Catholic rite of exorcism, in part because it was a power claimed by the Catholic Priests entering England illegally from the 1570s, who performed exorcisms, sometimes in cases which were ignored by the Protestant Church, and thus challenged its authority.⁷⁴ Catholics were able to use the news of successful exorcisms as propaganda to encourage loyalty, or conversion, to the Roman Catholic Church. This threat to the Protestant faith in England by exorcisms came also from another angle, for the Anglican Church faced similar negative publicity from the actions of extreme Protestants who travelled the country performing exorcisms (or dispossessions) of their own, in defiance of the Anglican Church. The most notable of these extremists was John Darrell.⁷⁵ Less than twenty years before the Lancashire witch trials, the county witnessed an alleged case of demonic possession which struck the Starkie household, known as the ‘Lancashire Seven’. The Starkie family were close relatives of Roger Nowell (the head of the household, Nicholas Starkie, was Nowell’s nephew), the Justice of the Peace who was instrumental in the examination and arraignment of the Pendle witches in 1612. The demonic possession of the entire Starkie family led them to seek out the aid of the then well-known Puritan exorcist John Darrell, and his assistant George More.⁷⁶ In this case too, one known primarily as a case of demonic possession, it was revealed that a cunning man named Edmond Hartley was in fact supposedly guilty of bewitching the family (by kissing each one on the lips and breathing the

⁷³ At the time ‘such evidence was admissible’ – Ibid, p. 1619

⁷⁴ James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550-1750* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 194

⁷⁵ James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2001), p. 28

⁷⁶ John Darrell was involved in several cases of dispossession, including the Throckmorton girls in 1593 - Levack, ‘Possession’, p. 1620

Devil into their bodies).⁷⁷ Once more, the lines between witchcraft and demonic possession were blurred.

Given the closeness of the Starkie case, both in location and time, to the Lancashire witch trials of 1612, and the ties that JP Roger Nowell had to both cases, it might be argued that the accuser within the Samlesbury case, Grace Sowerbutts, had been familiar with the local memory of the Starkie case. Certainly, it would seem that less than a decade after the Lancashire witch trials, there was a case very similar to the Samlesbury and Starkie incidents in neighbouring Yorkshire. In 1882, William Grainge published an edition of *Daemonologia*, the witchcraft tract produced around 1621 by Edward Fairfax of Fuyston as a result of his displeasure following the court's failure to prosecute those he believed had bewitched his children. Grainge wrote in his introduction that witchcraft was so prevalent in the common mind because it had 'fastened itself' to religious belief; that witchcraft was accepted as reality only because it had not yet been separated from the Church.⁷⁸ On Fairfax's own fears of witchcraft, Grainge is clear in his belief that he should not be admonished because to reject the existence of witchcraft in the early modern period was to align oneself with atheism.⁷⁹ Yet, by 1621, witchcraft cases were already beginning to be treated more cautiously. Fairfax accused six of his neighbours of witchcraft, but the Judge during this trial directed the jury to clear them, which in turn led Fairfax to the writing of the 1621 pamphlet, 'as a vindication of his own proceeding.'⁸⁰ This pamphlet, which opens by addressing 'thee Christian reader', was not published, but several copies were distributed locally by Fairfax. However, the direct address to the public makes clear that Edward Fairfax did aim to publish this text. Perhaps, given the sensationalist nature of Potts' pamphlet published not a decade earlier, and used as a

⁷⁷ John Darrell, *A True Narration of the Strange and Grevous Vexation by the Devil of 7. persons in Lancashire, and William Somers of Nottingham* (1600)

⁷⁸ William Grainge, Ed., in Edward Fairfax, *Daemonologia: A Discourse on Witchcraft as it was acted in the family of Mr Edward Fairfax, of Fuyston, in the County of York, in the Year 1621; along with the only known two Eclogues of the same author known to be in Existence* (Harrogate: R. Ackbill, 1882), p. iv

⁷⁹ William Grainge in *Ibid.*, p. 17

⁸⁰ William Grainge in *Ibid.*, pp. 17-21

means to solidify and clarify the existence of real witchcraft in Lancashire, Edward Fairfax of neighbouring Fuyston (or Fewston, today) wrote his *Daemonologia* inspired by Potts' text. The similarities can even be seen in the author's choice of phrasing. Thomas Potts wrote that Demdike 'dwelt in the Forrest of Pendle, a vaste place, fitte for her profession.'⁸¹ On the accused Fuyston witches, Fairfax wrote that they dwelled in the Forest of Knaresborough, 'in which dwell many suspected for witches'.⁸²

Fairfax wrote of bewitchments that seemed to encompass a multitude of beliefs and stereotypes within the period, many of which reflect ideas of demonic possession, and yet, like in the Samlesbury case, such a term is never used. Whilst the majority of the Pendle witches are accused of similar crimes - the making of clay images and saying of spells and charms in order to harm or kill - in *Daemonologia* the author details bewitchments, trance-like states, visions (including visits from demons), fits, and more. This more convoluted collection of events and afflictions certainly suggests some degree of authorial construction. Fairfax also, interestingly, discusses one such episode experienced by his daughter Helen in which he likened her symptoms to 'the disease called "the mother"'.⁸³ 'The mother' being a gendered disease also known as 'Pasio Hysterica' (or 'hysteria') which had been documented first in a 1603 tract by Edward Jorden.⁸⁴ It would certainly seem that Fairfax, well-read and a self-proclaimed 'learned' man, was utilising the sources and beliefs of his time in order to construct a sensational tale of witchcraft. However, this is merely speculative, and as Grainge wrote in his introduction to the pamphlet, belief in witchcraft was a real occurrence within the early modern period.

⁸¹ Potts (1613), p. 14

⁸² Fairfax, *Daemonologia*, p. 35

⁸³ Fairfax, *Daemonologia*, pp. 36-37

⁸⁴ Edward Jorden, *A briefe discourse of a disease called the Suffocation of the Mother* (John Windet, 1603)

Witchcraft

Whilst the exact number cannot be determined, research has shown that between around 1400 and 1775, approximately 100,000 individuals were prosecuted as witches in Europe and America, and around half were executed.⁸⁵ Moreover, though not all of those prosecuted were female, it has been determined that up to 80 percent of the total figure were indeed women.⁸⁶ In comparison with continental Europe, England saw a relatively low number of individuals brought to trial and prosecuted for witchcraft. Approximately 1,000 people were tried and less than half of those were executed in England between 1542 and 1735.⁸⁷ However, England did experience a much higher percentage of women accused and prosecuted for witchcraft over men. Between 1560 and 1675, the number of women accused of witchcraft in Essex made up 93 per cent of the total number.⁸⁸ Outbreaks of witch-hunts were sporadic in England and typically occurred in rural areas, perhaps areas which experienced religious or political tensions, or socio-economic hardships, making local communities more inclined to resent certain individuals or to search for a scapegoat for their misfortune.⁸⁹

When examining early modern witch trials in any form and from any angle, it is important to remember that within the early modern period it was common belief that witches did exist, the general consensus throughout Europe was that they were servants of the devil, and that they posed a serious threat to society.⁹⁰ These beliefs were evident in the officials presiding over witch hunts and trials, as well as at local levels. When accused witches were brought to trial, this resulted in an even wider spread of belief in and fear of witches and witchcraft,

⁸⁵ Sharpe, *Instruments*, p. 5; Levack, *Oxford Handbook*, pp. 3-4

⁸⁶ Alison Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and Gender in Early Modern Europe' in *The Oxford Handbook*, p. 449

⁸⁷ Charlotte-Rose Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions in Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017), p. 6

⁸⁸ The total number was around 313 individuals, and only 23 of those were male – Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, p. 142

⁸⁹ Elmer, *Witchcraft*, pp. 1, 16; Goodier, *1612*, p. 9

⁹⁰ A witch was, according to George Gifford's 1587 *Discourse*, 'one that woorketh by the Devill, or by some devilish or curious art, either hurting or healing.' - George Gifford, *A Discourse of the subtile Practises of Devilles by Witches and Sorcerers* (London, 1587), quoted in - Borman, p. xiii

especially when these trials produced printed pamphlets or inspired demonological treatises. However, these beliefs differed regionally, nationally, or perhaps even within specific class groups.⁹¹ The overarching features which connected the identities of feared witches throughout Europe and America were their practice of maleficium, or harmful magic against others, and their role as servants of the devil, thus placing them firmly in opposition to God and the Christian Church. Witches were thought to have entered into an agreement with the devil himself, often known as a demonic pact, and thus received their ‘witch mark’ as a result. These marks could be then searched for on the body of an accused witch in order to help prove their guilt. The demonic pact was a witch’s way of giving their life to Satan and thus renouncing God. *Daemonologie* contains a chapter dedicated to this pact entitled, ‘The Deuilles contract with the Magicians’.⁹² In continental belief, witches practiced their dark arts in groups and at gatherings, known as Sabbats, and it was common knowledge that they often flew to remote locations for these Sabbats in order to consort with demons and practice maleficium. Moreover, continental witches were diabolic conspirators, involved in an overarching plot to overthrow Christianity. In 1612, with the Good Friday gathering of alleged witches, which resulted in a thwarted plot to blow up Lancaster Castle, the conspiratorial witchcraft trope entered the English belief system.⁹³ In English witchcraft belief, it was rare for concepts like Sabbats or a demonic pacts to enter into English discourse, and the witch’s mark did not exist in the same way. Instead, the idea of a witch’s mark subtly transformed into a ‘witch teat’, the spot which was used to feed familiar spirits or demons. One of the powers of the English JP was the ability to issue search warrants, of a suspect’s property, or of their body.⁹⁴ The nurturing of familiars was a key element in beliefs

⁹¹ Levack, *Oxford Handbook*, p. 3

⁹² King James VI and I, *Daemonologie*, pp. 14-16

⁹³ Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, pp. 152-170; Sharpe, *Instruments*, pp. 59-60, 71-73

⁹⁴ Whilst there is no evidence of such searches taking place in Pendle, there is an indication that at least one accused witch had an identified teat, for her confession states that a familiar got ‘blood under her left Arme’.- Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch*, p. 42; Potts (1613), p. 17

about English witchcraft.⁹⁵ Familiars, indeed, were present in English witchcraft pamphlets since the first of their kind, *The Examination and confession of Certaine Wytches*, was published in 1566 in which dog-like, ‘evil favoured’ spirits were aligned with the accused.⁹⁶ Moreover, in the St Osyth trial of 1582, JP Brian Darcy asked a local woman, Margaret Simpson, to strip and search the accused witches for signs of their mark, or teat, with no regard for their modesty or human decency in such an act.⁹⁷ The English witch, or more specifically the English female witch, was so frightening because she represented deep-rooted societal fears of a monstrous mother;⁹⁸ a woman who rejected true maternity and fed demons from her body instead, who murdered children, and destroyed fertility.⁹⁹ From the concept of this monstrous maternity comes the fear that female witches raised their children within the realms of witchcraft and the devil. English trials very often experienced the accusation of one individual developing into an examination of the accused’s entire family. If one family member was a witch, then it was highly probable that the entire family practiced. These accusations came especially easily to matriarchal families, because the monstrous mother was the head of her subversive household, and practiced the subversive art of witchcraft, and she would desire the spread of such evil to her children as well.¹⁰⁰ Such was the case in the Lancashire trials, in which the key figures amongst the accused were two matriarchal heads of two families of witches. *The Wonderfull Discoverie* makes clear the fact that the involvement by a mother of her children in witchcraft is a most grievous act.

⁹⁵ The concept of familiars, Millar states, are almost entirely unique to English witchcraft belief, with over 80 per cent of English witchcraft pamphlets making reference to familiar spirits. – Charlotte-Rose Millar, ‘The Devil and Familiar Spirits in English Witchcraft’, in *The Witchcraft Reader*, Ed. by Darren Oldridge (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 240–248, pp. 241–242; Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 23

⁹⁶ ‘The Examination and confession of Certaine Wytches (1566)’ in Marion Gibson, *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing* (Oxon: Routledge, 2000), pp. 20, 22

⁹⁷ Gibson, *St Osyth*, p. 68

⁹⁸ Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 6–8

⁹⁹ It is interesting to note that in Potts’ pamphlet, the treatment of the accused male witches, whilst they may have familiars, do not feature any suckling of them. – Lyndal Roper, *Witch in the Western Imagination*, p. 17

¹⁰⁰ Deborah Willis, ‘The Witch-Family in Elizabethan and Jacobean Print Culture’, *Journal of Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013), p. 6

In the same way that witchcraft beliefs varied regionally, so too did the processes of witch-hunting. In continental Europe it was more common for an accused witch to be tortured for their confession, and for the names of their fellow witches. The English legal system did not allow for the use of torture when examining a suspected witch.¹⁰¹ Torture was instead reserved for cases of suspected treason, or when a quick confession was necessary in order to root out a conspiracy (such as with Guy Fawkes following the 1605 Gunpowder Plot). However, other coercive methods may have been employed to gain a confession, which could have included sleep deprivation or keeping a prisoner in an uncomfortable position for long periods of time.¹⁰² Mental coercion too, may have been used; promising or threatening an accused witch with certain things which could make them feel that their confession would be their salvation.¹⁰³ Prior to a formal accusation of witchcraft being brought to a local JP, it was not uncommon for villagers to use illegal tests, such as swimming or pricking, to determine someone's guilt and thus strengthen their case against them. Whilst not part of the official proof system, Darr calls these practices 'typical' of witchcraft cases.¹⁰⁴

As Darr has laid out, guilt for any crime in this period was to be determined at three different stages. The first stage was in the hands of the JP, who was to assess all of the evidence available, including conducting his own investigations and examinations, before determining whether there was sufficient proof to proceed with the case.¹⁰⁵ The authors of English witchcraft pamphlets were selective in the evidence they made available to the public, meaning that it was very rare that a reader could see the questions asked by an examiner when gaining a witch's confession. As such, we cannot know what coercive methods, if any, were used by JP Roger Nowell in his examinations of the Pendle witches in

¹⁰¹ Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch*, p. 94

¹⁰² Goodier, *1612*, p. 11

¹⁰³ Brian Darcy, for example, promised the St Osyth accused lenience if they confessed. - Gibson, *St Osyth*, p. 61

¹⁰⁴ Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch*, p. 29

¹⁰⁵ Stage two was pre-trial, when grand jurors determined whether a bill of indictment was true (*billa vera*), and if it was, then the case went to stage three, the trial itself. - *Ibid*, pp. 30-31

order to gain the confessions needed to develop a case worthy of the Assizes court.¹⁰⁶ The dialogue was published one-sided, perhaps to mask any coercive methods which may have been used, or to solidify a prosecuted witch's guilt in the eyes of the public by making their confessions seem unforced.

Witchcraft trials were public and theatrical, and knowledge of them was made widespread by the printing press.¹⁰⁷ English witchcraft pamphlets were oftentimes a means of spreading learned or elite views to the masses. They were frequently decorated with woodcut images, though Potts' pamphlet only contains one, which were used in the period to market the purchasing of literature meant for popular consumption, and the topic of witchcraft was an undoubtedly popular one which would certainly appeal to the public. For the most part, Elizabethan pamphlets were much shorter than Jacobean pamphlets (though there were exceptions), perhaps because literacy was rising steadily throughout the period, meaning that more people were willing to engage with larger texts.¹⁰⁸ A common theme throughout the genre was the notion of the 'discovery' of witches, by neighbours, by authorities, or by court officials. Whilst many pamphlets were designed for the purpose of entertaining the masses, some authors did attempt to remove their work from the genre of popular literature by placing more emphasis on truth and justice. Oftentimes times this was aided by a strong emphasis on patronage, as was the case for *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, and on the justice system's authority, as granted by the monarch, and by God.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 15

¹⁰⁷ Elmer, *Witchcraft*, p. 16

¹⁰⁸ This is, unfortunately, speculation. Literacy levels in this period were difficult to quantify, with the clearest indication of literacy often being an examination of people's ability to sign their own name. This task has been undertaken, and the findings do suggest that a 'considerable proportion of the rural population of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England could purposefully wield a pen. It is highly likely, but much harder to prove, that individuals who could make meaningful letters or marks were also able to recognize them — to 'read' them.' – Mark Hailwood, 'Rethinking Literacy in Rural England, 1550–1700', *Past & Present* 260:1 (2023), 38–70, p. 60; This study has built upon the work of Cressy in 1977. See also:- David Cressy, 'Levels of Illiteracy in England, 1530–1730' *The Historical Journal* 20:1 (1977), 1-23

¹⁰⁹ For an in-depth analysis of Witchcraft Pamphlets and how they changed over time, see:- Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*; Suhr, 'Publishing for the Masses', pp. 118-121; Anna Bayman, "'Large Hands, Wilde Eares, and Piercing Sights": The 'Discoveries' of the Elizabethan and Jacobean Witch Pamphlets', *Literature & History*, 16:1 (2007), pp. 26-45

Justice and Power

In early modern England, law was overseen at first a local, and then national level, both of which were established and controlled by Westminster. A local JP (Justice of the Peace) was appointed by the Privy Council to oversee legal matters in his own area of a county, and there tended to be three or four JPs per county. They were reported to by local officers and constables, had the authority to try and prosecute for very minor offences (known as Petty Sessions), and were charged with keeping the King or Queen's Peace. This role was unpaid, and so a JP would have needed wealth and status prior to appointment, though it was not necessary that they should have legal training.¹¹⁰ In the late sixteenth-century, JPs also became responsible for gathering evidence of crimes to be presented to Assizes Courts. JPs weren't required to keep any formal record of their investigative notes; however, these notes would have been presented to court officials prior to trial for review.¹¹¹ As clerk of the Assize, Thomas Potts most likely used JP Roger Nowell's notebook as a resource in his development of *The Wonderfull Discoverie*. However, Darr asserts that whilst JP examinations were provided to the assize judges, they 'were not admitted as evidence', even when they featured a suspect's admission of guilt.¹¹² Yet, as is clear in the evidence presented, much of what Potts shows in the pamphlet was in fact gathered during this initial process.¹¹³ Once questioned by a local JP, defendants were taken to gaol and there awaited trial, but these gaols were in such dire conditions that this was a punishment in itself. Such was the case in the

¹¹⁰ There were also tracts in circulation which provided 'guidance' to such figures on witchcraft cases, for example, Bernard's *Guide to Grand-Iury Men* - Richard Bernard, *A guide to grand-iury men diuided into two booke: in the first, is the authors best aduice to them what to doe, before they bring in a billa vera in cases of witchcraft, with a Christian direction to such as are too much giuen vpon euery crosse to thinke themselues bewitched. In the second, is a treatise touching witches good and bad, how they may be knowne, euicted, condemned, with many particulars tending thereunto.* (London: Felix Kingston, 1627)

¹¹¹ Henry French, 'Legal and judicial sources', in *Understanding Early Modern Primary Sources*, ed. by Laura Sangha and Jonathan Willis (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 38-39

¹¹² Darr, *Marks of an Absolute Witch*, p. 41

¹¹³ Examples of this will be discussed in Chapter 2.

Lancashire witch trials, when one of the accused, Elizabeth Southernnes, known by the alias Demdike, died in prison in Lancaster Castle before coming to trial.¹¹⁴

Since the late middle ages, England had a tradition of judicial centralisation (due to the establishment of the English common law), which meant that professional judges appointed by the Crown travelled around one of six county Assizes Court circuits twice a year, hearing and trying both civil and criminal cases.¹¹⁵ The offenses tried here were much more serious than Petty Sessions run by JPs or Quarter Sessions which tried smaller cases, and the stakes were much higher, for an Assize Court could impose the death penalty.¹¹⁶ Court rulings, then, came from London and were based upon the common law practiced throughout England. The Northern Assize Circuit, which included Lancaster and York, was in this period the least desirable because it was inconveniently long and its business was five times as great as on other circuits.¹¹⁷ Court officials such as Altham, Bromley, and Potts would have been very eager to move up on the career ladder and leave the circuit, but promotion to another one was dependent on royal patronage.¹¹⁸

We know frustratingly little about Thomas Potts beyond his role as clerk of the court,¹¹⁹ author of this extensive pamphlet, and recipient of the patronage of one Thomas Knyvet, Baron of Escrick.¹²⁰ In Cockburn's study of Assize clerks in the seventeenth century, Potts is mentioned, only once, and simply to reveal that he was an associate on the Northern Circuit, and served as a clerk for the East Riding of Yorkshire.¹²¹ We do know, however, that after 1612, Potts' ambitious motivations for penning *The Wonderfull Discoverie* perhaps came

¹¹⁴ Potts (1613), p. 100

¹¹⁵ Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, p. 100

¹¹⁶ French, 'Legal and judicial sources', p. 41

¹¹⁷ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 7; 'The Circuits Commission – Report', *The Law Times*, 5 (Office of the Law Times, 1845), pp. 273-274

¹¹⁸ Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 7

¹¹⁹ As Cockburn has stated, the court clerk of the assize was 'a virtually full-time administrative official... his personal duties began with the opening of assizes and ended only with the return of convictions to the Crown Office'. - J. S. Cockburn, *A History of English Assizes 1558-1714* (London, Cambridge University Press, 1972) p. 79

¹²⁰ Nicholls, *Investigating*, p. 9

¹²¹ J. S. Cockburn, 'Seventeenth-Century Clerks of Assize – Some Anonymous Members of The Legal Profession', *The American Journal of Legal History*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 325

to fruition, for whilst little is known of the author and clerk beyond the 1612 trials, Pumfrey did discover that he was the recipient of royal favour, likely aided by his patron Knyvett, in the form of the ‘keepership of Skalme Park’, where the King’s hounds were bred and trained, in 1615, and in 1618 was granted ‘granted the office of collecting the forfeitures on the laws concerning sewers, for twentyone years’, thus becoming a minor patron himself.¹²²

James Altham, one of the two judges during the 1612 Assizes, was reaching the end of his career, having been called to the bar in 1581. He died five years after the Lancashire trials, and whilst he did try a witch in York, Jennet Preston,¹²³ it was his fellow Assize Court judge who oversaw the Lancashire witch trials.¹²⁴ Sir Edward Bromley, a Shropshire-born judge, saw a fairly substantial amount of success after 1612 (perhaps because of the infamy of these Pendle trials), being promoted to the Midland Assize circuit, as well as becoming surveyor of lands in Lancashire, recorder of Shrewsbury, and Serjeant-at-Law.¹²⁵ Seven years after the trial of the Pendle witches, Bromley was appointed as judge for the Flowers trial in Lincoln, documented in the anonymous pamphlet *Damnabable Practises of three Lincoln-shire Witches*.¹²⁶ Borman’s 2014 study of this trial discussed the importance of Bromley’s ‘reputation for thoroughness’ following the 1612 Lancaster assizes, because in trials of this nature, the choice of judge was crucial.¹²⁷ In an early modern trial, it was the judge’s beliefs and prejudices which helped to shape the outcome, for the judge would have made clear to the jury what was expected of them, and ultimately had the power to overturn any verdict

¹²² Pumfrey, ‘Potts, plots and politics’, p. 38; Pumfrey’s findings were also paraphrased in Clayton’s work - John A. Clayton, *The Lancashire Witch Conspiracy: A History of Pendle Forest and the Pendle Witch Trials* (Barrowford: Barrowford Press, 2007), p. 132

¹²³ Potts (1613), pp. 210-217

¹²⁴ David Ibbetson, ‘Altham, Sir James (c. 1555–1617), judge’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 Sep. 2004) <https://0-www-oxforddnb-com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-429> [Accessed 7 Sept 2019]

¹²⁵ N. G. Jones, ‘Bromley, Sir Edward (bap. 1563, d. 1626), judge’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23 Sep. 2004) <https://0-www-oxforddnb-com.serlib0.essex.ac.uk/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-66565> [accessed 7 Sept 2019]

¹²⁶ Also known as the Witches of Belvoir, the full pamphlet title is: *Damnabable Practises Of three Lincoln-shire Witches, Joane Flower, and her two Daughters, Margret and Phillip Flower, against Henry Lord Rosse, with others the Children of the Right Honourable the Earle of Rutland, at Beaver Castle, who for the same were executed at Lincolne the 11 March last* (London, 1619)

¹²⁷ Borman, *Witches*, p. 176

made by the jury anyway.¹²⁸ Potts recorded Bromley's final speech during the Lancaster Assize, in which he proclaimed otherwise, stating that pains were taken 'not to induce or leade the Iurie to finde any one of you guiltie upon matter of suspition or presumption'.¹²⁹ However, Bromley's direct address to those found not guilty during these trials makes plain that this judge would have desired another outcome if not for the evidence presented in court, for he stated, 'presume no further of your Innocencie then you have just cause... without question there are amongst you, that are as deepe in this Action, as any of them amongst you'.¹³⁰ On this particular excerpt, Borman believes that this is evidence of Bromley's attempts during the trials to sway the jury to his way of thinking, but that he was forced to 'content himself to admonishing' those prisoners who had been acquitted instead.¹³¹

Lancaster was the last stop on the Northern circuit, with the Assize judges having just left York, and the trial of Jennet Preston. Upon arrival, the Lancaster Gaoler would have presented both judges with the gaol calendar – a list of the prisoners due to be tried at the Assize court over the coming days. Prior to trial, a jury of twelve men would have determined whether a case had enough evidence to make it answerable in court and worth pursuit, and at this time a defendant would enter their plea. During the Assize, prisoners were tried in batches. A defendant had no defence counsel, no prior knowledge of the evidence which was to be set against them, and as such no means of defending themselves. Trials were short, fast-paced, and chaotic, they lasted around 15 minutes and went on within a public courtroom in which crowds of people could be extremely loud and rowdy.¹³² Assize judges tended to have sway over the evidence presented to a jury and could make clear the viewpoints that a jury should take, and ultimately, the judge had the power of influencing the final verdict reached

¹²⁸ Ibid, pp. 176-184

¹²⁹ Potts (1613), p. 168

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. 171

¹³¹ Borman, *Witches*, p. 184

¹³² Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, pp. 33-35

by the jury. A court clerk, such as Thomas Potts, was responsible for the coordination of records and general administration during and after the trials at an Assize court.¹³³ The 1612 assize court was Potts' first time on the circuit, and since many court clerks often failed to develop past this point in their careers and thus fell into obscurity, ambition might mean that Thomas Potts' writing of *The Wonderful Discoverie* was an attempt to avoid such obscurity and improve his career prospects, which he seems to have done.¹³⁴

The legal system in the period was undoubtedly unjust, and the workings documented by Potts shows a clear favouring of patriarchal figures over the voices and agency of the accused, most especially the female accused. Oftentimes, in this period, authority was patriarchal as well as hierarchical, and women were then defined by their social and marital status. That statement is not meant to underestimate women's contribution to the early modern economy, of which Whittle has estimated was up to 44 per cent of labour force participation.¹³⁵ Female spaces and occupations *did* exist within this period. As discerned by Carter's study, oftentimes the nature of 'women's work' could place women at the forefront of witchcraft suspicions. Power over corruptible substances (like food and medicine), and over the vulnerable (children, new mothers, the sick), meant that when a woman did have some authority and autonomy, she was at risk.¹³⁶ In the eyes of the elite, a daughter was obedient to her father, and a servant to her master, until such time as they were connected to a new household through marriage. For the most part women had no autonomy or power within the public or political sphere, though there were always exceptions. The domestic sphere often allowed women some power; a successful marriage was most often a partnership in which wives typically ran the household and the domestic duties associated with this, while

¹³³ Cockburn, *A History*, p. 79; Pumfrey, 'Potts, plots and politics', p. 22

¹³⁴ Pumfrey, 'Potts, plots and politics', p. 22;

¹³⁵ Jane Whittle, 'Putting Women Back into the Early Modern Economy: Work, Occupations, and Economic Development', *The Economic history review* (2024), p. 25

¹³⁶ Carter, 'Work, Gender and Witchcraft', pp. 11-14; Levack, *New Perspectives*, p. vii; See also:- Flather, *Gender and Space*

husbands worked, farmed, looked after finances, and so on. Moreover, if a woman was widowed, she became the head of her household, and as such held at least some degree of political power (which was generally more likely if she had property). However, a married woman remained, at least in the public sphere, subject to her husband. Reactions to and consequences of a husband's activities within the community, be they positive or negative, automatically included the entire household, thus if a husband was guilty of a crime or scorned for his disagreement with authority, so too was his wife.¹³⁷ With economic growth came more opportunities for many women to gain paid work, and wealthier women could own (and rent out) land, loan money, and so on, and whilst female access to capital remained limited, chances for female participation in the economy grew especially for unmarried and widowed women.¹³⁸ Patriarchal households did exist, but if a woman married or remarried, her power became her husband's. Approximately 20 per cent of all households were headed by women, and whilst many had to remarry for economic survival, some powerful households saw women remain single by choice; seizing the chance at power.¹³⁹ Additionally, these female heads-of-household often gave preference to their female relatives when considering who would inherit their property.¹⁴⁰

The gendered divide was present further afield than just within work and marriage. Early modern women had, or created, their own social spheres in which they could enjoy as much agency as contemporary society would allow. The period saw women creating their own social networks and spaces. Church services were divided by gender as well as class, and women often attended church in groups of their peers, thus creating a collective gender identity. Groups of women were often heavily involved in the organisation of church

¹³⁷ Bernard Capp, 'Separate domains? Women and authority in early modern England', in *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England*, ed. by Paul Griffiths et al. (New York: St Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 118-128

¹³⁸ Heidi Breuer, *Crafting the Witch: Gendering Magic in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2009), p. 109

¹³⁹ Capp, 'Separate domains?' p. 119

¹⁴⁰ Amy Louise Erickson, *Women and Property in Early Modern England* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 19

celebrations and collections, and those who could afford it did at times donate (within their groups) to these collections as individuals, rather than under their husband's name.¹⁴¹

Childbirth, too, was a female domain, in which these networks came together to aid a new mother in all aspects of postnatal life, including a woman's 'lying in' period, and a child's christening. These networks, too, enabled women to seize power in the form of gossip and slander; with the support of her peers, a woman could more successfully scorn another member of the community with fewer repercussions.¹⁴² As Mendelson and Crawford found, gossip had:

a respected function in the community as a means of enforcing canons of morality and neighbourliness. Its utility in deterring crime and sexual licence was acknowledged by church court officials, who often asked witnesses about the existence of a 'common fame', the gender-neutral term for a rumour spread through gossip.¹⁴³

Women could also benefit from their social inferiority, their lack of presence in politics and law, by taking part in riots, petitions, and demonstrations, giving them at least a small voice in public affairs, without facing the same legal ramifications as their male counterparts would.¹⁴⁴

Despite these instances in which an early modern woman could claim some power or agency in both the private and public spheres, they remained limited by their gender. Female power was feared as a threat to a well-ordered society, and especially if that power came from groupings of women (either social or familial).¹⁴⁵ Punishment was doled out for unruly

¹⁴¹ Katherine L. French, 'Rebuilding St. Margaret's: Parish Involvement and Community action in Late Medieval Westminster', *Journal of Social History*, 45.1 (2011), pp. 156-159

¹⁴² In fact, accusations of witchcraft were often the result of local gossip and slander within the period.

¹⁴³ Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England 1550-1720* (Oxford: Oxford Academic, 2011), pp. 212-216

¹⁴⁴ Capp, 'Separate domains?', p. 122

¹⁴⁵ This is evident in several tracts from the seventeenth-century which indicate how frightening it was when a woman committed a violent crime, especially against a child or their husband. - *A particular and exact account of the trial of mary compton, the bloody and most cruel midwife of poplar: As also of her maid, mary compton the younger; who were both arraigned in one indictment for felony and murder, in destroying, starving to death, and famishing several poor infant babes: As also ann davis as accessory* (London: 1693); *A pittilesse mother that most vnnaturally at one time, murthered two of her owne children* (London: G. Eld, 1616); *A warning for bad wives: Or the manner of the burning of Sarah Elston* (London: 1678)

women, the legal system and figures of authority favoured men in any rulings, and women remained in contemporary opinions the weaker, less-intelligent, and more morally corrupt species.¹⁴⁶ Those individuals, too, who did not have financial security or familial support had no such claims to even a small amount of autonomy within the period. It is vital to consider the gendered experience within the period when reading Potts' *The Wonderful Discoverie*. Not only were almost all of the accused witches women living in poverty, but the majority of the accused actually came from two almost entirely female families headed by widowed women. If the accused witches had no economic standing in society, no political power, and were already deemed suspect by the community due to the female social and familial spheres in which they existed, then perhaps their only means of claiming power and agency was to accept the accusations of witchcraft being placed upon them, or to accuse others of the same.

The Lancashire Witch Trials of 1612 were, for over two centuries, remembered only through the writings of Thomas Potts, and it is through his voice, his motivations, and his beliefs, that we experience the accused Pendle witches. In his construction of *The Wonderful Discoverie*, Potts created for the contemporary reader a sensationalised tale of witchcraft and recusancy, complete with clear villains and gallant heroes. It is through the contextual awareness of such key themes and ideals that we can more fully understand and analyse not simply what happened during the Lancashire witch trials of 1612, but *why* they were recorded the way that they were by Potts. In order to assess the pamphleteer's motivations in producing this pamphlet and constructing its key figures in such dramatic ways, it is necessary to be aware of the backdrop against which he was writing. As we will see in Chapters 2 and 3 to follow, any close-reading and analysis of this text must be aware of such contextual nuances, for, I argue, they are present throughout this pamphlet's production.

¹⁴⁶ In *Daemonologie*, James I wrote that women were more susceptible to witchcraft because 'that sexe is frailer then man is'. - King James VI and I, *Daemonologie*, p. 31

Chapter 2

The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster: Production, Patronage, and Plots

In March of 1612, a young, poverty-stricken girl was out in Pendle Forest. When she passed a local pedlar and asked for some pins, he denied her.¹ Upset by his treatment of her, she spoke out of turn, and then the pedlar fell, lamed by what the modern reader would understand as a stroke, and what contemporaries believed to be witchcraft. Thus, a witch hunt began on Pendle Hill. By 1612, the majority of English witch accusations had been brought against only one or two individuals at a time, and those that saw a larger number of witches tried still, for the most part, resulted in only a small number of executions. When 20 individuals were brought to trial at the August Assizes in Lancaster, and another (closely connected) individual was taken to York, this trial was already somewhat of a phenomenon in the history of English witchcraft. The trials at Lancaster and York resulted in a total of 11 individuals executed, and one other who died in prison. Such a high prosecution rate was bound to turn some heads, and so it was decided that it was necessary to publish the whole affair.

Almond has stated that *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* by Thomas Potts is ‘arguably England’s best-known account of early modern witchcraft’.² As we have examined, it was designed as a true and unbiased retelling of court record. Whilst it does present truth, giving insight into the system of evidence gathering and prosecution in an early modern witch trial, it also provides a hyperbolic depiction of local individuals as foul, odious servants of the devil in Potts’ own words. As Gibson’s work has shown, the structuring and production of this manuscript is entirely Potts’ design; he is

¹ Whether she wanted to buy the pins, or be given them, is unknown, for we have three differing accounts in the pamphlet. – Potts (1613), pp. 142-149

² Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. xii

selective in what evidence is revealed and what not, and the result is that the pamphlet, though well-organised, confuses the reader as to what is truth and what is opinion, and how much of what they experience is actually *viva voce* court testimony.³ It is necessary to delve into the author's motivations and to lay down the foundations for close-reading and analysis of Potts' creative insertions within the pamphlet by developing an understanding of the construction and production of this text, before beginning to analyse Potts' construction of some of the key actors in the 1612 witch trials, and especially of the witch-figure. This chapter will, as such, build upon pre-existing knowledge of the Lancashire witch trials and their subsequent pamphlet by gathering historiographical analyses alongside new observations in order to provide a more full and succinct examination of the structure and construction of *The Wonderfull Discoverie* than has been done before.

Witchcraft pamphlets were produced for sale, for public consumption, and the publication of such *verbatim* (or at least that which is claimed to be) court evidence is a rare occurrence. As Gibson has found, this did not occur nearly as often in other felony cases, nor in neighbouring countries in this way. They are, therefore, a valuable historical source simply for their existence.⁴ Though it cannot be ignored that, as Gibson argues, 'this claim to verbatim status and documentary reliability' that exists in pamphlets such as Potts' is 'in essence illusory'.⁵ Suhr, in examining English witchcraft pamphlets, defined the genre as a 'meeting of... two worlds', those being the popular world, with its fear of *malefic* or harmful witchcraft, and the elite, which focused on the satanic or demonic. Pamphlets were then 'the spreading of the elite view to the general masses.'⁶ Whilst they varied in size, from a few to several hundred pages, for the most part pamphlets produced in the Elizabethan period were

³ Gibson, 'Potts' dusty memory', pp. 41-45

⁴ Marion Gibson, 'Becoming-Witch: Narrating Witchcraft in Early Modern English News Pamphlets', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 14:3 (2019), p. 317

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 317

⁶ Carla Suhr, 'Publishing for the Masses', p. 118

much shorter than those in the Jacobean era. In order to ensure a popular following, oftentimes witchcraft pamphlets were published for entertainment purposes, perhaps even from a comedic perspective. The use of woodcuts or illustrations, whether generic or specific, in an early modern text was often a publisher's marketing tool; an image was a means of letting the public know that a text was designed for the popular readership.⁷ *The Wonderfull Discoverie* contains one such illustration, which may be indicative of the fact that it was created to be read by the masses.⁸ However, the long and scholarly narrative of Potts' pamphlet, whilst undoubtedly well-structured and coherent, was also very clearly tailored to grab the attention of the Jacobean Court. In this sense, despite similarities in aesthetic, and in conceit,⁹ Potts attempted to elevate his work and separate it from other forms of popular literature (thus appealing to the elite) by placing more evidence on truth and justice, insisting on the 'verifiable nature' of this work, and highlighting the 'patronage' of the Assize Judges in its production.¹⁰

Sharpe stated that in English witchcraft, there was a gap between anti-witchcraft statutes focusing on *maleficium* and the 'central concern of most demonological writers', the covenant with demons, and the position of the witch as servant of the devil. In Sharpe's opinion, this gap was filled by witchcraft pamphlets.¹¹ In less than two centuries, more than 100 pamphlets were published, all of them varying greatly in length and structure, and many of them, *The Wonderfull Discoverie* included, were over 100 pages long and extremely complex.¹² These pamphlets were often filled with religious and legal prose which depicted the fight against witchcraft as 'the struggle between God and the devil'.¹³ Whilst this is not a

⁷ Bayman, 'Large Hands', pp. 27-32; Suhr, 'Publishing for the Masses', p. 121

⁸ See Figure 2, p. 74

⁹ Throughout the genre there is a common emphasis on the conceit of the 'discovery' of witches, by neighbours and by the legal system, and in turn an emphasis on some form of 'beneficial social or moral purpose'. - Bayman, 'Large Hands', p. 30

¹⁰ Bayman, 'Large Hands', p. 32

¹¹ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, p. 95

¹² Ibid, p. 95

¹³ Ibid, p. 95

key feature within Potts' own additions to the 1612 pamphlet, the presence of the demonic pactis prevalent throughout the text. Furthermore, this notion of heresy is attached not only to witchcraft, but also to Catholicism, to appeal to the popular fears of Potts' contemporaries, and of the King. In the latter half of the sixteenth century, English witchcraft pamphlets were published that provided document-based accounts of trials, but by the 1590s, Poole said that the genre changed in order to favour a more narrative-based account of trials. He calls Potts a 'pioneer' in the genre of witchcraft pamphlets because of the manuscripts' substantial evidence-based structure, within a well-written, scholarly narrative. In fact, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, he claims, was quoted and referred to in anti-witchcraft treatises and pamphlets for the decade to follow.¹⁴

Examining the structuring of a pamphlet can tell us a lot about potential authorial motivations. In the case of the St Osyth witches, Gibson posits that the structure of *A true and just Recorde of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S. Oses in the countie of Essex* in fact reveals a good deal about the motivations of not just author, but witch-hunter too. Printed in 1582, this text was supposedly authored by 'W. W.', but Gibson believes that it was likely penned by magistrate and JP Brian Darcy, or at the very least someone working for him, and unlike Potts' pamphlet, this one contains insights into the examination process.¹⁵ In the sections entitled 'confessions', the reader can see how these confessions were obtained, and the care with which JP Brian Darcy took to record his questioning. For example, following the first recorded examination of Ursley Kempe, the pamphlet reads:

The saide Brian Darcey then promising to the saide Vrsley, that if shee would deale plaine-ly and confesse the trueth, that shee should haue fauour: & so by giuing her faire spee-ches shee confessed as follloweth.¹⁶

¹⁴ Poole in Potts (2011), pp. 63-64

¹⁵ Gibson, 'Becoming-Witch', p. 325

¹⁶ W. W., *A true and just Recorde of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S. Oses in the countie of Essex* (London: 1582), pp. 24-25

Such questioning and persuasions, being made clear within the pamphlet, offers insight into how the evidence against an alleged witch was reworked until it met ‘the needs’ of the examiner.¹⁷ Potts’ pamphlet does not offer such insights, though there is evidence of multiple examinations of single individuals occurring over time, such as Alizon Device, who was examined twice at Reade, the home of JP Roger Nowell, on 13 and 30 March 1612, then again in Lancaster Gaol (the date of this examination is not given), and finally in court at the Lancaster Castle Assize on 19 August.¹⁸

The Wonderfull Discoverie contains a blend of pre-trial and in-court confessions, examinations, and witness testimonies, and these are collected and re-written, not in chronological order so as to clearly differentiate, or in order of speaker, which might again provide more insight to a reader trying to understand the events detailed, but in sections of gathered ‘evidence’ corresponding to each accused witch individually. To make this clearer, several of the accused witches were ‘examined’ on more than one occasion, but to use one example in particular, we can specify the particular examination of James Device taken on 27 April 1612. This one examination is never detailed in full, but rather has been separated by the author, used and reused as evidence against several of the accused. The first time that the reader sees this examination is on one page in the section dedicated to (and entitled) ‘A Particular Declaration of the most barbarous and damnable Practices... by Elizabeth Southernes alias Demdike’. The same ‘Examination of James Device’ is used again as evidence against Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, this time with very different details pertaining to Chattox’s crimes. We then see the same examination being used against James’ own mother, Elizabeth Device, but this time it is used twice, with examinations from other Pendle

¹⁷ Gibson, ‘Becoming-Witch’, p. 325

¹⁸ Potts (1613), pp. 21-22, 43-46, 144-145

figures between them. This single examination can be traced throughout, next against James himself, where it is used three times in a single section, then Alice Nutter, Katherine Hewitt (alias Mouldheels), and finally against John and Jane Bulcock.¹⁹

This treatment could be applied to every examination of the accused, though there are a few single examinations from external witnesses against a particular individual, such as ‘The Examination of Margaret Crooke’, who alleged that her brother Robert Nutter, before he died, ‘fell sicke, and so languished’, and claimed that it was at the hands of Anne Redferne, who bewitched him.²⁰ Nonetheless, that so many examinations and confessions can be identified as repeated (though not in their content) throughout the pamphlet solidifies that Potts carefully selected his material, constructing his *Wonderfull Discoverie* in a very particular way. His construction very clearly revolves around individuals, rather than chronology, which seems less a stylistic choice than an opportunity for the author to highlight the guilt of the accused witches. By displaying the evidence as it pertains to each witch he provided himself with ample opportunity to ensure that their guilt was less likely to be questioned by contemporary readers. In order to draw clearer conclusions about the motivations behind the production of this pamphlet by its author, and indeed the commissioning of this pamphlet by the Judges of the Lancashire Assize, it is necessary to examine the structure of *The Wonderfull Discoverie* in detail. The most appropriate way of doing this is by breaking the pamphlet up into its pre-existing sections and addressing each individually.

The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster (1613)

¹⁹ Potts, pp. 23, 42-43, 51-56, 65-80, 123-124, 129-130, 136-138

²⁰ Ibid, p. 116

THE
W O N D E R F V L L
D I S C O V E R I E O F
W I T C H E S I N T H E C O V N -
T I E O F L A N -
C A S T E R .

With the Arraignement and Triall of
Nineteene notorious W I T C H E S , at the Assizes and
generall Gaole deliuerie, holden at the Castle of
LANCASTER, *upon Munday, the se-*
uenteenth of August last,
1 6 1 2 .

Before Sir I A M E S A L T H A M , and
Sir E D W A R D B R O M L E Y , Knights ; BARONS of his
Maiesties Court of EXCHEQUER : And Iustices
of Assize, Oyer and Terminor, and generall
Gaole deliuerie in the circuit of the
North Parts.

Together with the Arraignement and Triall of I E N N E T
P R E S T O N , *at the Assizes holden at the Castle of Yorke,*
the seuen and twentieth day of Iulie last past,
with her Execution for the murther
of M A S T E R L I S T E R
by Witchcraft.

Published and set forth by commandement of his Maiesties
Iustices of Assize in the North Parts.
By THOMAS POTTS Esquier.

L O N D O N ,
Printed by *W. Stansby* for *John Barnes*, dwelling neare
Holborne Conduit. 1 6 1 3 .

Figure 1: Thomas Potts, 'Title Page', *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London: W. Stansby, 1613)

The title page of this pamphlet tells the reader what to expect of the content, who the author of this text is, and the printer or publisher.²¹ Whilst the first point is prevalent amongst many English witchcraft pamphlets, it is very rare that the author or creator of a pamphlet is named,

²¹ The pamphlet was printed by W. Stansby, for publisher John Barnes. Unfortunately, we do not know much more than this about either name.

and if they are, as in the aforementioned *A true and just Recorde*, that name might be unrecognisable or untraceable in historical record.²² Moreover, the title page does not immediately give insight into the outcome of the Lancashire trials, but does mention the execution of Jennet Preston in York for murder, which is likely an attempt to grab the reader's attention by igniting a morbid curiosity in his contemporaries. For a 17th century reader, this may have been encouragement enough to read the pamphlet. The title of the pamphlet itself is an homage to King James VI and I, who published his *Daemonologie* in part to counter Reginald Scot's 1584 work *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*.²³ In this title, Potts adds the word 'Wonderfull' in order to imply that it was 'inspired by God', subverting Scot's titling as a token of respect to the King.²⁴

Dedicatorie and Comments

The Dedicatorie is written in Potts' own words, and is full of unabashed flattery in which he pays homage to his patron, Lord Knyvett and his wife, to their faith, and to their 'great love'.²⁵ As we have seen, this dedication, and indeed the involvement of Knyvett in the publication of this pamphlet, is evidence of the political ambitions of those involved..

This is all the more prevalent when we consider one of the most intriguing aspects of the events detailed within Pendle-witch story, the alleged plot, made by a gathering of witches at Malkin Tower on Good Friday, 1612, to blow up Lancaster Castle and kill its gaoler. This occurred following the arrest of Demdike, her granddaughter Alizon Device, and Chattox, the approximate date of which was 4 April 1612. They were taken to await trial at Lancaster

²² W. W., 'A True and just Recorde'

²³ Philip C. Almond, *England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot & 'The Discovery of Witchcraft'* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 1-2, 71-72; King James VI and I, *Daemonologie*; Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft, Wherein the lewde dealing of witches and witchmongers is notable detected* (London: 1584)

²⁴ Poole in Potts (2011), p. 61

²⁵ Potts (1613), p. 1

Gaol, and then, according to *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, their relatives and neighbours gathered on Good Friday (10 April) to ‘devise such a damnable course for the deliverance of their friends at Lancaster’.²⁶ On this supposed plot, Borman states: ‘This was almost certainly a tale invented by the examining magistrates to make an example of their prisoners and heighten public interest.’²⁷ Where there was the continental notion of a witches’ Sabbat, there was an opportunity for said witches to convene and conspire, to plan a treasonous attack on Lancaster Castle.²⁸ A plot to blow up the castle seems too similar to the 1605 conspiracy to be coincidental, and would certainly remind James of what he owes to the man who foiled the attempt on his life, and now to the court officials who foiled a second plot against his property.

This section also includes a deliberately humble mention of the fact that Potts’ own actions are not worth note, for he is merely documenting the worth and work of others in the arraignment and trial of these notorious witches. This praise of those esteemed men of God, the Assize court officials, sets up the pages to follow the Dedicatorie, which contain brief notes from the Assize Judges. The first is signed by both Altham and Bromley, and states; ‘wee found such apparent matters against them, that we thought it necessarie to publish them to the World’.²⁹ This statement is both justification and validation in one, with ‘apparent’ of course suggesting that there was no doubt, in their eyes, of these witches’ guilt. They Potts in the publication of this pamphlet in order to inform the world of the atrocities committed by the Lancashire witches. With such an unusually high prosecution rate for English witch trials, these events posed a threat to the status of the court officials, and so a publication of the abhorrent crimes of the accused witches was deemed necessary in order to justify the verdict.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 127-128

²⁷ Borman, *Witches*, p. 59

²⁸ A castle owned by James I and VI as King of England - Potts, (1613), p. 60

²⁹ Potts (1613), p. 8

The next note in this section is from Bromley alone, in which he validates Potts' work as true to form, with little of his own opinion in there, save what was necessary in order to 'shew what their offences were, what people, and of what condition they were'.³⁰ Potts' opinions can be witnessed throughout the pamphlet, namely in his vivid descriptions of the malicious witches on trial. Moreover, what Bromley does not state is that Potts' role went beyond description of the prisoners during trial, for he develops a structure for this pamphlet which groups together an individual's trial at court and the evidence which was collected against them in previous examinations by local JPs. These efforts make this particular text a much easier read than most, if not all, English witchcraft pamphlets.

Before the particulars of arraignment and trial begin, there is an unusually placed woodcut illustration which depicts five male figures (two of whom appear to be in a state of undress, embracing each other) in a pool of water around a fountain of sorts.³¹ This illustration is difficult to place, or to define, and certainly deserves further exploration into its meaning, if indeed it has one, and origins. Orgel assesses a number of examples of early modern illustrations which contradict the printed text which they are assigned to, the term of which is a 'disjunctive' illustration or woodcut, something which is reused by a printer in a variety of texts as a means of saving money.³² This illustration may be an example of a disjunctive image, with no relevance at all to the text. However, Orgel also states that many argue that the 'bad printers' would reuse images, whilst the 'good printers' would not,³³ and from what is known of William Stansby, it could be assumed that he would have fallen under the category of 'good', if the popularity of his work is anything to go by.³⁴

³⁰ Ibid, p. 10

³¹ By 'unusually placed', I mean that it is not at the very front of the pamphlet to catch the public eye.

³² Stephen Orgel, 'Textual Icons: Reading Early Modern Illustrations', *The Renaissance Computer: Knowledge Technology in the First Age of Print*, Neil Rhodes and Jonathan Sawday, eds. (London, Routledge, 2000) pp. 57-92

³³ Ibid, p. 57

³⁴ James K. Bracken, 'William Stansby's Early Career', *Studies in Bibliography, Vol. 38* (Biographical Society of the University of Virginia, 1985) pp. 214-216



Figure 2: Thomas Potts, 'Woodcut Illustration', *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London: W. Stansby, 1613), p. 12

In addition to this illustration, *The Wonderfull Discoverie* is often rather decorative. The first page of each new section is laid out with an ornate, oftentimes floral or Greco-Roman style banner, and a heavily patterned initial or drop-cap. It is this especially which enables the reader to separate each section and case. Much of the text is also italicised, this is usually within speeches or notes on the text (from Potts, Bromley, or Altham), any Latin text, and the names of court officials and the accused. There is no clear purpose for this, aside from perhaps, visual impact. The pamphlet very often wastes space with ornate design, enlarged and bold writing, and at times simply blank pages. It appears then, that author, printer, and publisher alike did not necessarily consider cost in the printing of this manuscript, opting instead to add an aesthetic flair to the already hyperbolic and carefully crafted text. Given its

decorative additions to such a sensational tale, *The Wonderfull Discoverie* was certainly designed with public consumption in mind.

The Case Against Elizabeth Southern, alias Demdike

The next section of the pamphlet is a detailed look at the crimes of Elizabeth Southern, often known as Old Demdike. This section is titled, ‘A particular Declaration of the most barbarous and damnable Practices, murthers... by the most dangerous and malitious witch...’.³⁵

Demdike is the only member of the Pendle witches to die prior to trial in August 1612, and as such, the only member to not be physically described by Potts in his detailed introductions to each trial. The date of her death is never stated, although Potts does admit that the place of death was at Lancaster Castle. Elizabeth Southern died in prison, having only been examined once by local JP Roger Nowell on 2nd April 1612 in an area of Pendle called ‘The Fence’. Despite this, Potts introduces the 1612 pamphlet with a depiction of Demdike as the most villainous witch in Pendle, and the individual whom ‘our whole businesse hath such dependence’.³⁶

When examining Potts’ pamphlet as a whole and taking into account the dates of examinations and confessions taken by JPs prior to trial,³⁷ it is apparent that the earliest examination took place at Reade, the private estate of Roger Nowell, and that this particular examination was the direct result of the supposed crimes of Alizon Device, granddaughter of Demdike, examined on 13 March 1612. Knowing that it was Alizon who launched the Pendle hunts, why then is Demdike the first witch named in Potts’ pamphlet? Furthermore, why is

³⁵ Potts (1613), p. 13

³⁶ Potts (1613), p. 14

³⁷ Whilst the names of the local JPs are present throughout the *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, more archival research is needed in order to understand their motivations for these witch accusations, especially with regards to the enigmatic Nicholas Bannister, Roger Nowell’s associate who history knows little about.

she the most odious of all the witches? It may simply be that because Demdike died before the commencement of the August Assizes, her examination, and the evidence against her, could not be placed alongside the other Pendle witches. However, the dramatised depiction of her by Potts suggests a vested interest in how the reader views this particular witch. One reason for this may be that Elizabeth Southern - an old woman who lives outside of society, dwelling in Pendle Forest with her family, and is likely feared or disliked by her neighbours - is a figure true to the early modern stereotype of a witch, in which case, placing her before all others in this pamphlet may be a deliberate attempt to frighten contemporary readers. Another explanation could be that this deliberate placement is a means of overshadowing whatever mistreatment this elderly woman received in prison to cause her death with a declaration of her obvious 'villanie and mischief', of which Potts' language makes clear there is no doubt.³⁸ Both of these theories strengthen the notion that Potts' pamphlet was created in an attempt to both warn readers of the atrocious nature of witchcraft, and to justify the significant number of deaths which this trial caused.

³⁸ Potts (1613), p. 14

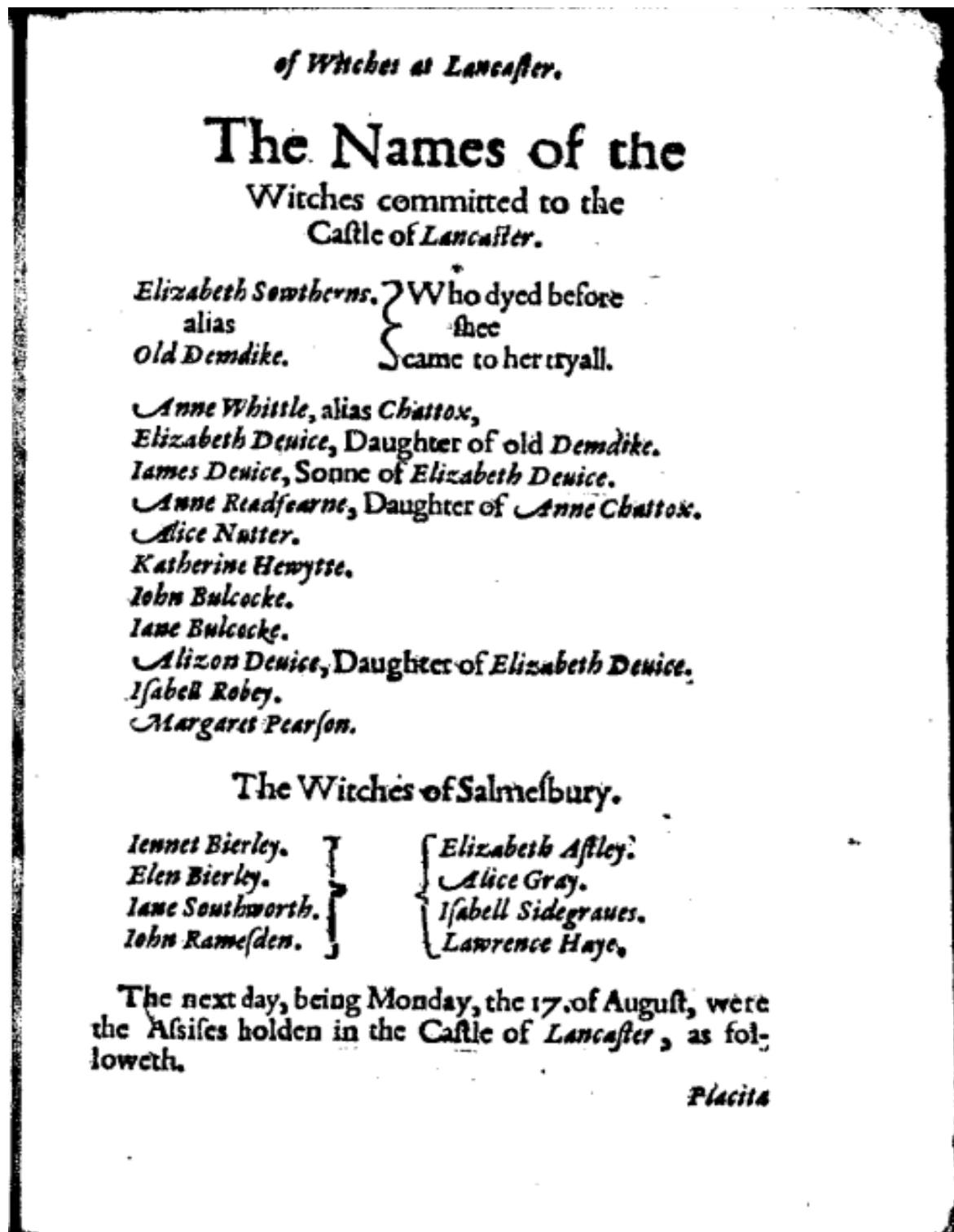


Figure 3: Thomas Potts, 'Gaol Calendar', *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster* (London: W. Stansby, 1613), p. 27

Following the section which focuses on Elizabeth Southernns, there is a list of twenty names, the witches committed to the Castle of Lancaster, with Demdike's name first and separated from the other eleven Pendle witches, because she 'dyed before shee came to her tryall'. Then below that list, on the same page, is another consisting of eight names, titled 'The Witches of Salmesbury'.³⁹ The Lancaster Assize was the final stop for Judges Bromley and Altham in 1612, having arrived from Kendal on the afternoon of Sunday 16 August.⁴⁰ On that day, these men would have been met by the Castle gaoler, Thomas Covell (who also acted as magistrate, coroner, and was at one time Mayor of Lancaster), who would have presented them with the gaol calendar listing all prisoners to be tried during the trials over the coming days. Here, Potts too provides a gaol calendar for his readers, and presents it as though it was the list in its entirety and readers were witnessing a true-to-form copy of actual court document.⁴¹ This however, is undoubtedly a small portion of the extensive list provided by Covell, for there were certainly more than witches on trial during this quarterly assize, and is very likely a reconstruction completely by Potts so as to fit with his narrative in separating the witches of Pendle from those of Salmesbury. Furthermore, and this is simple speculation, it is unlikely that the name 'Elizabeth Southernns, alias Old Demdike' would have met the eyes of Bromley and Altham in this gaol calendar, given her death prior to their arrival.⁴² As Gibson has stated, the 'flair' in the display of this document, which takes up an entire page, shows the printer's attempt to give the 'visual effect of authority and recorded truth.'⁴³

Almond details the processes of the court which Potts chose to omit, such as the authority of the jury to determine whether an 'answerable case had been established', which was the stage at which a prisoner entered their plea. This occurred prior to the trial process

³⁹ Ibid, p. 27

⁴⁰ Almond, *Lancashire Witches*, p. 33; Potts, p. 26

⁴¹ Gibson, 'Potts' dusty memory', p. 45

⁴² Potts (1613), p. 27

⁴³ Gibson, 'Potts' dusty memory', p. 45

detailed by Potts, when prisoners were tried ‘in batches’ as can be seen through his structuring of the pamphlet.⁴⁴ The decision to omit certain processes and practices leads the reader to question whether more were arraigned for witchcraft, but the cases against them lacked substantial evidence. If this were the case, the exclusion of this aspect of court proceedings may have been a tactical means of glazing over the witch-hunting aspects of the justice system, of concealing the attempts made by local JPs to root out witchcraft by any means and on little evidence; strengthening the image of fairness and truth within the justice system, whilst disguising its flaws.

Before the pamphlet delves into the trials themselves, Potts includes a two-page introductory note titled ‘Placita Corone’ (or ‘Lawsuits’). This begins with a paragraph in Latin, which when loosely translated and summarised, states simply the date and location of this trial, before sirs James Altham and Edward Bromley, barons of the exchequer on behalf of King James.⁴⁵ Following this, is a statement that the following proclamations and examinations are not in the exact order of the Assize, ‘with the Proclamations and other solemnities belonging to so great a Court of Justice;’⁴⁶ but of the proceedings against the witches in the order that they came to the bar, beginning with Anne Whittle, alias Chattox.

The Arraignment and Trial of the Pendle Witches (Part One)

Despite the claim that there is nothing within this pamphlet ‘but matter of Fact’, Potts introduces each accused witch in his own words.⁴⁷ From the first accused witch, Potts’

⁴⁴ Almond, *Lancashire Witches*, p. 34

⁴⁵ This has been translated by Marion Gibson in full: ‘Delivery of the gaol of the lord king of his castle of Lancaster, and of the prisoners existing in the same. Held at Lancaster in the county of Lancashire on Monday the seventeenth day of August in the tenth year of the reign of our lord James, by the grace of God king of England, France and Ireland, defender of the faith; and of Scotland the forty-sixth year; before Sir James Altham, baron of the exchequer of the lord king, and Sir Edward Bromley, another baron of the same exchequer of the lord king and justices of the lord king at Lancaster.’ – Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, p. 190; Potts (1613), p. 28

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 29

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 10

narratorial biases are evident, for he depicts the first accused witch, Anne Whittle, as though she was, on the one hand, the most wicked of all, and on the other, a ‘poore creature’, her age and status almost moving one to ‘pittie’ (almost, but not quite, due to her evil offences).⁴⁸

Beginning with Anne Whittle, Potts begins a pattern of illustrative depictions of the Lancashire witches. As for the evidence used against Chattox, it is unclear what (if any of this) was heard in court, for the supposed ‘voluntary confession’ of Chattox, and the depositions against her, were all taken prior to trial (dating between 30 March and 27 April 1612), before local JPs. Moreover, several of these so-called *verbatim* examinations and confessions are continued on by brief, yet opinionated observations by Potts, which in turn calls into question the validity of the evidence provided. Not only do Potts’ comments undermine the veracity of confessions, but in fact, the length and structure of each statement indicates that they are either overviews or extracts, chosen for their relevance, rather than *verbatim* reports. For example, in concluding the evidence against Chattox, the final statement presented is ‘The Examination of Alizon Device’, taken in March, before Roger Nowell. This examination is, allegedly, in Alizon Device’s words, and yet Potts immediately moves from one paragraph beginning ‘And she this Examinee further saith,’ to his own summarising one:

In the end being openly charged with all this in open Court; with weeping teares she humbly acknowledged them to be true, and cried out vnto God for Mercy and forgiveness of her sinnes...⁴⁹

This certainly seems to indicate that what we are experiencing is Potts’ overview of events and statements, not only from the trial itself, but evidence taken months prior by Roger Nowell.

⁴⁸ Potts (1613), p. 30

⁴⁹ ‘She’ meaning the accused, Chattox, and not Alizon Device - Potts (1613), pp. 43-45

It cannot be known how much of the evidence given was achieved through coercion, or interrogation, for nowhere can the reader experience the voice of the examiner, who could have led, encouraged, or even fabricated an examinee's report. As Almond stated of Roger Nowell, whom he titles the 'witch hunter', 'We do not know what enticements or threats... Nowell might have used',⁵⁰ what we do know, is that the absence of an examiner's presence in these extracts tells the reader that they are certainly not experiencing this evidence in its entirety. In addition, at times said confessions contain references to Catholicism which fit neatly in with the anti-papal sentiments of the period, and with the notions of political ambition behind the motivations for publication. An example of this can be seen as early as the voluntary confession of Anne Whittle, which contains details of a prayer or a charm calling upon, 'Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost', and paints, quite vividly, a picture of this woman not simply as a witch, but as a Catholic too, both of which were crimes of treason and heresy in Jacobean England.

As we have seen, in the case of the Pendle witches, there seemed to be a shift toward fear of not only malefic witchcraft, but heresy too. Whilst certain aspects of diabolic witchcraft have been proven to have been present prior to 1612, the notion of witchcraft as a conspiracy and evidence of Sabbats seem to have been introduced to the English witchcraft discourse after these events.⁵¹ In several of the depositions taken by Roger Nowell, there was a clear attempt to draw the reader toward fear of a covenant with the devil, as well as the more popular notion of the English witch's familiar spirit. When considering this feature alongside the subtle nod to the witch's Sabbat through the Good Friday meeting at Malkin Tower, and the supposed plan to blow up Lancaster Castle and assassinate the gaoler, these witches are aligned closely with heresy in the subversion of Christian practices, and with

⁵⁰ Almond, *Lancashire Witches*, p. 15

⁵¹ Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, pp. 116-140, 152-160, 183-184

treason in the echoes of the Gunpowder plot. It can be speculated that this is due to the influence of King James' *Daemonologie*, his amalgamation of English and European witchcraft beliefs in his work, and his past endeavours to prosecute both the witches *and* the Catholics who have plotted against him.⁵² Witchcraft, according to *Daemonologie*, was 'high treason against God', and witches 'ought to be put to death according to the Law of God, the ciuill and imperial law, and municipall law of all Christian nations'.⁵³ In the 'voluntary Confession' of Chattox, the first point to be addressed is this notion of the demonic pact, in which the examinee signs over her soul for power.⁵⁴ Several of Nowell's examinations begin in this manner, with a clear indication of leading questions in order to prove diabolism in Lancashire County. Whilst it cannot be proven, these factors suggest a fabrication, or at the very least, a manipulation of evidence in order to strengthen the case against those accused, and to ensure that said case gets the approval of the King. As Pumfrey states, 'Satanic witchcraft had at last been proven in a court of law to exist in James VI and I's southern kingdom.'⁵⁵

The arraignment and trial of Elizabeth Device follows much the same pattern as Chattox's before it, in that it contains a lengthy introduction by Thomas Potts, followed by several examinations and confessions used as evidence against her. However, in the case of Elizabeth Device, there is even more confusion as to whether evidence was gathered prior to trial, or heard during trial, specifically when considering the evidence given by Device's nine-year-old daughter Jennet. In the same fashion as the rest of the pamphlet, Potts picks and chooses which evidence to place where, and in what order. For Elizabeth Device, the reader can that see one examination of young Jennet Device was given during trial, as Potts gives

⁵² James I can oftentimes be quoted likening the practice to '*Papistris*', which is depicted as so flawed that the prayers of a '*Papist* priest' are echoed by 'the conjurers'. – King James I and VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 13, 38

⁵³ *Ibid*, pp. 54-55

⁵⁴ Potts (1613), p. 33

⁵⁵ Pumfrey, 'Potts, plots and politics', p. 22

great detail about her mother's reaction to this occurrence. However, two more examinations are provided for the reader, one given by the same Jennet Device, and another by her brother James against their mother, and in these instances, no date, location, or witnesses are listed. As such, the reader cannot be sure whether this evidence was read out at court, said under oath at court, or noted down, perhaps even created, prior to trial.⁵⁶

As Gibson states, by including transcripts of examinations and other legal materials, rather than narrating events himself, Potts' pamphlet confuses rather than informs.⁵⁷ However, this action was necessary if Potts were to remain an unbiased and truthful reporter of events, rather than a storyteller. Of course, Potts took this persona upon himself to emphasise to the reader that he and the other court officials did nothing other than examine the evidence brought before them. From a twenty-first century perspective, it is clear that the Lancaster Assizes did nothing to find the truth amidst these contradictory confessions, and so the trial itself appears corrupt from the offset. Questions arise as to whether the court officials already knew who they were planning to prosecute, and so an in-depth cross-examination would be unnecessary effort, or whether indeed the entire Jacobean legal system was in fact, flawed and corrupt.

The arraignment and trial of James Device is, once again, similarly structured. As with the case against Chattox, James Device's voluntary confession contains a charm which mimics Catholic prayer, and not witchcraft in its phrasing:

Upon Good-Friday, I will fast while I may
Vntill I heare them knell
Our Lords owne Bell...
Heavens doore key,

⁵⁶ Potts (1613), pp. 52-61

⁵⁷ Marion Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (London, Routledge, 1999) p. 3

Open, open Heave doore keyes...⁵⁸

Purkiss, in analysing the charms and prayers present within this pamphlet, has suggested that they contain Catholic prayers and phrasings from various sources, and so may have been partially constructed by Potts, or another figure of authority over these accused.⁵⁹ This, whilst called a ‘voluntarie confession’ was actually James’ second examination, taken by court officials (including the gaoler) at Lancaster Castle and then read aloud before the court. That it was taken at the castle, but not during trial before judge and jury could suggest that it was coerced, that he confessed to what officials wanted him to say, and that he would have been unable to confess the same in front of a full court because it may not have been his own words. This infers that the legal authorities of the Lancaster Assize may well have been encouraging papal references in order to associate witchcraft with Catholicism for the benefit of King James and the Jacobean Court.

Under the same subheading of this voluntary confession, Potts concludes this section with ‘The Verdict of Life and Death’, stating that the gentlemen of the Jury found Anne Whittle, Elizabeth Device, and her son James Device ‘guiltie of the several murthers by Witchcraft’.⁶⁰

The Arraignment and Trial of the Witches of Salmesbury

The arraignment and trial of the Pendle witches are interrupted by the examinations of and evidence against the Salmesbury witches: Jennet Bierley, Ellen Bierley, and Jane Southworth. Similarly to the Pendle case, the evidence against them is focussed primarily on the testimony

⁵⁸ Potts (1613), p. 84

⁵⁹ Purkiss, ‘Charming Witches’, pp. 22-23

⁶⁰ Potts (1613), pp. 82-86

young girl, 14-year-old Grace Sowerbutts, whose first examination is the length of seven pages of text. This section is very often added to and embellished by Thomas Potts, who states that there was little evidence to condemn these witches, and that the evidence given by Grace Sowerbutts, ‘a wench’, with her ‘counterfeit fits’,⁶¹ cannot be deemed reliable or trustworthy. Her first examination is scrutinized over a further 6 pages, at the end of which Potts reveals that Grace Sowerbutts was taken away by two court officials by instruction of Sir Edward Bromley, and they return with another short examination which is then read aloud in court. This details Grace Sowerbutts’ admission that she was instructed by a Seminary Priest called Master Thompson, ‘which she taketh to be Master *Christopher Southworth*’,⁶² to accuse and give evidence against the witches of Salmesbury. This revelation of the influence of a Catholic conspiracy within the northern assize suggests a desire to expose popery within the locality, and in turn, gain the approval of King James I and VI, for Lancashire was known to harbour recusants.⁶³ The three accused witches were, in the same way as Grace Sowerbutts, taken away from the public court and examined, before their short examinations were read out during trial. Here, the three accused agreed with the suggestion that the Priest Christopher Southworth was behind the whole ordeal.⁶⁴ Once more, it is interesting to note that these examinations were not taken before the court, but in private, and then read aloud as truth.

Knowing that James I was, by 1612, something of a sceptic, perhaps the treatment of the Salmesbury witches was yet a further form of flattery. Not only does this case very clearly build upon the recent threat to the King in the form of Catholic recusancy, but if James I was, as was discussed in Chapter 1, a self-proclaimed expert for his ability to not simply find real witches, but to in fact expose false ones, then Bromley and Altham, by exposing some great

⁶¹ Ibid, p. 99

⁶² Ibid, p. 106

⁶³ Harland, *Lancashire Lieutenancy*, pp. 251-252

⁶⁴ Potts (1613), pp. 108-109

conspiracy in the Samlesbury trials, are further aligning themselves with their monarch. They are proudly stating that they have the knowledge and expertise to see through such farcical accusations as those made by Grace Sowerbutts against the Samlesbury accused. This would have perhaps aided their cause in the publication of this pamphlet, to justify their verdicts amidst the uproar following the execution of Jennet Preston at York. Through the Samlesbury case, Potts is making clear that the Assizes judges do not take all evidence at face value, and are in fact secure in their own understanding of real versus fake witches.

The Arraignment and Trial of the Pendle Witches (Part Two)

It is unclear whether the position of the Salmesbury case in the middle of the Pendle witch trials was a deliberate choice made by Potts, or whether the witches were simply examined in that exact order. If so, then the next to come to trial was Anne Redferne, and the rest of the accused Pendle witches followed her. The trial of Anne Redferne, and then those of Alice Nutter and Katherine Hewitt who followed, continued in much the same fashion as the three Pendle witches listed so far in this pamphlet with regards to structure. Once more, it is unclear what, if any, evidence was heard in court, and how said evidence was gathered. The examinations used against these women are not always dated, nor is there always a location provided. However, as all were taken before local JPs Roger Nowell and Nicholas Bannister, the reader can confidently assume that they occurred prior to arraignment. The key difference between the trials of these three individuals can be seen in the case of Alice Nutter, and the reiteration by Potts of Bromley's attempts to prove her innocence. During the 'Examination and Evidence of Jennet Device', Bromley attempts to test the validity of the 9 year old's testimony that Alice Nutter was present at the Good Friday sabbat⁶⁵ It could be argued that

⁶⁵ Ibid, pp. 124-126

court officials were reluctant to execute a woman of a higher social standing. It has also been suggested that Nutter's accusation was manipulated to ensure her execution by authorities,⁶⁶ and this test of Jennet Device's testimony was simply a means of avoiding discontent from the community. Before continuing with the trials of the Pendle witches, the jury delivered the 'verdict of life and death', finding all three women 'guiltie of the fellonie and murder conteyned in the Indictment against' them.⁶⁷

The next case to be brought forth was the arraignment and trial of two individuals at once; John Bulcock was tried alongside his mother Jane Bulcock, much like the Salmsbury witches. However, the evidence against them is relatively unremarkable in both length and in the structural similarities with the other trials. Interestingly, after this, the trials are interrupted once more, this time by a two-page list of 'The names of the Witches at the Great Assembly and Feast at Malking-Tower'.⁶⁸ It is unclear whether there is any method behind this placement, for this gathering had already been mentioned in the evidence against both James and Elizabeth Demdike, Alice Nutter, and Katherine Hewitt. The pamphlet then continues on as normal, with the arraignment and trial of Alizon Device.

In the case of Alizon Device, which was the catalyst for the arraignment of all of the Pendle witches, Potts includes 'The Confession of Alizon Device', which was published and declared in open court, and 'agreeth verbatim' with the examination taken by Roger Nowell at Reade, which had 'all the whole court not a little wondering... at this liberall and voluntarie confession of the Witch'.⁶⁹ Device's confession is placed alongside 'The Evidence of John Law' (her alleged victim), and 'The Examination of Abraham Law' (his son). All

⁶⁶ James Crossley, in his 1845 edition of the pamphlet, suggested a land-dispute between Roger Nowell and Alice Nutter, claiming that it was Nowell's resentment which caused the latter to be accused of witchcraft. This has never been proven, but interestingly, it has been adopted as canon by some of the authors of Pendle fiction. – Crossley in Potts (1845), pp. 25-26

⁶⁷ Potts (1613), p. 132

⁶⁸ Ibid, pp. 140-141

⁶⁹ Ibid, pp. 144-145

three testimonies seem to contradict one another in one small, but visible detail. Alizon's claim was that she asked to 'buy some pinnes of him' and he refused, whereas John Law claimed that she asked him in earnest for them, to which he refused.⁷⁰ The two are contradictory, but do not seem illogical, for Alizon could have been attempting to conceal the fact that she had begged this pedlar, in the same way that John Law could have wanted to cover his refusal to sell goods. However, the inclusion of Abraham Law's examination provides yet another version of the same story in which Alizon Device asked to 'buy some pinnes... and she had no money to pay for them', but John Law gave her them anyway.⁷¹ Abraham Law's statement paints his father in a considerably more favourable light, and Potts' inclusion of all three statements, Gibson argues, is his way of endorsing the 'archetypal story of the witch being refused... and retaliating', without having to make any clear comment in this regard.⁷² Given that Alizon had already confessed her guilt, perhaps then Potts' inclusion of all three statements was an attempt to reiterate that this was a true account of proceedings, for his readership would certainly assume that Alizon Device, having confessed, did indeed retaliate out of retribution for a refusal of charity.

Once more, before the final Pendle witches are brought to trial, the jury delivered the verdict of life and death, in which John and Jane Bulcock were found guilty,⁷³ and Alizon Device 'convicted upon her owne Confession'.⁷⁴ This statement, 'upon her owne Confession', once more leads to questions regarding the evidence being presented by Thomas Potts. If Alizon was specifically judged on her in-court confession, what were the others judged on? Their confessions obtained by Roger Nowell, perhaps? The selective nature and

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 144-149

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 147

⁷² Gibson, 'Potts' dusty memory', p. 48

⁷³ This verdict actually reads that John and Jane Bulcock were found 'not guilty', but this was corrected in the beginning of the pamphlet with a brief note entitled 'Faults escaped in the Printing.' The Bulcocks were found guilty and sentenced to death. – Potts (1613), p. 11

⁷⁴ Potts (1613), p. 151

frequent authorial additions are often confused. How much of what the reader experiences was heard during court, and how much of it was simply included for the benefit of the reader and the dramatisation of these trials? Trials of this nature were short and fast-paced, lasting for as little as 15 minutes amidst the chaos of a public courtroom, which Almond calls ‘carnavalesque’.⁷⁵ As such, it is unlikely that all of the evidence experienced by the reader was declared in open court. In the Jacobean courtroom, there was no such thing as a defence counsel, and accused individuals had no idea of what evidence was to be presented against them. It would have been difficult to focus in a loud courtroom amidst the jeers and protests of onlookers, and impossible to organise a defence against evidence which they had heard for the first time in court. Moreover, in the case of the Lancashire witches, the majority of these individuals would have been uneducated, illiterate, and entirely overwhelmed in the face of educated legal professionals determined to prove their guilt.

The final of the Pendle witches to be examined in this pamphlet are Margaret Pearson and Isabel Robey. In his descriptive introduction to the accused Margaret Pearson, Thomas Potts makes a statement revealing that the structuring of this pamphlet was his own design. He states, ‘I place her in the end of these notorious Witches, by reason her judgement is of an other Nature’,⁷⁶ which informs the reader that he is controlling not only what evidence is published, but also the order by which the reader experiences it. In the final of these experiences, the arraignment and trial of Isabel Robey, Potts’ narrative first addresses the reader with an overview of sorts, before making a direct reference to King James’ published work *Daemonologie*.⁷⁷ Whilst the only direct reference to the King’s work is an ambitious and sycophantic nod to James I, and a further attempt to justify the outcome of this trial by stating that it was done in the name of the King, in a fashion that he himself designed and

⁷⁵ Almond, *Lancashire Witches*, p. 35

⁷⁶ Potts (1613), p. 153

⁷⁷ ‘What hath the Kings Majestie written and published in his *Damonologie*, by way of premonition and prevention, which hath not here by the first of last beene executed, put in practice or discovered?’ - Ibid, p. 157-158

publicised. After the evidence against Isabel Robey was presented, Potts includes the final ‘Verdict of Life and Death’ where the last of the Pendle witches were found guilty.⁷⁸

Judgement

The final section to address the Pendle and Salmesbury witches begins with a list of ten namestitled ‘the Prisoners at the Barre to receive their Judgement of Life and Death.’⁷⁹ This is continued by a four-page statement which appears to be the in the words of Edward Bromley, although Pumfrey suggested that Potts may have ‘improved’ upon Judge Bromley’s speeches for publication,⁸⁰ in which he calls upon those judged to be patient with the law, for it is just, and the evidence against these witches which led to this verdict was nothing ‘but matter of fact’.⁸¹ This statement is a direct address toward the accused, and despite its length and detail, it seems to be a closing speech which was declared in court, and therefore likely copied down at the time. As such, it isn’t until the end of the third page of text that the judgement is actually declared, and the ten Pendle witches are sentenced to ‘bee hanged until [they] be dead’.⁸² This same statement addresses the accused Margaret Pearson separately, and sentences her to ‘stand upon the Pillarie in open Market’, before spending a year in prison without bail.⁸³

The next statement is in the same voice and style, this time addressed to ‘the Prisoners found not guiltie by the Juries’, and the list of names are separated into two parts.⁸⁴ The first part provides a list of five names, all of which are individuals listed in the beginning of the

⁷⁸ Ibid, pp. 163-165

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 166

⁸⁰ Pumfrey, ‘Potts, plots and politics’, pp. 21–22

⁸¹ Potts, p. 168

⁸² Ibid, p. 169

⁸³ Ibid, p. 170

⁸⁴ Ibid, pp. 171-173

pamphlet under the title of ‘The Witches of Salmesbury’.⁸⁵ Interestingly, not a single person within this list was featured in Potts’ pamphlet save for these lists. It is unclear why their trials were deemed unworthy of publication, perhaps they weren’t entertaining or shocking enough for a Jacobean audience, but that is merely speculation. Their names are followed by the three acquitted Salmesbury witches, the trials of whom were made considerably more interesting given the anti-Catholic and political undertones. The fact that these three innocent women were featured where the other five were not certainly strengthens the notion that this particular publication was motivated not simply by the desire to educate the public on the dangers of witchcraft, but for personal and political gain, to smoke out Catholic dissenters in the region, and to curry favour with the King in this considerably dramatised affair.

The closing statements by Edward Bromley are concluded further by Thomas Potts, although it is at first glance difficult to differentiate between both voices. Potts states once more that he has produced only matter of fact, for ‘It is no part of [his] profession to publish anything in print neither can [he] paint in extraordinarie tearmes.’⁸⁶ Having read his many hyperbolic additions to almost every aspect of this pamphlet, it is very evident that these claims of truth and fact are farcical.

The Arraignment and Trial of Jennet Preston

The final section of Potts’ *The Wonderfull Discoverie* is the publication of the arraignment and trial of Jennet Preston, who was tried at the York Assize just under a month earlier than the other witches examined in this pamphlet. This section is relatively self-contained, with its own title page which mirrors stylistically that of the whole pamphlet. In a manner which has

⁸⁵ Ibid, p. 27

⁸⁶ Ibid, pp. 172-173

become typical throughout, the case of Jennet Preston is introduced by Thomas Potts, before a collection of depositions against her are provided for the reader. In his introduction, however, Potts addresses a reason for this particular publication which is not mentioned elsewhere in the pamphlet. In a direct address to the husband, friends, and ‘kinsfolkes’ of Jennet Preston, he details their ‘scandalous slander out of the malice of [their] hearts’. It would appear that the prosecution and execution of Jennet Preston caused something of a local uproar, when the community accused the court of ‘maliciously’ prosecuting her, unjustly taking her life despite her innocence.⁸⁷ As such, it can be assumed with confidence that this particular publication of court record was an attempt to respond to and quiet the public discontent. Perhaps then, it is not too much of a stretch to consider that the publication of the Pendle and Salmesbury witch trials was a preventative action in case of further uproar. Once more, after the evidence and examinations were listed against the accused, the case was concluded, rather colourfully, by Potts. At this, the pamphlet ends without summary or reference back to the Lancashire trials, which adds to the notion that this pamphlet was designed in a way which suggests that the early modern reader was experiencing actual court documents, and not the dramatic retelling which the modern reader, with the benefit of hindsight, is able to experience.

By the 20 August 1612, one accused witch had died in prison, one was convicted but avoided execution, ten individuals (eight female and two male), were executed as witches with much of the evidence against them coming from the testimony of a nine-year-old child,⁸⁸ five more were acquitted, and the case against the three witches of Salmesbury ‘collapsed spectacularly’,⁸⁹ when it was discovered that the chief witness (this time, a 14 year old child)

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 178

⁸⁸ The testimony of Jennet Device, which sentenced her entire family to hanging, was deemed by Potts as ‘the very Act of God’, when Judge Bromley attempted to test her evidence with trick questions and by making her take the hands of those she was accusing in court. – Potts (1613), pp. 125-126

⁸⁹ Pumfrey, ‘Potts, plots and politics’, p. 22

had been coached through her evidence by a devilish Catholic Priest. Potts played the role of author carefully and intelligently, selecting, omitting, and restructuring evidence. What was, for several centuries, deemed a ‘transparent window’⁹⁰ into early modern court proceedings, can now be accepted as a constructed text; important processes of trial procedure were omitted, earlier examinations and witness testimonies were portrayed within the pamphlet as *viva voce* court testimony, and the words of others were likely summarised, edited, and improved upon throughout.

The result of discerning such authorial input from Potts within the structure of *The Wonderfull Discoverie* is that the pamphlet can be viewed as a dramatic and well-thought-out narrative, in which his voice remained, despite declarations insisting otherwise, ever present. This voice throughout the text is the one that tells the reader: justice has been done here, the law and God have prevailed over a group of odious and evil witches. More than that, this justice was able to successfully identify and persecute not one but two threats to Jacobean England, witchcraft and papalism, both diabolic crimes against Church and Crown. Whilst nothing can be truly determined, what seems clear is that it was Potts’ job as commissioned author of this pamphlet to praise the legal system and its honoured judges, to catch the attention of King James, and also, to avoid any social criticism or uproar which may result from such a high execution rate.

This analysis of the structure and production of this text has been informed by pre-existing historiographical examinations of the pamphlet, especially that of Marion Gibson, on the selective nature of evidence presented. Moreover, this chapter was inspired by the efforts of Poole and Almond in their methods of breaking down the pamphlet by event as a means of gaining a better understanding of the 1612 trials. It seemed prudent then, in an examination of

⁹⁰ Ibid, pp. 21–22

the structure of this work, to break the text down into new sections based on its existing layout. Looking at the text in this way, by analysing how it was laid out and structured for the readership, has allowed for a deeper understanding of the motivations which fuelled its publication. This, in turn, will help develop deeper analyses of the literary aspects of *The Wonderful Discoverie*. That is, by gaining insight into the materiality and format of the text, we can then more fully explore the textual nuances within it, through a close reading of the hyperbolic construction of its key actors.

Chapter 3

‘No man neere them, was secure or free from danger’¹: Constructing Witches in *The Wonderfull Discoverie*

If not for Thomas Potts’ *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, the names of the Lancashire witches would be entirely lost to history. As the only surviving record of the 1612 trials, this pamphlet is the only insight that we have into the actual lives of the actors within this Pendle history. Yet they are not actors in their own stories, but rather the created characters of Potts’ sensational tale. Nonetheless, it is only through Thomas Potts’ voice that we know anything of these 1612 figures; as Peel and Southern have stated, the characters in Potts’ pamphlet are sorely absent elsewhere in historical record.² Potts was likely working from both his own notes as clerk during the Lancaster Assize, and the notes attained during the examination and evidence-building phase of these witch hunts by Roger Nowell and his counterparts, but the original documents available to him are untraceable today. They would have gone to the Clerk of the Crown’s records for Lancaster, but these have not survived within the Public Record Office for 1612, nor has an Assize Roll for that date.³ Furthermore, outside of the 1613 pamphlet, the only clear reference to the Pendle witches is in the ‘House and Farm Accounts of the Shuttleworths of Gawthorpe’, in which an item for July 1612 simply reads ‘when Margaret Pearson was sent for trial at the instigation of Nicholas Bannister’. Even Parish registers, a favoured source for historians, are unhelpful when aiming to gain insight into the lives of the Pendle witches, for their names cannot be found.⁴

¹ Potts (1613)

² Peel and Southern’s 1865 work, Gibson states, is the best account of what happened during the trials. Their work has been utilised since. – Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 141; Gibson, *Early Modern Witches*, p. 175

³ Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, pp. 135-141

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 141-142, 146

If Potts' account of the key actors within this historical moment is all we know of them, then it stands to reason that more attention needs to be paid to how they were written and constructed by this pamphleteer. Armed with a contextual awareness of the backdrop of 1612 Lancashire against which this tale was set, and a deeper understanding of the motivations behind the production of this pamphlet, this chapter aims to apply a close reading methodology - using both historical knowledge and gender as categories of analysis – to the literary construction of the important figures within *The Wonderfull Discoverie*. Whilst these trials are not new to historiographical studies, none have looked closely at Potts' interjections save to admit that they exist. Moreover, aside from the works of Gibson on the structuring of evidence within the pamphlet, and then Purkiss on the use of charms and prayers in said evidence, no one has applied a close reading methodology to this text. Finally, as of yet, critique has not attempted to treat the authorial interjections throughout this text in the same way as one might assess works of fiction, with a new historicist approach to reading Potts' words as evidence of his clear narratorial biases.

In writing this 1613 pamphlet, Thomas Potts blends the examinations and confessions of the accused and witnesses with his own ad-lib additions to the text. To clarify, Potts' authorial interjections are most often at the beginning of evidences against each witch, where he introduces the accused and then comments upon the examinations to follow. These comments do not fully discuss what is presented or the events detailed, but rather overviews the nature of their offences, for example:

Arraigned, for that she feloniously had practized, exercised, and used her Deuilish and wicked Arts... upon *Anne Foulds*... feloniously did kill and murder.⁵

⁵ This example is from the 'Arraignment and Triall of Katherine Hewitt'. – Potts (1613), pp. 129-130

Potts' commentary is not solely limited to these introductions, however. The author quite often summarises examinations, rather than report them *verbatim*, and at times moves immediately from witness testimony to summarising or dramatic prose, without breaks or indication that the testimony has ended. For example, Potts inserts his opinions at the end of the evidence presented by Abraham Law against Alizon Device: 'Oh who was present at this lamentable spectacle that was not moved with pitie to behold it!'⁶ Potts' aims in such a statement are clear. He hopes, in presenting this evidence and inserting such hyperbolic additions as this that he will draw the reader into the memory he is recounting. By calling the case against Alizon Device a 'lamentable spectacle' - in which the sight of poor, lamed John Law and the hurt of his son Abraham can be witnessed for all at the Assize court – the author is trying to engage the reader in sharing these feelings of pity for the victims. This, in turn, encourages the readership to accept this pamphlet as true and accurate, and the outcomes and verdicts on display as justified. It is these dramatic additions, more so than the alleged crimes of the accused witches, which are the key focus of this chapter. Certain aspects of the accused actions will of course be discussed, but in order to assess how these actors, and especially the accused witch-figure, have been created within this text, close attention must be paid to the voice of its author.

Whilst all of the constructed characters in Potts' pamphlet are of note, in order to examine the representation of the witch-figure in both the historical record and historical fiction of the Lancashire witch trials, it is necessary to identify key characters for analysis within each text. These are the figures who have been paid close attention in the fiction inspired by Potts' text, and so representations of them can be examined in their original form, and then traced through five fictional texts across four-centuries. These characters, despite the aims within this thesis to examine representations of the witch-figure, especially in relation to

⁶ Potts (1612), p. 149

gender, cannot be limited to the accused witches of 1612 nor to only female figures, but rather a combination of witches, a witness, and a witch-hunter. Moreover, for two reasons, not all accused witches or all characters can be examined in full. The first reason for this is that there are simply too many names, as there were too many accused witches, to be able to apply close-reading and analysis to each one. The second is that the authors of the Pendle-inspired fiction to follow do not do so either, and so there are certain characters who have automatically been highlighted as crucial to this study. The historical figures are as follows: for the witches, Elizabeth Southernnes, alias Demdike,⁷ and her granddaughter Alizon Device, as well as the wealthy and somewhat enigmatic Alice Nutter; Jennet Device, Demdike's youngest granddaughter, not a witch but a witness instead, is the next to be examined; finally, local JP Roger Nowell, the only male figure paid much attention within the literature inspired by Potts' 1613 pamphlet.

Constructing Witches: Diabolic Women

It is extremely difficult to gain any insight into the lives of the non-elite in the early modern period, and this is especially true of women since the period was so dominated by men. In almost every aspect of life, early modern women were marginalised, and so any attempts to understand these figures face great difficulties. As Capp states, their voices are only heard in a constructed or mediated form, 'by court officials or other male contemporaries.'⁸ In assessing these problems within Potts' *Wonderfull Discoverie*, it is necessary then to treat the memories of these women as hyperbolised and sensationalised objects within Potts' story, constructed as witch-figures, and not a true representation of their historical voices. Whether

⁷ Henceforth written as 'Demdike'.

⁸ Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 2

Potts' exaggerations stem from his political motivations, from the desires of court officials to justify the outcome of these trials, or from a genuine belief in and abhorrence of witchcraft cannot be truly determined, but the exaggerations themselves also cannot be denied. One place in which Potts' hyperbole has been the most obviously exposed is in his introductory statement about Demdike. He claims that the eighty-year-old woman had been a witch for fifty years, and raised her children to practice the same craft. However, in Demdike's confession, she stated her own origins as having occurred 'about twentie years past', when she met 'a Spirit or Deuill in the shape of a Boy'.⁹ Here we have a thirty-year exaggeration by the passionate author, who deemed Demdike to be the ultimate Pendle villain, the arch-witch from whom all the other accused witches originated.

Twenty years, or fifty, Demdike's pre-existing reputation as a witch was certainly worth mentioning for Potts, and the same can be said for her rival Chattox, described as 'A dangerous Witch, of very long continuance; always opposite to old Demdike'.¹⁰ She was always opposite because they were rivals of a sort, with both families accusing one another in the end. The rivalry between Demdike and Chattox could have existed because of their mutual reputations, and each woman's determination to be viewed as more powerful than the other. Reputation was everything for an early modern witch. On the one hand, a pre-existing reputation as a cunning person could equate to a hot meal, or material or monetary payment. Swain argued that people might have fostered their own reputations to ensure both opportunities for work and localised fear, so that the reputed witch's neighbours were less inclined to offend them for fear of their power, as can be seen in the Pendle trials, with John Device's annual payment of meal to Chattox.¹¹ Yet, for both Chattox and Demdike in Pendle, and countless other accused witches besides - Ursley Kempe, for example, in St Osyth, who

⁹ Potts (1613), pp. 14, 16

¹⁰ Potts (1613), p. 31

¹¹ J. T. Swain, 'The Lancashire Witch Trials of 1612 and 1634 and the economics of witchcraft', *Northern History*, Vol. 30 (1994), 64-85, p. 81

had a 'naughty name', meaning a reputation for witchcraft – a long-standing reputation could also be a death sentence.¹²

Reputation could also be associated more widely to a whole family, and this too is a feature experienced within Potts' pamphlet. As has been made evident by Deborah Willis' 2013 study, it was common in the early modern period for an accused witch to have a family also suspected locally, and for authorities to frequently examine whole-families in their hunt for witches. Indictments were often issued against two or more family members, and most often, mothers and children, especially daughters; at least seven English witchcraft pamphlets published between 1590 and 1620 featured familial ties between accused witches.¹³ In the case of the Demdike family, three generations were accused of *malefic* witchcraft. For Edward Fairfax in 1621, all of the witches that he accused were women, friends and neighbours, and two pairs of the six accused were mother and daughter. Upon examination of this case, it can be said that Margaret Waite and her daughter Peg each fall into some element of the witch-figure stereotype established within this period. Margaret Waite is a widow, living alone in a female-only household, with a black cat as a familiar, and an 'evil' reputation for witchcraft; and her daughter, who Fairfax makes clear is as much a witch as her mother, is known more for her impudence and 'lewd' behaviour, perhaps even her amoral sexuality, 'for she is young and not deformed'.¹⁴ Thus, we have several stereotypes on display, as highlighted, perhaps constructed, by Fairfax; the old, widowed witch and matriarch of her witch-family, and her daughter the temptress, an inferred sexually transgressive, young witch. To be described as 'lewd' in this period was to be viewed as sexually immoral. Toulalan found that, in cases of sexual deviance and violence within the

¹² Marion Gibson, *The Witches of St Osyth: Persecution, Betrayal and Murder in Elizabethan England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 37-40

¹³ Deborah Willis, 'The Witch-Family in Elizabethan and Jacobean Print Culture', *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 13:1 (2013), 4-31

¹⁴ Fairfax, *Daemonologia*, pp. 32-33

early modern period, the offenders were viewed as more likely to be guilty if they were known to engage in 'lewd' behaviours (such as, for men, the visiting of 'lewd' women, meaning women known to transgress, or perhaps even prostitutes).¹⁵ Additionally, in the 1589 pamphlet *The apprehension and confession of three notorious witches*, Joane Cunny is also described as a member of a witch family, with the pamphlet reading that she lived very 'lewdly', and with 'two lewde Daughters' (both accused of witchcraft too), who had two 'Bastard Children' of their own.¹⁶

Like these examples, the witch-families within Potts' pamphlet are very likely deemed guilty, first and foremost, for their relationship with other suspected witches. An excellent example of this is in his depictions of Elizabeth Device, daughter of Demdike, and mother of the accused Alizon and James Device, as well as the witness Jennet. Her trial opens with the lines:

O Barbarous and inhumane Monster, beyond example; so farre from sensible understanding..., as to bring thy owne natural children into mischief and bondage.¹⁷

Elizabeth Device is instantly monstrous for several reasons. Potts writes of her reputation for witchcraft, which originated from her own mother, and then spread to her, and by extension her own children. There was, according to Potts, none more capable of dangerous witchcraft than this woman because of the family in which she belonged. Moreover, in Elizabeth Device and in her mother Demdike we can see the existing early modern fears surrounding the subversion of maternal love in which a witch becomes the monstrous mother, damning the

¹⁵ Lewd sexual behaviours, at this time, 'might be referred to as "unnatural" or "deviant" if they transgressed contemporary notions of what was morally acceptable because they took place outside of marriage or were thought to be "against nature" because they were against God's will and "deviated from procreative sex between man and wife".' - Sarah Toulalan, "Is He a Licentious Lewd Sort of a Person?": Constructing the Child Rapist in Early Modern England', *Journal of the history of sexuality* 23.1 (2014), 21-52, pp. 21-24

¹⁶ See also Marianne Hester's *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches* for interesting examples of sexual deviance in the case of the St Osyth witches of 1582 -*The apprehension and confession of three notorious witches. Arreigned and by iustice condemned and executed at Chelmes-forde, in the Countye of Essex, the 5. day of Iulye, last past. 1589* (London: E. Allde, 1589), p. 7; Marianne Hester, *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches* (Oxon: Routledge, 1992), pp. 177-184

¹⁷ Potts (1613), p. 47

souls of her own children by introducing them to witchcraft, harming other children with her *malefic* magic, and upending the natural act of breastfeeding by feeding a demonic familiar from her own body.¹⁸ Demdike is purported to have fed her familiar, Tibb, blood from ‘under her left Arme’, and following a dispute with a neighbour, was alleged to have bewitched said neighbour’s child to death.¹⁹ Such notions of a violent and monstrous motherhood which went against societal norms was cause for significant anxieties in the early modern period, and Chamberlain states that ideas of infanticide especially were the clearest examples of cultural fears at this time.²⁰ Demdike is, in only thirteen pages of text, five of which are in Potts’ own words, the epitome of that most dangerous witch-figure, the monstrous mother.²¹

In fact, Demdike is the most monstrous witch out of all of the accused in Potts’ pamphlet. As head of her own female-centric family, Potts writes of her subversion of the maternal (though of course not in these terms) in introducing her daughter and grandchildren to witchcraft. However, more than this is the fact that Demdike is the alleged origin of witchcraft in the region, and thus she is displayed as a matriarchal arch-witch, the ultimate villain in Potts’ story. Children were vulnerable, and the harming or corruption of them was tragic.²² As Carter discusses, one of the main occupations classed as ‘women’s work’ was the caring for children,²³ and Roper finds that old women especially were often involved in the care and nourishment of children. The old woman, already the ‘abiding stereotypical witch’, was therefore the biggest threat to children in the power she held over their well-beings. If a child sickened, she could be blamed of bewitching them.²⁴ The old woman could also be

¹⁸ Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, pp. 87-90; Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, p. 107

¹⁹ Potts (1613), pp. 17, 22

²⁰ Stephanie Chamberlain, ‘Fantasizing Infanticide: Lady Macbeth and the Murdering Mother in Early Modern England,’ *College Literature*, vol. 32, no. 3 (2005), p. 76

²¹ The first three pages are Potts’ hyperbolic introduction of the accused, then we see Demdike’s ‘voluntarie confession’ over the next three, in the next six pages we have depositions against her from neighbours and family, and the final two feature further statement from Potts. – Potts (1613), pp. 13-26

²² Hannah Newton, *The Sick Child in Early Modern England, 1580-1720* (Oxford ; Oxford University Press, 2012), p. 5

²³ Carter, ‘Work, Gender and Witchcraft’, pp. 5-8

²⁴ Diane Purkiss has provided several examples of accusations in which the woman overseeing a new mother’s lying in period, or caring for their infant child, is subsequently accused of witchcraft. – Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, pp. 99-109;

viewed as having that capacity to corrupt or harm children due to her envy over her loss of ability to bear them.²⁵ In this way too, the harming of children, or envy of other women's maternal bodies, the accused witch could become the monstrous mother. Not only was the old woman threatening for her abilities to harm a child's body, but she was also feared for her power to corrupt a child's behaviours, indeed their souls, as Demdike did for her daughter, and then her daughter did for her own children. Roper, in investigating the notion of the child witch in this period, indicates the recurring idea that children could become 'infected' by witchcraft. In Roper's 1723 Augsburg case-study, the witch children were all 'infected' by an old woman, as Potts' Demdike family was by this matriarchal villain.²⁶

Demdike is the first accused witch that the reader meets, this is the first impression that an early modern readership will have of the Lancashire witches. Within these first lines, her character is laid out by Potts as the worst of all, a 'wicked and devilish' witch. In the title of this 'Declaration', Potts does clarify that Demdike died before receiving trial, but the font is small and easily missed in comparison with the bold 'most barberous and damnable'.²⁷ If she did not receive trial, then it begs the question as to why the pamphleteer bothered to include this declaration at all. One theory is that her life and practices are too closely linked with so many of the Lancashire witches to be ignored and so her testimonies must be included. Or perhaps Potts truly believes that she is the worst of them all, and thus her crimes must be laid bare for the public. Conversely, the inclusion of the damnable practices of Demdike may well have been a determined attempt to draw focus away from the fact that she died in gaol, encouraging readers to view her as an evil servant of the devil rather than an old woman who was mistreated and imprisoned in horrendous conditions until her death.

Lyndal Roper, "'Evil Imaginings and Fantasies': Child-Witches and the End of the Witch Craze", *Past & present* 167 (2000), 107–139, p. 123

²⁵ Roper, 'Evil Imaginings', p. 124

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-115

²⁷ Potts (1613), p. 13

Potts, still introducing this ‘Declaration’, claimed that the ‘whole business’ of these trials was dependent on the malicious actions of this witch, ‘for from this Sincke of villanie and mischief, have all the rest proceeded’.²⁸ She was a widow, a mother, a grandmother, and as such, was the head of a large household and living without a male influence to monitor their activities. If Demdike was the head of her household, and her entire family lived in said household, then she was in fact the head of a rather large clan, which consisted largely of women. Potts’ linguistic treatment of her as the origin of the ‘villanie’ present amongst the Lancashire witches paints Demdike as the matriarch, a powerful and dangerous woman heading up a coven of witches, all of whom have learned their craft from her. Thus, not only is she the most ‘barberous and malitious’,²⁹ she can also be deemed the most dangerous. Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, is the pamphlet’s other matriarch, the head of her own family of witches and another stereotypical crone. Interestingly, even this figure was initially instructed by Demdike, and as such cannot be deemed as powerful or dangerous as Potts’ favourite villain, for it was Demdike who ‘seduced’ Chattox into the craft.³⁰

In his 1845 edition of Potts’ pamphlet, Crossley compares the figure of Demdike with Elizabeth Sawyer from *The Witch of Edmonton*, complete with pages-long excerpts from the play. Elizabeth Sawyer is of course the characterisation of the real-life accused witch from Henry Goodcole’s 1621 pamphlet *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer a Witch*,³¹ but the character is only loosely based on this pamphlet, and so it could be that Dekker et. al were indeed inspired by Demdike for their drama. Crossley’s interpretation does not analyse

²⁸ Ibid, p. 14

²⁹ Ibid, p. 13

³⁰ Ibid, p. 19

³¹ Henry Goodcole, *The wonderfull discoverie of Elizabeth Savvyer a witch late of Edmonton, her conuiction and condemnation and death. Together with the relation of the Diuels accesse to her, and their conference together* (London: A. Mathewes, 1621)

the similarities so much as state their existence.³² However, the extract chosen and rewritten in his notes on the pamphlet does, interestingly, feature the lines:

Must I for that be made a common sink,
For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues
To fall and run into?³³ (2.1.1–15)

If Demdike is the origin or ‘sinke’ of witchcraft, the dramatised Sawyer has been created as the ‘sink’ of men’s negative opinions. As Amussen wrote of this particular speech, the constructed witch-figure of Sawyer has been written as just that, a construction. The dramatists have created a character aware of her own status as witch, and how this status was shaped, not by her own doing, but by the beliefs of her enemies.³⁴ If Sawyer was truly inspired by Demdike, then it is fair to assume that the construction of Demdike in Potts’ text was not taken as seriously by his contemporaries as the author had planned. Potts’ Demdike is an outright villain and thus undeserving of mercy, but the Sawyer developed for the stage is much more complex, a villain created by popular prejudice, whose very character is designed to be questioned.

That Demdike has been constructed to be the pamphlet’s villain is undeniable. Capp argues that all early modern men believed in their own supremacy. Essentially, patriarchal authority, at every level, was viewed as necessary and right because societal structures, law, and the Church make it so. Yet, despite the unquestioned existence of such supremacy, men often saw their power ‘as constantly under threat’.³⁵ This can be read in Potts’ dialogue. The frequency of phrases like those attached to Demdike and her daughter Elizabeth - ‘no man escaped her’, ‘sparing no man’, and the like – tells the modern reader that these women were

³² Crossley in Potts (1845), pp. 5-9

³³ Dekker et al., *The Witch of Edmonton*, Ed. by Lucy Munro (London: Bloomsbury, 2016)

³⁴ Susan D. Amussen, ‘The Witch of Edmonton: Witchcraft, Inversion, and Social Criticism’, *Early Theatre*, 21: 2 (2018), p. 174

³⁵ Bernard Capp, *When Gossips Meet: Women, Family, and Neighbourhood in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003)pp. 10, 20

a threat to all of society because they were a threat to men, and to the societal structures overseen by men. Purkiss argued that Shakespeare's Weird Sisters were written to be terrifying to an early modern audience, constructed as a threat to male identities and male bodies, and Potts' constructed Demdike can be read in the same way.³⁶ If 'no man escaped her', then all men must fear her, for her power was so great and threatening to masculinity that she subverted its authority by her very existence. Certainly, Demdike reads more like a constructed villain than she does an eighty-year-old woman. It could be suggested that, like early modern playwrights, Potts utilised pre-existing witch stereotypes prescribed by classical stories in order to create the perfect villain. Early modern playwrights were influenced by classic notions and texts, and Potts, too, hints at classic stereotypes in his 1613 pamphlet. He states, 'no man escaped her... or her Furies.'³⁷ The Greek Furies, figures who are somewhat witch-like by themselves for their ties to violence and vengeance, especially female-on-male vengeance, are closely tied with the Greek Goddess-witch Hecate.³⁸ Through this single line, Demdike, being likened to mythological creatures and witch-Goddesses, becomes a figure of legend and infamy. Interestingly, Blundell wrote that the name or word Demdike 'was soon used in a descriptive sense, presumably implying a witchlike character, it is mentioned in a document relating to a witch at Shippool in 1627.'³⁹ In popular memory more recently too, the name Demdike was associated (at least in Lancashire memory), with villainy. According to Sterling three and a half centuries later, Demdike was still viewed by many as a villain, and was used as a Lancastrian bogeyman of sorts to ensure the behaviour of young children; 'the

³⁶ Purkiss, *The Witch in History*, pp. 209-211

³⁷ Potts (1613), p.15

³⁸ Daniel Ogden, *Magic, Witchcraft, and Ghosts in the Greek and Roman World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 116

³⁹ 'The Pendle Witches: A Trial in 17th Century Lancashire', *Programme from an Exhibition at Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum, Burnley*, arranged by John D. Blundell, Curator (19th May-30th September, 1972) (County Borough of Burnley, Art Gallery and Museum Sub-Committee, 1972), p. 15; Lancashire Archives, Ref: QSB 1/33/16 – 'Witchcraft at Skippool, 1627' – from the Lancashire Quarter Sessions records

same threat was always delivered – “If you don’t behave, Mother Demdike will get you” – and always in a tone that equated Mother Demdike with doom.’⁴⁰

Due to her premature death, Potts never actually met the infamous Demdike. His construction of her had to come from the evidence and testimony of her family and neighbours, who likely blamed Demdike for their actions under duress or in an attempt to save themselves, as well as the notes of JP Roger Nowell, who would indeed have been one of the only officials to actually observe her in person. Therefore, Thomas Potts is careful not to discuss Demdike’s appearance within this declaration, for he, having never met her, would be going on the words of others. Yet the same could be said about his depictions of her character. We know from the pamphlet that Demdike is a blind woman of around eighty years old, had apparently been a witch for between twenty and fifty years, and lived in the Forrest of Pendle where she at times was consulted for healing, perhaps as a wise-woman or cunning-person, and her family begged for food and jobs. Once more, the author tends toward the dramatic, for he claims that she ‘dwelt’ in this ‘vaste place’, which was ‘fitte for her profession.’⁴¹ After dehumanising or zoomorphising Demdike by claiming her a forest dweller, Potts continues in something of an ominous tone, ‘What shee committed in her time, no man knowes.’⁴² Such purposeful language supports the theory that Potts is going to lengths to dramatise or entirely construct these accused witches; his descriptions of Old Demdike not only paint her as an evil witch, but actually places her in a stereotypically ‘witchy’ landscape, complete with monosyllabic adjectives and a hyperbolic ending which needs only an ellipsis to make it truly suspenseful.

In what Potts calls her ‘voluntarie Confession’, Demdike adheres to the stereotypical notions of English witchcraft. Her first interaction with what would become her familiar

⁴⁰ “The Shadow of Old Mother Demdike haunted my childhood holidays.’ - Jane Sterling, ‘In search of the Lancashire Witches’, *Home Owner* (January 1969), 5-7, p. 5

⁴¹ Potts (1613), p. 14

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 14

occurs as she was ‘coming homeward from begging’,⁴³ which immediately reveals her economic status. We know that beggars were viewed as burdens upon their communities, and by confirming to the early modern reader that this woman was not only an accused witch, but a beggar too, Potts sets her up as a disdainful character. Within this period, a great number of those accused of witchcraft were of a similar socio-economic status, and in fact, even the witches of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare’s Weird Sisters, have a moment of typical charity-refused vengeance in which they express their desire for revenge against the sailor’s wife who refused them charity.⁴⁴ The Thomas/Macfarlane hypothesis comes into play only a few times within the 1613 pamphlet, for on only twelve occasions are the origins of a dispute (which led to allegations of harm) specifically detailed in Potts’ pamphlet, and on only three occasions did they feature an instance of charity-refusal. However, the origins of the witch-hunt are found in the aforementioned incident between Alizon Device and the Halifax pedlar John Law, and on this incident, Potts’ language is undeniably against the beggar-witch Alizon. Her trial begins unlike the rest, not with a hyperbolic description of this monstrous witch, but with a call for sympathy for the witch’s victim:

Behold... this lamentable spectacle of a poore distressed Pedler; how miserably hee was tormented.⁴⁵

Potts’ choice to open with this lament to the lamed John Law is purposeful. Aside from this incident of charity-refusal and Law’s alleged bewitchment, there was no other evidence against Alizon Device. Moreover, rather than deny the charges against her, or engage in unseemly behaviour as we will see of her mother, thus giving Potts ample opportunity to

⁴³ Ibid, p. 16

⁴⁴ ‘A sailor’s wife had chestnuts in her lap/ And munched.../ “Give me,” quoth I./ “Aroint thee, witch!” the rump-fed runnion cries.’ (Act 1, Scene 3, lines 3-6) – William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, Ed. by Stephen Orgel (London: Penguin, 1971), p. 7

⁴⁵ Potts (1613), p. 142

ramble about her many crimes and sins, Alizon was humble and remorseful, pleading guilty in court.

It is interesting to note that Alizon Device has so little written about her in Potts' words, because Alizon has been one of the most popular figures for reclamation by later authors.⁴⁶ In *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, Potts can only focus on the poor state of her supposed victim, for the worst that he can say about Alizon Device is that, despite her youth, she was still 'spotted with innocent blood' like the other convicted witches.⁴⁷ A similar treatment is afforded the accused Alice Nutter, although for different reasons. Potts' language in introducing the evidence against Alice Nutter is much less insulting, for it would seem he has little to say against her. He begins with:

For it is certaine she was a rich woman; had a great estate, and children of good hope: in the common opinion of the world, of good temper, free from envy or malice.⁴⁸

Alice Nutter is an anomaly within this pamphlet. She is written by Potts to stand apart from all other accused witches. Potts writes of his own confusion about what could possibly have drawn this rich woman 'to this wicked course of life'. He states that 'great was the care and paines' of Judge Bromley to prove her innocence at court, 'to marke her out from the rest', because her presence amongst such odious creatures was shocking to these court officials.⁴⁹ Mitchell believed that Alice Nutter's presence amongst the Lancashire witches could only be explained by her being 'framed' by her enemies, though who those enemies might be is not determined.⁵⁰ Crossley, in his 1845 edition of Potts' pamphlet, was the first scholar to suggest a conspiracy or vendetta against this enigmatic accused witch, but again provides no

⁴⁶ Both William Harrison Ainsworth and Mary Sharratt write her as their heroine, as will be seen in Chapters 4 and 6.

⁴⁷ Potts (1613), p. 149

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 120

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 120

⁵⁰ Indeed this seems to have been taken from Crossley's hypothesis - W. R. Mitchell, *Lancashire Witch Country: On and Around Pendle Hill* (Clapham: Dalesman Publishing Co. Ltd., 1966), p. 34

substantial evidence to back up these speculations.⁵¹ The only thing that can be said about Alice Nutter for certain is that in the eyes of the 1613 pamphleteer, she was not like the other accused witches of the region. Williams, in a study of broadside ballads in the early modern period, which she states drew on social norms in order to display ‘appropriate feminine behaviour’, said that writers did not grant any agency to their represented witches, but rather depicted them as handmaidens to the Devil.⁵² Potts’ writing on Alice Nutter provides a unique juxtaposition because outwardly, this character is evidence of such appropriate behaviours, and so members of the patriarchal authority question her presence at the bar, and yet she, like all the rest, had ‘used her divellish and wicked Arts’ to harm and murder.⁵³

In contrast with the penitent and remorseful Alizon Device, and the enigmatic Alice Nutter who refused to confess even at the behest of her own children,⁵⁴ Potts’ linguistic treatment of the other Pendle witches is full of hyperbolic insult and imagery. As we have found, Demdike is the prime example, for she is this author’s chosen arch-witch, but the same sensational language can be seen in his development of the other accused witches too. Potts’ voice is clearest in the praise of his superiors and the condemnation of the accused, his inferiors. The way in which he describes the alleged witches makes clear his intent, to paint them as monstrous and other, and to assure their guilt to the reader. The accused witch who comes second only to Demdike in Potts’ negative treatment of her is her daughter Elizabeth Device. Her familial-informed reputation is not the only reason she is monstrous in Potts’ tale. The author is quick to point out physical appearance and demeanour (in everyone but Demdike, who he didn’t get to meet), as further evidence of guilt, and Elizabeth Device is

⁵¹ Crossley in Potts (1845), pp. 316-317

⁵² Sarah F. Williams, “‘A Swearing and Blaspheming Wretch’: Representations of Witchcraft and Excess in Early Modern English Broadside Balladry and Popular Song”, *Journal of Musicological Research*, 30:4 (2011), pp. 312, 316

⁵³ Potts (1613), p. 120

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 126

seemingly the most witch-like of all in this regard, and has thus been remembered as ‘strangely deformed’:

This odious Witch was branded with a preposterous marke in Nature, even from her birth, which was her left eye, standing lower then the other; the one looking downe, the other looking up.⁵⁵

Potts’ descriptive ad-libs were generally limited to his introducing each accused witch, but here, during the evidence or ‘examination’ sections of Elizabeth Device’s trial, in a section entitled ‘The Examination and Evidence of Jennet Device’, no actual evidence is given and the author inserts a page and a half of his own observations of her behaviours and her countenance. On appearance, the otherness of her lazy eye immediately paints her as monstrous. Such physical differences were often found attached to accused witches in early modern England. Eaton looks at the concept of deformity in the early modern witch-figure, in both witchcraft pamphlets, and in literature, and argues that these witches’ deformities ‘signified the sinfulness of their souls.’⁵⁶ This depiction of a monstrous and othered Elizabeth Device can be compared to the one-legged elderly accused Elizabeth Clarke in 1645 and the partially disabled Joan Flower in 1619, and Eaton has found that approximately 30 per cent of witchcraft tracts ‘printed between 1565 and 1700... also refer to deformity.’⁵⁷

The accused Chattox, too, is othered by Potts because of her appearance. Potts places Chattox in order ‘next to that wicked fire-brand of mischief, old Demdike’, and is sure to describe her for the contemporary reader as ‘a very old withered spent & decreped creature, her sight almost gone.’⁵⁸ Whilst he could not reasonably describe the deceased arch-witch Demdike by her appearance, in Chattox this author was able to insert the very obvious

⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 53

⁵⁶ Scott Eaton, ‘Witchcraft and Deformity in Early Modern English Literature,’ *The Seventeenth century*, vol. 35, no. 6 (2020), p. 818

⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 818-820

⁵⁸ Potts (1613), p. 31

stereotype associated with the early modern witch-figure, old age. The witch was most frequently depicted as the old crone in early modern belief, and this was reiterated by how the witch-figure was often portrayed in art in the middle and early modern age.⁵⁹ The stereotype prevailed in popular thought; the witch-figure was female, and she was frighteningly withered and wrinkled, she was often a widow, and as in the case of Chattox, she was also known to frighten neighbours with her tendencies to speak out in a scold-like manner against them, and also to talk to herself, for Chattox was so named for her 'lips ever chattering'.⁶⁰ Old women were viewed as other because, in their age, they were less determined in their attempts to fit into societal norms and indeed were often associated with mental instability,⁶¹ so they provoked reactions of 'repulsion, alienation... and [were] commonly considered less intelligent and useless.'⁶² Moreover, the aged female body was viewed as less-than female, at times less-than human. Age brought the reproductive functions of a female body to an end,⁶³ and as woman's role in society was determined by her ability to be a good wife and mother, the aged female body was a hindrance to that prescribed role. As Roper wrote, whilst Demonologists did say that anyone could be a witch, they made clear that 'witches were predominantly older women.'⁶⁴

If old women were, in part, deemed more likely to succumb to witchcraft because of their refusal to hold their tongue in disputes, placing themselves into the category of local scold, this was certainly not limited only to the elderly. Elizabeth Device was, for Potts, all the more witch-like for her behaviour, which he mentions on more than one occasion,

⁵⁹ Not always, of course. Female witches' bodies were also often painted as beautiful, and so depicted as holding a seductive power over masculinity. For example, Zika provides interesting insights into the symbolism behind the cauldron, which, he argues, represents the womb and vagina, and the destructive potential of this. This, interestingly, links the seductress with the monstrous feminine in a different way than the old crone. – Charles Zika, *The Appearance of Witchcraft* (Oxford: Taylor and Francis, 2013), pp. 76-84; Scott Eaton, 'Witches and the Devil in Early Modern Visual Cultures: Constructions of the Demonic Other', *Midlands Historical Review*, Vol. 5 (2021), 1-25

⁶⁰ Potts (1613), p. 31

⁶¹ Alison Rowlands, 'Witchcraft and Old Women in Early Modern Germany,' *Past & Present*, no. 173 (2001), p. 52

⁶² Encarnación Juárez-Almendros, *Disabled Bodies in Early Modern Spanish Literature: Prostitutes, Aging Women and Saints* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2017), p. 84

⁶³ Purkiss, 'Witchcraft in Early Modern Literature', p. 132

⁶⁴ Lyndal Roper, *Witch Craze* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 160

detailing that she was ‘accustomed’ to cursing and crying out ‘in such fearefull manner’.⁶⁵ In Crossley’s edition of the pamphlet, he comments upon these instances, stating that nothing seems to shock these pamphleteers more than ‘the utter want of decorum and propriety exhibited by these unhappy creatures’ when faced with the injustice of the evidence against them.⁶⁶ Witches were often accused of such behaviours, presented as discordant and transgressive in speech and manner, thus breaking the rules of conduct established by a patriarchal society.⁶⁷ In the case of Anne Gunter, the accused witches Agnes Pepwell and Elizabeth Gregory were both suspected for their failure to conform to appropriate feminine behaviours, they were the victims of prejudice because they were contentious women and ‘notorious’ scolds.⁶⁸ The scold-like curses and excessive crying of Elizabeth Device in court offend the sensibilities of the author so much that he deems it necessary to interrupt the claimed *viva voce* testimony in order to document it. To the modern reader, her reaction seems entirely understandable and very human given the fact that she had (after months living in squalor in Lancaster Gaol) just been dragged to court and faced with her youngest daughter, who was to testify against her, but to Thomas Potts, such behaviours make her more witch-like and less human.

The last way in which the accused Pendle witches were depicted as monstrous is in Potts’ inference to their sexuality. Elizabeth Device allegedly bewitched John Robinson to death in revenge for the insults he hurled at her for having a bastard child.⁶⁹ In the 1589 Chelmsford case, Joan Cunny’s two grandchildren, from her two ‘lewd’ daughters, were also bastard children, thus adding to their labels as lewd women.⁷⁰ On a slightly separate note, Demdike too was associated with images of negative sexuality for Potts writes of her feeding

⁶⁵ Potts (1613), pp. 48, 52

⁶⁶ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 23

⁶⁷ Williams, ‘Swearing and Blaspheming’, p. 310

⁶⁸ Brian P. Levack, ‘Possession’, p. 1620

⁶⁹ Potts (1613), p. 52

⁷⁰ *The apprehension and confession of three notorious witches*, 1589, p. 7

her familiar, who forced himself onto her other knee, ‘to get blood under her left Arme: and she being without any apparell saving her Smocke’.⁷¹ An early modern reader would assume several things from this statement: that Old Demdike must have been a true witch, for she fed a familiar her blood from a specific point in her body; that this feeding point, otherwise known as a witch’s mark or witch’s teat, must have been under her arm; and that this process of nourishment went against nature, against acceptable social behaviour, especially with regards to female behaviour. What is presented to the reader here is vivid, visual imagery which depicts Demdike as a witch, a monstrous mother, and a sexually depraved woman all in one. The description of this process of feeding a devil in animal form from a secret place on her body, whilst almost entirely undressed, seems deliberate from the author. This act can be visualised by the reader, and to them it is entirely scandalous, for not only is this woman an obvious witch, but she clearly has an immoral sexual appetite.⁷² Moreover, the intricate details included by Potts in this scene, of the accused nursing both demon and child at the same time, further plays upon early modern fears of witches as anti-mothers, who harm rather than nurture children as a true and Godly woman should. It is unclear whether these details were embellished by Potts, or taken directly from Nowell’s investigative notes, but it seems unlikely that such details would be deemed important enough for the accused herself to admit. Ultimately, this vivid extract seems to be constructed by a male figure of authority, for the purpose of solidifying the guilt of the accused witch, and perhaps even to induce fear in the early modern reader.

The Demdike women were viewed by their reputations as witches and by their transgressive sexuality by their neighbours. In Demdike’s confession, taken by Roger Nowell prior to her being brought to Lancaster Gaol, she discusses an occasion in which her

⁷¹ Potts (1613), p. 17

⁷² It must be noted, however, that this imagery is relatively tame in comparison to some English tracts. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Millar identified references to witches engaging in sexual relations with their familiars in over 50 per cent of seventeenth-century pamphlets. – Millar, *Witchcraft, the Devil, and Emotions*, p. 183

granddaughter, Alizon Device, had done some work for a neighbour, Richard Baldwyn, at his Mill, but was not paid (in money, food, or goods) for this work. As a result, Demdike, blind at the time, was led by her granddaughter to Richard Baldwyn's home to request payment on her granddaughter's behalf. In this account there is no clear indication as to why Alizon Device was not paid for her work, but Baldwyn's treatment of her and her grandmother would seem to be a clear indication of his disdain for them; 'get out of my ground Whores and Witches, I will burne the one of you, and hang the other.'⁷³ When reading such interactions, it is important to remember that they can be subjective. In Demdike's confession, this interaction provoked her to curse Baldwyn via her familiar Tibb, requesting that he 'Revenge thee of him'.⁷⁴ When an accused witch such as Demdike is questioned and eventually confesses, they may attempt to justify their actions by highlighting, or even embellishing, their experiences of mistreatment and reasons for retaliation. Despite this, communal resentment towards the elderly and the poor as burdens on society was common, and as such, Richard Baldwyn's harsh words were likely an accurate representation of his views.⁷⁵ Moreover, given the likelihood that Demdike had been suspected of witchcraft for many years, the fact that witch families were a common fear within the period and Alizon Device would have likely been a suspected witch by association, and the notion that female witches were dangerous in part for their sexual appetites, Baldwyn's description of them as 'Whores and Witches' seems an appropriate view in early modern Lancashire. Certainly, the author of this pamphlet, who so frequently inserts his own opinion at the end of the evidence

⁷³ Ibid, p. 17

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 17

⁷⁵ Whilst the term 'scold' was generally gendered in favour of women, Cressy has found that it was also not uncommon for men to have uncontrollable tongues when tempers were high. Such insults could have been common for Richard Baldwyn. - David Cressy, *Dangerous Talk: Scandalous, Seditious, and Treasonable Speech in Pre-Modern England*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 19-23

against an accused witch, does not discuss the insults hurled at the ‘most dangerous and malicious’ villain, Demdike.⁷⁶

Women, by Christian law, were deemed lesser than men, this much is clear. When the book of Genesis talked of Eve taking that first bite of the forbidden fruit, Christianity listened, and women were viewed accordingly. More prone to temptation, to desire, to sin, the female body was weaker to the force of Satan, more susceptible to evil influences; ‘thanks to two to five millennia of male-produced theology, women are understood as the spiritual weak-link between men and Satan’.⁷⁷ This weakness was then, ironically, what made witches all the more threatening to societal structures, for the susceptibility of women to the temptations of sin and the devil meant that they, in turn, had the power to do as Eve did, and tempt the men around them. Witches, as servants of the Devil, could tempt using their magic, but also their bodies and their sexuality, ‘as witches were thought to be lustful and woman to have sexual capital.’⁷⁸ A sexually transgressive woman was more likely to be associated with witchcraft because such transgressions were closely associated with witchcraft and with Satan, and could destabilise the sensibilities of the early modern man, giving this ‘weaker sex’ power over men.

Male Witches: An Author’s Afterthought

That men could be tempted by these dangerous witches can be used to explain the existence of male witches in Potts’ pamphlet. There were only two men accused in the 1612 Lancashire trials, both direct relatives of one or more accused female witch. First, there was James Device, son of Elizabeth, grandson of Demdike, and brother of Alizon. This male witch was

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 13

⁷⁷ Laurel Zwissler, ‘In the Study of the Witch: Women, Shadows, and the Academic Study of Religions,’ *Religions*, vol. 9, no. 4 (2018), p. 112

⁷⁸ Eaton, ‘Witches and the Devil’, p. 10

afforded more attention than the other in part because of his weakened state during trial, which Potts may have felt worth justifying. James Device was ‘so insensible, weake, and unable in all thinges’ that he couldn’t stand or speak, and had to be held up by someone else in order to receive trial.⁷⁹ Baratta suggests that James’ weakness could be evidence of torture at the hands of the Lancaster gaoler who, Potts stated, went to great effort to procure further evidence from those imprisoned prior to the August Assizes.⁸⁰ This cannot be proven, but what is clear through Potts’ voice is that he made a point of dismissing James Device’s weakness, perhaps to take away from the potential mistreatment and abuse he experienced whilst awaiting trial:

or by reason of his Imprisonment so long time before his Tryall (which was with more favour, commiseration, and reliefe then hee deserved) I know not.⁸¹

The author includes such a suggestion in order to dismiss it, it seems, for it is in a list of many suggested reasons for James’ weakness including it being caused by his own means, to avoid trial. Despite James’ frailty by the time of trial, Potts’ account continues as normal. James, like his mother and his sister, is a member of the Demdike family, and as such, is guilty by familial association. However, he is also depicted by Potts as taking a particular pleasure in ‘revenge, bloud, & mischief’. The author calls him a ‘Monster in Nature’ and elsewhere a ‘bloody Monster’,⁸² which seems overtly abusive of a man who was so weak that he supposedly couldn’t speak or hear. Furthermore, Potts writes that James Device, unable to stand or speak or hear, plead ‘not guilty’ and then ‘guilty’ upon hearing the evidence against him, but how could he do either without the strength to so much as speak or hear that

⁷⁹ Potts (1613), p. 63

⁸⁰ Luca Baratta, ‘Lancashire: a Land of Witches in Shakespeare’s Time,’ *Journal of Early Modern Studies*, 2 (2013), p. 190

⁸¹ Potts (1613), p. 62

⁸² *Ibid*, pp. 64, 69

evidence?⁸³ It seems that Potts' treatment of James was constructed after-the-fact, to gloss over his feeble state (and the potential cause of it) in order to write him as yet another undeniably guilty witch, thus justifying his sentence.

If Potts' construction of James Device was an afterthought so as to justify the verdict against him, the other accused male witch wasn't even afforded as much as that. John Bulcock, in Potts' pamphlet, was so much of an afterthought that he has been written of at all times alongside his mother in the section entitled 'The Arraignment and Triall of John Bulcock and Jane Bulcock his mother'.⁸⁴ Potts' hyperbolic additions to the evidence against John and Jane Bulcock refers to them as one; how they committed their atrocities together, attended the gathering at Malkin Tower together, and how they both cried out 'in very violent & outrageous manner, even to the gallows'.⁸⁵

Male witches were not unheard of in the early modern period. Around one-fifth of all accused were men, and in some areas like Iceland, Normandy, and Estonia, male witches made up the majority of the accused.⁸⁶ A 'common suggestion' made by historians is that male accused witches can be explained away by their associations with female ones.⁸⁷ Whilst this may, at least partially, have been the case for James Device and John Bulcock, the same cannot be said for all male witches in the period. In the duchy of Lorraine, Briggs found that around 28 per cent of accused witches were male, and whilst a high proportion came from families of reputed witches, men were featured more often in the sensational or unusual cases than women were.⁸⁸ Moreover, Schulte argues that men too could have long-standing reputations as witches, identifying cases where men were subjected to repeated accusations

⁸³ Indeed, the evidence against him was written as *viva voce* testimony, but only the evidence given by his sister Jennet was actually given in court, and we have no way of knowing if James Device truly was present for this.

⁸⁴ Potts (1613), pp. 134-139

⁸⁵ Though how else is an innocent person condemned to death supposed to react in such a situation? – Ibid, p. 135

⁸⁶ Apps and Gow, *Male Witches*; Rowlands, *Witchcraft and Masculinities*, p. 2

⁸⁷ Robin Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 331

⁸⁸ For example, 'men figured quite prominently among the supposed werewolves'. – Ibid, pp. 364-365

even after acquittal.⁸⁹ This is not unlike a female accused in Pendle, Margaret Pearson, who in 1612 was facing her third trial for witchcraft.⁹⁰ Kent offers six case studies of male witches accused in England and New England, finding that four out of the six accused were married, but only one man was married to an accused witch.⁹¹ So, certainly, the existence of male witches cannot always be so easily dismissed as guilt by association. Kent asserts, no magical practice ‘was exclusively allied to one gender’, whereas Rowlands invites us to consider the various categories of magical terminologies (*maleficium* versus sorcery, for example) as they might apply or appeal to gendered differences, but there is no clear evidence of masculine magical practice within *The Wonderful Discoverie*.⁹² Kent also rejects Schulte’s argument that male witches were accused because they were ‘feminized men’, finding instead that, in the case of accused male witch Nicholas Stockdale, he and his accusers were all of similar social standing - they were ‘adult, male, settled, skilled and independent’.⁹³ Briggs, too, found little evidence that male witches displayed anything but masculine behaviours, stating that many displayed more aggressive tendencies, thus putting them at risk of accusations.⁹⁴

However, in *The Wonderful Discoverie*, the two depicted male witches are certainly not deemed as insidious as their female counterparts, nor are they portrayed as particularly feminine or indeed masculine. The evidence against James Device is repetitive, with the same ‘examinations’ being separated into three parts for both James Device and Jenet Device, and twice for Elizabeth Device, making it appear as though there were a multitude of depositions

⁸⁹ Schulte also identified a case in Holstein where a man was accused 28 years after his initial acquittal. – Rolf Schulte, *Man as Witch: Male Witches in Central Europe* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 38-40

⁹⁰ Potts writes: ‘for this is the third time shee is come to receive her Triall; one time for murder by Witch-craft; an other time for bewitching a Neighbour; now for goods. How long shee hath beene a Witch, the Deuill and shee knowes best.’ – Potts (1613), p. 153

⁹¹ E. J. Kent, *Cases of Male Witchcraft in Old and New England, 1592-1692* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols Publishers, 2013), p. 3

⁹² James Device is accused of the same practices as his female family members, such as making pictures of clay against his victims. - Kent, *Cases of Male Witchcraft*, pp. 2, 9-11; Alison Rowlands, ‘Not ‘the Usual Suspects’? Male Witches, Witchcraft, and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe’, in *Witchcraft and Masculinities in Early Modern Europe*, Ed. Rowlands, Alison (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 4-8; Potts (1613), p. 66

⁹³ Kent, *Cases of Male Witchcraft*, pp. 9, 32-33

⁹⁴ Briggs, *The Witches of Lorraine*, p. 365

against him, when in reality there were three (plus one undated which James himself gave, potentially under duress, whilst in gaol at Lancaster Castle). Such repetitive evidence suggests that Potts made attempts to make the evidence against James worse than it was. He was depicted by the author as monstrous, yes, but only because to describe him as anything else would risk arousing sympathy for him in the contemporary readership, and thus suspicion over his maltreatment in gaol. John Bulcock is not even that; he is simply the other half of his mother, both of them being witches because they were present with all the others at the Good Friday gathering and were therefore connected to the other Lancashire witches by association.⁹⁵

Jennet Device

This gathering of witches on Good Friday, 1612 at Malkin Tower was a theory supported primarily by the evidence supplied by nine-year-old Jennet Device. It was here that the alleged plot to blow up Lancaster Castle and kill its gaoler was concocted. This sensational plot was arguably a key feature in the plan to gain the King's approval. Therefore, the fact that it rested so much weight on the testimony of a child seems preposterous to the twenty-first century reader. However, as James I said in *Daemonologie*:

[B]arnes or wiues... may of our law serue for sufficient witnesses and proofes... may be sufficient in matters of high treason against God: For who but Witches can be prooues, and so witnesses of the doings of Witches.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ This alleged gathering or Sabbat is of course cause for speculation, but Baratta has suggested that it could well have occurred; 'It is plausible that a reunion of people worried about their fate and that of their relatives really took place in old Demdike's home, but the plan of a possible assault on the castle definitely appears fictional, although destined to grip the popular fantasy.' - Baratta, 'Lancashire: a Land of Witches', p. 198

⁹⁶ King James I and VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 54

‘Barnes’, meaning children, are deemed worthy witnesses by the King himself, who also asserts that witches are excellent witnesses against each other. So, Jennet’s testimony should be taken seriously, for who better to testify against a family of witches than the child of one? Jennet Device’s reasoning behind her testimony is a mystery, but it was unfortunately not an isolated occurrence in early modern England (nor indeed Europe). Child witnesses would often accuse people they knew, were even related to, potentially after a disagreement, or a deeper, festering resentment.⁹⁷ There is much speculation behind the reason for such accusations coming from children like Jennet. It is possible that she knew of the potential for thrill and attention that may be achieved by such accusations because other children, in other witchcraft cases, had achieved it. Levack, making use of the work of De Blecourt, discusses the wide publication and popularity of the Gaufridy case in Marseilles, 1611, which spread awareness of the case, not just in France, but in England (and the Netherlands), too. This particular trial, with its wide media exposure, contained details of a witches’ sabbath, and in the following year, history experienced one of a few very rare accounts of an English witch sabbath through Potts’ *Discoverie*. So, when considering the spread of ideas of witchcraft across popular thought, such notions may have seemed fantastic to the child’s mind who could have heard of such sensational tales because ‘of course, people talked’.⁹⁸ In 1589 Chelmsford, too, the accused Joane Cunny and her two daughters were testified against by their own family, the two grandsons of Joane, ‘the eldest being about 10. or 12. yeeres of age... were cheefe witnesses.’⁹⁹ The Throckmorton children in the late sixteenth-century are another example, for they successfully accused witches of causing their convulsive fits over a

⁹⁷ Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, p. 349; Poole in Potts (1613), p. 27

⁹⁸ Levack, *Witch-Hunt*, pp. 96-97

⁹⁹ ‘*The apprehension and confession of three notorious witches* (1589), p. 7

period of five years.¹⁰⁰ Then of course, there was the case of the Starkie children, so geographically close to Jennet's Pendle home.¹⁰¹

In this sense, it could be argued that through local rumour and speculation, Jennet Device heard tell of fantastical stories of witchcraft from other lands, and reiterated those stories within the courtroom at Lancaster Castle, because as Witmore believes, children, precisely because they were children and therefore impressionable, were 'a reproductive medium so responsive they... unthinkingly absorbed and performed the fictions of others', including interrogators.¹⁰² As Goodier wrote, it is difficult to guess at the experiences of Jennet Device,¹⁰³ but Potts' own account of her testimony in *The Wonderfull Discoverie* reveals that she, upon facing her mother in court:

as with weeping teares shee cryed out unto my Lord the Judge, and told him, shee was not able to speake in the presence of her Mother.¹⁰⁴

The weeping tears of Jennet Device suggest a sense of guilt or fear over her actions in court, and this lends itself to the notion that perhaps, there is more to the tale than a deviant child telling stories about her family. Scholars have of course speculated that she was trained or coached in her testimony, with the first suggestion coming from Crossley in 1845.¹⁰⁵ Potts writes of this young girl as the perfect witness, for when her testimony comes into question during the trial of Alice Nutter, because of Bromley's supposed reluctance to prosecute such a rich and good tempered woman, Potts writes of Judge Bromley testing Jennet Device to determine the validity of her accusations. Jennet was asked to leave the court room at the

¹⁰⁰ Michael Witmore, *Pretty Creatures: Children and Fiction in the English Renaissance* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019), p. 174

¹⁰¹ John Darrell, *A True Narration of the Strange and Grevous Vexation by the Devil of 7. persons in Lancashire, and William Somers of Nottingham* (1600); George More, *A True Discourse concerning the certaine possession and dispossession of 7 persons in one familie in Lancashire* (1600)

¹⁰² Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, pp. 174-175

¹⁰³ Goodier, *1612*, p. 96

¹⁰⁴ Potts (1613), pp. 52-53

¹⁰⁵ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 306

Lancaster Assize whilst the judge ordered the accused witches to line up, ‘and betwixt every Witch another Prisoner, and some other strange women amongst them’, so as to confuse the young witness, who was brought back in and asked to identify witches from the line up. Following Jennet Device’s passing of this test, Potts concluded in a way which depicts Jennet Device as some sort of heavenly sign; ‘This could be no forged or false Accusation, but the very Act of God’.¹⁰⁶ Roper’s study of child witches suggests that the early modern period viewed them as vulnerable to being drawn into witchcraft by influential adults.¹⁰⁷ Even the King’s demonological treatise, despite stating that children were capable witnesses, states that children are ‘not that capable of reason’, and so if they are drawn into witchcraft, their ‘ignorant age will no doubt excuse them.’¹⁰⁸ As Maschuch writes, children equated to a ‘vulnerable spiritual character’ in the early modern period, corruptible and susceptible, and whilst history rarely features accounts of the early modern child, when children are seen they ‘appear most frequently as perpetrators of disorder.’¹⁰⁹ Yet Potts praises Jennet Device so highly, in a tone which is oftentimes similar to how he portrays the judges, to strengthen her testimony for contemporaries.¹¹⁰

The Samlesbury Case

Jennet Device was an admirable and fully admissible witness in the 1612 Assize. Despite her age, her word was taken as truth, and her testimony was used to prosecute the accused witches. The case of the Samlesbury witches, however, saw a child-witness (in fact older than

¹⁰⁶ Potts (1613), pp. 125-126

¹⁰⁷ Roper, ‘Evil Imaginings’, pp. 107–139

¹⁰⁸ King James I and VI, *Daemonologie*, p. 54

¹⁰⁹ Michael Mascuch, ‘The Godly Child’s “Power and Evidence” in the Word: Orality and Literacy in the Ministry of Sarah Wright’, in *Childhood and Children’s Books in Early Modern Europe, 1550-1800*, Ed. by Andrea Immel and Michael Witmore (Oxon: Routledge, 2006), pp. 108, 110

¹¹⁰ In her evidence against her brother, James, Potts writes that she delivered it with ‘so great a Presence... with what modestie, gouernment, and vnderstanding’. – Potts (1613), p. 69

Jennet Device) be deemed a liar and her evidence dismissed as false. The section of Potts' pamphlet dedicated to the Samlesbury witches differs from the rest of the pamphlet in many ways. In introducing every accused witch from the Pendle area, Potts uses strong words, abusive adjectives like 'foul', 'odious', 'monstrous', 'barbaric'.¹¹¹ Their guilt is already plain to the early modern reader, before any judgements are made. His treatment of the Samlesbury witches, however, is in what we could call a more matter-of-fact tone. These three women aren't inhumane creatures, they are 'the famous Witches of Samlesbury, as the country called them'.¹¹² 'As the country called them' is an important phrase, in that it is so unlike his linguistic treatment of the other witches on trial at this assize; there is doubt there. He continues with this tone, introducing the Samlesbury case by revealing the outcome; three women, Jennet Bierley, Ellen Bierley, and Jane Southworth, were brought to trial upon the accusations of one 14-year-old girl, Grace Sowerbutts, who was instructed in her testimony. Potts' language immediately places the blame for these particular accusations entirely on the 'subtle practice and conspiracy of a Jesuit priest', of which the county of Lancashire, 'hath good store'.¹¹³

Unlike the nine-year-old Jennet Device, whose testimony is taken as clear evidence of witchcraft, Grace Sowerbutts, though a weak and naïve child, is treated at times with as much disdain as those 'odious' Pendle witches. Following her long and complex testimony, Potts calls her an 'impudent wench', with her 'counterfeit fits'.¹¹⁴ The reader then, of course, knows without reading further that her evidence was false. Once more, Potts is selective about which evidence he includes and which he does not, and this 'true and unbiased' account cannot be *viva voce*, because at this stage of trial, no one in court was aware of the supposed influence of a Jesuit priest. This priest, named here as 'Master Tompfox, (which is a misprint

¹¹¹ Ibid

¹¹² Ibid, p. 87

¹¹³ Ibid, pp. 87-88

¹¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 96, 99

of Thompson) or Southworth' is said to have experience 'working upon' the 'feminine disposition being more Passiue then Actiue.'¹¹⁵ Meaning that this priest, according to Potts, is gifted at manipulating young girls, for it is inherent in them to be easily influenced. Again, Grace Sowerbutts is portrayed as weak and easily manipulated – this girl has no active thoughts of her own.

Potts' linguistic approach to Christopher Southworth, the Seminary or Jesuit Priest behind this unusual case, is almost exactly the same as his approach to the Pendle witches. His actions are described as 'wicked and damnable', and he works 'by the help of the Devil'. He is also frequently associated with the same monstrous terms, he is a 'bloudie Butcher' in the same way that the accused witches were described as 'bloudy Monster[s]', thus he is instantly as diabolic and abhorrent as the Pendle witches. The Southworth family was one of those guilty of recusancy, of clinging to the Catholic faith, and of harbouring wanted Jesuits in the past. Christopher Southworth was in fact, a known and wanted priest, suspected of hiding in Samlesbury (amongst his family).¹¹⁶ It was common for recusant families to send their sons overseas for training, as was likely the case with Southworth, and this in itself may have made him a more frightening spectre for those Assize court officials, for as Hibbard states, international Catholicism was viewed as even more 'dark, unknown, [and] frightening' than the English practices were under James' rule.¹¹⁷ This therefore brings into question whether there truly was a Catholic plot to accuse three women of witchcraft in 1612, or whether the court officials seized upon the opportunity brought about by weak evidence to include such a plot in the overall narrative, to appeal to a wider, and indeed more elite audience – including the King himself. This would certainly explain why a seminary priest is

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 100

¹¹⁶ Gillow, *The Haydock Papers*, pp. 22-23; Jane Sterling, *Elizabethan and Jacobean Lancashire* (Burnley: Hortus Printing Co. Ltd., 1973), pp. 5-10; Almond, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 9

¹¹⁷ Caroline M. Hibbard, 'Early Stuart Catholicism: Revisions and Re-Revisions', *The Journal of Modern History* 52:1 (1980), 2–34, pp. 10-13

portrayed in such negative ways, as a servant of the Devil. Dolan wrote that, in this period, the Catholics ‘who skulk across the pages of pamphlets, broadsides, statutes, and sermons have the vivid contours and extraordinary powers of cartoon villains’, and Christopher Southworth is certainly an exaggerated villain in Potts’ account.¹¹⁸ Before 1605, when Jesuit activity was very minimal within the country, Walsham writes that English society was still fearful of Jesuits: ‘a hostile discourse about the activities of this burgeoning religious order was already beginning to evolve’, and Marshall wrote that ‘papists’ were a prominent, and unsettling, presence for English society.¹¹⁹ Potts’ own religious affiliations are not definitively known, but given his ties to Thomas Knyvett, and the fact that Catholicism, and indeed fear of its practitioners, was, as Walsham put it, a ‘lasting feature’ of the religious scene, it can be assumed that Potts was more aligned with Protestantism.¹²⁰ This would of course explain the fervour with which Potts writes of this recusant plot, as well as support the frequency of Catholic imagery present in the evidence against the accused witches.

The accused Samlesbury witches, the victims of Grace Sowerbutts’ proclaimed counterfeit accusations, are treated with little sympathy from the author, despite the ordeal which they would have endured as a result of these accusations. They are not the odious servants of the devil that the Pendle accused are, but they are also not written of respectfully. They are described with pathos; frequently associated with the words ‘poor’ and ‘creature’, but are always less than human. Potts seems to utilise these three women as a means of solidifying the court’s authority and justifying all of the verdicts reached. He writes of these

¹¹⁸ Frances E. Dolan, *Whores of Babylon: Catholicism, Gender, and Seventeenth-Century Print Culture* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 16

¹¹⁹ Alexandra Walsham, “‘This Newe Army of Satan’: The Jesuit Mission and the Formation of Public Opinion in Elizabethan England”, in *Moral Panics, the Media and the Law in Early Modern England*, Ed. by David Lemmings and Claire Walker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 43; Peter Marshall, *Reformation England, 1480-1642* (London: Zed Books, 2021), p. 187

¹²⁰ Walsham, *Church Papists*, p. 95; Baratta, ‘Lancashire: a Land of Witches’, p. 196

women that their appearance may have damned them if it weren't for the efforts of the court officials:

for the wrinkles of an old wives face is good evidence to the Jurie against a Witch... But old Chattox had Fancie, besides her withered face, to accuse her.¹²¹

Potts' voice is clear here, and in this statement he seems to be telling his contemporary readers to never fear, for the court officials in charge have the keen ability to tell a real witch from a false one, something which King James I believed about himself with the publication of *Daemonologie*.

Patriarchal Authority: Potts' Heroes

The uncovered Catholic conspiracy and the plot, allegedly concocted at what could be called England's first witchcraft Sabbat, are the clearest points of evidence when discussing the prevalence of Potts' political ambitions in writing *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, for they so clearly lend themselves to the fears and beliefs of the King. However, what is also clear is that Potts' reverence for James I can be read throughout the pamphlet. The King's influence can be seen most notably of course, in Potts' frequent praise of him, especially in the pamphlet's front matter, and whilst the author does not construct a character-version of King James in this text, he uses the work of the monarch in order to construct his witches. The frequency and importance, from an evidential standpoint, of the *malefic* act of making a clay image by the accused witches can certainly be linked to James I's witchcraft treatise.

Demdike, for example, 'confesseth... that the speediest way to take a mans life away by Witchcraft, is to make a Picture of Clay'.¹²² This is a practice detailed in James I's

Daemonologie, which stated that the Devil taught witches how to make and work with such images:

¹²¹ Potts (1613), p. 101

¹²² Ibid, p. 18

That by the roasting thereof, the perfons that they beare the name of, may be continually melted or dried away by continuall fickeneffe.¹²³

Furthermore, the influence of *Daemonologie* can be read in the case against Jennet Preston.

When the accused was brought to see the corpse of Thomas Lister (deceased five years before the 1612 trials), upon touching ‘the dead corpes, they bled fresh bloud presently, in the presence of all that were there present.’¹²⁴ This, as Peel indicated, echoes what King James wrote: ‘In a secret murder, if the dead carcasse be at any time thereafter handled by the murderer, it will gush out blood.’¹²⁵ It was this which Sir James Altham pointed out specifically for the jury as ‘of more consequence then all the rest’, and thus it was this evidence which proved the witch’s guilt.¹²⁶ Potts does not often reference the King’s *Daemonologie* by name, but it is very evident that his writing was informed directly by this treatise. On his introduction to the evidence against Alice Nutter, Potts wrote:

The two degrees of persons which chiefly practice Witchcraft, are such, as are in great miserie and pouertie, for such the Deuill allures to follow him, by promising great riches, and worldly commoditie; Others, though rich, yet burne in a desperate desire of Reuenge. He allures them by promises, to get their turne satisfied to their hearts contentment.¹²⁷

This extract is in fact an almost exact replica of the same distinctions made by James I in

Daemonologie:

These two degrees now of persones, that practises this craft, answers to the passions in them, which ... the Deuil vied as meanes to intyse them to his seruice, for such of them as are in great miserie and pouertie, he allures to follow him, by promising unto them greate riches, and worldlie commoditie. Such as though riche, yet burnes in a desperat desire of reuenge, hee allures them by promises, to get their turne satisfied to their hartes contentment.¹²⁸

¹²³ King James VI and I, *Daemonologie*, p. 44

¹²⁴ Potts (1613), p.183

¹²⁵ Quoted in Peel and Southern, *The Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 80

¹²⁶ Potts (1613), p. 189

¹²⁷ Ibid, p. 119

¹²⁸ King James VI and I, *Daemonologie*, p. 32

The Samlesbury case, too, when delving further into the story, seems to reflect another moment in James I's life. The 1592 pamphlet *Newes from Scotland* contains certain references within the confessions of the accused witches which would seem to have been coerced.¹²⁹ Namely, the mention by Donald Robson of 'my Lord Bothwell' and his provision of food and finances to the coven of witches.¹³⁰ The Earl of Bothwell was James I's cousin who had plotted an uprising against him in 1589, and so it seems unlikely (though this cannot be proven one way or another) that he was involved with funding the Berwick witches in their treasonous plots against the King. Regardless of its validity, the presence of the name Bothwell in the pamphlet would not have gone unnoticed by contemporary readers. King James I and VI, the subject of both an alleged witchcraft plot in 1591 and then, in 1605, the Gunpowder plot, painted himself with a Protestant and anti-witch (at least in his early reign) zeal and paranoia which led the court authorities behind the Lancashire witch trials to emphasise their uncovering of similar plots or conspiracies during the August Assizes. Both the supposed plot, formed during the sabbat at Malkin Tower, for the witches to blow up Lancaster castle, and the uncovered plot within the Samlesbury case would surely be sufficiently sensational so as to attract the attention, and approval, of the King.¹³¹ Grace Sowerbutts being revealed as the student of a much more malicious mind, the seminary priest Christopher Southworth, who orchestrated the entire case, certainly echoes the North Berwick witches and their alleged patron, Lord Bothwell.

Potts' political motivations are not solely limited to the King. In his reference to the other figures of patriarchal authority throughout the pamphlet, his admiration can be seen.

Judges Edward Bromley and James Altham are written of in the 'Dedicatorie' as 'those

¹²⁹ 'With the true examinations of the said Doctor and witches, as they uttered them in the presence of the Scottish King.' – *Newes from Scotland, 1591*, p. 3; Calhoun, 'James I and the Witch Scenes', pp.184-189

¹³⁰ Eric Pudney, *Scepticism and Belief in Witchcraft Drama, 1538-1681* (Lund: Lund University, 2016), p. 114

¹³¹ Jennifer Linhart Wood, *Sounding Otherness in Early Modern Drama and Travel: Uncanny Vibrations in the English Archive* (Washington: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 73

Reverence Magistrates’, who have been prepared by God and placed in the seat of Justice.¹³²

The pamphlet is full of this imagery, the ‘Divine Right of Kings’ being transferred to the ‘Divine Right of the King’s representatives’ – for that’s ultimately what a Judge was in an early modern Assize court. Once more, ambition comes into play when we read such high praise. Potts is determined to convey, as narrator, his devotion to King and State, to the justice system with which he is involved, and to his ‘honourable & worthy Lords’, the Assizes judges.¹³³

A similar respect is offered in Potts’ depiction of JP Roger Nowell. Potts calls him, ‘a very religious honest Gentleman... whose fame for this great service to his Countrey, shall live after him.’¹³⁴ *The Wonderfull Discoverie* is peppered with reference to the ‘paines’ taken by Nowell in his witch-hunt, for he was, according to Potts, ‘the best instructed of any man’ in gathering the evidence necessary to prosecute the accused witches.¹³⁵ Nowell was already familiar with witchcraft prior to the 1612 trials. He was a close neighbour and half-uncle of Nicholas Starkie of Huntroyd, and was thus closely connected to the Starkie family. In 1594, Nicholas Starkie’s two children, John and Anne, began to suffer from ‘troublesome afflictions’... and ‘fittes’, attributed to demonic possession, which then spread to several members of the household staff, too, and was ongoing for several years.¹³⁶ Nowell would have witnessed his half-nephew (son of his half-brother Edmund) pay doctors, cunning man Edmund Hartley, renowned occult specialist John Dee, and eventually two Puritan ministers, John Darrell and George More, to ‘confront the demons’ and cure his family of their affliction.¹³⁷ Amidst the chaos of the events surrounding the Starkie family, or the ‘Lancashire

¹³² Potts (1613), p. 3

¹³³ Ibid, p. 13

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 15

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 33

¹³⁶ For the full record, see the Protestant ‘exorcists’ George More and John Darrell’s 1600 pamphlets – George More, *A True Discourse concerning the certaine possession and dispossession of 7 persons in one familie in Lancashire (1600)*; John Darrell, *A True Narration of the Strange and Grevous Vexation by the Devil of 7. persons in Lancashire, and William Somers of Nottingham (1600)*

¹³⁷ Jonathan Lumby, “‘Those to whom evil is done’”: Family dynamics in the Pendle witch trials’, in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. by Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002) pp. 63-67

Seven', Hartley, the local 'witch' consulted by Nicholas Starkie, was denounced and arrested, then executed for witchcraft at the Lancaster Assize in 1597, for using 'popish' cures and charms, and allegedly bewitching young maids by kissing them.¹³⁸ This was, according to Mitchell, the cause for Nowell's pre-existing zeal against witches.¹³⁹ However, Nowell's zeal was not unheard of in early modern England, for the same has been said of many witch-hunters and indeed JPs; Brian Darcy, for example, has been argued to have set about the task of examining the witches of St Osyth with 'unusual zeal' too.¹⁴⁰

Such zeal in seeking and prosecuting witches was, to Thomas Potts, inspiring and worthy of an author's flattery. Roger Nowell, mentioned briefly but frequently, is always written as painstakingly sure in his own King-ordained efforts. Bromley, by the end of the pamphlet, is so revered by the author that he calls him; 'the Lanterne from whom I have received light to direct me in this course to the end.'¹⁴¹ Such a hyperbolic metaphor is further proof of Potts' authorial voice and political motivations in writing *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, for he describes Judge Bromley as his almost Biblical guiding light, and thus the documenting of the 1612 trials is, in this imagery, his God-divined path. Which is perhaps not untrue. Potts may have felt that these efforts were in perfect adherence to the authority given to the Assize court by the Crown, and, as witch-hunters, to the authority given by God. It was not uncommon in this period for officials to pursue their Crown-given responsibilities in rooting out and punishing enemies of the Church and Crown to extreme levels. Walsham details many examples of such English civic (and clerical) officials 'proactively pursuing' heretics, idolaters, Catholics, and nonconformists to often violent ends, believing that their

¹³⁸ Anna French, *Children of Wrath: Possession, Prophecy and the Young in Early Modern England* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015) p. 96; Lumby, 'Those to whom evil is done', pp. 63-67

¹³⁹ Mitchell, *Lancashire Witch Country*, p. 10

¹⁴⁰ Alison Rowlands, quoted in - Gibson, *St Osyth*, p. 48

¹⁴¹ Potts (1613), p. 164

acts were carried out ‘within... an established framework of judicial persecution.’¹⁴² Such was the nature of these court officials’ uncovering of a papist plot in Lancashire, and Potts surely, would have felt vilified in his reverent statements toward the judges. Moreover, whilst secret seminary priests were the enemy of the Crown, the witch was the enemy of God *and* of state, considering Potts’ deference to *Daemonologie*, and the ‘just judges’, Roper states, were the direct opposition to the witch’s nefarious efforts, for in their psychology, they were ‘agents of divine authority’.¹⁴³ The divine authority of judges in the battle against the evils of witchcraft was detailed often by demonologists. Clark quotes both Del Rio and Boguet, who wrote that ‘worthy’ judges, who put ‘God before their eyes’ when carrying out their duties, were, as a result, invulnerable to the dangers of witchcraft, and their efforts earned them ‘inexpressible reward in heaven.’¹⁴⁴

The clear contrast between this imagery, of the patriarchal figure of authority as chosen by King and by God, the very embodiment of light, and the odious and malicious witch-figure is crucial to understanding Potts’ authorial voice. In 1613, upon the publication of *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, Potts wrote a carefully constructed, sensational story of witchcraft, inspired by and utilising court record, but also with a clear authorial voice motivated by political ambition and popular belief. The result is that what history knows of the accused witches of 1612 Lancashire is coloured by early modern stereotypes and pre-existing notions of what a witch was. This was Potts’ witch-story, and the accused were written to be his villains, rooted out and exposed by the heroic, patriarchal court officials.

¹⁴² Alexandra Walsham, *Charitable Hatred: Tolerance and Intolerance in England, 1500-1700* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), pp. 108-112

¹⁴³ Roper, *Witch Craze*, pp. 63-64

¹⁴⁴ Martin Del Rio and Henry Boguet, quoted in Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 578

After 1613

We know little of how the pamphlet was distributed and circulated amongst the masses. It was published by John Barnes, who, Poole finds, had registered the working title of the pamphlet by 7 November 1612, and so must have received at least a first draft of the manuscript by then.¹⁴⁵ However, following its publication, we can only guess at how the wider public received it. It was, at least, popular amongst the learned, especially with regards to further treatises on witchcraft and prosecution. Poole's 2011 study has discussed the impact of Potts' pamphlet across the seventeenth-century, and found that it was first mentioned in John Cotta's 1616 *The triall of vvitch-craft shewing the true and right methode of the discouery*:

[As] was lately proued against some late famous Witches of *Yorke-shire* and *Lancaster*, by the testimonies beyond exception of witnesses... in their tryall and arraignment.¹⁴⁶

Poole also suggests that other witchcraft pamphlets borrowed Potts' title, thus evidently using his work as a source for inspiration (perhaps instruction), such as *The wonderfull discouerie of the witch-crafts of margaret and philip flower* (1619) and Henry Goodcole's *The wonderfull discouerie of Elizabeth Savvyer a witch late of Edmonton, her conuiction and condemnation and death* (1621).¹⁴⁷ Moreover, Edward Fairfax's semi-biographical pamphlet about the bewitchment of his children reads that his neighbour:

[Had] a former wife bewitched to death by the witches of Lancashire, as in the book made of those witches and their actions and executions you may read.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ The proposed title at this stage was 'the great discovery of Wytches in the county of Lancaster'. – Poole in Potts (2011), pp. 52-53

¹⁴⁶ John Cotta, *The triall of vvitch-craft shewing the true and right methode of the discouery: With a confutation of erroneous wayes. by iohn cotta, doctor in physicke*. (London: 1616), p. 90

¹⁴⁷ Goodcole's pamphlet inspired the play *The Witch of Edmonton* that same year. – Poole in Potts (2011), p. 64; *The wonderfull discouerie of the witch-crafts of margaret and philip flower, daughters of ioane flower, by beuer-castle, and executed at lincolne, the 11. of march, 1618* (London: 1619); Goodcole, *The wonderfull discouerie of Elizabeth Savvyer* (1621); Dekker et. al, *The Witch of Edmonton*

¹⁴⁸ Though Poole disputes the validity of this statement given that none of the names of the female victims in Potts' pamphlet fit the bill. - Fairfax, *Daemonologia*, p. 93

In 1618, with Dalton's *The Country Justice*, and then again in Bernard's 1627 *A Guide to Grand Jury Men*, Potts' pamphlet was drawn upon for guidance on the discovery of witchcraft, and on this Poole writes that the 'arm of the law crafted by Thomas Potts had a long reach indeed.'¹⁴⁹ In 1633 and 1634, Lancashire then witnessed a second wave of witchcraft accusations (led, in part, by another child witness, Edmund Robinson). No trial records remain, but we do have two depositions from the hunt, which James Crossley included in his 1845 edition of *The Wonderfull Discoverie*. These examinations shared many commonalities with the 1612 pamphlet, including the surnames of both victims and accused, familiars in strange forms, and even a gathering of:

between 30 and 40 witches, who did all ride to the said meetinge, and the end of there said meeting was to consult for the killinge and hurtinge of men and beasts.¹⁵⁰

In this case, however, the judges were less convinced of the evidence, referring the case to London for the Privy Council to investigate further. When examined in London, Poole writes that young Edmund Robinson admitted to being inspired by a tale he had heard, 'of a witch feast... at Mocking Tower... about twenty years since.'¹⁵¹ Despite the failure to prove witchcraft amidst this new batch of Lancashire accused, such a sensational hunt occurring twice in the same region gained attention in London, and resulted in the play *The Late Lancashire Witches* in 1634, inspired by and satirising these most recent events.¹⁵² Yet by this time, witchcraft belief was on the wane in learned circles, and accusations were more often met with scepticism. Whilst the events of 1612 were mentioned again in the later part of the

¹⁴⁹ Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, pp. 100-101; Poole in Potts (2011), p. 66

¹⁵⁰ Crossley in Potts (1845), pp. 28-32

¹⁵¹ Poole in Potts (2011), pp. 67-68

¹⁵² Poole in Potts (2011), p. 68; Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood, *The Lancashire Witches* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2002)

seventeenth-century, Potts' text fell out of fashion with belief in witchcraft, and was more often viewed after the 1630s as evidence of the long-standing reputation for backwards-thinking and superstition in Lancashire county.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ John Webster referred to the trials in his 1677 *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, as proof of the nonsensical nature of witch trials, and then there was a second play about Lancashire witches in 1682, Thomas Shadwell's *The Lancashire-Witches, and Tegue o Divelly the Irish-Priest*, which Poole said was hissed out of theatres and heavily censored. – Poole in Potts (2011), pp. 70-71

Chapter 4

The Lancashire Witches, A Romance of Pendle Forest: A 'Male Gothic' Rewriting

In 1612, the trials of Jennet Preston at York and then the Pendle witches at Lancaster would have undoubtedly been noticed publicly and widely, especially considering the uproar at York documented by Potts himself in *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, yet the Lancashire witch trials were all but forgotten by history for the next two centuries.¹ It was not until around 1810 that the 1612 witches were rediscovered, when Sir Walter Scott republished Potts' pamphlet in *A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts*, calling it 'a curious and rare book'.² Scott, who later also published his *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft*, could arguably have been the catalyst for the revival of historical interest in the Lancashire witch trials in England.³ Then in 1845, when James Crossley, who had read Scott's *Collection*, republished Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie* for The Chetham Society, and encouraged his friend William Harrison Ainsworth to write a novel on the same subject, the 'real revival of the Lancashire Witches' fame' was witnessed.⁴ This chapter will examine *The Lancashire Witches, A Romance of Pendle Forest*, Ainsworth's Gothic retelling of the 1612 story, using the same tools and methodologies that have been established so far. With an awareness of the history of the Lancashire witch trials, and now a deeper understanding of how the key actors within that history were remembered in text by Potts' literary constructions of them, an analysis of the historical fictions inspired by Potts' work can begin. In order to conduct the same manner of close reading and analysis to Ainsworth's novel it is important to first frame the historical

¹ A clear indication of this can be seen first within the works of celebrated historian and vicar of Whalley Thomas Dunham Whitaker, who in 1801 published an extensive two-volume *History of Whalley* which covered the entirety of Pendle Forest, and within this the Pendle witches were not mentioned once - Thomas Dunham Whitaker, *An History of the Original Parish of Whalley: And honor of Clitheroe, in the Counties of Lancaster and York* (Blackburn: Hemingway and Crook, 1801)

² Sir Walter Scott, *A Collection of Scarce and Valuable Tracts, on the Most Interesting and Entertaining Subjects: but chiefly such as relate to the history and constitution of these Kingdoms* (London: T. Caddell and W. Davies, 1809)

³ Sir Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London: John Murray, 1830)

⁴ James Crossley references Scott's work in his 1845 edition of the Potts pamphlet - Crossley in Potts (1845), p. lii ; Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 13

fiction within the context that Ainsworth was writing, and to understand who William Harrison Ainsworth was, and what his motivations and inspirations may have been when writing this novel. *The Lancashire Witches* has never been examined in this manner, and in assessing this novel alongside Potts' text, this chapter will discern how the constructed figures within Potts' pamphlet were rewritten to align with Ainsworth's aims over two centuries later. Ainsworth's retelling takes one of the accused witches, Alizon Device, and rewrites her as the delicate heroine. Stolen at birth, the book writes her not as a biological daughter of the Demdike family, but the 'well born' daughter of Alice Nutter. Ainsworth's construction of his heroine, and her mother, differ greatly from Potts' pamphlet, yet in this novel witchcraft is still real and frightening. Ainsworth also takes Potts' hero, JP Roger Nowell, and re-constructs him negatively (though not quite as evil as Demdike, perhaps). Ainsworth's novel, full of Gothic imagery and Catholic context, rewrites the Pendle tale to align not only with his own beliefs, and the interests of his contemporaries, but also with James Crossley's views on the 1612 Trials.

William Harrison Ainsworth

Ainsworth was born February 1805 to Thomas Ainsworth, a successful lawyer who ran Manchester-based firm Halsted and Ainsworth, and Ann Harrison, the only daughter of scholar and unitarian minister Rev. Ralph Ainsworth. His mother Ann brought her husband and sons to services at her father's former church, and Ainsworth was raised in a non-conformist household.⁵ Ainsworth's first biographer, Stuart Ellis, wrote frequently in his two-volume study on Ainsworth's love of history and of romantic narratives, claiming that he spent his youth listening to stories about fantastic characters like highwayman Dick Turpin,

⁵ S.M. Ellis, *William Harrison Ainsworth and His Friends, Vol. I* (London: John Lane, 1911), pp. 11-12, 25

dreaming of ghostly visits from said characters, and hearing recounted memories from family friends who were old enough to remember the 1745 Jacobite Rising and similar rebellions, all of which shaped his interests as an author.⁶ He was a highly celebrated author of historical romances, having written over forty in his seventy-seven years of life.⁷ He was known as ‘the Lancashire novelist’, and out of his substantial bibliography, his novel *The Lancashire Witches, A Romance of Pendle Forest* is one of his only works to remain in print to this day.⁸ This novel, initially serialised in the Sunday Times in 1848, was published as a three-volume collection in 1849, and then re-released with illustrations by John Gilbert by Routledge in 1854.⁹ His popularity within the nineteenth-century is undeniable; in 1881, at a banquet held in Ainsworth’s honour, the Mayor of Manchester stated that of his some 250 volumes in the free libraries of Manchester, ‘during the last twelve months these volumes have been read 7,660 times.’¹⁰ Ainsworth himself was also very frank about his own abilities. In 1842 he established a somewhat self-aggrandising literary magazine, and in his preliminary address of the first volume of *Ainsworth’s Magazine*, the writer makes clear that he values his own works and accomplishments highly; he categorises himself amidst the ‘various accomplished writers’ who have the ability to ‘advance the best purposes of literature’ through this magazine.¹¹ Then, in Vol. III of *Ainsworth’s Magazine*, in an address ‘To Our Readers’, once more the editor makes clear the influence of his own works, in this instance the magazine itself, when he writes ‘that [the readers] are... a more numerous race of readers than at any

⁶ Ainsworth said of his youth, ‘and when night deepened the shadows of the trees, have urged my horse on his journey, from a vague apprehension of a visit from the ghostly highwayman.’ Quoted in Ellis, *Ainsworth and His Friends*, pp. 18-22, 24

⁷ Ellis, *Ainsworth and His Friends*, pp. 1-5, 20; *Men and Women of Manchester*, Designed and produced by the City of Manchester Public Relations Office (Manchester: William Morris Press, 1978)

⁸ Jeffrey Richards, ‘The ‘Lancashire novelist’ and the Lancashire witches’ in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. by Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 166

⁹ Richards ‘The Lancashire novelist’, pp. 168-169

¹⁰ These 250 volumes naturally include repeated copies of the same titles across libraries. - *Men and Women of Manchester*, p. 11; J. Crossley and J. Evans, ‘Banquet to William Harrison Ainsworth Esq. at Manchester Town Hall, 15th September, 1881’ (Manchester, 1881), pp. 11-13

¹¹ *Ainsworth’s Magazine: A Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, & Art., Vol. I*, ed. by William Harrison Ainsworth, illustrated by George Cruikshank (London: High Cunningham, 1842), p. ii

former period of our short but animated career.¹² Ainsworth's works remained popular for at least the remainder of the nineteenth-century; a 1905 study conducted in the form of letters between Manchester's libraries indicated that within a 12-month period, the works of William Harrison Ainsworth were read, or at least borrowed with the intention to read, as many as 6183 times in one library. *The Lancashire Witches*, being one of his most popular works in these libraries, was issued an approximate 566 times out of the 14 libraries who offered such specific data.¹³

Thanks to the social circles within which he travelled, we know a good deal about Ainsworth's life, his influences, and his inspirations.¹⁴ Raised in an educated family, Ainsworth attended Manchester Grammar School, a boys school for the middle and upper classes of Manchester society, and was taught in classes dedicated to languages, Latin and the classics, and religion.¹⁵ It was his early plan to enter into a legal career, but as Ellis stated, his mind was always on romantic narratives and stories of the past.¹⁶ He was a highly social figure, who rubbed shoulders with many celebrated minds of the period. His friendships were of course to influence his writing, though none had quite so large an impact as James Crossley, the historical researcher behind *The Lancashire Witches*. One cannot discuss Ainsworth or his 1848 novel without also discussing Crossley, not merely because Crossley's edition of Potts' 1613 pamphlet was instrumental in Ainsworth's research, but because of their close, lifelong friendship. A 12-year-old Ainsworth met 17-year-old Crossley in 1817, whilst Crossley was training in law, working as a clerk for Ainsworth's father in his firm and

¹² Ainsworth also published excerpts from his Pendle-witch novel *The Lancashire Witches* in his magazine after its initial publication elsewhere - *Ainsworth's Magazine: A Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, & Art., Vol. III*, ed. by William Harrison Ainsworth, illustrated by George Cruikshank (London: High Cunningham, 1843), p. I; William Harrison Ainsworth, 'The Lancashire Witches', *Ainsworth's Magazine: A Miscellany of Romance, General Literature, & Art., Vol. XXIV*, ed. by William Harrison Ainsworth (London: Hugh Cunningham, 1853), 209-216

¹³ MCL M740/2/8/1/21 – W. H. Ainsworth – Works in circulation (Manchester Centra Library)

¹⁴ A lot is also owed to his biographers, S. M. Ellis and Stephen Carver – Ellis, *Ainsworth and His Friends*; Stephen Carver, *The Author Who Outsold Dickens: The Life and Work of W H Ainsworth* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books Ltd., 2020)

¹⁵ Ellis, *Ainsworth and His Friends*, pp. 30-40; J. A. Graham and B. A. Phythian, *The Manchester Grammar School, 1515-1965* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1965); 'The History of MGS', *Manchester Grammar School* <<https://www.mgs.org/2015/the-history-of-mgs>> [accessed 11.07.23]

¹⁶ Ellis, *Ainsworth and His Friends*, pp. 20-23

lodging with the family. James Crossley was, and remained throughout his life, an exceptionally well-read and educated man who often provided the research and historical knowledge ‘to feed Ainsworth’s imagination’ in his writing.¹⁷ Not only this, but in their many years of written correspondence, Ainsworth can be found appealing to Crossley for not only background, but at times creative ideas too; ‘Pray have you been able to invent, or find any plot, or other incident, adaptable to my projected Domestic Tragedy?’¹⁸ Clearly Crossley was instrumental in his friend’s success. Following the publication of his successful novel *Rookwood*, again published in three-volumes as was customary of the time, but this time published anonymously, Crossley, already well-known in the learned circles of Manchester, took pains to review the book, and reveal Ainsworth as its author in the *Manchester Herald*, favourably claiming that, ‘this [book] is... the most powerful novel which has appeared for many years’, and went on to proclaim Ainsworth as ‘the English Victor Hugo.’¹⁹

With his friendship with Crossley came Ainsworth’s links to The Chetham Society, which was established in Manchester in the 1840s with the purpose of ‘publishing historical and literary material with relevance to the Lancashire area’.²⁰ Crossley was president of the society for many years, and under his lead its members often focused on literary subjects based upon his own preferences. Ainsworth, of course, was a member of this society and benefitted from the expertise of its members, as well as the supporting boost that it provided his reputation, for ‘admittance by the society represented... social acceptance by Manchester’s elite.’²¹ It was during his presidency of The Chetham Society that Crossley began to edit, and eventually published, his edition of Potts’ *The Wonderful Discoverie*; the text that provided the foundations for Ainsworth’s *The Lancashire Witches*. Interest in

¹⁷ Steve Collins, ‘William Harrison Ainsworth: Manchester Historical Novelist’, *Manchester Region History Review*, Vol. 17 ii, Ed. by Melanie Tebbutt, Craig Horner, John Wilson (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2006), [20-42] pp. 20-21

¹⁸ MCL, Ainsworth letters to Crossley, 21 Apr 1830, quoted in - Stephen Collins, *James Crossley: A Manchester Man of Letters* (York: The Chetham Society, 2012), p. 71

¹⁹ Collins, *James Crossley*, p. 72

²⁰ Ibid, p. 120

²¹ Ibid, p.128

witchcraft history was a rare occurrence in the first half of the nineteenth-century. Machielsen identifies the works of Andrew Dickson White and George Lincoln Burr in the 1880s as the first contributions to the subject in English-speaking academia. They framed witchcraft within a wider ‘war’ between rationalism and superstition, one which, despite the decline of witchcraft, was ongoing more generally.²² However, Crossley’s 1845 edition of Potts, whilst it may not have been widely-known in academia, was certainly the first historiographical approach to the 1612 trials, and in his commentary it is clear that he, in this war between rationalism and superstition, was firmly on the former’s team.²³ Crossley’s edition contained a lengthy introduction to the text, which featured a contextual history of the Pendle region and a scathing assessment of early modern witchcraft belief and demonological treatises.²⁴ It also featured Crossley’s editor’s notes on the pamphlet, and this is where most of his historical discoveries (namely regarding the names and places featured) and opinions on the events can be seen. Once published, Crossley asked his friend to write a novel on the topic, and so it is in thanks to Crossley and The Chetham Society that we have the first in a long list of literary interpretations of the 1612 witch trials.²⁵ Naturally, Ainsworth dedicated his novel ‘To James Crossley, Esq... President of the Chetham Society, and the learned editor of the groundwork of the following pages of this Romance’.²⁶

²² Jan Machielsen, *The War on Witchcraft: Andrew Dickson White, George Lincoln Burr, and the Origins of Witchcraft Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), pp. 6-7

²³ Crossley comments on the evidence presented, saying that if Potts’ had applied any of his rhetoric efforts to unpacking the evidence itself, he ‘would have found still grosser contrarieties, and as great absurdity.’ – Crossley in Potts (1845), p.157

²⁴ As we saw in Chapter 3, this introduction also contained a brief overview of the 1633-34 Lancashire witch trials, and included two depositions from the case. – Crossley in Potts (1845), pp. 28-32

²⁵ The editing of this pamphlet began in 1844 – Ibid, pp. 138-147

²⁶ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*

The Lancashire Witches, A Romance of Pendle Forest

The Lancashire Witches is a novel in three parts, which would at the time have been published in three volumes as was common. It provides the reader with a romanticised and extended back-story to the 1612 Lancashire witch trials, without actually exploring the trials themselves as they were detailed by Potts' pamphlet. Rather, the novel introduces and then develops a Gothic fantasy of ghosts and curses, witchcraft and magic, lost children, dashing heroes, and foolish lawyers that fill in the blanks within the history of the Pendle witches to suit Ainsworth's own writing style, and indeed the tastes of his readers. Ainsworth was writing during a time of keen literary interest in Gothic fiction, when Edgar Allan Poe was publishing regularly (especially 1838-43), Ainsworth's friend and acquaintance Mary Shelley had revised and re-released *Frankenstein* (1831), and the Brontë sisters published both *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre* (1847).²⁷ The novel opens with a lengthy Prologue set in the early sixteenth-century, which focuses on the Pilgrimage of Grace as experienced around Whalley, with a lot more hyperbolic and gothic flair. 'Book the first' then jumps to May 1612, and a May Day festival in which the author writes of a fast-paced and action packed twenty-four hours, introducing the reader to (almost) all of the characters crucial to his plot. 'Book the first' ends in a witches' sabbath, complete with all of the stereotypical feasting, dancing, and dealings with the devil, and the reader's first true experience of the dangers of witchcraft. 'Book the second' follows the many sub-plots within Ainsworth's tale, most notably, a land dispute between the characters of Alice Nutter and Roger Nowell, and Nowell's subsequent character switch from well-reasoned noble to zealous witch-hunter. Finally, in 'book the third', the reader experiences the culmination of his Gothic tale; the end of his witches, and

²⁷ For a useful timeline of Gothic fiction publications between 1742 and 2012, see:- Andrew Smith, *Gothic Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), pp. ix-xxvi; William Hughes, *Historical Dictionary of Gothic Literature* (Plymouth: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013), p. 24; Edgar Allan Poe, *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe in four volumes, vol. 1* (New York: W. J. Widdleton, 1849); Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre*, Ed. Sally Minogue (Ware: Wordsworth Editions Ltd, 1992); Emily Brontë, *Wuthering Heights* (London: VIVI Books, 2018); Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein: The 1818 Text* (London: Penguin Books, 2018)

the tragic sacrifice of his heroine, as well as a lengthy hunting scene, and a visit from King James I. The final chapter sees the salvation of one of Ainsworth's only redeemable characters, Alice Nutter, saved by her own daughter, and dying with her soul spared from damnation.

It would be close to impossible to analyse every character choice made by Ainsworth in this three-volume text, which runs to nearly 600 pages, but character development is crucial to understanding this author's representation of the historical figures of the 1612 Lancashire trials. As such, and much in the same fashion as this thesis has analysed Potts' treatment of a select group of key figures, there is a group of Ainsworth's characters who deserve particular attention. First, we have the women and witches in the text, and of course one cannot analyse *The Lancashire Witches* without exploring Ainsworth's choice of heroine, Alizon Device, chosen by Ainsworth to be the perfect, yet tragic, Gothic damsel. From Alizon, we must then examine her younger, and vastly different, sister Jennet Device, in whom Ainsworth places many significant moral lessons. Next is the most enigmatic of the Pendle witches, Alice Nutter, who is likely seen as an infinite well of opportunity for plot to authors considering the mystery that surrounds her. Finally, the origin of witchcraft in Pendle herself, Demdike, who was most certainly Potts' villain, and arguably one, but certainly not the only villain of Ainsworth's. After investigating Ainsworth's development of his female characters and the all-important witch-figure, it is natural to then turn to his treatment of two of the most important masculine figures within the 1612 pamphlet - JP Roger Nowell, and the author himself, Thomas Potts. Each key character will be placed within the themes prevalent throughout Ainsworth's tale; with gender and class being depicted by Ainsworth consistently through a Gothic lens of witchcraft and magic, monstrosity and villainy, and always against the backdrop of Pendle and its rich, albeit not always completely accurate, history.

As is befitting of the Gothic genre, Ainsworth's novel experiments with time, jumping through decades between the Prologue and 'Book the First', and then stretching out single hours to last several chapters each.²⁸ This aids in building suspense, fleshing out character development, exploring key themes, and writing the Lancastrian landscape, which is given such a high level of attention that Pendle seems to be a fully-developed character within itself.²⁹ Ainsworth's clear focus on landscape is both a common trait within his writing and a product of his research. As detailed within the frequent letters between he and James Crossley, Ainsworth often visited the area for long periods of time to gain inspiration for his writing. Peel and Southern detailed that while visiting the Pendle district, 'He stayed with a relative who had a house at Whalley and was also a guest at Newchurch vicarage.'³⁰

This novel is arguably dedicated to two things at once; the celebrating and chronicling of Lancashire, and the Gothic retelling of history. Of course, this focus on landscape and history, be it subverted or not, is a common theme in nineteenth-century Gothic literature. As Richards states, 'Ainsworth was writing at precisely the period in the 1840s and 1850s when antiquarian history was flourishing'.³¹ Punter discusses at length the prevalence of history in the Gothic, and that despite its frequent inaccuracies, these histories reshaped by authors influence the readers' dealings with all versions of the past.³² It is this way of thinking which will impact not solely the reading of Ainsworth's 1849 text, but also the echoes of this text, throughout the many Pendle-inspired novels to follow. Ainsworth's version of events is not a true representation of the past, it does not retell the story as written by Thomas Potts in 1613. Rather *The Lancashire Witches* takes the figures of the Lancashire witch trials and gives them

²⁸ Emma McEvoy, 'Gothic and the Romantics', in *The Routledge Companion to the Gothic*, ed. by Catherine Spooner and Emma McEvoy (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 25

²⁹ As Jeffrey Richards has stated, in his day, Ainsworth was known as 'the Lancashire novelist' and was an active member of the Chetham Society, which was dedicated to the study of Lancashire. - Richards, 'The Lancashire novelist', p. 166

³⁰ Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 13

³¹ Richards, 'The Lancashire novelist', p. 169

³² David Punter, *The Gothic Condition: Terror, History and the Psyche* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), pp. 20-26

new voices to suit his own narrative, his own aims to create a fully realised neo-history of the Pendle witches, in which its players do not always follow the path laid out for them by historical memory. However, that is not to say that Ainsworth is retelling this historical moment with the same motivations as could be argued for the twenty-first century authors explored in this thesis.

Punter has claimed that Gothic fiction, especially when history is involved, should always be considered as teeming with spectral narratives, for these tales are always written to include ghosts in some form.³³ With regards to the later Pendle novels, Punter's argument could ring true, for the aims of the twenty-first century appear to be to give voice back to the voiceless, and to allow the ghosts of the past their own autonomy. For Ainsworth, however, this aim could be brought into question by his treatment of individual characters, of class divides, of the past, and by questioning who or what is his true Gothic monstrosity in this text.

It wasn't only Crossley's edition of Potts' pamphlet that Ainsworth drew inspiration from. There are also clear links to *The Journal of Nicholas Assheton*, published earlier that same year for The Chetham Society.³⁴ Nicholas Assheton, described by Ainsworth as 'a type of the Lancashire squire of the day',³⁵ was the elder brother of Richard Assheton; an alleged victim of Demdike in the 1612 trial and the figure chosen by Ainsworth as his romantic hero, despite his death several years before the trials began.³⁶ This journal, though written five years after the events of the Pendle trials, was a crucial resource for Ainsworth's novel. It vividly details gentry life in the Pendle region; it is filled with the many hunts and social

³³ They are a 'series of accounts by the dead'. - Punter, *The Gothic Condition*, pp. 13-14

³⁴ It was first published in the aforementioned *History of Whalley* of 1801. - Rev. F. R. Raines, Ed., *The Journal of Nicholas Assheton of Downham, in the County of Lancaster: for part of the year 1617, and part of the year following* (Manchester: Charles Simms & Co., 1848); Whitaker, *An History of the Original Parish of Whalley*

³⁵ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 61

³⁶ 'And [Chattox] further sayth that the said Demdike shewed her that she had bewitched to death, Richard Ashton, Sonne of Richard Ashton of Downham Esquire.' - Potts (1613), p. 20

gatherings of the Asshetons and other familiar names of the Lancastrian gentry mentioned in Potts' pamphlet, including Lister, Bannister, Starkie, and Nowell. It provides a fascinating insight into the period, an opinion shared between Ainsworth and Crossley, who stated that the journal is 'a most valuable record of the habits, pursuits, and course of life of a Lancashire country gentleman of that period.'³⁷ This hunting, feasting, and merriment can be seen clearly throughout Ainsworth's novel, regardless of how irrelevant it may seem to the retelling of the Pendle witch story. It is in his drawing from Assheton's *Journal* that Ainsworth's claiming of creative license is clearest. The most obvious example of this is of course the visit of King James I to Hoghton in 1617, experienced and documented by Nicholas Assheton, and inserted unashamedly into the Lancashire witch story by Ainsworth. As Peel and Southern stated, 'It is clear [he] was acquainted with this journal and the hunting, the feasting, the masquing, which attended this royal visit to Lancashire were too much for him to miss.'³⁸

Ainsworth tended to romanticise and take creative license with the historical moment that he chose to fictionalise, and this trend was not limited solely to *The Lancashire Witches*.³⁹ Of his 1841 novel *Guy Fawkes*, in which he fictionalises the background and story of the Gunpowder Plot, Collins discusses the romantic attachment that Ainsworth created for Fawkes, calling it his 'modus operandi', to base a story on historical fact, 'often supplied by James Crossley and other Chetham Society editors', but to carefully and elaborately construct sub-plots and develop his characters so as to appeal to readers.⁴⁰

³⁷ Crossley in Potts, (1845), p. 16; Jeffrey Richards also claims that Ainsworth undoubtedly used this journal in his writing - Richards, 'The Lancashire novelist', pp. 168-169

³⁸ Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 143

³⁹ 'It must always be borne in mind that Ainsworth was a great romancer' - Ibid, p. 147

⁴⁰ As he did too with the highwayman Dick Turpin - Collins, 'William Harrison Ainsworth', pp. 31-32; Carver, *The Author Who Outsold Dickens*

The Origin of Witchcraft in Ainsworth's Pendle

The Lancashire Witches begins with a long 'prologue' which follows the final few days of Abbot John Paslew's life before his execution in 1537. At first glance, beginning the Pendle-tale so many years prior to the actual trial seems unnecessary, yet to this author it warranted a detailed retelling and embellishment. Therefore, it would seem that, for Ainsworth, the history of anti-Catholic sentiment and the symbolism of the Pilgrimage of Grace are very important to understanding the Pendle witch trials. Catholicism was an extremely important topic in 1612 Lancashire, and so it would be next to impossible for Ainsworth to ignore it. It is, however, difficult to discern whether Ainsworth's inclusion of such a lengthy account of the Pilgrimage of Grace, and his affording it the responsibility of the very origins of witchcraft in Pendle, was merely a stylistic choice, or something deeper. It could be suggested, for example, that by introducing witchcraft as the result of a Catholic abbot's actions, Ainsworth is in fact debasing the archaic beliefs of the old religion, or perhaps he is debunking religion as a whole. Given that the Prologue is the only in-depth reflection or exploration of Catholicism within the novel, and does not play any real part in his character development thereafter, any of these theories are mere speculation.

This prologue sets the tone of the rest of the novel. It is disturbing, ominous, and full of clear gothic tropes. The reader is faced with frequent imagery of ruin and death, a 'dark and forbidding' wizard in league with the Devil, murder, curses, flashback and memory, ghosts, and of course stormy, foreboding weather to set the tone throughout.⁴¹ These recurring motifs are not only common within Gothic writing in general, but also within Ainsworth's own works. In much the same way as Ainsworth rewrote the haunting legend of the Lancashire witches, and even of Abbot Paslew's demise a century earlier, the author had

⁴¹ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 7

an uncanny ability to take historical moments which already carry dark and perplexing undertones, and rewrite them in a Gothic sphere suitable for his nineteenth-century audience. For example, Ainsworth's ballad 'Old Grinrod's Ghost', published in 1866 is about another 'ghostly legend' associated with the executed 1759 figure of John Grinrod, who poisoned his family. This is a Gothic verse, full of crows and ghosts and pathetic fallacy, not at all unlike the style of *The Lancashire Witches*.⁴²

Interestingly, in the Prologue, it becomes clear that the supernatural exists in Ainsworth's tale. It is not something isolated only to the unlearned and 'superstitious', but exists in abundance even before the infamous Lancashire witches are introduced. In Crossley's introduction to Potts' pamphlet, he condemns the very existence of the trials, stating that if man 'should be in search of materials for humiliation and abasement, he will find in the history of witchcraft... large and abundant materials'.⁴³ His argument is that it is understandable for the seventeenth-century inhabitants of the region to have believed in magic and witchcraft, for they would have been a 'wretchedly poor and uncultivated race... in whose minds superstition... must have had absolute and uncontrollable domination.'⁴⁴ Therefore, it is perhaps for this reason, and because of, Ainsworth's evident desire to encapsulate Lancashire, that he writes of witchcraft as the real occurrence it was believed to be in 1612.

Moreover, it may not have only been an adherence to historical belief that drove him. Perhaps Ainsworth's choice to display magic as real could come from his awareness of local beliefs still in existence within the Pendle region. In an 1873 text, once again printed for The Chetham Society, Harland and Wilkinson discussed the beliefs still in existence in Lancashire; namely, that the 'agency of the Devil is a frequent ingredient in the composition

⁴² William Harrison Ainsworth, 'Old Grinrod's Ghost', *Lancashire Lyrics: Modern Songs and Ballads of the County Palatine*, ed. by John Harland (London: Whittaker & Co., 1866), pp. 45-49

⁴³ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 1

⁴⁴ Crossley, *Ibid*, pp. 18-19

of our local legends’, and that witchcraft ‘still keeps its hold in the minds of many of our peasants.’⁴⁵ They detailed the many beliefs and practices still in circulation regarding witchcraft, with specific examples dated as late as the 1870s, one of which details a family feud in which a son complains to magistrates that his own mother had bewitched him after he treated her harshly.⁴⁶ That accusations such as these were still in existence strengthens the notion that witchcraft was a real fear to many, at least in Lancashire, at the time of publication of *The Lancashire Witches*. As such, perhaps Ainsworth’s creative choice to include a very real, very dangerous magic within his text was a means of reflecting, and indeed exploiting, the ominous air that still surrounded the Pendle region.⁴⁷

Another in which the Prologue relates to and sets the scene for the tale to follow, is in the form of a curse, an abbot’s malediction or ‘anathema’ against an unbaptised baby, ‘May the malediction of Heaven and all its hosts alight on the head of thy infant... In blood it has been baptised, and through blood-stained paths shall its course be taken.’⁴⁸ This child that said abbot refused to baptise - instead her and her kin, declaring them all witches, children ‘of evil’⁴⁹ – will grow to be Mother Demdike, or Elizabeth Southernes, the alleged witch that Potts himself declared the ‘sinke of all villanie and witchcraft’ in Pendle, the very root of the evil that exists there.⁵⁰ It is in this way that Ainsworth’s tale is truly introduced. The hyperbolic rewriting of the Pilgrimage of Grace as it occurred in the Whalley area of Lancashire does pave the way for the novel’s gothic tropes, and also for some of the key themes that were to be explored or dismissed by Ainsworth; that of Catholicism and Reform,

⁴⁵ John Harland and T. T. Wilkinson, *Lancashire Legends, Traditions, Pageants, Sports, &c.: with an Appendix containing A Rare Tract on the Lancashire Witches &c. &c.* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1873), p. vi & 234

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 235

⁴⁷ Davies discusses the changing beliefs of the period in which Ainsworth was writing, finding that people did still maintain practices to protect against witchcraft, and children still listened to and spread rumours about the suspected ‘witch’ in their locality, but these examples were much fewer than they had been a century prior. - Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736-1951* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), pp. 271-280

⁴⁸ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 22

⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 23

⁵⁰ Potts (1613), p. 14

of Romanticism and the desire for a return to ‘Merry England’,⁵¹ of Lancastrian pride, of the dangers of superstitious beliefs, and of gender and female power.

Good versus Evil

‘Book the first’ covers a period of twenty-four hours, in which the people of Pendle gathered to celebrate May Day. Ainsworth’s historically inaccurate novel, filled with scenes of hunting and merriment, which climax with the King’s visit years too early, are in Richards’ opinion, Ainsworth’s celebration of ‘merry England’.⁵² That is, the pre-Reformation period in England in which Catholic England witnessed such secular and religious festivals as the May Day festivities featured here. May Day was, in the first half of the nineteenth-century, an object of nostalgia for those antiquarian historians who looked fondly at the merry England of old, a time of ‘mutual respect and social harmony’.⁵³ Certainly, these views would fall in line with Crossley’s, who in many of his political writings for *Blackwoods Magazine* made clear that the changes to his beloved Manchester brought about by industrialisation and modern growth were abhorrent, and he no doubt fell into the category of those historians who yearned for a simpler, more merry England of old.⁵⁴ However, whilst many of the scenes depicted within Ainsworth’s novel lend themselves to this theme of merriment and community, when examining them more closely, ‘mutual respect’ seems to not have much of a place within the text. Instead, it could be argued that Ainsworth draws out clear divides between his characters; gendered divides, class divides, and divides resulting from different moralities and values. His depictions of ‘merry England’, complete with rush-carts and Morris dancers, flesh out his tale with an exploration of historical traditions and pageants, and introduce many

⁵¹ Richards, ‘The Lancashire novelist’, p. 169

⁵² Ibid, p. 174

⁵³ Ibid, pp. 175-176

⁵⁴ He called it the ‘disenchanted influence of steam, manufactures, and projected rail-roads’ in his introduction to Potts - Collins, *James Crossley*, pp. 35-43; Crossley in Potts (1845), p. xlv

of his characters in these May Day scenes; but his character development even within these scenes emphasises a clear divide in his representations of the identity of his characters. These developments would appear to lend themselves more to the Gothic than to traditions of Romanticism, as Richards has suggested.⁵⁵

Ainsworth's first book is thus filled with contrasts between his Romantic homage to 'the good old times, when England was still merry England' and his fearsome depiction of Lancashire as witch country.⁵⁶ It begins and ends in scenes of celebration that feature dancing and singing and merriment, but the second is the dark sibling to the May Day celebrations, when the reader experiences a witches' Sabbath at the book's end. This Sabbath scene is rife with what could only be described as Shakespearean imagery; the witches gathered are hag-like in appearance and behaviour, and the magic worked by them is extremely similar to Shakespeare's 'Weird Sisters' in *Macbeth*, thus introducing the witch as the Gothic Other of the tale. The stereotypes ring true, these witches chant and laugh over bubbling cauldrons, throwing all manner of grotesque ingredients into them to work their spells. If we compare Shakespeare's imagery with Ainsworth's, it is extremely evident that the weird sisters were his inspiration for the monstrous witch-figure. In Act 4, Scene 1 of *Macbeth*, we witness a Sabbath:

Round about the cauldron go;
In the poison'd entrails throw.
Toad, that under cold stone
Days and nights has thirty-one
Swelter'd venom sleeping got,
Boil thou first i' the charmed pot.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Richards, 'The Lancashire novelist', pp. 169-175

⁵⁶ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 48

⁵⁷ William Shakespeare, 'Macbeth', in *Complete Works of William Shakespeare*, Ed. by Germaine Greer and Anthony Burgess (Glasgow: Harper Collins, 1994), p.1068

In Ainsworth's sabbath, we see a similar ritual of gruesome ingredients and rhyming chants:

Head of monkey, brain of cat, eye of weasel, tail of rat, Juice of mugwort, mastic, myrrh –
All within the pot I stir.⁵⁸

The similarities are too great to be coincidental, and it is intriguing to think that Ainsworth was inspired by the seventeenth-century play which seems already so closely linked to Potts' pamphlet, to King James I and VI, and to the Lancashire witch trials. Ainsworth would undoubtedly have been familiar with Shakespeare's plays, and perhaps *Macbeth* most of all. As Newry detailed in her study of 'Early Nineteenth Century Theatre in Manchester', the most popular theatre of the period, the 'Theatre Royal' opened first with Shakespeare's classics, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, and *The Tempest*, and this theatre would have been a hotspot for Manchester's educated elite to spend an evening.⁵⁹ Moreover, Crossley was well-versed enough in literary critique to, at least on one occasion, write comparatively on eighteenth-century literary scholars who produced editions of Shakespeare's works, and *Macbeth* featured quite often in Crossley's examinations.⁶⁰ Given that their friendship spanned six decades and so often focused on learning, it is fair to assume that Ainsworth would have been familiar with Shakespeare's works through Crossley at least, even if he had inexplicably not come across these plays on his own. The importance of this scene can also be likened to *Macbeth* in that the witch-figure sets the tone for the plot to follow; a tale of monstrous women subverting societal norms, of the ineffectuality of certain characters' attempts to escape their fates, of the prevalence of Christian faith, and of the dark, Gothic tone of the

⁵⁸ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 150

⁵⁹ Katherine Newry, 'Early Nineteenth Century Theatre in Manchester', *Manchester Region History Review*, Vol. 17 ii, Ed. by Melanie Tebbutt, Craig Horner, John Wilson (Lancaster: Carnegie Publishing, 2006), [1-19], pp. 4-6

⁶⁰ Collins, *James Crossley*, pp. 27-28

entire text. The first book in *The Lancashire Witches* goes some way in developing characters, but it is arguably not until this closing scene that the plot of Ainsworth's tragic, Gothic story truly begins.

Upon opening, the reader is immediately introduced to the chosen May Queen of the day's festival, one Alizon Device, granddaughter to the infamous Mother Demdike, whose entire family was cursed by Abbot Paslew's anathema some 80 years earlier. Yet Alizon is not introduced to the reader as a witch, but as a fair and lovely maiden. In fact, Alizon is described as the very epitome of Victorian beauty, 'Slight and fragile, her figure was of such just proportion that every movement and gesture had an indescribable charm.'⁶¹ Here, the character of Alizon can be likened to the 'Angel in the House', as witnessed in so many Victorian, and especially Victorian Gothic texts.⁶² She is a pretty, charming damsel, fragile and graceful, and as such Ainsworth is writing this historical fiction with his audience in mind. Alizon Device, it is clear from first impression, is the heroine of this particular tale, and her existence seems to indicate Ainsworth's own morals as being more, as Carver puts it, 'conventional' despite the existence of magic and immorality throughout the text.⁶³ In reality, Alizon Device could have more likely been described as she was by historians in the twentieth-century, as a 'delinquent beggar maid'.⁶⁴ The Demdike clan was an impoverished family, and so was most likely seen as a burden and a nuisance to their neighbours. In the post-Reformation period, where the 1601 Poor Law meant that each parish was solely responsible for the 'destitutes' within it, resentful neighbours would have been more inclined to see Alizon Device as a hopeless beggar than vote her May Queen.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 50

⁶² See: Coventry Patmore's poem, 'The Angel in the House', from which this phrase is coined. This 1854 poem details the ideal wife as an obedient, delicate woman, a character that can be seen throughout Victorian literature. - Coventry Patmore, 'The Angel in the House' (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1856)

⁶³ Stephen Carver, 'William Harrison Ainsworth: The Life and Adventures of the Lancashire Novelist', *Fukui Daigaku Kyoiku Chiiki Kagakubu no Kenkyu Kiyou*, 1:59 (Japan: 2003) pp. 1-23

⁶⁴ Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 147

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 147; Marjorie Keniston McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England, 1350-1600* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 273-274

Just as Ainsworth utilises juxtaposition in his depiction of a merry and then a malefic celebration, so too does he compare his characters in similar fashion. Immediately after the reader is introduced to Alizon, who up to that point has had no dialogue but is very clearly a charming and kind girl with her distinctive beauty and ‘jocund’ features,⁶⁶ Ainsworth introduces Jennet Device, whose appearance alone indicates that she is the opposite of her sister. Nine years old, deformed at the spine, with ‘almost malignant’ and ‘vindictive’ features, Jennet is instantly unlikeable, and when the character begins to speak, the dialogue is loaded with jealousy and spite.⁶⁷ Moreover, Jennet’s speech is of a Lancastrian vernacular that Ainsworth wrote as a distinguishing class feature in the novel; ‘tak care whot ye do to offend me, lass... or ey’ll ask my granddame, Mother Dem-dike, to quieten ye.’⁶⁸ Jennet’s character is cunning and savage, with fleeting moments of goodness and kindness being overshadowed by a vicious temper, a sharp tongue, and a wit more advanced than should exist in a nine-year-old child. It must be noted that following such speech, those characters who bear witness react with a vivid blend of fear and disgust, but none take her threats lightly. Ainsworth’s representation of Jennet once again echoes Crossley’s observations, for he stated that the youngest Device would have been ‘a forlorn outcast’, outrightly scorned, feared, or at the very least avoided by all in the locality.⁶⁹

In contrast, Alizon’s character and dialogue set her apart from her younger sister. She is modest and moral, and Ainsworth uses her own dialogue as well as that of other characters to set her apart from the Demdike family; ‘You think with me, that that lovely girl is well born’.⁷⁰ Whereas the Demdike family are depicted as entirely different from the so-called ‘well born’ characters of the novel, Alizon is likened to the respected Asshetons in her fine

⁶⁶ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, pp. 50-51

⁶⁷ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, pp. 51-52

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 53

⁶⁹ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 24

⁷⁰ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 114

speech, and is placed above all others in her fair appearance and pious morality, as befitted the heroine of such a tale. Alizon, it is clear, does not fit into the witch-shaped mould modelled by so many of the characters in this novel. Despite being older than Jennet, she is more clearly a manifestation of the Gothic 'girl child' as outlined by Armitt. The girl child was identified not solely by age, but by an innocence and an inexperience that is celebrated, for regardless of age the Gothic, according to Armitt, 'infantilises... its female protagonists'.⁷¹ In Emily Brontë's 1847 novel *Wuthering Heights*, for example, the character of Cathy dies as an adult, but returns in Lockwood's dreams as a spectral girl-child, innocent and infantile once more.⁷² Armitt also discusses Poe's story *The Oval Portrait* as an example of this Gothic celebration of the girl-child; in this 1845 tale, the main character displays a fascination with a painting of a young girl who is beautiful because she is frozen in time, 'just ripening into womanhood'.⁷³ In Gothic literature it is not uncommon for these girl-child heroines to be celebrated for their endearing innocence to an extent that a patriarchal society refuses to let them mature, as is the case with Ainsworth's Alizon. She is a fair maiden, unmarred by age or life experience and beloved because of it. Ainsworth's heroine is so worthy and so romanticised for her purity and her immaturity, that even in her death, rather than write her execution as was true of Potts' record, Alizon Device martyrs herself for the salvation of her mother, still a virginal girl child, and thus remains forever perfect.

In contrast, her younger sister holds none of the same celebrated qualities of the Gothic girl child. Jennet, though she does possess something of a conscience, in many ways adheres to the low-born witch-family into which she was born. Jennet Device, Crossley argued, must have been 'admirably trained' in the evidence that she gave, or else she had a

⁷¹ Lucie Armitt, 'The Gothic Girl Child' in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 61-62

⁷² Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*, p. 16

⁷³ Armitt, 'Gothic Girl Child', p. 63; Edgar Allan Poe, *The Oval Portrait, 1842* (California: CreateSpace, 2015)

‘great natural capacity for deception’.⁷⁴ In *The Lancashire Witches*, Jennet is presented as both easily manipulated, and deceptive if not outright bad (manipulated, that is to say, by her own fate and the evil to which she was born, and deceptive as a result). It is in Jennet that we see the effects of the abbot’s curse from Ainsworth’s prologue, for the author is not subtle in his writing of a battle between good and evil for the child’s soul, and it is a quite literal battle at that. In chapter two, Jennet is alone, and the scene features her outer rather than inner monologue throughout. Jennet talks to herself about her jealousy over her sister Alizon, about ‘folks’ being ‘afeared’ of her grandmother the witch, and then about her own desire to be a witch if it would grant her the power to become as pretty as Alizon.⁷⁵ A black cat she calls Tib, a family cat which those aware of Potts’ pamphlet would know as a supposed familiar of the Demdike family, appears to her and her monologue is then directed towards the feline.⁷⁶ Here, Ainsworth’s battle begins. Tib, a black cat being such a common symbol for a witch,⁷⁷ is the messenger of evil and darkness in this scene, and the author introduces its opposite in the form of a white dove, the literal symbol of God and goodness.⁷⁸ The imagery here is obvious, painfully so, and Ainsworth takes that further by associating the cat with jealousy and bitterness, and the dove with purity and love, especially directed toward Jennet’s sister, ‘then she thought of Alizon’s kindness to her, and half reproached herself with the poor return she made for it’. Moreover, Jennet then falls asleep, and her dreams, once again extremely literal, are of a ‘contest going on between two spirits, a good one and a bad’.⁷⁹

This contest is a constant theme in Ainsworth’s characterisation of Jennet, and is hinted at throughout the first book as she moves between envy and love, bitterness and

⁷⁴ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 24

⁷⁵ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, pp. 56-57

⁷⁶ Potts (1613), p. 16

⁷⁷ See, for example, Edgar Allan Poe’s 1843 short story ‘The Black Cat’, in which the creature is believed to be the servant of a witch, or indeed a witch in disguise. – Edgar Allan Poe, ‘The Black Cat’ in *The Works of Edgar Allan Poe: In Four Volumes, Vol. 1* (New York: W. J. Widdleton, 1850), pp. 281-290; Magdalen Wing-Chi Ki, ‘Diabolical Evil and “The Black Cat”’, *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 62.4 (2009), 569-589

⁷⁸ Genesis 8 in *Holy Bible: King James Version* (Abbotsford: Zeiset, 2020), pp. 23-25

⁷⁹ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 58

kindness, and even the character of Alizon voices her fears aloud: ‘I hoped to be her guardian angel – to step between her and the assaults of evil’.⁸⁰ Once more, Ainsworth’s writing is more literal than symbolic, and Alizon is not only the beautiful heroine, but the pious and angelic martyr, selfless and good, and therefore the ideal female in nineteenth-century literature. The battle for Jennet’s soul seems to come to fruition in the aforementioned sabbath at the climax of book one, when a witch offers up Jennet’s soul to be ‘baptised’ into the craft, and a disembodied voice, the voice of Satan it would seem, claims, ‘Jennet is mine already... she is fated. The curse of Paslew clings to her.’⁸¹ As such, Ainsworth’s Prologue and the inclusion of a Holy curse on the entire Demdike family provides an explanation, almost justification, for the existence of witches in the region. An anathema of such ferocity cannot be undone, and the Lord’s power cannot be escaped, and as a result, the Lancashire witches almost have no choice in their behaviours, nor their fates. This curse, especially as it manifests in Jennet, takes away the control that the Demdike family has over their own bodies in much the same fashion as the alleged witches of Pendle take it from their victims. In the Gothic this theme is a common one, questioning and indeed often completely rejecting the concept that our bodies are our own, unchangeable or unaffected by external forces.⁸² The bodies of Ainsworth’s characters are constantly subject to transformation, by time, accident, feeling, sickness, or maleficence, and for the Demdike family, by Satanic forces beyond their control. Jennet’s moral struggle, her inability to escape her own fate, is a clear example of this trope. By providing a reason early on for the maleficence of these witches, Ainsworth is free to explore the landscape and romance within his novel without being waylaid by any exploration of individual choices and backstories for many of the witches featured.

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 120

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 156-157

⁸² Punter, *The Gothic Condition*, p. 135

One contradiction to this overarching explanation can be seen within the character of Alice Nutter, of whose past the reader learns in some detail. Nutter is given something of an excuse for her entrance into witchcraft due to her own tragic life, which in turn offers her some chance of redemption. It is unclear why Ainsworth chose this figure as the one most worthy of redemption from the tale laid out by Potts two centuries earlier, but it could be because of Potts' depiction of her as something of a respectable woman of good standing, who took the wrong path.⁸³ Perhaps Ainsworth saw in the enigmatic Alice Nutter of history the opportunity to rewrite an alleged witch as a lost woman who found her way back to grace, through her higher class and social status; the fact that history knows so little about her or how she came to be tried and executed amongst the infamous Lancashire witches also left greater room for artistic licence. Crossley stated that Alice Nutter 'deserves to be distinguished from the companions with whom she suffered, and to attract an attention which has never yet been directed towards her', and so it is very likely that Ainsworth developed her character with Crossley's influence.⁸⁴ Regardless of his reasons, Ainsworth creates in Nutter the opportunity for his heroine, Alizon Device, to experience true tragedy, and also to further solidify her own goodness.

In the same fashion that she hopes to be Jennet's salvation, the character of Alizon Device makes it her aim to save Alice Nutter from the clutches of 'the Fiend'.⁸⁵ Unlike the 'low-born' Jennet Device, Alice Nutter is a character worthy of salvation in Ainsworth's text. As the tale unfolds the reader discovers that Alizon's escape from the Demdike family curse to be born a witch is due to the fact that she is, in fact, a well-born girl, stolen from her biological mother Alice Nutter as a baby. When we consider Alizon's overt goodness alongside the character of Alice Nutter being the only witch capable of salvation, we are left

⁸³ Potts (1613), pp. 119-126

⁸⁴ Crossley in Potts (1845), pp. 24-25

⁸⁵ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 231

with two possible reasons which help explain Ainsworth's construction of these characters. The first is the strength of Alice's maternal bond to Alizon – perhaps Alizon was able to wrench Alice Nutter from the clutches of Satan and the evils of witchcraft due to this bond, which would explain why she could not save the much more innocent Jennet in the same way, and why Alice Nutter, upon finding her lost child, begins the process of *anagnorisis*.⁸⁶ Alice Nutter has realised her mistake in entering into a bargain with the Devil amidst her grief over losing her child, and thus begins to fight back against her own Faustian compact. Yet this fight is not an easy one; 'Then came despair and frenzy, and, like furies, lashed her with whips of scorpions, goading her with the memory of her abominations and idolatries'.⁸⁷ Ainsworth's linguistic choices are interesting here for a number of reasons, the first being that this scene shows the beginnings of Alice Nutter's cathartic descent into melancholy and madness. Madness is a common trope in Gothic fiction, both as a frightening monstrosity, and as a punishment. As Wiśniewska has argued, this fear of madness is a frequent trope in the Gothic because insanity in itself is both a symptom of and a punishment for monstrosity.⁸⁸ In the case of Nutter, as we are aware of her violent and devastating past, the loss of her only child, the reader can see Ainsworth's justification of her path into witchcraft, for surely, she would have to have gone mad with grief. Yet this character did still go against morality in this path, and so a new, frenzied madness is her punishment. This punishment goes further with the simile 'like Furies', which symbolised punishment in Greek mythology.⁸⁹ Greek Furies, according to den Otter, are found often in nineteenth century Gothic as representative of divine punishment for monstrosity, and monstrosity in this sense refers to characters who

⁸⁶ Which is the moment in works of tragedy in which a character discovers the truth of their own circumstances. - Philip F. Kennedy and Marilyn Lawrence, Eds., *Recognition: The Poetics of Narrative, Interdisciplinary Studies on Anagnorisis* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), pp. 1-4

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 245

⁸⁸ Dorota J. Wiśniewska, 'Supernatural Agents of the Unconscious Mind: The Gothic mode in Hamlet and Macbeth', *Universitatis Lodzianis: Folia Litteraria Anglica*, Vol. 5 (2002), 183-191, p. 183

⁸⁹ It is interesting that Alice Nutter is associated with the mythological 'Furies' in Ainsworth's text, whereas in Potts' pamphlet it is Demdike, Potts' ultimate villain, who is depicted in this way. – Potts (1613), p. 15

deviate from the 'natural order of things'.⁹⁰ In mythology, they are Goddesses, but in the Gothic they can be quickly likened to representatives of hell, and so once more Ainsworth's celebration of a very Christian sense of purity and piousness can be extracted through such imagery in much the same way as the aforementioned battle for Jennet Device's soul. For Nutter to experience such a potent and maddening form of punishment, which is so intrinsically linked to her own maternal love for her daughter, may be Ainsworth's means of cleansing this character of her sins, and thus further justifying her eventual salvation.

The second possible for Nutter's salvation, is that Ainsworth sets her apart from the other Lancashire witches due to her class and learning. Alizon Device is, in part, so beloved due to the feeling shared by many characters that she simply must be well-born. Some of those same characters, in learning of Nutter's true identity as a powerful witch, still go out of their way to protect her and her daughter, showing her a level of respect not bestowed on any of the other witches; 'Whatever I may think, I admire your spirit, and will stand by you.'⁹¹ Is this loyalty and respect due to Nutter's ties to the ever-beloved Alizon, or is it due to her own attributes? Nutter has the sharp intellect, even temper, beauty, and charm not afforded to any of the other Lancashire witches, and Ainsworth emphasises it often in his writing. This is, probably, due to her social standing. Alice Nutter outwardly appears to be a fine and respectable woman, just as the real figure is described by Potts himself in 1613.⁹² That Alice Nutter is portrayed by Ainsworth as a redeemable character may once again be the product of Crossley's influence, for he clearly paints her 'the victim of a foul and atrocious conspiracy',⁹³ and so the tragedy of her story only lends itself to Ainsworth's dramatic plot. Yet the reader must question whether Crossley's own favourable treatment of Alice Nutter is

⁹⁰ A. G. den Otter, 'Displeasing women: Blake's furies and the ladies of moral virtue', *European Romantic Review*, 9:1 (1998), 35-58, pp. 36-37

⁹¹ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 221

⁹² 'For it is certain she was a rich woman; had a great estate, and children of good hope: in the common opinion of the world, of good temper, free from envy or malice' - Potts (1613), p. 120

⁹³ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 35

a direct result of her class too. Ainsworth pays great attention to this character's social standing and her estate throughout the text, and it is when she is closely linked to this estate, rather than when she practices witchcraft, that she wields the most power and authority. When authorities make attempts to arrest her at her home of Roughlee, she foils them at every turn, saying 'I have no intention of quitting my dovecot'.⁹⁴ Gothic literature often iterates the Victorian notion that a woman's place is in the home, the domestic sphere, and those who subvert that in any way are then associated with monstrosity.⁹⁵ This is true of Ainsworth's villains, and it is only Alice Nutter who rejects this tradition. As Schoch has stated, 'Gothic literature of the nineteenth century was deeply concerned with threats to masculinity',⁹⁶ and whilst the character of Alice Nutter does pose these threats, she does so from a position of authority so assigned to her by said masculinity, that female domestic space in which she reigns. In this sense, whilst Nutter can be linked with those Gothic abjections present in Ainsworth's witch figure, she can be saved by her adherence to what Milbank called 'a sexual ideology of a whole culture', her true place as a woman in the home.⁹⁷

It would therefore seem that the author places class as an important factor in character development. For whilst not all of the well-born characters are portrayed so admirably, it can be argued that none of the low-born characters are worth saving in Ainsworth's text. This can certainly be witnessed when we compare Alice Nutter with the ominous and infamous figure of Demdike. Potts claims that Demdike is the very origin of witchcraft in the region, stating that it was from her that all of the rest of the alleged witches were introduced to the craft. This is a theme that Ainsworth of course reiterates, and indeed explains away, in the

⁹⁴ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 220

⁹⁵ Diana Wallace, 'A Woman's Place' in *Women and the Gothic: An Edinburgh Companion*, ed. by Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), pp. 74-90

⁹⁶ Sara Schoch, 'Gothic Monsters and Masculinity: Neutralizing the New Woman in Victorian Gothic Literature', *Explorations, Vol 15* (California: UC Davis, 2012), 1-15, p. 1

⁹⁷ Alison Milbank, *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1992), p. 1

Prologue. Yet despite this, she is not, as we would expect, the focus of his tale. In fact, whilst she could be argued as one of, if not the main, villain of the novel, she remains something of an idea rather than a fully realised character for the majority of the text. It can be said, however, that Ainsworth's aim is for this hidden evil to be all the more frightening for it. In the character of Demdike we have a looming threat which grows in size and infamy throughout the story development, and in this way she is very much a Gothic trope in herself. Moreover, Demdike is associated so often with her home of Malkin Tower that it becomes an extension of her character, and Malkin Tower, very unlike Alice Nutter's Rough Lee, is the very epitome of a typical home for the monstrous, Gothic Villain. In this sense, not only does Demdike deviate from morality in her actions as a witch, she also deviates from her sex in that she resides in and works mischief from not a home, but a villainous lair.

Both Demdike and her home are not introduced until the end of the second book, and before this the reader could only experience the foreboding dread of that eventual encounter with the text's villain, the wicked witch. The scene in which we are finally introduced to Malkin Tower and its inhabitants is written by Ainsworth as a scene from an Arthurian fairy tale where his hero, Richard Assheton, races on Merlin, his noble steed, to rescue Alizon Device from the hands of the wicked witch, Mother Demdike, who has her locked in Malkin Tower. The tower itself, 'standing alone, like a beacon' resembling a terrifying 'gigantic black cat, with roughened staring skin, and flaming eyeballs.'⁹⁸ Demdike's home, upon first impression, is just as frightening and irregular as the frequent, ominous references would have had the reader believe, and resembles a witch's familiar in its shape; even the imagery here links Demdike's abode with her craft, as though this tower is another extension of her close relationship with Satan through its resemblance to one of his servants.

⁹⁸ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 235

Demdike herself, then, is a clear representation of the Gothic uncanny and monstrous in her appearance alone. Crossley calls her ‘beyond dispute, the Erictho of Pendle’, the most dreaded and fearsome of all witches. Ainsworth’s depiction of this character most certainly agrees with Crossley’s observations, and by claiming her an Erictho-like figure, perhaps he provided Ainsworth with the very inspiration for her appearance too. John Hamilton Mortimer’s 1776 painting of the witch of legend shows a haggard crone with masculine features and a broad frame.⁹⁹



⁹⁹ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 17; John Hamilton Mortimer, ‘Sextus, (the Son of Pompey), applying to Erictho, to know the fate of the Battle of Pharsalia’ (London, 1776) - <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1866-1114-398> [accessed 12.12.21]

Figure 4: John Hamilton Mortimer, 'Sextus, (the Son of Pompey), applying to Erictho, to know the fate of the Battle of Pharsalia' (London, 1776) - <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1866-1114-398> [accessed 12.12.21]

When encounter this dreaded villain we find an exaggerated image of the early modern witch stereotype not dissimilar to Mortimer's painting; 'so frightful, so charged with infernal wickedness and malice... Was it a man or a woman?'¹⁰⁰ So we have Demdike, the very epitome of the Gothic Other, so monstrous as to be almost unrecognisable as a woman, and therefore once again the opposite of the saveable Alice Nutter. In her appearance alone Demdike is cast as the villain. With dialogue Ainsworth solidifies Potts' description of Elizabeth Southernes, for as he said, 'certaine it is, no man neere [her], was secure or free from danger',¹⁰¹ so too did Ainsworth write his character exclaiming her goal not to be wanted and charmed by men, but to be feared by them, to 'freeze the blood in their veins'.¹⁰² In this, Demdike is set apart by Alice Nutter by her open rebellion from patriarchal norms (Nutter practices in secret), by her refusal to, or her inability to, fit into the mould society has set for her as a woman.

It is in this depiction of witches that we can see the early modern treatment and view of women that Crossley so vocally criticises; 'woman, the victim of a wretched and debasing bigotry, has yet so little of the feminine adjuncts, that the fountains of our sympathies are almost closed'.¹⁰³ Crossley's treatment of the accused as victims is not a positive one, they are unfeminine and therefore seem slightly repulsive. However, his argument maintains that it was the men, those with the power and learning to know better, who should be held accountable, and that the accused women are not to blame for their circumstances. Considering this, it is curious that Ainsworth surrounds the witch-figure with so many negative Gothic tropes, for surely he is encouraging the very same viewpoint as his friend has

¹⁰⁰ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 236

¹⁰¹ Potts (1613), p. 15

¹⁰² Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 237

¹⁰³ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 1

rejected? However, as can be said of many Victorian gothic texts, Ainsworth seems to use the monstrous as a means of commenting upon several social issues which exist within his period of writing. This commentary seems to be directed towards women who exist outside of social norms. Whilst later Pendle-inspired texts arguably reverse this line of thinking, making the rebellious woman a commendable figure and thus ensuring that the theme of monstrosity is closely linked to that of masculinity, Ainsworth's obvious praise of the delicate and fair Alizon Device places this text firmly in the category of traditional Victorian novels, with a clear focus on the fact that power belongs with enlightened patriarchs and obedient, Godly women are the only worthy kind.¹⁰⁴ As a result, the monstrous witches are so because they, to repeat Crossley, have 'so little of the feminine adjuncts',¹⁰⁵ that the Victorian writer, and indeed reader, could not justify their salvation, even if it was simply fictional.¹⁰⁶

'Busy and mischievous' Men¹⁰⁷

Despite these treatments of, and the moral lesson behind, Ainsworth's key female characters, it cannot be said that the evil witch-figure is the only villain of the text, and this is perhaps where Crossley's influence really comes into play in Ainsworth's rewriting. In the same passage that Crossley disapproves of the treatment and representation of women in early modern witch trials, he also condemns the roles played by men in this period of history, stating that a man's involvement in this history was him 'tyrannizing over the sex he was bound to protect, in its helpless destitution and enfeebled decline, seems lost in prejudice and superstition and only strong in oppression.'¹⁰⁸ Naturally, the modern reader would find issue with Crossley's linguistic choices here, because he assigns very clear and antiquated

¹⁰⁴ Deborah Gorham, *The Victorian Girl and the Feminine Ideal* (Oxon: Routledge, 2013); George Watt, *The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016)

¹⁰⁵ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 1

¹⁰⁶ Mary Mercedes Fanning, *The Heroine of the Gothic Romance* (New York: Fordham University, 1943), pp. 6-11; Schoch, 'Gothic Monsters', pp. 1-15

¹⁰⁷ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 121

¹⁰⁸ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. iv

patriarchal roles to men and women, with women as always being the lesser of the two. However, he does not praise, as Potts has done for example, those figures of masculine power in the trials. This is a standpoint that Ainsworth too seems to adopt.

Whilst Crossley did not provide any glowing or empowering descriptions of the accused witches of 1612, he did justify their beliefs in witchcraft due to their separated and therefore 'superstitious' lifestyles, and in doing so cleared them of blame in the atrocities of the trials. The figures of authority and power did not get the same treatment, and it is through his observations that Ainsworth seems to have created his versions of both Roger Nowell and Thomas Potts. Both characters are introduced under the same circumstances, namely, the ongoing land dispute between Roger Nowell of Read Hall and Alice Nutter of Rough Lee. This dispute is one suggested by Crossley to not only have existed, but also to have possibly played a role in the accusation and prosecution of the enigmatic figure of Alice Nutter, and whilst Crossley's comments do state that 'the truth or falsehood of which, at this distance of time, it is scarcely possible satisfactorily to examine', it is a theory that Ainsworth utilised in order to insert both characters into the story from its beginning.¹⁰⁹ In fact, this tense rivalry between Roger Nowell and Alice Nutter is a key driving force within the plot of *The Lancashire Witches*. This rivalry, detailed so often within the historical fiction on the Pendle witches, is, contrary to popular belief, not factual; there is no evidence to show that it ever existed. This is a theory first suggested by Crossley, but becomes fully realised within Ainsworth's novel. That this theory then becomes more widely recognised in literary representations of the trials only helps to highlight the significance of Ainsworth's novel in how the Pendle witches are remembered. Undeniably, such a theory adds much more depth to enigmatic historical figures like Nowell and Nutter, especially the latter. It is this tumultuous relationship which strengthens the plot, adding fuel to the fire created by Ainsworth to

¹⁰⁹ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 26

explain how and why so many were executed for witchcraft in 1612. As Peel and Southern have stated, several sources ‘mention this tradition, but one has copied the other and there is no reliable confirmation, nor anything to show that Roger Nowell had any motive for seeking the downfall of Mistress Nutter.’¹¹⁰

The land dispute also helps Ainsworth introduce the author of the 1612 pamphlet, Thomas Potts, into *The Lancashire Witches*. Potts is inserted into the story as Nowell’s lawyer for the aforementioned dispute. The language used to describe him is negative and dismissive from the beginning. He is often described as a ‘little’ man, which hints not solely to stature but also to character;¹¹¹ Ainsworth belittles him and his position of authority, and as such Potts becomes almost a source of comedy in the text, brought into the text to, as Peel and Southern argue, ‘suffer humiliation at the hands of the local populace.’¹¹² He is an overtly ambitious character, who goes above and beyond to flatter and impress his ‘singular good friend and honoured client, Master Roger Nowell’, makes clear attempts to sniff out witchcraft at every turn (and openly admits his desire for the King himself to become aware of these efforts), and becomes after a time simply a pitiful character prone to foolish accidents and ridicule.¹¹³ One clear example of this is in the character’s meeting a local woman named Bess, who states of Potts, ‘Neaw; when Bess Whitaker... weds, it shan be to a mon, and nah to a ninny-hommer.’¹¹⁴ Through the vernacular of Bess, Ainsworth emasculates Potts’ character by assigning to him the character of a fool, and thus makes a mockery of the legal system which this character represents, a trend which is repeated throughout the text. This treatment is likely due to Crossley’s views of the man with ‘his habitual tautology and

¹¹⁰ Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 147

¹¹¹ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 63; As agreed by Richards, ‘Potts is depicted as a bustling, comically pompous London lawyer, constantly quoting the *Daemonologie* of King James I (as indeed he does in his book). He is subject to a succession of indignities’. - Richards, ‘The Lancashire novelist’, p. 178

¹¹² Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 147

¹¹³ See, for example - Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, pp. 66, 75, & 95

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 187

grave absurdity', but may also stem from a dislike for the legal profession in general on Ainsworth's part, since he decided against joining it himself despite his father and best friend's ties to the justice system. Moreover, this absurdity is not solely attached to the lawyer, but also to the 1612 legal system in which he is situated, of which Crossley claims 'presents such a miserable mockery of justice.'¹¹⁵

These views are naturally in opposition to opinions expressed by Potts in his 1613 text, for whilst he celebrates the law, Crossley, and as such Ainsworth, reject its validity as a mockery; and whilst Potts praised the presiding Judges Bromley and Altham, Crossley claims them unenlightened.¹¹⁶ Similarly, in *The Wonderful Discoverie* Potts presents Roger Nowell as an honourable gentleman who took 'great paines' to seek out and prosecute witches,¹¹⁷ whereas in Crossley's comments, Nowell is a 'busy and mischievous personage' who 'tarnished' his family name by taking part in these trials and therefore aiding the whole scheme of 'oppression'.¹¹⁸ Once more, Crossley's stance is adopted by Ainsworth and developed into a fully-fledged character in *The Lancashire Witches*. The character of Roger Nowell seems, at first, a sensible one; he does not pander to religious, witch-fearing zealots as Potts does, and tries to find logical explanations for anything that he cannot immediately explain. However, as was suggested by Crossley, Ainsworth takes the supposed land dispute between Nowell and Nutter and uses it to slowly reduce Nowell's character to one of a petty, self-serving figure with too much authority. As Crossley stated, Roger Nowell could well have 'entered actively as a confederate into the conspiracy from a grudge entertained against [Alice Nutter] on account of a long-disputed boundary'.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ Crossley in Potts (1845), pp. 23-24

¹¹⁶ The 'enlightened' choice, Crossley states, would have been to show mercy on the accused witches. - Crossley in Potts (1845), pp. 33-34

¹¹⁷ Potts (1613), p. 25

¹¹⁸ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 121

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 26

It is following a long scene in which this land dispute comes to fruition, finding Alice Nutter the victor in the claim, that the character of Nowell's entire philosophy seems to change. There is no subtlety in Ainsworth's writing of this change, nor the reasons behind it, for rather suddenly after the land boundaries have been discussed his priorities change and with a 'sinister smile' he begins to plan for the arrest of Alice Nutter, now his enemy.¹²⁰ Ainsworth's Alice Nutter wins this dispute unfairly, aided by witchcraft, and the result is that Nowell jumps from scepticism of the very existence of witchcraft, to making bold and zealous statements such as, 'So abhorrent is the crime of witchcraft, that were my own son suspected, I would be the first to deliver him to justice.'¹²¹ In this same scene Nowell also makes clear his intentions to arrest Ainsworth's heroine, the truly innocent Alizon Device for her links to Nutter, and so Roger Nowell suddenly becomes the second villain of the novel, motivated not by evil ties to the Devil as is Mother Demdike, but by petty spite, jealousy, and greed. The subsequent linguistic treatment of Nowell from this moment on make clear that by threatening the heroine, Nowell is another, less obvious but no less real, form of the monstrous. As den Otter has argued, in the Gothic, 'lovable virgins' such as Alizon Device, 'are either oppressed or subsumed by male prerogatives', and this is precisely what happens in *The Lancashire Witches* thanks to Roger Nowell.¹²²

Once more, Ainsworth's character developments can be closely linked to Crossley's editorial notes on Potts' pamphlet, for in these Nowell is something of a villain too. Crossley calls Roger Nowell, 'an eager and willing instrument in that wicked persecution' of the accused witches of 1612, whose actions only strengthened the 'whole scheme of oppression.'¹²³ 'Oppression' is the key word here, for in this swift shift in character, Nowell becomes the Bluebeard-esque Gothic villain who, as Thorslev has examined, is privy to the moral

¹²⁰ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 216

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 217

¹²² den Otter, 'Displeasing Women', p. 36

¹²³ Crossley in Potts (1845), p. 3

expectations of society around him, yet does not always adhere to them for personal gain. He is always male, he is always of noble birth, and he is always a misogynist who persecutes women to 'further [his] particular ends.'¹²⁴ Through developing Nowell as a patriarchal Gothic villain, the threat to the life of the Gothic girl child, alongside Mother Demdike as the monstrous, Gothic Other, a threat to the innocence of that same child, Ainsworth not only strengthens the incomparable goodness and purity of Alizon Device in comparison, but also the role of Alice Nutter (despite her own deviance) as defender of this heroine, for Nutter throughout makes moves to defy both the matriarchal witch and the patriarchal gentleman in the name of her daughter. As a result, Ainsworth's tale utilises typical Gothic tropes in order to comment upon acceptable societal roles and behaviours, namely by associating those unacceptable with the grotesque and the monstrous.

After *The Lancashire Witches*

Both Crossley's text and Ainsworth's novel were well and widely received, and the Pendle witches became legends in their own right, remembered and memorialised by Lancastrians, and in literary and historical works for decades to follow.¹²⁵ An excellent example of its prevalence within the minds of writers and scholars is within William Makepeace Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, in which a Lancastrian nurse tells tales of these infamous witches to children. Thackeray was a contemporary of both Ainsworth and Crossley, and certainly crossed paths with Crossley on at least one occasion, at the opening of the Manchester Free Library.¹²⁶ This author didn't retell the story of the Pendle witches again

¹²⁴ Peter L. Thorslev, *The Byronic Hero: Types and Prototypes* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1962), pp. 50-56

¹²⁵ Blundell wrote that 'About the time that Crossley and Harrison Ainsworth were rekindling interest in the Pendle Witches, a Burnley poet, Henry Houlding, produced a small volume of poems, in which he waxes long on Malkin Tower, Pendle Hill, witches and demons, his poems 'The White Witch' and 'The Enchantress', are full of the superstition and romanticism of Victorian writing.' The only poems by Houlding that I have been able to find are in his collection *Rhymes and Dreams*, the earliest copy of which seems to be dated 1895. - 'The Pendle Witches: A Trial in 17th Century Lancashire', *Programme from an Exhibition at Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum, Burnley*, arranged by John D. Blundell, Curator (19th May-30th September, 1972) (County Borough of Burnley, Art Gallery and Museum Sub-Committee, 1972), p. 16; Henry Houlding, *Rhymes and Dreams: Legends of Pendle Forest and Other Poems*. (Burnley: B. Moore, 1895)

¹²⁶ Collins, *James Crossley*, pp. 178, 183

(certainly his 1854 novel would have been far too close to Ainsworth's own if that were the case), but the notion that these witches were being utilised as folklore within his novel shouldn't go unnoticed.¹²⁷ In 1895, Lancashire-based poet Henry Houlding produced the poetry collection

Rhymes and Dreams, which contained poems entitled 'Malkin Tower' and 'The White Witch', though they did not feature any reference to the historical witches or Ainsworth's novel, but make clear the continued interest in the topic.¹²⁸

Similarly, in Mrs Hibbert-Ware's 1890 novel *Fairfax of Fuyston*, a significant portion of her first volume is set against the backdrop of Lancashire, at the very end of 1612 when those infamous witches were still frighteningly relevant, with part 1 being entitled, 'The Witches of Pendle'. Throughout her tale the Pendle witches provide an ominous and mysterious undertone, for Lancashire, she writes, 'may now lawfully be said to abound as much in witches of divers kinds as seminaries, Jesuits, and Papists'.¹²⁹ Whilst Mrs Hibbert-Ware does not directly reference the Lancashire witches in detail, she does make reference in this first volume to their evildoings and their eventual execution. Whilst we cannot prove that this author was familiar with Ainsworth's work, it seems extremely likely; especially considering her reference in other writings to her use of 'Cheetham Publications' for research, and the fact that at least one of her scholarly articles was published in the *New Monthly Magazine*, edited by Ainsworth's cousin William Francis Ainsworth in 1878.¹³⁰ These connections are not proof by any standards, but they warrant comment nonetheless, as it

¹²⁷ Mrs Gaskell's 1859 novel *Lois the Witch* is also based on the early modern witch trials, though this time the trials in Salem, Massachusetts in 1592 – Elizabeth Gaskell, *Lois the Witch* (London: Dodo Press, 2008)

¹²⁸ Houlding, *Rhymes and Dreams*, pp. 236-250, 260-289

¹²⁹ Mrs (Mary Clementina) Hibbert-Ware, *Fairfax of Fuyston; or, a Practice Confess'd* (London: F. V. White & Co., 1890), p. 61

¹³⁰ JR M.S 1035 – 'Papers of Mary Clementina Hibbert-Ware', John Rylands Library; William Francis Ainsworth, Ed., *The New Monthly Magazine*, Vol. XIV (London: E. W. Allen, 1878); Ellis, pp. 10-11

would seem that Hibbert Ware fell into the same category of Manchester's elite as did Ainsworth and Crossley before her.¹³¹

These are but a few examples of the growing interest in the history of early modern witchcraft, especially as it coincided with the rising popularity of historical romance.¹³² Perhaps more significant than subtle references in literature, or brief references in historical and topographical texts, in displaying the impact of Ainsworth's novel on the memory of the Lancashire witches, is an opera entitled *The Lancashire witches; or King Jamie's frolic*, which was performed in Manchester in 1879. This was undeniably inspired, not by the 1613 pamphlet, but by Ainsworth's *The Lancashire Witches*. Granted, many of the characters within this opera have been merged or blended together for the stage, but it did contain the same heroine, beloved by an Assheton, with the same ferocious wicked witches as villains, and of course an appearance from King James I, much like the novel. From the opera programme, complete with ticket prices and various local advertisements, we can see a brief summary of each of the three acts to further solidify its source of inspiration. Act 1 opens upon the same May Day scene as Ainsworth's 'Book the First', and a song entitled 'Alizon, sweet Alizon' is one of the first to be performed; an ode to Ainsworth's angelic damsel, it would seem. In Act 2, a chorus of witches sing 'Over hill, over mountain', which lends itself to Ainsworth's *Macbeth*-like sabbaths. Act 3 certainly takes a more positive turn than the tragedy of *The Lancashire Witches*, with King James I, the 'gay cavalier', pardoning all accused witches, and thus of course the creators of this Opera took creative liberties in order to appeal to their audience. However, the importance of Ainsworth's writing for this piece

¹³¹ In her publication on the life of Samuel Hibbert-Ware, Mrs. Hibbert-Ware dedicated the first chapter to the family's close ties to Manchester, beginning with the Hibberts, who were 'one of the old Manchester mercantile families'. – Mrs (Mary Clementina) Hibbert-Ware, *The Life and Correspondence of the Late Samuel Hibbert-Ware* (Manchester: J. E. Cornish, 1882), p. 1

¹³² Then, as we have established, in the 1880s the works of White and Burr introduced witchcraft to academic historiography. - Machielsen, *War on Witchcraft*; William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Works of William Makepeace Thackeray: The Newcomes* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1884), p. 23; Rachel A. C. Hasted, *The Pendle Witch-Trial, 1612* (Preston: Lancashire County Books, 1993), p. 3

only goes to emphasize the importance of his novel on nineteenth-century culture, at least in Manchester, and on memory of the Pendle witches as a whole.¹³³

¹³³ JR R228955 – ‘Production of a new and original opera, in three acts, The Lancashire witches; or King Jamie’s frolic’, Theatre Royal, Manchester. (Monday, October 20th, 1879, and following evenings) Written by R. T. Gunton. Music composed by F. Stanislaus.

Chapter 5

Mist Over Pendle: Poison, Privilege, and Puritanism

William Harrison Ainsworth's *The Lancashire Witches* existed in a period of renewed interest in the history of witchcraft, especially in the author's social circles thanks to the scholarly efforts of James Crossley and The Chetham Society. The nineteenth-century novel was also situated amidst a variety of popular Gothic texts, and so would have been well-received in 1848 for his contemporary readers. Over a century later, in 1951, Robert Neill published the second Pendle-witch inspired novel, *Mist Over Pendle*. Neill's retelling of the 1612 Lancashire witch trials, in the same way as Ainsworth's, does not feature the trials themselves, but rather the build up to them. It follows a created character, Margery Whitaker, who acts as omnipresent narrator, travelling through Pendle playing witness and investigator with Roger Nowell. The witches of Pendle are still villainous, as they were in Ainsworth's novel, but in Neill's reworking they are non-magic, dealing instead in poison, led by the author's chosen arch witch, Alice Nutter.¹

This chapter, like the previous, will engage with the historical awareness of the 1612 Lancashire trials, and previous analyses of Potts' pamphlet, as well as what we now know of Ainsworth's *The Lancashire Witches*, in order to analyse this twentieth-century retelling. Unlike Ainsworth, we know very little about author Robert Neill.² Therefore, in order to complete any in-depth analyses of Neill's novel, it is necessary to consider the social and cultural contexts within which he was writing, and to contemplate what others were writing, and thinking, about witchcraft at the time. Once more, the aims of this chapter are to apply

¹ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*

² What we do know has been gleaned from contemporary newspaper cuttings in the Lancashire Archives. - *Mist Over Pendle – Cuttings*, 'Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

these contexts to a close reading of this historical novel, assessing how Neill has constructed the Lancashire witch-figure, and how that compares to both Potts' narrative, and Ainsworth's. *Mist Over Pendle* has never been analysed in any real capacity, either by historiographical or literary critique, and so this chapter will contribute to the study of both the Lancashire witch trials and historical fiction in new ways with this analysis.

Twentieth-Century Witches

For many a contemporary reader, Neill's seventeenth-century tale provided a means of literary escape. As Plain discussed, the literary atmosphere post-war often rejected war imagery; 'the war increasingly became the site of crippling lethargy and imaginative exhaustion... People no longer wanted to read about the war, nor to watch it on screen'.³

Many popular books of the 1940s contained plots set apart from stories of war; there was the light-hearted relief of romance and coming-of-age themes in novels like *I Capture the Castle* and *The Pursuit of Love*, epic fantasies such as *Titus Groan*, and Evelyn Waugh's most popular novel *Brideshead Revisited*, a story of 'nostalgia, aristocracy and Catholicism'.⁴

Waugh's novel, whilst not quite as 'historical' as Neill's, is evidence of an appreciation for pre-war tales separate from the weary and disillusioned post-war period, with prevalent themes of class, aristocracy, and English Catholicism existing in both.⁵ Neill's first novel certainly does not pertain to war imagery and themes, standing apart not simply in time-period, but also in many ways for its simplicity. One reviewer, in London's *The Sunday Times* was of the opinion that Neill's novel was thoroughly enjoyable, but that Neill 'must get rid of the air of artifice, of not quite complete seriousness, which sometimes in this book suggests

³ Gill Plain, Ed., *British Literature in Transition, 1940-1960: Post War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 5

⁴ 'Books that shaped the 1940s', *Penguin*, 04 June 2020 < <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2020/06/books-that-shaped-the-1940s>>; Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited: The Sacred and Profane Memories of Captain Charles Ryder* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000)

⁵ Christopher Hitchens, 'It's all on account of the war', *The Guardian*, Saturday 27 September 2008 < <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/27/evelynwaugh.fiction>>

that he is keeping a shrewd eye on the films.’⁶ This opinion of the novel seems to have been a rare one in 1951, but it is not unfounded. As his critics stated, the novel was a murder-mystery without the mystery.⁷ His readers did not need to look very far to learn of the fate of the Lancashire witches, and Neill himself makes plain from the beginning that the novel’s villain is Alice Nutter, and as such the overall plot is somewhat relaxed in its simplicity. It is not a quest to solve a case, but a quest for justice, a story of good versus evil and this combined with the charming wit of its heroine, the inclusion of romance and deepening friendships, and the air of magic and villainy which lends itself to a Disney film, makes it a novel that would have provided relief for the post-war reader.

The twentieth-century experienced the witch-figure in new ways, in both academic and popular thought. Gibson considers 1900 the turning point in popular views of the witch-figure, when L. Frank Baum published *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* with both bad and good witches.⁸ This inspired the famous 1939 film *The Wizard of Oz*, which went further to offer up a dichotomy between good and wicked witches, the possibility for the existence of a good witch becoming ingrained in popular thought.⁹ However, there were still wicked witches in popular culture,¹⁰ and especially in children’s literature and film with works like C. S. Lewis’ novel *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (1950), and Disney’s *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* (1937).¹¹ Moreover, the period leading up to publication of *Mist Over Pendle* also

⁶ C. P. Snow, *The Sunday Times*, London, 20 May 1951 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle – Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁷ ‘You could call “Mist Over Pendle” a murder mystery thriller of 300 years ago.’ - *Bristol Evening World*, 22 June 1951 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle – Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁸ Michelle Boyd has also called its villain, the Wicked Witch of the West, ‘one of the most famous fictional witches of all time’. – Marion Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths in American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2007), pp. 139–140; Michelle Boyd, ‘Alto on a Broomstick: Voicing the Witch in the Musical Wicked’, *American Music*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2010), p. 79

⁹ Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Chicago: George M. Hill Company, 1900); Victor Fleming, *The Wizard of Oz* (MGM Studios, 1939)

¹⁰ See, for example, Walton’s 1945 Gothic novel of a witch-haunted house – Evangeline Walton, *Witch House* (Colorado: Centipede Press, 2014)

¹¹ Disney’s *Cinderella* was released in 1950, a year before Neill’s novel. It doesn’t feature an overt witch-figure, but does contain a wicked step mother. – Ben Sharpsteen, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1937); Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, and Clyde Geronimi, *Cinderella* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1950); Additionally, post-war children’s films, Giunta argues, aimed to reinforce gendered societal expectations of domesticity and motherhood in young girls in features like *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *Peter Pan* (1953), where the young girl rejects fantasy in favour of ‘growing

witnessed the first publications from author Dennis Wheatley who, amidst tales of war and espionage, published several novels on occult themes, the first of which, *The Devil Rides Out*, was about a Devil-worshipping cult and was published in 1934.¹²

Neill's novel fits into the period in which it was written given the popularity of witchcraft as a topic in more than just literature and film. In terms of belief in witchcraft in this period, it did not disappear entirely, and there is evidence to support that some were still fearful, but in many ways belief was transformed from a locally-driven fear of witches, to an empowered view of witches as rebellious, forward-thinkers. Historians such as Owen Davies and Ronald Hutton have suggested that popular belief dwindled from the 1860s onward, essentially theorising that as Britain began to modernise, and the nation became less divided into smaller, agriculturally-driven communities, so too did the minds of its people begin to expand from localised fears to broader ideas.¹³ Waters disagrees that belief died out completely, suggesting that it instead evolved, and Purkiss argues that this evolution moved belief away from the harmful witch archetype of the early modern period, toward a new, modernised, neo-Pagan witch to be celebrated, rather than feared.¹⁴

A letter dated 1821 which stated that there had been 'no witches' in Plymouth since 1816 was reprinted in *The Times* in 1930 as evidence that belief in witchcraft was no longer present, and readers across England protested this conclusion, so many in fact that *The Times*

up'. - Joseph V. Giunta, "'Because My World Would Be a Wonderland": Fantasy Circumspection and Adult Construction of Girlhood in *Alice in Wonderland* (1951) and *Peter Pan* (1953)", in *Social Order and Authority in Disney and Pixar Films*, Ed. by Kellie Deys and Denise F. Parillo (London: Lexington Books, 2022), pp. 95-96; Moreover, Hine et al. find that twentieth-century Disney princesses more generally are passive characters, shown in 'limited, traditional domestic roles', thus providing limited gender role models for girls. - Benjamin Hine, Katerina Ivanovic, and Dawn England, 'From the Sleeping Princess to the World-Saving Daughter of the Chief: Examining Young Children's Perceptions of 'Old' versus 'New' Disney Princess Characters', in *The Psychosocial Implications of Disney Movies*, Ed. by Lauren Dundes, Lauren (Basel: Multidisciplinary Digital Publishing Institute, 2019), pp. 73-75

¹² Dennis Wheatley, *The Devil Rides Out* (London: Bloomsbury Reader, 2013); Bernard Doherty, 'Black Magicians and Foreign Devils in Little Britain: Dennis Wheatley and the Invention of British Satanism,' *Aries* (2022), pp. 5-7

¹³ Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture*, pp. 271-293

¹⁴ Thomas Waters, 'Maleficent Witchcraft in Britain since 1900', *History Workshop Journal, Issue 80* (2015) 100-122, p. 101; Diane Purkiss, 'Modern Witches and their Past', in *The Witchcraft Reader*, Ed. by Darren Oldridge (Oxon: Routledge, 2020), pp. 422-424

was forced to retract those earlier observations, as belief in some notion of witchcraft was clearly still prevalent.¹⁵ Waters' examination of witchcraft in the twentieth-century provides several other examples of the lingering belief in England. Twentieth-century doctors treated patients with a variety of ailments, who blamed their conditions on witchcraft; others felt that they were competing with 'white witches' for clients due to the prevalence of belief. Others still believed in malefic witchcraft, for example a Devonshire GP who in 1956 wrote, 'I have had one definite death from witchcraft'.¹⁶ Moreover, fear of witchcraft was experienced in relation to violent crimes too, and Waters provides specific examples dating from 1911 (Lincolnshire) to 1940 (East Dereham), where alleged witches had been attacked, and the attacks recorded by police and magistrates. An example of this was a 1916 shooting in Somerset, when farmer Philip Hill admitted to believing in witchcraft and claimed that people had been 'bewitching my child and pony', after murdering his neighbour Daniel Lawrence.¹⁷ Both in the medical profession and in violent crimes, the cases in the first half of the twentieth century echo the seventeenth despite the inclusion of modern additions like shootings and epilepsy, and thus prove that witchcraft belief was still in existence in some form in the few decades prior to the release of *Mist Over Pendle*.

However, as is evidenced by the fact that such cases stopped being featured by journalists as the century continued, there was a shift in popular belief which coincided with the rise of belief in the 'witch-cult'. It was the theories of folklorist Margaret Murray which popularised the neo-pagan witch-figure from 1921 on.¹⁸ Murray was an Egyptologist whose works on ancient Egypt remain respected a century later, yet her study of European witchcraft has been rejected academically. Academically, of course, being the operative word, for her theories were, at least for a time, embraced publicly and the witch archetype she began to

¹⁵ Waters, 'Maleficent Witchcraft', p. 101

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 102-104

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 108

develop in 1921 is ‘frustratingly difficult to dislodge from the minds of the public’.¹⁹ Murray’s hypothesis, the ‘witch-cult’ theory, argues that the early modern witch trials in Europe were the direct result of the existence of a pre-Christian religion or witch-cult which spanned over centuries, countries, and existed within both the peasantry and, to a lesser extent, nobility. This witch-cult, rather than worshipping a Christian ‘Devil’, worshipped an ancient fertility God sometimes linked to Janus or Diana, other times called the ‘Horned God’.²⁰ This ancient, Dianic cult was under constant pressure from Christianity and other cultures and traditions as time moved on, so that ‘various modifications were introduced’, and by the time of the early modern witch-hunts, their practices had become more malefic and akin to what they were accused of in court.²¹ According to *Witch-Cult*, accused witches could not truly do magic, but they *were* part of a cult that believed that they could, meeting in covens, engaging in sabbaths, and performing ritualistic sacrifices including infanticide, which Murray seems to accept as fact given that the ‘accusations seem to have been substantiated on several occasions.’ Murray provided examples from court records to support her theories, including Potts’ *The Wonderful Discoverie*.²²

Today, Murray’s theories are, as Noble phrases it, ‘undeniably wrong’, but in 1921, they were exciting enough to be considered.²³ Simpson stated ‘how refreshing and exciting her first book was at that period. A new approach, and such a surprising one’.²⁴ Her theories certainly captured imaginations, and they appealed to the public mind more than previous outlooks on early modern witchcraft had done. Moreover, there was a growing trend in the

¹⁹ Likely in part because it formed the basis of Murray’s 1929 entry on ‘witchcraft’ in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, which remained in print until 1969 without alteration. - Catherine Noble, ‘From Fact to Fallacy: The Evolution of Margaret Alice Murray’s Witch-Cult’, *The Pomegranate*, 7.1 (2005), 5-26, p. 6; Jacqueline Simpson, ‘Margaret Murray: Who Believed Her, and Why?’, *Folklore*, 105:1-2, (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis Ltd., 1994) 89-96, p. 89; Caroline Oates and Juliette Wood, *A Coven of Scholars: Margaret Murray and her Working Methods* (London: The Folklore Society, 1998), p. 11

²⁰ The ‘Devil’ was, according to Murray, an addition made by Christian record-keepers - Margaret Alice Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe: A Study in Anthropology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1921); Noble, ‘Fact to Fallacy’, p. 6

²¹ Murray, *Witch-Cult*, p. 12; Noble, ‘Fact to Fallacy’, pp. 6-7

²² Murray, *Witch-Cult*, pp. 139-158

²³ Noble, ‘Fact to Fallacy’, p. 6

²⁴ Simpson, ‘Margaret Murray’, p. 90

study of pre-Christian religions and fertility cults in the years prior to the publication of the witch-cult hypothesis; for example, Sir James Frazer's examination of fertility cults in 1890 with *The Golden Bough*, which Murray based some of her theories on.²⁵ Whilst Murray wasn't the first to link early modern witchcraft with Paganism, for Jules Michelet did this in 1862 with *La Sorcière*, it was her *Witch-Cult* which popularised the notion.²⁶ She received high praise in publications like *The Occult Review*, and was commissioned to write the entry on 'Witchcraft' for the Encyclopaedia Britannica in 1929.²⁷ Her presence in popular culture meant that her ideas were, according to Simpson, 'accessible to journalists, film-makers, popular novelists, and thriller writers, who adopted them enthusiastically.'²⁸ The 'witch-cult' theory is certainly more glamorous than the 'rationalist approach' to witchcraft that had been experienced thus far, which saw witchcraft as a tragic mistake, the result of backwards thinking before the elite and learned stopped believing in magic around the eighteenth century.²⁹ It seemed to be a natural extension of those suffragette-led theories of male oppression by thinkers such as Matilda Joselyn Gage, who wrote in the late nineteenth-century that the early modern witch hunts were woman-hunts, directed by an abusive, patriarchal system of authority (both Church and State) in order to quell intelligent and knowledgeable women that they could not control.³⁰ If early modern witches were already being viewed, at least by feminist-thinkers, as women who lived outside of the societal norm and defied the patriarchy, with their knowledge of herbalism and healing; then it seems like a natural step to give these figures religious autonomy and nonconformity too.

Following on from the work of Murray, the early twentieth century experienced the writings of the Rev. Montague Summers, who was mentioned in at least one review of *Mist*

²⁵ Tom Shippey, *Hard Reading: Learning from Science Fiction* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), pp. 180-181; Noble, 'Fact to Fallacy', p. 7

²⁶ Jules Michelet, *La Sorcière*, translated by I. J. Trotter (London: Simpkin, Marshall & Co., 1863)

²⁷ Noble, 'Fact to Fallacy', p. 9; Simpson, 'Margaret Murray', p. 89

²⁸ Simpson, 'Margaret Murray', p. 89

²⁹ Noble, 'Margaret Murray', p. 9; Machielson, *War on Witchcraft*, pp. 3-13

³⁰ Matilda Joselyn Gage, *Woman, Church and State* (New York: The Truth Seeker Company, 1893)

Over Pendle, and wrote of witchcraft as real, and the Pendle witches as guilty.³¹ Summers, an ‘eccentric’, self-ordained Catholic priest with a keen interest in witchcraft and the occult, translated and published the 1486 *Malleus Maleficarum*,³² and in 1926 and 1927, *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* and *The Geography of Witchcraft*.³³ For Summers, witches were not simply a misunderstood witch-cult, but a ‘community of satanists’ and Poole said that at times he sounded like ‘a reincarnation of Thomas Potts himself.’³⁴ Gibson has recently provided new insights into the beliefs and writings of Summers, identifying that he first was persecuted (for homosexuality and witchcraft), though not formally, and as a result, the accused witch became the witch-hunter. His *History of Witchcraft* deemed it a form of conspiratorial anarchy led by men - with women as their acolytes - and reiterated all of the extreme examples given by early modern demonologists of the crimes of witchcraft.³⁵ It is unlikely that Summers’ works would have been taken seriously, for his belief did not stop at witches and he also published works on the reality of vampires, werewolves, and more.³⁶ However, his determination of the guilt of the Lancashire witches may have been influenced by Murray’s works.³⁷

In 1929, G. B. Harrison released a new edition of Thomas Potts’ pamphlet, with a brief introduction of his own.³⁸ This was not as detailed as James Crossley’s publication a

³¹ ‘The Witches of Pendle Hill’, *Manchester Evening News*, 2 July 1951 – in *Mist Over Pendle – Cuttings*, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

³² As well as new editions of the works of Shakespeare. Summers was not an ordained priest but a self-proclaimed, or acting priest, for the Catholic Church refused him a priesthood due to his homosexuality. – Julian Goodare, ‘Summers, Montague (1880-1948)’, in *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition*, Ed. by Richard M. Golden (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 1090; Shakespeare et al., *Shakespeare Adaptations. With an Introduction and Notes by Montague Summers* (New York: B. Blom, 1966)

³³ Montague Summers, *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* (New York: University Books, 1956); Montague Summers, *The Geography of Witchcraft* (Evanston: University Books, 1958)

³⁴ Poole in Potts, (2011), pp. 78-79

³⁵ He ‘believed everything demonologists had ever imagined, however extreme’. - Marion Gibson, *Witchcraft: A History in Thirteen Trials* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2023), pp. 152, 154, 158-159, 163-164

³⁶ Summers’ contemporary, Burr, was quoted comparing Summers’ work to ‘Middle Ages’, and Machielsen states, whilst Murray’s work was taken seriously in the mid-twentieth century revival of interest in witchcraft history, Summers was brushed off as ‘an eccentric’. Both Summers and Murray, by the 1970s, were dismissed as ‘amateurs’. - Machielsen, *War on Witchcraft*, pp. 8-9

³⁷ Montague Summers, *The Vampire: His Kith and Kin* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., Ltd., 1928)

³⁸ Harrison was a historian who worked on early modern journals and Shakespearean drama. In 1951, the same year as Neill’s novel was published, he released a collection of essays on Shakespeare’s tragedies – G. B. Harrison, *Shakespeare’s*

century earlier, but Neill claimed he had completed extensive research on the Pendle trials, so it is likely that he picked up Harrison's copy at some stage. That is not to say that Neill's writing agrees with Harrison's, but Harrison is very clearly a supporter of Murray's work, and there are certain similarities to both within *Mist Over Pendle*. In his introduction to Potts' pamphlet, he states that, 'the Lancaster trial reveals the practice of the witch-cult in its full horror.'³⁹ It would appear that Harrison believed in the danger and power of these accused; he referenced Murray and a 'witch-cult' often throughout. Neill's version of the Pendle tale doesn't align itself with the complete theories proposed by Margaret Murray, nor does G. B. Harrison's introduction, in that neither include any hints towards a pre-Christian religion, but Neill may well have taken some initial inspiration from Murray's *Witch-Cult* and Harrison's editor's notes for his plot. For example, Harrison, like Murray, calls the accused witches 'the coven', a theme repeated throughout *Mist Over Pendle*, as will be explored. He also suggests the plausibility of the presence/ use of poison by the accused Pendle witches, which is a crucial feature within the novel, and is how Neill explains the many sudden and mysterious deaths in the area. Finally, Harrison states plainly that there was, 'little injustice in the sentences passed at Lancaster in August 1612', much like what Murray states about witches in general, and Neill's witches of course, whilst not capable of working magic, are in fact guilty.⁴⁰

Tragedies (London: Routledge, 2013); G. B. Harrison, *An Elizabethan Journal: Elizabethan and Jacobean Journals 1591-1601, Volume I* (London: Routledge, 1928)

³⁹ G. B. Harrison in Thomas Potts, *The Trial of the Lancashire Witches, 1612*, Ed. G. B. Harrison (London: Peter Davies, 1929), p. xlv

⁴⁰ Harrison in Potts (1929), p. xlv; Murray, *Witch-Cult*; Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*

Robert Neill

Robert Neill is an enigmatic author for the modern reader.⁴¹ After its initial success, *Mist Over Pendle* was only ever briefly mentioned in discussion about the 1612 trials and their memory. The brevity of these references to Neill's novel are frequent, however, and span across a variety of genres. For example, in the 2000 *Proceedings of the Geologists Association*, Williamson associated Neill and Ainsworth's novels with Pendle Hill:

It is... not surprising that the hill has many important historical and literary associations... Ainsworth's *Lancashire Witches*, together with... *Mist over Pendle* by Robert Neill.⁴²

In the edited volume *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, the novel is mentioned three times, and only in order to acknowledge that it exists, by James Sharpe, Marion Gibson, and Joanne Pearson.⁴³ Codd did the same in 2001 and Baratta in 2013.⁴⁴ Swain went a little further by dedicating almost a full sentence to the novel, which he claims was based 'more heavily' on Potts' *Discoverie* than Ainsworth's novel, but Swain does not specify why.⁴⁵ In fact, until Gibson's 2018 work *Rediscovering Renaissance Witchcraft*, which features four pages of discussion on the 1951 novel, it had not been the focus of any major form of academic attention since its publication, nor had its author.⁴⁶ Gibson wrote, albeit not in any great detail, about Neill's close use of Potts' 1613 pamphlet in constructing the novel, but that the author's characterisations are 'an ill-match for the Renaissance realities' of Potts' time.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Even his year of birth is up for debate.

⁴² Iain A. Williamson, 'Field Meeting upon Pendle Hill, northeast Lancashire: Lancashire Group, 25 June 1999', *Proceedings of the Geologists Association*, 111, (2000) 281-283, p. 281; Plus other topographical works like - Hillary Place, 'Postcards from the Pennines,' *New Library World*, 86.8 (1985), 158-159

⁴³ James Sharpe, 'Introduction: The Lancashire Witches in Historical Context', Marion Gibson, 'Thomas Potts' 'Dusty Memory': Reconstructing Justice in *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches*', and Joanne Pearson, 'Wicca, Paganism, and History: Contemporary Witchcraft and the Lancashire Witches', in *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories*, ed. Robert Poole (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), pp. 1, 42, 198

⁴⁴ Helen Codd, 'Review: Witchcraft and Witch Trials: A History of English Witchcraft and Its Legal Perspectives,' *Int'l J. Evidence & Proof*, 5 (2001), p. 269; Baratta, 'Lancashire: a Land of Witches', p. 195

⁴⁵ J. T. Swain, 'Lancashire Witch Trials', p. 65

⁴⁶ Gibson, *Rediscovering*, pp. 82-85

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 83

Witchcraft does not exist in *Mist Over Pendle*, and the heroes of the novel are logical and forgiving in nature, which cannot reflect the actual beliefs and tragedies of the Lancashire witches in 1612. Gibson's brief analysis concludes that it is 'strikingly traditional in demonising witches – less modern, more early modern.'⁴⁸ Neill's main historical hero is Roger Nowell, and regardless of whether witchcraft is real or not, in the novel, the accused are prosecuted of the crime regardless.

Though there are few academic interpretations of the 1951 novel, by combing through the writings of critics and journalists in 1951, the year of his debut,⁴⁹ as well as closely examining the small amount of text that still exists in Neill's own words (fiction excluded), we may be able to gauge a few details about who Neill was.⁵⁰ When searching through birth registries, it is difficult to determine exactly when or where Robert Neill was born. There was a Robert Neill born 1905 in Prestwich, Lancashire, England.⁵¹ This would make sense considering his connection to Lancashire and his first novel being Lancashire-based. However, there are newspaper articles which contain contradictory information; for example, in a May 1951 extract from the *Gloucester Echo*, the assurance is that he was born in Manchester, which is repeated by 1951 critics, and so is perhaps the more accurate, but we cannot be sure as there is no evidence of the author himself confirming this. Those same critics have also claimed that his mother and maternal family were from Colne, Lancashire, which could be another explanation for his interest in Pendle history.⁵²

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 84

⁴⁹ The cuttings of which were gathered in 1951 and 1952 from newspapers and magazines across the UK, Ireland, and USA. I was able to examine these in Preston's Lancashire Archives - in 'Mist Over Pendle – Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁵⁰ 'Robert Neill – c. 1955-1956', Literary Manuscripts – 19th Century-20th Century, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.104/ACC11076

⁵¹ 'Robert Geoffrey Neill', in *UK National Archives: England and Wales FreeBMD Birth Index 1837-1915, recorded by General Register's Office (GRO), 1905, Oct-Nov-Dec, Vol. 8d, p. 422*

<https://www.archives.com/uk/search/vital/results?Location=United%20Kingdom&FirstName=Robert&LastName=Neill&BirthYear=1905&DeathYear=1979&LocationId=3257>

⁵² In a *Colne Times* article, we also learn that, 'In correspondence with Mr. E. W. Folley, [Robert Neill] discloses that he is a direct descendant of Robert Shaw, the earliest of Colne's merchant princes, who built Colne Hall...' :- 'First Novel Becomes Best Seller', *Colne Times*, 27 July 1951; 'Historical Novel', *Gloucester Echo*, 5 May 1951; 'About A First Novel – And Its

We do have clear evidence of at least some connection to Lancashire, as before reading science at Queen's College, Cambridge, Robert Neill studied in Lytham, Lancashire.⁵³ In the *Burnley Express and News*, Neill is quoted saying, 'I could have found my way through Pendle Forest in the dark long before it ever occurred to me to write about it', which would certainly explain the dedication that the author displays in describing the Pendle landscape through the eyes of his narrator Margery.⁵⁴ By 1951 Neill was living in Cheltenham and was a lecturer in science at St Paul's College.⁵⁵ We also know that he was married, at least for a time, and certainly in the 1950s.⁵⁶ Finally, the *Daily Graphic* calls the author Lieutenant Robert Neill of the Royal Naval Reserve, stating that he worked in anti-submarine research in war-time, despite being a biologist by profession.⁵⁷

Though he is relatively unknown today, Neill produced a long bibliography of novels. Given the initial success of his debut, one could assume that such a large collection of works equalled success. However, there are no existing records which provide any definitive list of his works to be certain of the extent (or genre) of all of Neill's writing.⁵⁸ In a small collection of manuscripts from the author at the Lancashire Archives in Preston there is a letter addressed to a 'Miss Downton' by Robert Neill in 1956. From this we can discern a little of his writing process. His letter regards the scripts, meaning manuscripts, of novel *Black*

Author', *Burnley Express and News*, 1 August 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle – Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁵³ 'New Novelist', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4 May 1951 - Ibid

⁵⁴ About A First Novel – And Its Author', *Burnley Express and News*, 1 August 1951 - Ibid

⁵⁵ 'New Novelist', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4 May 1951 - Ibid

⁵⁶ As can be determined by a brief dedication found in an early manuscript of his novel *Black William* - Robert Neill, in 'Robert Neill – c. 1955-1956', *Literary Manuscripts – 19th Century-20th Century*, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.104/ACC11076, Box 1: Manuscript ('Black William')

⁵⁷ 'Witch Hunter', *Daily Graphic*, 9 May 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle – Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁵⁸ Nor are there many titles still in print. There are fourteen titles listed under the author's name on the Newcastle Libraries website, and twelve listed on 'Goodreads'. In 1968, Neill was invited to open Gosforth Library in Newcastle Upon Tyne, which naturally indicates that he was respected as an author and something of a celebrity, at least to the north of England. – 'Robert Neill', *Newcastle Libraries*

<<https://libraries.newcastle.gov.uk/Author/Home?author=%22Neill%2C+Robert%22&basicSearchType=Author&sort=title&view=list>> [accessed 07.08.2023]; 'Books by Robert Neill', *Goodreads*

<https://www.goodreads.com/author/list/19134645.Robert_Neill> [accessed 02.12.2023]; 'Gosforth Library: official opening by author, Robert Neill, at Regent Centre, Gosforth, Thursday, 21st March, 1968'

<<https://libraries.newcastle.gov.uk/Record/181520?searchId=&recordIndex=4&page=&referred=resultIndex>> [accessed 01.09.22]

William that he is sending for Miss Downton's attention, and writes a brief description of his procedure as evidence. Neill states that he first writes a 'pencil script', which is then 'typed roughly in one copy, which [he calls] the intermediate script', then edited and corrected (heavily, he specifies) and re-typed 'in several copies', for Neill's publishers in London and New York. He also mentions that these scripts are typed by his secretary. Granted, this letter does not tell us a whole lot about the historically elusive Robert Neill. It is unclear who 'Miss Downton' was and why Neill was sending her these manuscripts. She could have been a member of one of his publishing teams, but as there is no recipient address on the letter, this can only be guessed. As for the writer, the address in the top, right-hand corner of this letter indicates, as we know from other sources, that Neill was living in Cheltenham, Gloucestershire from 1951 until at least 1956.⁵⁹

Upon its publication in 1951, *Mist Over Pendle* cost 10 shillings and 6 pence.⁶⁰ It was published by Hutchinson & Co. in London, and some effort seems to have gone into marketing the text prior to its release, as it was listed for two months prior as the upcoming novel to look out for in *The Daily Graphic*. Once available to purchase, it was immediately listed in several newspapers as a 'best-seller' and received many positive reviews in the media; 'An uncommonly good first novel with a tale to tell' was the general consensus, and these reviews could be seen in print across the UK, Ireland, and in the United States for the remainder of 1951.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Robert Neill, in 'Robert Neill – c. 1955-1956', *Literary Manuscripts – 19th Century-20th Century*, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.104/ACC11076, Box 3: Manuscript ('Black William') and Letter; See also: 'Historical Novel', *Gloucester Echo*, 5 May 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle – Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655 '

⁶⁰ Richard Pomfret, 'Poison Had the Last Word', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 16 May 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁶¹ *John O'London's*, 25 May 1951 – Ibid

Mist Over Pendle

Before exploring the plot of *Mist Over Pendle*, it is important to consider the novel in relation to Ainsworth's *The Lancashire Witches*, which was the first (and only prior to Neill's), novel about the 1612 trials. It would seem logical to assume, given Ainsworth's success, that Neill had studied Ainsworth's novel in detail before writing his own. However, Neill was very adamant that his readers believe that he in fact did not. In May 1951, a journalist for the *Evening Chronicle* quotes Neill, who claimed that he had 'never read' Ainsworth's novel.⁶² Moreover, in a quote from Neill's publisher, Hutchinson & Co., it is claimed that *Mist Over Pendle* 'owes nothing to Harrison Ainsworth's *Lancashire Witches*'.⁶³

A huge number of reviews of the novel upon its release emphasise this same claimed indifference to Ainsworth's text, with many a critic mentioning how his plot choices differed from Ainsworth's. Neill himself stated, undoubtedly following the many critics who questioned his failure to include the Asshetons, who were so prominent in *The Lancashire Witches*, 'I did *not* drop the Asshetons out of the story; they were never in it. It was Harrison Ainsworth who put them in.' In this article, Neill also discusses with the interviewer his knowledge of the work of James Crossley and the Chetham Society on the Pendle witches and on the journal of Nicholas Assheton.⁶⁴ Despite the fact that Neill seems to have frequently denied that he had ever read Ainsworth's text, his clear critique of the inaccuracy of the novel shows that he most likely did, but chose to lead his own tale in a different direction and did not wish for his work to be compared to that of Ainsworth. He said, 'I followed Thomas Potts and as much of the truth as has survived... Ainsworth was disregarding truth just as wildly when he made Alizon Device his heroine.'⁶⁵ In 1976, Catlow published the somewhat narrative history entitled *The Pendle Witches* in which he refers to

⁶² 'New Novelist', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4 May 1951 - Ibid

⁶³ *Bookseller*, 17 March 1951 - Ibid

⁶⁴ Robert Neill, quoted in 'New Novelist', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4th May 1951 - Ibid

⁶⁵ Robert Neill, quoted in 'New Novelist', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4th May 1951 - Ibid

Neill in a way which no one had before. For whilst Neill, his publishers, and his 1951 interviews claimed that Neill had never read Ainsworth's text, Catlow claimed that Neill carried a copy of the novel with him, and had a 'reverence for Ainsworth's book', but felt there was more of the story to be told. This is followed by a direct quote from Neill on his fear that the 'real story' of the Pendle witches might be lost to a sea of 'gimmicky' souvenirs he had witnessed.⁶⁶ It is difficult to know whether Catlow's claims are real and the quotes are truly from the author, but it seems more likely than Neill's earlier claims that he had not read the only other Pendle-witch novel in existence at the time.

Not only did Neill discuss his close ties with Pendle, he also admitted his appreciation for history. He said, 'I have made the 17th century my hobby ever since I came down from Cambridge... I had known of the witches in Pendle Forest since my childhood... I had studied all the surviving records... and had accumulated 40,000 words of notes.'⁶⁷ If he had known of the witches from childhood, it would be safe to assume that this was the Lancashire influence upon his life, either by his mother from Colne or his schooling in Lytham.

Neill dedicated his novel to 'the dusty memory of Master Thomas Potts'.⁶⁸ On *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, Neill said:

Potts, in short, was a lawyer, first and always, and the 'Wonderfull Discoverie' is as dry and bleak as the dust of centuries. But if you know the ground and have a decent knowledge of the Lancashire of those days, it can set your imagination working.⁶⁹

Neill's knowledge of 1612 Lancashire and Potts' pamphlet, and his imagination shaped this new retelling, one which certainly takes creative liberties to flesh out the Pendle plot. It is Neill's portrayal of key themes such as class and education, religion and ignorance, and

⁶⁶ Richard Catlow, *The Pendle Witches* (Nelson: Hendon Publishing Co. Ltd., 1976), p. 42

⁶⁷ Robert Neill, quoted in 'New Novelist', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4 May 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁶⁸ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*

⁶⁹ 'First Novel Becomes Best Seller', *Colne Times*, 27 July 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

gender and villainy which colour his rewriting of several key figures from Potts' pamphlet. The key figures in question are his hero, Roger Nowell, and his villain, Alice Nutter, as well as the 'Demdike Brood', which he treats oftentimes as one entity. However, in order to fully analyse *Mist Over Pendle*, Robert Neill's new addition to the roster, Margery Whitaker, must be considered, for it is through this character's eyes that the reader experiences all others.

Mist Over Pendle is a novel of almost 400 pages in length, and although it is set in Lancashire, the tale begins in London, where the reader is introduced to Margery Whitaker, Neill's chosen heroine. Margery, a burden to her family, is sent to her distant cousin, Pendle JP Roger Nowell, who takes her in as his ward. Nowell's character, at least in the first few chapters, acts as teacher and informant, telling Margery, and therefore the reader, of the social and religious climate required to understand the story to follow. Neill, like Ainsworth though certainly not to the same extent, emphasises the importance of the Pendle landscape in his tale. In much the same fashion as Ainsworth's writing, Pendle Hill is imposing and mysterious, the atmosphere dark and full of secrets, in a way which lends itself to the overall tone of the Pendle witches:

If a hill could have an indwelling Spirit, then surely this one had - and it might not be the most friendly of Spirits. There was some brooding quality about this hill, as though it were sentient and knew more than it chose to tell.⁷⁰

The ominous tone when considering the landscape, however, does not remain when considering the topic of witchcraft, for this, it becomes clear, is not real in Neill's Pendle. There is no such thing as magic within the novel, but there are still threatening women who do harm, and they are dangerous for their cunning and ambition, rather than their Satan-gifted magic.

⁷⁰ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 34

These witches are separated, as they are in Potts' pamphlet, into two families, Demdike's family, and Chattox's family, but unlike the 1613 pamphlet in which Demdike and Chattox are the respective origins of witchcraft in each family, it is the ambitious Alice Nutter who seems to lead these women in their dark deeds. Throughout the novel, Roger Nowell, with the help of his sharp and witty cousin Margery, strives to unravel the mysteries surrounding these women, and to expose the true evil of Alice Nutter. Whilst on this journey toward justice, these characters interact with friends and neighbours, all of whom are defined by their religious views, or lack thereof. There are figures who do not seem to fall into a specific category, and the reader can assume that they, like Margery and Nowell, are passive Protestants. They differ slightly from those Nowell calls the 'papists', though these too are quiet in their faith and are written in much the same fashion as Neill's hero and heroine. Finally, there are the Puritans, and they all announce their beliefs with a fervour and zeal that seems at times satirical, and is often directly contrasted with the behaviours of Nowell and Margery.

A Hero and a Heroine

The novel opens with a brief backstory for Margery Whitaker, Neill's created heroine. Raised in a staunchly Puritan household, Margery never fit in with her siblings, and following the death of her parents the family asked, 'what...was to be done with Margery?'⁷¹ That Margery fits into the story at all is thanks to her being a distant cousin of Roger Nowell, who took his young cousin as his ward, and eventually she acts as a capable and enthusiastic clerk to the JP, which would of course be entirely unrealistic in 1612. Neill said that the character of Margery was 'novelist's licence', but that she could have existed given the real, historical

⁷¹ They viewed her as 'an idle, insolent, godless baggage, the pride of the Devil and the shame of her family.' - Ibid, pp. 11, 14-15

Whitaker family that she was written to be a part of.⁷² In 1877, Rev. Grosart's study of *The Spending of the Money of Robert Nowell, of Reade Hall, Lancashire* revealed that, whilst there was no 'Margery Whitaker', cousin of Roger Nowell, in history, there were indeed direct ties between the Nowells and the Whitakers across generations.⁷³ Therefore, whilst Margery is the novelist's invention, Nowell's distant, Puritan cousins, the Whitakers, were in fact real. Neill also stated that he placed the character of Margery into the Pendle tale out of necessity, he gave her the role of Nowell's clerk, for it seemed obvious to him that Roger Nowell 'undoubtedly had a clerk' if comparing his deposition notes with his surviving letters, the former of which are much more well-written.⁷⁴

Margery Whitaker is young, attractive, and good, much like Ainsworth's Alizon Device. This seems to be where the similarities end. Where Ainsworth's heroine is celebrated for her beauty and delicacy, Neill has inserted into the Pendle story a quick-witted, educated, somewhat fierier Margery to pull the many separate elements within the Lancashire witches' story together. She is celebrated for her mind more so than her beauty, although her beauty is of course mentioned. Nowell approves of Margery most when she is cunning and sly and clever; 'Subtle as the serpent.'⁷⁵ Whilst *Mist Over Pendle* is far from a feminist retelling, Robert Neill is kinder to more women than his predecessor, namely because of his invented heroine.⁷⁶ By writing his heroine in such a positive light, giving her a keen intelligence

⁷² Robert Neill, quoted in 'New Novelist', *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4 May 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁷³ For example, under 'John Nowell of Read, Esq.' we can see; 'Alice, wife of Henry Whitaker of High Whitaker, gent.', and also, 'Elizabeth, wife of Thomas Whitaker of Holme, gent.':- Rev. Alexander B. Grosart, *The Spending of the Money of Robert Nowell, of Reade Hall, Lancashire: Brother of Dean Alexander Nowell, 1568-1580* (Manchester: Charles E. Simms, 1877), pp. xxxi-xxxii

⁷⁴ It remains unclear where Neill saw these alleged records. - 'About A First Novel - And Its Author', *Burnley Express and News*, 1 August 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁷⁵ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 272

⁷⁶ In a later novel by this author, *Witch Bane* (1967), again about early modern witchcraft in Lancashire, Neill uses his characters to display similar notions in favour of class and learning, but interestingly in this tale, witchcraft is real. His heroine here is a young widow who is accused of witchcraft and subjected to a public 'pricking'. She is spared by the local hero, and her love interest (another figure of authority like Neill's Nowell), who essentially indicates that her social standing means that she cannot be a witch. The novel features various pious characters who engage in witch-hunting, and is set against the backdrop of Civil War. Unfortunately, we do not know how this novel was received, or indeed how any of Neill's works after his debut were received. We can only guess that, given the fact that *Mist Over Pendle* seems to be the only novel

alongside her quintessential goodness, he offers at least one female character praise for more than her beauty. Margery is something of an omnipresent character, for she bears witness to most of the events detailed in Potts' pamphlet in a way that no true historical figure could reasonably have done. In the same way as Ainsworth's Prologue was used to explain the trials to follow, Neill uses Margery to make sense of them.

If Margery is the brains behind the Lancashire witch-hunt, Roger Nowell is the driving force. It is his knowledge (of the law, of the region and its people), and his authority over such, which allow for the Pendle witches to be sent to the Assizes. Neill develops him into a kindly, gentlemanly hero for the reader, who takes Margery in without knowing her, then learns to love and respect her for her mind and her independence. His Nowell is a clear figure of authority outwardly, but the reader experiences a gentle, light-hearted character in his interactions with Margery, 'His smile came again, and it was infectious.'⁷⁷ He too is written as incredibly smart and logical in a way that commands respect. It is Nowell who reveals the ins and outs of the Pendle atmosphere, and it is in the characters of Nowell and Margery that we can see hints to Neill's own opinions and ideals. This is especially prevalent when considering religion.

Nowell, on showing Margery the land, said that Papists will 'be within your knowing here. We've good store of them in this County.' The character's tone suggesting that this was 'no great matter'.⁷⁸ This directly reflects Potts' writing when he wrote that Lancashire 'hath good store' of Jesuits/recusants, but where Potts' pamphlet writes of Catholicism as a dangerous, treasonous act, Neill writes of it indifferently, and at times even appreciatively. On the anti-Catholic edicts and sentiments in Jacobean England, Harrison stated that in

that was so highly commended as to warrant a collection of reviews by Lancashire Archives, that *Witch Bane* was not a bestseller. – Robert Neill, *Witch Bane* (London: Arrow Books, 1968); 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁷⁷ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 27

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 31

Lancashire, ‘the commissioners had failed; the ministers of the Church of England had no hold over the people, and the law was defied...’⁷⁹ Neill’s own story development echoes Harrison’s notes. Catholicism is ever-present in Neill’s *Pendle*, as is Puritanism, and Roger Nowell’s views on both are clear. He is critical of each, or at least, critical of any form of religious extremism. From the onset, Nowell seems to be a voice of reason in Neill’s retelling. His view is somewhat modern and indifferent; viewing religious extremity as a negative and religious persecution as a farce. He states that ‘Papists’, who were deemed the enemy in 1612, were simply men and women ‘like the rest of us’; he calls the local puritans ‘a noisy crew’; and he ties it all neatly together by stating that whilst the people of *Pendle* attend church as the law commands, ‘most of our folk lean to the ale-bench only’.⁸⁰ Neill’s villain Alice Nutter, too, is not in any way described by or associated with religion, which infers that the author himself perhaps promotes a non-extremist religious tolerance, for religion is not the enemy in *Mist Over Pendle*, merely a means of separating characters and depicting a more accurate 1612 *Pendle*.

We know very little of Neill’s own religious views. There was a debrief dedication written in an early manuscript of one of his novels, *Black William* that reads; ‘To my wife, of whom I cite Proverbs: iii, 17’.⁸¹ That he has quoted the Bible in a dedication suggests that he is a man of faith. However, this is unclear within his writing of *Mist Over Pendle*. He doesn’t disregard or openly reject faith in his characterisations, but his main characters Margery and Nowell are far from zealous in their actions, and whilst Margery was raised in a Puritan household and can recite the Bible from memory, she wields this as a weapon against the faithful, rather than as a badge of honour for her own beliefs. In fact, Neill often directly

⁷⁹ Harrison in Potts (1929), p. xli

⁸⁰ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, pp. 32-35

⁸¹ Proverbs 3:17 says, ‘Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.’ - Robert Neill, in ‘Robert Neill – c. 1955-1956’, *Literary Manuscripts – 19th Century-20th Century*, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.104/ACC11076, Box 1: Manuscript (‘Black William’); Proverbs 3:17 in *Holy Bible: King James Version* (London: Green World Classics, 2017), p. 445

quotes the Bible in his novel, but it is used, at all times, for very specific reasons, often when Margery needs to placate or humour the Puritans of the region.⁸²

As a 1951 reviewer stated, ‘His play on the Scriptures between the staunch Puritan, Richard Baldwin, and Margery... gives the novel a touch of satire on the dogmatism of the Puritans of that era.’⁸³ Both Margery and Nowell are wary of the opinions of local Puritan characters; ‘Then she stiffened warily; she had learned to know a puritan when she saw one.’⁸⁴ From the novel’s beginning, Puritanism is viewed depicted as a negative affair, and the Puritan characters are portrayed as stricter and more adamant in their sense of right and wrong than all other characters in the novel. There is a clear divide within *Mist Over Pendle* between the Puritans and everyone else that seems to echo what existed in 1612 Lancashire. There was, to rephrase Johnston, a distinctive split in English society in the first half of the seventeenth century; between the Puritan spirit, ‘craving godliness and order’, and those who still looked back fondly on the old religion and festivities associated with a Catholic England.⁸⁵ To add to Johnston’s argument, there was also a third category of people, those who perhaps embraced a relaxed Protestant England under the rule of Elizabeth I, but who were less than enthusiastic about the rigidity of Puritanism. This is certainly the category that Neill’s main characters Margery and Nowell fall into.

Neill often portrays Lancashire with similar undertones as Ainsworth; both novels are teeming with the merriment associated with a pre-Reformation England filled with pageantry and games. Yet Neill’s text takes this further with the inclusion of such a distinctive Puritan influence, too. This is a common historical view of 1612 Lancashire; as a county divided between those people less inclined to conform to the rising Puritan influence around them,

⁸² Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 333

⁸³ ‘Margery and the Witches’, *Durham Morning Herald*, 20 April 1952 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

⁸⁴ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 55

⁸⁵ Alexandra F. Johnston, ‘English Puritanism and Festive Custom’, *Renaissance and Reformation, New Series, Vol. 15, No. 4* (Autumn 1991), 289-297, p. 290

and those determined to enforce Puritan order. In 1618, King James made his 'Declaration of Sports' (also known as the Book of Sports) after his visit to Lancashire and his realisation that its people were being prohibited from taking part in certain recreations by local authorities of Puritan inclinations. This *Declaration* permitted the people to participate in a variety of recreational activities that went against said authorities' rigid views, such as Morris dances and Whitsun ales.⁸⁶ This is a clear example of the split or conflict present within pre-Civil War Lancashire, between Puritans and Catholics specifically, but more generally between Puritans and everyone else, given that such traditions were so widely enjoyed in the county.

Neill is aware of these traditions, and undoubtedly of the pre-existing conflict surrounding them, given his inclusion of varying religious and arguably agnostic characters within his novel. There is a lengthy Christmas scene which is certainly evidence of this, for Neill is clearly aware of the commonly enjoyed games and traditions of the seventeenth century populace, especially those that stand apart for their liveliness against a puritan backdrop. The detail in which he describes the role of Lord of Misrule in this Christmas scene shows a clear contradiction with puritan views of what is proper and godly.⁸⁷ For example, despite the King's declaration four years previously, in 1622 the Bishop of Gloucester revealed his negative views towards such pageantry in his 'Visitation Articles' for his diocese. He called those who engage in such recreational activities 'disordered persons', and appealed for their names to be revealed to relevant religious authorities. As Johnston states, the 'Puritan spirit... felt compelled to repress any challenge to its sense of fit and godly behaviour.' Often these pageanties were celebrated especially by the gentry in Lancashire, many of whom maintained their Catholic faith. A Lord Of Misrule often acted as a 'Master of Ceremonies' for holidays and occasions in noble households, and such

⁸⁶ King James I of England, *The Kings Maiesties declaration to his subiects, concerning lawfull sports to be vsed* (London: Bonham Norton and John Bill, deputie printers for the Kings most excellent Maiestie, 1618); Tho. Cestren and James Tait, 'The Declaration of Sports for Lancashire (1617)', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 32, No. 128 (1917), pp. 561- 568

⁸⁷ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, pp. 258-267

celebrations, if discovered by Puritan authorities often became a weapon against those who retained their Catholicism in private. For instance, in 1616 a charge of recusancy was brought against Lord William Howard of Thornthwaite in part for the erection of ‘a christmas lord’ by his tenants and servants.⁸⁸

It is within these depictions of merriment that the reader experiences the culmination of Neill’s own religious beliefs or lack thereof, or at least the message inferred regarding religion. That is, that organised religion is something of a farce, and that persecution in religion’s name is entirely wrong. Throughout the novel, Margery and Nowell are the favoured characters; both are witty, sensible, and good-humoured; they do not jump to believe in witchcraft or to punish a priest in hiding, they do not shun recusants in the area, and they reject Puritan ideals. The Christmas scene in *Mist Over Pendle* only emphasises this, for this is when Margery and Nowell are at their happiest, amidst the merry traditions not found within overtly religious households.⁸⁹

The character of Nowell’s views on witchcraft, too, are lenient. He hunts witches, according to Pomfret, ‘with impeccable fairness’ in Neill’s text.⁹⁰ That is, Nowell’s character is very clear regarding what can legally be done regarding witchcraft allegations, refusing to persecute someone based on reputation or fear. This is, of course, because he does not believe in witchcraft himself. His views are always tied to justice and external opinions, like when he and his clerk Margery question James Device, he makes clear his disbelief: ‘He’s admitted to making images... and they’ll call that murder since she died thereafter.’⁹¹ ‘They’ of course, being the believers, the fearful, such as those Puritan characters within the novel, and even the briefly mentioned assize judges Altham and Bromley, of whom Roger Nowell states, ‘A

⁸⁸ Johnston, ‘English Puritanism’, pp. 291-295

⁸⁹ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, pp. 258-267

⁹⁰ Richard Pomfret, ‘Poison Had the Last Word’, *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 16 May 1951 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655s

⁹¹ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 368

pretty pair! Either would hang any witch for two-pence!’⁹² The religious characters within the novel do believe in witchcraft, but this is another negative mark against zealots in Neill’s tale. Demdike’s seemingly most dangerous threat is ‘I’ll pray for you’.⁹³ This is ominous in that the reader, and the protagonist, do not quite know what she means by ‘pray’. However, it must be said that the only character truly fearful of this threat is a Puritan one, Richard Baldwin. Neill’s writing echoes that Protestant belief that witchcraft and Catholicism were alike, and draw’s from a deposition against Demdike in Potts’ *Discoverie*: ‘she heard her sayd Graund-mother say presently after her falling out with the sayd *Baldwin*, shee would pray for the sayd *Baldwin* both still and loude’.⁹⁴ In Neill’s text, Richard Baldwin is terrified of Demdike given that his daughter died after their last dispute, and he is fearful of the same happening to his only remaining child. This would seem a very reasonable response to the reader if it were not so quickly dismissed by the ever-logical Roger Nowell.

As Harrison stated in his edition of Potts’ pamphlet, despite King James’ harsher statute on witchcraft upon ascending the English throne, ‘there was no very noticeable attempt on the part of local magistrates to organise witch hunts’.⁹⁵ The Lancashire witches were of course an exception to this, and Harrison calls this example ‘sensational’, but it would seem that Neill was either inspired by, or at least agreed with Harrison’s statement in his creation of a fully-realised Roger Nowell. Neill’s JP most certainly makes little effort to hunt witches, and in truth falls into it in the end when trying to solve murder instead.

⁹² Ibid, p. 380

⁹³ Ibid, p. 222

⁹⁴ Potts (1613), p. 22

⁹⁵ Harrison in Potts (1929), p. xl

Class and Learning

Harrison said that ‘Witchcraft can only flourish in certain mental conditions, and the emotions of our ancestors were less easily suppressed than our own.’⁹⁶ In *Mist Over Pendle*, belief in witchcraft equates to foolishness, even ignorance, as does piety. This sense of foolishness is prevalent without the novel, and is undeniably linked to what Robert Neill seems to value above all else; reason and education. There is a visible divide between the reasoned and educated characters within the novel, and the ignorant, and this divide is made solid by class. Class is an important theme throughout *Mist Over Pendle*. Neill’s heroine and hero are members of the nobility; Roger Nowell by birth, and Margery Whitaker by character. Margery, in fact, could be likened to Ainsworth’s Alizon Device, who was raised by the Demdike clan, but was consistently viewed as ‘well-born’ due to her nature and beauty.⁹⁷ Neill’s heroine is written in a similar fashion, though with much more conviction and a sharper mind than the women in *The Lancashire Witches*. Class divides are made painstakingly clear within Neill’s novel, though it could be argued that these divides are less about money than they are about intelligence, beliefs, and behaviours.

With regards to wealth, there is of course a clear divide in characterisations. The beginning of chapter 4 introduces to the reader Nowell’s wealth and status. Neill utilises a formal supper scene, complete with detailed descriptions of various rooms and parlours, gleaming silverware, rich, roasted meats, cheesecakes and red wine, servants in matching livery, and Nowell himself in his ‘wine-red velvet, with arabesques of gold on his doublet-front’ in order to make clear to the reader the economic status of the JP.⁹⁸ Phyllis Bentley reviewed the novel in 1951, stating that Neill’s main characters seemed ‘too rich, too well dressed, too lavishly provided with horses, for their class at the time.’ Using the flame-satin

⁹⁶ Harrison in Potts (1929), p. xlvi

⁹⁷ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 114

⁹⁸ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, pp. 39-42

clothing favoured by Margery, and purchased by Nowell, Bentley claims this unrealistic as it sets the wealth of Roger Nowell too far apart from his social equals in Yorkshire, for example.⁹⁹ Moreover, Nowell's character is aware of his wealth, yet this is written in a forgiving way by Neill. He separates himself from the 'common sort' by reiterating his own place of privilege with regards to work, by highlighting the lack of work readily available for others in the area; 'It's very well for us who are the owners. It's well enough for the yeomen, who in their way are owners too. But for the common sort it's not nearly so well.'¹⁰⁰ By allowing this character such awareness and openness, Neill is in fact writing him as more humble than would be expected, and therefore his wealth is not viewed as a negative.

It is in this sense that, when examining *Mist Over Pendle*, wealth and class might be viewed separately, with wealth being a matter of privilege, but class being depicted more conceptually, as a certain level of decorum and education that makes one worthy of kindness and respect. Nowell is indeed the wealthiest character within the novel, and his ward Margery is of course given the same status, but they are not the only lady and gentleman-like figures within the tale despite the disparity in wealth between them and the other characters in *Pendle*. There are other characters, and often whole families, who despite their financial circumstances (which are often modestly hinted at or simply ignored) and indeed their religious beliefs, are written with similar care; they are equally likeable and relatively unflawed. For example, Christopher Southworth, the priest-in-hiding, is certainly written graciously; as is Miles Nutter, the innocent son of the evil Alice, alongside his kindly (yet also Catholic) aunt and uncle who love him as their own. These characters hold a sense of decorum which allows for them to be treated as equals by the character of Nowell.

⁹⁹ Phyllis Bentley, 'A Choice of New Novels', *The Yorkshire Post* Leeds, 1 June 1951 - in 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

¹⁰⁰ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 49

Class seems to be an important theme within mid-century literature in England and not solely limited to *Mist Over Pendle*. Published six years before Neill's first novel, Evelyn Waugh's popular *Brideshead Revisited* has been called an 'elegy for a dying class' for its focus on and celebration of English aristocracy.¹⁰¹ Waugh himself was very open about this celebration, regardless of the accusations of elitism which followed him. Novelists, he claimed, write of what they know, and of what excites them, and themes of aristocracy are what excited Waugh. Class consciousness, he claimed, was a sensitive topic by the time of writing *Brideshead Revisited*; it became a taboo subject which Waugh compared to 'mentioning a prostitute 60 years ago.'¹⁰² In a letter dated 1952, only one year after Neill's debut, Evelyn Waugh wrote of the loss of aristocratic heritage post-war as a tragic affair; 'I am afraid you are right when you say that there are no ladies and gentlemen now. It was a most important distinction basic to English health and happiness'.¹⁰³ Neill's depiction of class is certainly less of an ode to aristocracy,¹⁰⁴ and whilst Waugh admits to writing what he knows, it is unclear given the mystery surrounding his upbringing whether Neill could boast the same familiarity with aristocracy as his contemporary could. What we do know of Neill's personal background in fact supports his key focus within the novel, for the only thing we know for certain is that Neill was a scholar. Neill celebrates, above nobility, the education that results from such privilege in this period, favouring a sharp mind over a stately home.

Those characters who are depicted as clear opposites to Neill's hero and heroine, in wealth, in class, and in education, are the witches. As Harrison stated of the Lancashire witches; 'with one exception, all were of the labouring class.'¹⁰⁵ This is certainly explored by

¹⁰¹ Christopher Hitchens, 'It's all on account of the war', *The Guardian* (27th September 2008) <<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/sep/27/evelynwaugh.fiction>> [accessed: 07.07.2022]; 'Books that shaped the 1940s', Penguin, 04 June 2020 <<https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2020/06/books-that-shaped-the-1940s>> [accessed 15.06.2023]

¹⁰² Hitchens, 'It's all on account of the war', *The Guardian*

¹⁰³ Laura Coffey, 'Evelyn Waugh's Country House Trinity: Memory, History and Catholicism in *Brideshead Revisited*', *Literature & History, Volume 15, Issue 1* (May 2006), 59-73, p. 59

¹⁰⁴ His Margery, for example, is very openly humble about her family and beginnings, but admits to good fortune with her ties to cousin Roger Nowell.

¹⁰⁵ Harrison in Potts (1929), p. xlii

Neill. Aside from Alice Nutter, all of the alleged witches are impoverished, and the only impoverished characters are witches, or witch-adjacent in the case of Jennet Device. More striking than their monetary status, Neill's portrayal of these witches is often baser and more animalistic than human, and they are treated as such by the novel's other characters.

A more subtle example of this, to begin with, is his characterisation of Jennet Device who, in Neill's story, acted as witness against the witches of the Good Friday gathering out of hurt, rather than malice (as in Ainsworth's novel), or naivety (as in the retellings to follow). Her mother abandoned her, left her with no food or company, and so of course a child would turn to those who had given her comfort before, meaning the lovely and ever-present heroine Margery.¹⁰⁶ In Neill's novel, the character of Jennet is shown more kindness than in Ainsworth's tale, for she is inherently good and quite clever, and she is fairer in appearance than the rest of her family. In the words of Roger Nowell, 'she's shrewd and knowledgeable. She has two sharp eyes and a trick of hiding herself... We've fair warrant for a spy.'¹⁰⁷ Yet, she is not good enough to be respected by the likes of Nowell, perhaps as a result of her class. Nowell admits to wanting to use her as a spy and is willing to feed her and treat her kindly for it, but it must be noted that when he feeds Jennet, she must eat in the kitchen, and not at his table. Even the noble Nowell of Neill's text has his limits, it seems.

However, despite her lack of education, this character is treated much more humanely than her family. When first the reader hears of the Demdikes, it is in the death of a Pendle local following a dispute with Demdike and Alizon Device. Demdike, the 'old beldame... the old crone' and Alizon 'the young whelp' are written of cursing, spitting, and throwing fistfuls of cow-dung at Mitton before 'some power struck him down'.¹⁰⁸ These behaviours are very clearly the opposite of what is exhibited by Neill's main characters. They are immediately

¹⁰⁶ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, pp. 358-359

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 256-257

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 58-59

depicted as depraved characters who do not subscribe to the ladylike behaviour displayed elsewhere in the novel. Their foul language and behaviour, before the reader meets the witches themselves, make clear that they are negative characters. Such behaviour makes them monstrous. Yet it must be said that whilst Neill portrays these witches as less-than human, as animalistic, and therefore the enemy, they are not written to be hated or feared so much as pitied, as can be seen in the description of their home, 'Whatever these Demdikes might be, the Malkin Tower was testimony to their poverty and squalor.'¹⁰⁹ In fact, the characterisations of all of the witches aside from Alice Nutter are more complex. They are monstrous, yes, their behaviour is abhorrent and their intentions are 'evil', but they are also pitiful and ignorant, and as such are less of a threat.¹¹⁰

The most detailed scene of alleged bewitching within the novel is this first one, which led to the death of Henry Mitton, after Demdike asked for charity and it was refused by Mitton, who called her a 'ditch drab' in response.¹¹¹ His death following this lays out the typical charity-refused model of witchcraft accusations which was experienced often in early modern witch trials, and only goes to further emphasise that Neill's witches are impoverished.¹¹² The character details that she went begging because 'there's been no bite in the house since yestere'en, and the cold's colder when your belly clings.'¹¹³ This line is telling. The 'Demdike Brood', as they are named, are starving, and feel it more deeply because they are freezing in their tower of squalor. Demdike has a begging license, but clearly is faced with resentment by her neighbours when she makes use of it. Her reaction to this refusal of charity is damning in an era of witch-belief, but Neill's inclusion of this scene adds depth and pathos to the memory of those accused witches who fit into the charity-

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 66

¹¹⁰ As Gibson stated, most of them 'are guilty of little more than anti-social behaviour.' - Gibson, *Rediscovering*, p. 83

¹¹¹ Demdike asked for 'blue milk if nowt better' - Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 69

¹¹² Thomas, *Religion and Decline*; Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*)

¹¹³ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 69

refused model. It is also worth mentioning that she, and the rest of her brood, are set apart by the author not just in appearance and poverty, but also in dialect, as was the case in Ainsworth's novel. This dialogue of the witches is very clearly different from all other characters within the novel. The vernacular used for these witches is not exaggerated or difficult to understand, but it is another clear divide that sets the accused witches (all but Alice Nutter) apart from the rest of Pendle. Whilst a vernacular dialogue does not immediately equate to a lower class, in the case of *Mist Over Pendle*, this division suggests a lack of education and etiquette when all other characters converse so differently. Therefore, in the reader's first experience of the 'Demdike Brood', they have learned how to pick out a witch from the novel's many characters; Robert Neill's witches are poor, they are ignorant, and they are ugly to the level of monstrosity.¹¹⁴

Appearance, of course, is a clear dividing factor between the 'Demdike Brood' of witches and the lovely Margery, and it emphasises their monstrosity. When the reader first meets the matriarch at Malkin Tower, Demdike's character entered slowly, ominously, she 'came from the shadows'.¹¹⁵ The matriarch is a haunting figure in two forms; the first in her introduction to the reader as a 'living witch', she is frighteningly haunting. The second then, is in her pitiful countenance, aged and filthy, unsteady on her feet, and with her sight almost gone, she haunts the reader with pathos.¹¹⁶ Neill's Alizon Device too provides some insight into his motivations. Once again, she is depicted as monstrous in appearance and in mannerisms: 'black hair and the dark eyes, the droop at the corners of the mouth, and the same mute suggestion of malice and evil temper... the sly darting of her eyes hinted at a cunning...'¹¹⁷ On Ainsworth and Neill's treatment of Alizon Device, Pomfret said; 'This girl, whom Ainsworth made his gentle, saintlike heroine, has now become a termagant of the

¹¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 69-70

¹¹⁵ Ibid, p. 68

¹¹⁶ Ibid, p. 67

¹¹⁷ Ibid, p. 72

witch brood.’¹¹⁸ Alizon was Ainsworth’s heroine, an angelic and good character. Neill’s Alizon is a direct contrast; she is ugly and sly, more often described as ‘witch and a whore’, than a girl.¹¹⁹

Despite the clear theme of poverty surrounding these characters, their characterisations remain monstrous. Even though Neill makes clear that witchcraft is not real, that these characters believe it is enough to condemn them. When Neill discussed Ainsworth’s choice of Alizon Device as his heroine, he claimed that ‘there is hardly a doubt from the evidence and from her own confession, that she was just the slut I have made her.’¹²⁰ Summers described the Lancashire witches in a similar way to Neill’s portrayal, ‘foul and horrible... all the bestial malice, crass stupidity, empty revenge, and besotted superstition of the remote countryside’.¹²¹ It would seem that the rise in popular witchcraft study in 1920s concluded much the same opinion; that the early modern witches were guilty, ignorant, and irredeemable. Of course, as Machielsen’s study of the historiographical contributions of White and Burr makes clear, there were other examinations of early modern witchcraft history which viewed the accused witch more sympathetically, and early modern belief as superstition. It cannot be determined, however, whether Neill would have been aware of or had access to academic works like that of these two American scholars.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Richard Pomfret, ‘Poison Had the Last Word’, *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 16 May 1951 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655s

¹¹⁹ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 222

¹²⁰ Whilst we can only guess at what he meant by this, the word ‘slut’ here does not seem to be associated with her sexuality, for Neill’s Alizon Device is not defined in any way by sexual behaviours in this novel. Whilst ‘slut’ can mean ‘sexually promiscuous’, it can also mean a female who is ‘untidy, dirty, or slovenly’, which certainly corresponds with the author’s descriptions of this character. The *Oxford English Dictionary* contains examples of the word ‘slut’ being used in this way in both 1938 and 2000. - Robert Neill, quoted in ‘New Novelist’, *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4th May 1951 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655; ‘Slut, N., Sense I.1.’, *Oxford English Dictionary*, May 2024 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/3665174539>> [accessed 21.05.2024]; ‘Slut, N., Sense I.2.a’, *Oxford English Dictionary*, May 2024 <<https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1116694172>> [accessed 21.05.2024]

¹²¹ Montague Summers, quoted in – Potts (2011), p. 79

¹²² Moreover, Machielsen’s work tells us that these academics were not in fact widely recognised as witchcraft historians. They were referenced in historiographical works of the 1960s and 70s, but ‘students of the early modern witch-hunt have ignored both men.’ – Machielsen, *War on Witchcraft*, p. 7, 47

Clearly, the author holds no sympathy for the alleged Pendle witches; in the author's eyes, they were ignorant and evil, even if they could not perform any real magic, and this is why they are portrayed as irredeemable and monstrous throughout the novel. However, they are not the true villains of the novel, for they are entirely too uneducated to be the masterminds of Neill's tale. The Puritan character Richard Baldwin says, '[when] I'd seen poor Harry dead and quiet, I came out here in great unease of spirit. And there on this hillside, not twenty roods away, were two damned witches squatting like gorged crows—Demdike and her squinting bastard.'¹²³ The language here is important again when considering how Neill presents the clear class divide. These witches are debased linguistically. They squat like animals, and are viewed more as evil creatures, evil objects, rather than fully-fledged characters. These witches are accessories within Neill's story, allowing for comments about the importance of education and decorum. They are literary objects for use, not subjects in *Mist Over Pendle*.

The clearest evidence of Neill's view of these witches as debased creatures is in how they are treated by the authoritative figures within the novel, more specifically, how they are spoken to, and how they are punished. Nowell, for example, when addressing Elizabeth Device, a fully-grown woman with children of her own, speaks to her like a child; 'You're to learn your manners... If you give me cause again, you'll go outside and have the lesson applied to your back.'¹²⁴ This hint to whipping is followed through within the novel, too, and whilst it seems entirely shocking to a modern reader, the tone with which it is broached is somewhat blasé. For example, Nowell encourages the churchwarden Baldwin to whip Alizon for insolent behaviour, and Margery, rather than feel horror, remorse, or even pity, deems it 'proper'.¹²⁵ Such treatment, despite the tone surrounding it, wouldn't have been accepted by

¹²³ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 60

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 69

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 74

his contemporaries either. The public whipping of women hadn't been legal in England since 1817, and so perhaps Neill's inclusion of such corporeal punishment was simply an attempt by him to insert more of the seventeenth-century in his novel, for it was hardly a common occurrence in his time.¹²⁶

Moreover, there are other occurrences within *Mist Over Pendle* in which the reader is surely supposed to feel, if not pity, then certainly shock, despite Neill's seeming lack of sympathy for the alleged 1612 witches:

Alizon Device was ready to be swum. She lay naked in the mud, scratched, bruised and bleeding... Her left wrist was tied to her right ankle and her right wrist to her left ankle, and... showed the extremity of her terror.¹²⁷

This passage is graphic in its imagery; it is purposefully brutal, and contrasts the barbaric behaviour of the populace with the fear and shame experienced by the accused witch. Yet the character of Alizon, even after such abuse, is not given any redeeming moments or autonomy by the author. Such shocking and debasing treatments are less about remembering the 1612 witch-hunts than they are about regretting the ignorant behaviours that went along with them.

Neill's Arch-Witch

Ignorance, however, is not an issue when it comes to Neill's chosen villain. Alice Nutter is a class apart from his main characters but not in terms of wealth, mannerisms, or indeed education. She is outwardly handsome and put-together, a perfect mistress of the house, and handles herself publicly with grace. Yet it is her ambitions and her hatred of her own social standing which motivate her evil deeds. In this sense, she is a class of her own simply because this character makes clear the divide between her and Roger Nowell. On introducing

¹²⁶ Peter King, *Crime and Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 6

¹²⁷ Neill, p. 331

the character of Alice Nutter, Neill wrote, ‘that woman’s the Devil’s agent-general for these parts.’¹²⁸ Interestingly, he has rephrased Potts’ statement describing Demdike.¹²⁹ It is Alice Nutter, and not Demdike who becomes the origin, the matriarch of the Pendle witches in Neill’s novel. She is the main villain, whom reviewer Pomfret called the ‘arch-witch’.¹³⁰ On his establishment of Alice Nutter as villain, Neill said that his notions had some warrant in fact:

It seems fairly plain that her own family thought her guilty of at least something... the evidence given against her was too flimsy (even on the standards of those days) to have convicted a woman of her wealth and accomplishments unless there had been more against her than appeared. There is at least a hint in the evidence of a grandmother who was mixed up with the witches and tried to get Robert Nutter poisoned... so that Alice should inherit.¹³¹

As such, it would seem that Neill, convinced that the real Alice Nutter was guilty of something, if not witchcraft, made her his villain in a similar way that Ainsworth included the Nutter-Nowell land dispute; to explain away the existence of such an enigmatic figure in the list of witches sent to Lancaster in 1612. In order to commit her to the Assize, the character of Nowell had to accuse her of witchcraft, rather than murder, which would have been too difficult to attach to such a well-to-do woman. These accusations were the only ones in Neill’s tale that were coerced, rather than given freely; Nowell encouraged Elizabeth Device and James Device both to accuse Alice Nutter by playing on their spite.¹³² This of course was a recurring theme in both the Pendle trials, and in the novel; the accused Pendle witches turned on each other. When the character of Nowell asked Alizon Device about what had occurred with John Law, Alizon’s character openly confessed with no coercion. He then

¹²⁸ Neill, p. 53

¹²⁹ ‘Shee was a generall agent for the Deuill in all these partes’:- Potts (1613), p. 15

¹³⁰ Richard Pomfret, ‘Poison Had the Last Word’, *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 16 May 1951 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655s

¹³¹ Robert Neill, quoted in ‘New Novelist’, *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4th May 1951 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655s

¹³² Neill, pp. 380-383

asked her if she was aware of any other ‘evil doings’ in Pendle, to which ‘Alizon needed no second invitation, and there was a gleam of the old malice in her eyes as she plunged at it and accused...’¹³³

It is interesting that Neill includes these witch-on-witch accusations in his fictional version of the trials, because one thing made plain by Neill in *Mist Over Pendle* is that witchcraft is not a solo endeavour. This is an important theme throughout the novel, and one which links Neill’s writing directly back to the arguments posed by Murray. Character Nick Bannister says of the rumoured Pendle witches: ‘These women, Roger, are what I’ve called them – a sisterhood. If they have not the powers... at least they think they have.’¹³⁴ Neill weaves a complex web of women connected to each other, through generations and loyalties and mutual enemies, the accused witches of Neill’s story are all interconnected, and they are called a sisterhood or coven throughout the novel; ‘these women are evil and dangerous, a sisterhood of Hell.’¹³⁵ Alice Nutter is at the centre of this ‘sisterhood’ or ‘coven’, all-knowing in the way that news and gossip spreads amongst women; ‘I never know how Alice Nutter knows anything, but know she does.’¹³⁶

This is why, despite the ease with which these lower-class witches accuse each other, their malice does not automatically turn them against their leader Alice Nutter. This is not out of respect or love, but fear; ‘the first mention of Alice Nutter brought a startling change in Demdike; at once she retreated to the wall, her little eyes rolling and blinking, and her whole frame trembling.’¹³⁷ In Potts’ pamphlet, Demdike is the origin of ‘all villanie and witchcraft’, and arguably the most abhorrent of the witches. However, in Ainsworth’s text and again in Neill’s, they both chose Alice Nutter as someone to be feared, even by the other witches, as

¹³³ Ibid, p. 339

¹³⁴ Ibid, p. 96

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 239

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 291

¹³⁷ Ibid, p. 341

the leader and most powerful. The question is, do these authors depict her as a powerful witch because of her social status, or are they arguing that her social status can be explained away by her being the most powerful witch? Perhaps Alice Nutter is, to these male authors, worthy of being feared because she is also more worthy of being respected by the male figures of authority in Potts' text. Her social standing, her appearance, likely her education or mannerisms, undoubtedly set her apart from the other accused witches of 1612 Pendle, and so to an early modern reader, as well as to these authors, she may appear to be the most successful witch of them all.

In 1951, when *Mist Over Pendle* was published, the choice to make Alice Nutter the villain was a shocking and delightful one to Neill's readers and reviewers. Neill's novel, also released in America, was re-titled *The Elegant Witch* for sale in the states, which outlines immediately who Neill's coven-leader is, and also sets his novel apart given the elegance of his villain.¹³⁸ Clara Hieronymus calls the character of Alice Nutter 'an impeccable, elegant and thoroughly malevolent woman who had wanted social prestige at any cost'.¹³⁹ Moreover, many a contemporary critic, especially in the United States, seemed more shocked by the characterisation of Alice Nutter as the main villain because of her elegance and beauty, as can be witnessed in so many review-titles, for example, 'A Pretty Witch May Be Too Lovely To Burn'.¹⁴⁰

Despite her loveliness, she is Neill's undeniable villain. Upon first meeting of this character, the reader experiences a dark power that she has as it impacts the narrator; 'Without warning the dark eyes were on Margery, and for a moment her mind was a frightened chaos. Power and menace were shooting from those depths, and a wild urge was

¹³⁸ 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

¹³⁹ Clara Hieronymus, 'Fiery, Enchanting Tale of Adventurous Witch', *Nashville Tennessean*, 13 April 1952 - in 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

¹⁴⁰ 'A Pretty Witch May Be Too Lovely To Burn', *Charlotte Observer*, North Carolina, 30 March 1952 - in 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

on her to turn and run.’¹⁴¹ This ‘power’ of Alice Nutter’s is interesting in that it feels supernatural, despite the fact that there is no evidence of the supernatural in *Mist Over Pendle*, and all of the deaths are explained away as murder-by-poisoning. Yet the threatening figure of Alice Nutter in Neill’s tale seems to have a very similar ability as the Alice Nutter in Ainsworth’s: ‘The little girl was about to speak, but on a sudden a sharp convulsion agitated her frame; her utterance totally failed her’.¹⁴² In both texts, Alice Nutter is the most powerful, probably because she is the most learned. For Neill she is the most powerful because she is the only one smart enough and ambitious enough to become so, her character is ambitious to a fault. She brought about the murder of her own niece so that her son could become an heir to the Nutter line.¹⁴³ Such ambition from a woman in the early modern period would of course have been feared for its stepping outside of societal norms. When considering the time in which Neill was writing, his ambitious witch-figure is the clear villain too for her resemblance to the Disney witch-villain, namely the Evil Queen in *Snow White*.¹⁴⁴

The similarities are striking. Both Neill’s Alice Nutter and Disney’s Evil Queen are elegant, beautiful leaders who commit (or attempt to commit) the barbaric and anti-feminine act of infanticide for their own gain. They are also both the nemesis of a loveable, innocent, young heroine, and both have a propensity for poison. Muir suggests that narcissism is one of, if not the key quality at the root of many a Disney villain’s evil, and utilises the Evil Queen as a key example of her argument.¹⁴⁵ For Neill’s Alice Nutter, Pendle’s Evil Queen-equivalent, it is not necessarily narcissism of her physical appearance, but narcissism of social standing and power that drive her. That is to say, it is her desire to move up in wealth and class, and as such in power, that motivate her evil-doings. ‘At the end of *Snow White*, the

¹⁴¹ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 227

¹⁴² Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 141

¹⁴³ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle* p. 170

¹⁴⁴ Ben Sharpsteen, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1937)

¹⁴⁵ Robyn Muir, ‘Evil Queens and Wicked Women: Female Disney Villains and the Construction of Femininity’, in *Evil Women: Representations within Literature, Culture and Film*, Ed. by Robyn Muir et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2022), p. 138

Evil Queen's quest for beauty is punished with death', and Alice Nutter's quest for power ends the same way.¹⁴⁶ Her actions are unfeminine, at least with regards to the early modern period, but arguably in Neill's time too, because she is not happy with her social place, and is determined to move up in the world. Her fixation on the power and authority of Roger Nowell, for example, is made clear throughout, and she wants that power for her own son, and by extension for her. As Nowell ranted:

She'd make you a creature for her advancement, would she? She'd link her lad with you, and through you with me, and through me with half the quality of Lancashire?¹⁴⁷

These ambitions set her apart from her fellow witches, yes, but also from her fellow women within the novel. Whilst there are several what could be called decent male characters in *Mist Over Pendle*, there are only three female characters who be called the same, and all three adhere to societal standards at all times. One, of course, was the novel's heroine, who despite her sharp wit is deferent to her uncle and caregiver always. Then there is Margaret Nutter, the kindly, widowed woman who, despite having no husband, does not live alone without a male influence, and instead resides with and cares for her brother. Finally, there is Grace Baldwin, the gentle daughter of Puritan Richard Baldwin, who is mild mannered and acts as a friend and companion for the novel's heroine. Alice Nutter, in contrast, steps outside of her gender by refusing to conform to the role assigned to her. Putnam argues that many of the Disney villains display 'transgendered attributes – depicted as women with either strong masculine qualities, or strangely de-feminized...'¹⁴⁸ This Disney villain-like othering of Alice Nutter can be seen not just in her ambition, but also in her heinous crimes, which go against what

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 143

¹⁴⁷ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 117

¹⁴⁸ Amanda Putnam, 'Mean Ladies: Transgendered Villains in Disney Films', in *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*, Ed. by Johnson Cheu (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2013), p. 147

should be her instincts as a mother, indeed as a women, to care and nurture, in Neill's retelling.¹⁴⁹

In *Mist Over Pendle*, Neill of course introduces the most frightening theme to those regarding witchcraft, be they clerk, author, or reader - that of infanticide. Upon finding a dead and naked child abandoned in the night, alongside a seminary priest (one Christopher Southworth), the Catholic priest does not even register as in any way villainous. The mother of the dead child is Eliza Howgate, 'a reputed witch.'¹⁵⁰ Yet when investigating the death of said child, Nowell and Margery do not come across Eliza Howgate but Alice Nutter, who seems to be at the centre of every abhorrent occurrence in the novel. When infanticide is mentioned in *Mist Over Pendle*, it is always with regards to either 'baby fat', if it is an infant, or poison for an older child. On the uses of baby fat, Neill wrote; 'A baby's fat may make an ointment... and such an ointment may be used to kill. They know of herbs to season it...'¹⁵¹ This use of baby fat to make an ointment is another common trope in early modern witch belief that indicate Neill's research on the topic. As Frances Bacon said in 1627 'The ointment that witches use is reported to be made of the fat of children digged out of their graves'.¹⁵² This ointment, which Ostling calls a 'witch salve' is threatening and anti-feminine for its clear ties to infanticide, the most anti-maternal and anti-feminine of crimes. However, it is also to be feared because the witch who creates such a salve requires a level of herbal knowledge that can only be presented by a woman.

¹⁴⁹ Interestingly, Schwabe finds that in the original, Grimms' version of 'Snow White' from somewhere between 1812 and 1815, the wicked queen is not the heroine's step-mother, but her biological mother. Whilst newer versions of the story revised this, and perhaps Disney did so on purpose so as not to frighten their young audience with the prospect of an evil mother, the existence of this common trope for the witch-figure, as the 'monstrous mother', envious of the youthful, maternal bodies of younger women, who could harm her own children out of spite, is an interesting one. – Claudia Schwabe, *Craving Supernatural Creatures: German Fairy-Tale Figures in American Pop Culture* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019), pp. 91-97

¹⁵⁰ 'And the man's Kit Howgate, a bastard of our Demdike'. - Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 169

¹⁵¹ Ibid, p. 156

¹⁵² Michael Ostling, 'Babyfat and Belladonna: Witches' Ointment and the Contestation of Reality', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (2016), 30-72, p. 32

Alice Nutter is the villain not merely for her links to the death of the aforementioned child, possibly for its ‘fat’, but also for her many murders committed by Belladonna poisoning. The use of both ‘the fat of infants’ and Belladonna are important within Neill’s writing, though their uses differ.¹⁵³ Belladonna, the weapon of Neill’s witches, was first mentioned, at least as it is named now, in a 1504 Parisien book, *Grand Herbiere* and although it was ‘native to the Continent of Europe, Belladonna has been long used in England’.¹⁵⁴ It has in fact been a herb associated with women and witchcraft throughout history, with links to the Greek sorceress Circe, and to Dionysian cults in which it was used to induce trance-like states.¹⁵⁵ Interestingly, its psychotropic properties, Bever argued, ties it to notions of witchcraft and flight; for whilst a witch salve obviously didn’t make flight possible, it may have induced trances that made dreams of flight seem real.¹⁵⁶ In *Mist Over Pendle*, however, there are no trances or flights of witches, and when interviewed about his inclusion of belladonna, Neill simply said, ‘a poison... known to have been used by witches elsewhere.’¹⁵⁷ Piomelli and Pollio, whilst their findings do indicate some slight similarities between ‘odd herbal folk recipes’ and an alleged witch’s ointment as discussed by Ostling, conclude that the herbal knowledge of the early modern witch was in fact an ideal distorted by inquisitors, and could not be proven to have existed.¹⁵⁸

However, for Neill’s novel, poison and herbal knowledge are crucial to the plot. It is not necessarily the plant, but the herbal knowledge and poison that it stands for, which are important to the characterisation of Alice Nutter. Poisoning is a feminine crime in both Neill’s

¹⁵³ Whereas both are key ingredients in the ‘witch salve’ that Ostling examined for its ties to witch-flight in witchcraft record. – Ibid

¹⁵⁴ ‘A Treatise on Belladonna’, *Drug Treatise, Number X* (Cincinnati: Lloyd Brothers, 1905), p. 2

¹⁵⁵ M. R. Lee, ‘Solanaceae IV: Atropa belladonna, Deadly Nightshade’, *The journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 37 (2007) 77-84, pp. 77-78

¹⁵⁶ Edward Bever, *The Realities of Witchcraft and Popular Magic in Early Modern Europe: Culture, Cognition, and Everyday Life* (New York: Palgrave, 2008), p. 130

¹⁵⁷ Robert Neill, quoted in ‘New Novelist’, *Evening Chronicle*, Manchester, 4th May 1951 - in ‘Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings’, ‘Moon In Scorpio – Cuttings’, Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

¹⁵⁸ Daniele Piomelli and Antonino Pollio, ‘In upupa o strige: A Study in Renaissance Psychotropic Plant Ointments’, *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences*, 16 (2), (1994) 241 – 273, pp. 272-273

novel, and in popular thought, due to its links to the domestic and culinary. Sadowski said, ‘The venefica, a female poisoner and potion-maker... [represents] the dark and devious underside of the legitimate feminine roles of the nurturer and healer.’¹⁵⁹ This is especially true of Neill’s Alice Nutter, who poisons her ill brother-in-law with a syllabub meant to aid in his healing.¹⁶⁰ Moreover, once again, Alice Nutter bears a striking resemblance to the Evil Queen in *Snow White*; she poisons her victims with an apple, and Alice Nutter poisons hers with her excellent apple tarts.¹⁶¹ As Scrine argued, female crimes, such as poison, upon examination reveal ‘numerous anxieties that are deeply linked to gendered expectations about women’s familial role, the marriage contract, and patriarchal authority.’¹⁶² This is precisely the type of crime being committed by Neill’s Alice Nutter. She utilises her gendered role in order to subvert it; outwardly portraying an image of domestic perfection, whilst in the background using her assigned position as mother and caregiver in order to murder and further her own agenda. Witchcraft in *Mist Over Pendle* is a feminine art, and Alice Nutter, being at surface level the most acceptable of women, is the most adept at it. Her fellow witches are more inclined to be hated and condemned publicly for their failure to adhere to the societal norms that Nutter so cleverly manipulates.

Neill’s Lancashire witches stand apart from how they were remembered in Potts’ 1613 pamphlet, and in Ainsworth’s 1854 novel. Alice Nutter is his ultimate villain, the wicked Disney-esque witch around whom all of the misfortunes in Pendle seem to revolve, and the other witches are barely worthy of fear, for Neill writes them as base creatures of ignorance. They are most certainly not as fearsome as the monsters depicted by Potts, or Ainsworth’s evil, uncanny witches. Witchcraft in Neill’s novel reflects twentieth-century thinking, they

¹⁵⁹ Piotr Sadowski, ‘Foul, Strange and Unnatural’, *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal*, Vol. 53, No. 3 (University of Manitoba, 2020), 139-154, p. 143

¹⁶⁰ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 317

¹⁶¹ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 354

¹⁶² Clair Scrine, ‘More Deadly than the Male’ The Sexual Politics of Female Poisoning: Trials of the Thallium Women’, *Liminia*, Vol. 8 (University of Western Australia, 2002), 127-143, p. 127

were a sisterhood of dangerous women who, whilst they couldn't actually perform any magic, were members of a secretive, cult-like coven of women who did do harm, and deserved punishment for their crimes. Neill's evilly ambitious villain and themes of the dark subversion of domesticity, combined with the depraved and irredeemable monstrosity of the 'Demdike Brood', make clear that this novel is not a sympathetic treatment of the Pendle witches of 1612. The only characters who hold any true depth or worth in *Mist Over Pendle* are his hero, Roger Nowell, and his invented heroine, Margery Whitaker. These characters are the clearest display of Neill's own views towards the justification of the sentencing of the Pendle witches. More importantly still, Nowell and Whitaker emphasise Neill's very clear celebration of education in a somewhat elitist way that paints those uneducated and fervently religious members of seventeenth-century society as ignorant and superstitious. Neill's aims in writing this novel seem to have been to portray a more accurate Pendle, not filled with curses and magic as in *The Lancashire Witches*, but a society of real people and their many flaws.

After *Mist Over Pendle*

Neill's novel has been mentioned in the same breath as Ainsworth's text since its publication in 1951.¹⁶³ He went on to produce a long list of other novels which were highly anticipated by critics in 1951 and 1952, but there seems to be no lasting evidence to reveal one way or another how successful his career was after *Mist Over Pendle*.¹⁶⁴ His novel on the Pendle witch-story, however, remains in memory, especially when thinking of the 1612 Lancashire witch trials. Neill wrote this text mid-way through the twentieth-century and at the beginning

¹⁶³ James Sharpe, 'The Lancashire Witches in Historical Context', p. 1; Williamson, 'Field Meeting upon Pendle Hill', p. 281

¹⁶⁴ 'Mist Over Pendle - Cuttings', 'Moon In Scorpio - Cuttings', Robert Neill Manuscripts, Lancashire Archives, Ref: DDX.177/ACC7655

of a new surge in witchcraft-related thinking, and this thinking was transformed and made popularised by the lasting, albeit factually wrong, ideal of the ‘witch-cult.’ In 1954, the world witnessed the birth of Wicca when Gerald Gardner ran on Murray’s theories and wrote of the historical existence of a formal religious structure that was ‘the very same cult that had been sought out by the witch-finders of the seventeenth century and later explored through trial documents by Margaret Murray in the 1920s.’¹⁶⁵ Gardner’s claims to the discovery of a ‘genuine... ancient religion’ in *Witchcraft Today* was rejected by historians and dismissed in reviews by the Folklore Society, and yet his witch religion became successfully established as ‘a lasting component of modern spirituality.’¹⁶⁶ Gardnerian theory was developed further over the following decades, and Wicca or neo-Paganism became a public religion practiced by ‘hundreds of thousands all over the world.’¹⁶⁷

With the rise in popular thought about witchcraft, thanks in large part to the rise of these neo-Pagan ideals, the appeal of the topic of witchcraft and representations of the witch-figure endured in literature and film, and Neill wrote *Mist Over Pendle* within this cultural moment. For the remainder of the twentieth-century interest in witchcraft, the witch-figure, and more generally the occult in literature and film continued. Two years after *Mist Over Pendle*, Arthur Miller published his Salem-inspired play *The Crucible* and Wheatley published another satanic tale with *To the Devil – A Daughter*.¹⁶⁸ John Updike’s popular *The Witches of Eastwick* came in 1984, inspiring a film of the same name three years later.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁵ Walter Bennett, *The Pendle Witches* (Burnley: The County Borough of Burnley, Libraries and Art Councils, 1957); Helen Cornish, ‘Spelling Out History: Transforming Witchcraft Past and Present’, *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* (London: Equinox Publishing Ltd., 2009), 14-28, p. 17

¹⁶⁶ Ronald Hutton has produced the seminal work on Gardnerian theory, the birth of Wicca, and its impact and continuation through the twentieth-century. - Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 206-207, 241; Gerald B. Gardner, *Witchcraft Today* (London: Rider & Co., 1954)

¹⁶⁷ Ethan Doyle White, *Wicca: History, Belief & Community in Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), p. 2; Brydie Kosmina, *Feminist Afterlives of the Witch: Popular Culture, Memory, Activism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 10-11

¹⁶⁸ Wheatley continued to produce novels with themes of Satan, the occult, and witchcraft, for example *The Satanist* (1960), *The White Witch of the South Seas* (1968), and *The Irish Witch* (1973) - Doherty, p. 4; Arthur Miller, *The Crucible*, Ed. Abbotson, Susan C., (London: Bloomsbury, 2010)

¹⁶⁹ John Updike, *The Witches of Eastwick* (London: Penguin, 2007); George Miller, *The Witches of Eastwick* (Warner Bros., 1987)

Towards the end of the twentieth-century, Lancashire-born poet Geraldine Monk and Yorkshire-born poet Blake Morrison published poetry collections about Pendle and the Pendle witches, the former having been described as a radical, feminist approach to the witch trials.¹⁷⁰ Film saw the rise of the transgressive witch-figure living outside of patriarchal norms with *The Craft* (1996) and *Practical Magic* (1998).¹⁷¹ Even Disney produced their (historically inaccurate) take on the early modern witches of Salem, Massachusetts in the 1993 film *Hocus Pocus*.¹⁷²

Furthermore, witchcraft scholarship began to rethink the early modern trials so as to consider the lived experiences of the lower classes and the motivations behind witchcraft accusations.¹⁷³ On Pendle-specific scholarship, following the publication of Neill's *Mist Over Pendle*, especially in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, there was a revival of interest in the Lancashire trials from a historiographical and topographical perspective, though it wasn't necessarily a nationwide revival, for the studies in question all came from publication houses across Lancashire. One such example would be W. R. Mitchell's topographical *Lancashire Witch Country*, which was published in 1966 as a travel guide of sorts.¹⁷⁴ The key focus of this text was the shadow that witchcraft casts over the area. On page 6, a map features Pendle Hill at its centre, including a cartoon sketch of a stereotypical witch, complete with pointed hat, broomstick, and black cat.¹⁷⁵ Kathleen Eyre's text *Witchcraft in Lancashire* was published in

¹⁷⁰ David Kennedy and Christine Kennedy, *Women's Experimental Poetry in Britain 1970–2010* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 69; Geraldine Monk, *Interregnum* (London: Creation Books, 1994); Blake Morrison, *Pendle Witches* (London: Enitharmon Editions Limited, 1996)

¹⁷¹ Kosmina also discusses the presence of witchcraft and Wicca in *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, including references to the early modern trials in an episode where three female characters (Buffy, Willow, and Amy) are almost burnt at the stake - Brydie Kosmina, *Feminist Afterlives of the Witch: Popular Culture, Memory, Activism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), pp. 118-119, 126-127, 164, 225; Joss Whedon, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Mutant Enemy, 1997-2003); Andrew Fleming, *The Craft* (Columbia Pictures, 1996); Griffin Dunne, *Practical Magic* (Warner Bros., 1998)

¹⁷² Kenny Ortega, *Hocus Pocus* (Walt Disney Pictures, 1993)

¹⁷³ Thanks especially to Keith Thomas in 1971, whose work was then built upon by Alan Macfarlane in 1977. - Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*; Malcolm Gaskill, 'The Pursuit of Reality: Recent Research into the History of Witchcraft', *The Historical Journal*, 51.4 (2008), 1069-1088.

¹⁷⁴ Mitchell also published a historical study on the trials in 1988, referencing the unreliable work of Walter Bennett (1976), which contained no sources or citations, and the more detailed study by Peel and Southern in 1985 - Mitchell, *Lancashire Witch Country*; W. R. Mitchell, *The Lancashire Witches* (Clapham: Dalesman Publishing Company Ltd., 1988); Bennet, *The Pendle Witches*; Peel and Southern, *The Trials of the Lancashire Witches*

¹⁷⁵ Mitchell, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 6

1974, and is interestingly full of unflattering illustrations of the Pendle witches as foul, disfigured, and impoverished (which would echo Neill's witches), despite the fact that Eyre's argument subscribes to Murray's witch-cult hypothesis in which early modern witchcraft was a pagan revival of a belief in and worship of the 'Mother Goddess'.¹⁷⁶ Peel and Southern then produced the most thorough study of this period in 1985 with *The Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, which involved archival work and aimed to 'correct some of the current misconceptions' about the Lancashire trials.¹⁷⁷ In addition to these longer texts, the period also saw several Lancashire-based articles on the topic of the Pendle witches.¹⁷⁸ This revival was not limited solely to written studies of the trials, for there was even an exhibition entitled 'The Pendle Witches: A Trial in 17th Century Lancashire' at Towneley Hall, Burnley, in which the curator John D Blundell wrote: 'I have drawn quite freely on this work', by which he means Potts' pamphlet, 'and on a very useful recent handbook *The Trial of the Lancashire Witches*, by Peel and Southern'.¹⁷⁹ Given the dates of these publications, several of these texts and articles may have been inspired, at least in part, by Neill's text, with Mitchell referencing the novel, and Peel stating that it (in comparison to Ainsworth's work), gives 'a much more realistic picture of the events of the times, and for most of us today it is an infinitely more readable book.'¹⁸⁰ As such, even though Neill himself remains somewhat shrouded by mystery as an author, his retelling of the Lancashire trials, which received such high praise in the newspapers, seemed to instigate a reinvigoration of the local interest in the 1612 Lancashire witch trials. According to Catlow, as of 1976, twenty-five years after its

¹⁷⁶ Kathleen Eyre, illustrated by Geraldine Rachel Hardy, *Witchcraft in Lancashire* (Clapham: Dalesman Publishing Company Ltd., 1974), pp. 7-8, 19, 21, 42; See also Arthur Douglas's 1978 text, which contains similarly unflattering illustrations: - Arthur Douglas, with photographs by Stuart Mason, *The Fate of the Lancashire Witches* (Chorley: Countryside Publications Ltd., 1978)

¹⁷⁷ Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 10

¹⁷⁸ Rita Spurr, 'The trials of the Lancashire witches', *The Lancashire Life* (July 1966), pp. 40-43; Jane Sterling, 'In search of the Lancashire Witches', *Home Owner* (January 1969), pp. 5-7

¹⁷⁹ 'The Pendle Witches: A Trial in 17th Century Lancashire', *Programme from an Exhibition at Towneley Hall Art Gallery and Museum, Burnley*, arranged by John D. Blundell, Curator (19th May-30th September, 1972) (County Borough of Burnley, Art Gallery and Museum Sub-Committee, 1972), p. 3

¹⁸⁰ Peel and Southern, *Trials of the Lancashire Witches*, p. 15

publication, *Mist Over Pendle* had sold over 160,000 paperback and 30,000 hardback copies, with a spokesperson for Neill's publishers saying, 'It's the sort of book that could go on selling forever', which Catlow believes is a tribute to Neill's writing, but also to the 'enduring appeal' of the story of the Lancashire witches.¹⁸¹

¹⁸¹ Catlow, *The Pendle Witches*, p. 42

Chapter 6

‘Writing women back into history’¹: 21st Century Narratives

The twenty-first century has provided the Pendle-witch-inspired fiction with more literary retellings than the previous three centuries combined. For the purposes of this thesis, the focus is on the pattern of literature over four centuries, and so the twenty-first century fiction under examination within this chapter ends in 2012. There are three texts under examination here, the first text being the 2010 novel *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, by Mary Sharratt, and the others two novellas commissioned four hundred years after the Pendle witch trials in order to commemorate their 2012 quadricentenary in Lancashire; *The Daylight Gate* by Jeanette Winterson, and Livi Michael’s *Malkin Child*.² These retellings are stylistically varied, each providing different focuses and perspectives, and yet they share much in common. These are the first Pendle-focused fictions written by women, and all three books offer retellings of the 1612 Lancashire trials from the victim’s perspective – one of the accused Pendle witches, or the daughter of one - with a distinctly feminist voice echoing across each text.

Understanding this feminist voice is important to any analysis of these texts, for they work to create new narratives for their subjects, recreating the voiceless victims of Potts’ pamphlet as beings of agency, actors within their own history. These authors have attempted to reclaim history for the women accused of witchcraft in 1612, and have created three works of feminist literature in order to remember these trials, or more specifically, to remember the victims of these trials, the Pendle witch-figure. When thinking more specifically about

¹ Mary Sharratt in Darren J. N. Middleton, ‘A Novel Approach to Hildegard von Bingen: Talking with Mary Sharratt about Faith and Fiction’, *Encounter*, 77, 2 (2019), 19-47, p. 20

² There was one other 2012 novel of note, Christine Middleton’s *The Witch & her Soul*. The decision to leave this out of the analysis within this thesis was made because the main character explored within the text is a member of the accused Samlesbury witches (Jane Southworth), and not the Pendle witches, and so any analysis would be less consistent and would take away from the key figures which have been prominent since Potts’ 1613 treatment of them. – Christine Middleton, *The Witch & her Soul* (Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2012)

feminist theories with regards to history and historical fiction, feminist thinkers have attempted to expose gendered injustice and the violent oppression of women by the patriarchy by adopting the female witch-figure as a symbol of both the wrongful persecution of women at the hands of the male oppressor (which they have deemed a female holocaust, ‘femicide’, or ‘gynocide’), and the powerful embodiment of female resistance against, and challenge to, an oppressive society.³

The introduction of the witch-figure as such a symbol is often credited to suffragette Matilda Joselyn Gage who in 1878, made her first public speech stating ‘the Christian Church is based upon the fact of woman servitude’,⁴ her argument was derived from the Church’s attitudes towards women, and Eve. Then in 1893, in *Women, Church and State*, Gage posed that the early modern trials were a means of consolidating Christian, patriarchal power and that the patriarchal state and church were to blame for the prosecution of around 9 million gifted, and therefore dangerous (to the patriarchy), women.⁵ Gage used the 1486 *Malleus Maleficarum* in her argument, quoting Heinrich (Kramer) Institoris’ text, which blamed the propensity for women to be involved in witchcraft on ‘fleshly lust... which in [women] is never satisfied.’⁶ Of course, modern academics show that her claims were inaccurate regarding those accused, entirely exaggerated regarding the numbers prosecuted, and she often denied the presence of male witches entirely, in her selectively feminist approach to the history of witches.⁷ However, the symbolism has been reworked and strengthened by theorists for over a century.⁸

³ ‘Feminist activist-informed scholars have introduced the concept of ‘femicide’ – the murder of women’ – B. Ackerly and J. True, ‘With or Without Feminism? Researching Gender and Politics in the 21st Century,’ *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 1:1-2 (2018), 259-278, p. 264

⁴ Quoted in - Gibson, *Witchcraft Myths*, p. 114

⁵ Gage, *Woman, Church & State*(1893)

⁶ Gage, *Woman, Church & State*, p. 450; Institoris, *The Malleus Maleficarum*,

)

⁷ Rowlands, ‘Witchcraft and Gender’, p. 450

⁸ Stephanie Nicole Scheurich, *Hex the Kyriarchy: The Resignification of the Witch in Feminist Discourse from the Suffrage Era to the Present Day* (Ohio: Bowling Green State University, 2022), p. 4

Second-wave feminism saw radical thinkers like Andrea Dworkin and Mary Daly take the ideas presented by Gage and run with them. They furthered the myth of the ‘burning times’, of nine million women being hunted and executed by an androcratic society of woman-hating men, which Dworkin called ‘Gynocide’.⁹ In 1978, Mary Daly’s *Gyn/Ecology* built upon these arguments. She stated that it was ‘well-known that witches were accused of sexual impurity’, joining Gage and Dworkin in making use of the *Malleus* without assessing the frequency (or lack thereof) of such accusations in records of the early modern trials.¹⁰ Daly believed:

the intent was to break down and destroy strong women... The intent was to purify society of the existence and of the potential existence of such women.¹¹

The belief was that Church and state frequently asserted the connections between woman and evil, the susceptibility of the weaker sex to satanic ruin. This belief ‘historically facilitated the oppression of women’.¹² Womankind were all Eve, with the potential to ruin man. Witches, in the early modern period, were Eve realised; feared women with dark power that directly threatened patriarchal power relations. Dworkin argued that witchcraft was a woman’s crime because it was a means of destroying women, who were a threat to society because they were a threat to masculinity, and so men generated a myth of ‘feminine evil’, which prevailed and led to the deaths of nine million women.¹³

These theories are of course filled with historical inaccuracies, though Rowlands has suggested that radical feminist writings have influenced modern day ‘witches’, who adopt

⁹ Dworkin, *Woman-Hating*, pp. 118, 134-135

¹⁰ Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (Boston: Beacon, 1978), p. 180

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 183

¹² Jeffrey A. Ewing, ‘Women as “the Devil’s Gateway”: A Feminist Critique of Christian Demonology’ in *Philosophical Approaches to Demonology*, Eds., Benjamin W. McCraw and Robert Arp (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 75

¹³ She said that ‘men have deep-rooted castration fears which are expressed as a horror of the womb’. - Dworkin, *Woman-Hating*, pp. 134, 149

this assumed patriarchal persecution of female witches as their history.¹⁴ However, they do indicate the rise in interest in witchcraft and the early modern trials from the 1970s onward.¹⁵ In the 1990s, scholarship saw a revitalisation of the topic when female academics began publishing and providing new perspectives on early modern witchcraft and gender with historiographical support that took away from the radical views associated with the ‘Burning Times’ myth.¹⁶ Moreover, in general, from around the 1990s, feminist scholarship witnessed a reclamation and re-appropriation of previously feared stereotypes, fashions, and more, including the witch-figure, that thinkers of the first and especially the second wave had deemed too close to patriarchal norms and standards. As Rampton detailed, third-wavers re-adopted hyper-feminine tropes, low-cut tops, and words like ‘slut’ and ‘bitch’ as a means of empowerment. This reclamation of feminine tropes and women’s histories, and of the witch-figure, has taken feminist scholarship public, and in a way which aims for inclusivity and a more widespread exposure of gendered issues and theories, so that already by 2012, it was more commonplace and certainly less shocking to see a public discourse on topics such as societal abuse, rape, homophobia and transphobia, unfair pay, and more.¹⁷

As Judith Butler said, ‘within a language pervasively masculinist... women constitute the *unrepresentable*... women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity’.¹⁸ The reimagined witch in literature is a figure which has the potential to give agency to the collective female voice. The persecuted witch becomes a feminist before her

¹⁴ Rowlands, ‘Witchcraft and Gender’, p. 451

¹⁵ As we have already discussed, academic interests, too, were on the rise with scholars like Middlefort, Thomas, Macfarlane, and the like writing on the topic. H.C. Middlefort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany, 1562-1684: The Social and Intellectual Foundations* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972); Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*; Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*

¹⁶ To name but a few:- Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*; Anne L. Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts* (San Francisco: Pandora, 1994); Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft*; Alison Rowlands, ‘Telling Witchcraft Stories: New Perspectives on Witchcraft and Witches in the Early Modern Period’, *Gender & History*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (1998), 294-302; Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality, and Religion in Early Modern Europe* (New York: Routledge, 1995)

¹⁷ For example, the ‘Me Too Movement’ began in 2006 by Tarana Burke, though the hashtag didn’t gain traction until 2017 – Michelle Rodino-Colocino, ‘Me Too, #MeToo: Countering cruelty with empathy’, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 15:1 (2018), 96-100; Martha Rampton, ‘Four Waves of Feminism’, *Pacific Magazine* (Fall 2008) <<https://www.pacificu.edu/magazine/four-waves-feminism>> [accessed 03.02.2019]

¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014), p. 14

time, a woman victimised for her own power, a representation of queer experiences, and a historical narrative which provides proof of gendered injustice and patriarchal oppression.¹⁹ In reclaiming the witch-figure and in christening the early modern witch trials as patriarchal abuse, the historical woman-witch is provided with a new identity and sense of agency she had never before been allowed, and in a revised version of history where modern-day women and practicing ‘witches’ can claim this historical witch as their heritage; ‘We are the granddaughters of the witches you weren’t able to burn’.²⁰ This new identity for the early modern witch-figure aims to expose the mistreatment of these early modern women who were deemed dangerous for their failure (or in feminist theory, refusal) to adhere to patriarchal norms. If the early modern women were purchasable and useable property, objects of an androcentric society rather than subjects of their own story, then the early modern witch could be seen as the rebellion against such constraints. Those alleged witches were persecuted and prosecuted because of their refusal to adhere to societal norms. They could not be placed neatly into the prescribed categories deemed acceptable - mother, daughter, wife – and so they were deemed evil, fearsome, inhuman, and Other. This, of course, is a problematic view in that feminist writers can ignore the existence of male witches in early modern trials, thus subjecting the male historical victim to the same treatment as was received by female figures for centuries.²¹ This assessment is not all-encompassing; as Golden states, some of the best scholarship on early modern witchcraft comes from feminist historians.²² A feminist history can exist which treats both genders to an equal examination

¹⁹ Kosmina, *Feminist Afterlives of the Witch*, p. 5

²⁰ Scheurich, ‘Hex the Kyriarchy’, p. 1; Rowlands, ‘Witchcraft and Gender’, pp. 449-450

²¹ Moreover, as Kosmina asserts, there are still problems within the feminist reclamation of the word ‘witch’, for media and popular culture still experiences the word be hurled as an insult at powerful women in office, or be distorted to favour masculine figures who, facing a public backlash over their behaviour (even if that behaviour is sexual violence), call the campaign against them a witch-hunt. – Kosmina, *Feminist Afterlives of the Witch*, pp. 5-8; For reference to such campaigns and accusations, see also:- Gibson, *Thirteen Trials*, pp. 242-261

²² Richard M. Golden, Ed., *Encyclopedia of Witchcraft: The Western Tradition* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2006), p. 359

informed by gendered knowledge, rather than subjecting one gender to exclusion from historical memory.²³

Feminist historians and writers have focused on the idea of narrative when considering the identity and agency of historical victims of oppression and injustice. When considering the three Pendle-inspired texts by Sharratt, Winterson, and Michael, narrative is the key, overarching conceit which ties all three together; the discovery of a historical narrative, or the creation of a new one, for the purposes of giving voice and agency to the female victims of the 1612 Lancashire witch trials. As Ehret said, ‘human self-understanding and therefore sense of identity is narrative dependent’.²⁴ The narrative of the victim, the female historical figure abused and persecuted by a masculine figure of authority or a patriarchal institution, is clearly an important one for these twenty-first-century authors. Mary Sharratt made this plain in an interview she gave in 2021, stating, ‘that’s one of my missions, writing women back into history is to give women their voice back if it was taken from them.’²⁵ It is this which sets these modern novels apart from the works of Ainsworth and Neill. It was not until Mary Sharratt’s 2010 publication of *Daughters of the Witching Hill* that the female witches of the 1612 trials had been re-written as more than feared witches, more than villains.²⁶ Sharratt’s text, and the commissioned 2012 novellas by Winterson and Michael, make obvious attempts to develop new narratives for the persecuted women of the period, due to what Poole called a desire ‘give victims their own voices back’.²⁷

Early modern society can be viewed as not simply a patriarchy, but a kyriarchy, which was a term coined by feminist theologian Fiorenza in the early 1990s, and defined as ‘a social

²³ As discussed by Apps and Gow in their study of male witches in the period. - Apps and Gow, *Male Witches*, p. 5

²⁴ Verna Marina Ehret, ‘Transcontextual Narratives of Inclusion: Mediating Feminist and Anti-Feminist Rhetoric’, *Religions*, 9:5 (2018), 1-15, p. 4

²⁵ Susanne Dunlap, ‘Interview with Mary Sharratt, author of REVELATIONS’, *It’s Just Historical*, Season 2, Episode 6 (18 April 2021) <<https://www.itsjusthistorical.com/episodes/interview-with-mary-sharratt-author-of-revelations>> [accessed 21.04.23]

²⁶ Of course, in Ainsworth’s novel, he does write Alizon Device as his heroine, but she has been entirely re-invented, right down to her lineage, and so this novel does not offer the same sympathies. - Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*

²⁷ Poole in Potts (2011), p. 82

system built around domination, oppression, and submission'.²⁸ Kyriarchy is a term used to go beyond defining patriarchal social-structures and encompasses the oppressive nature of patriarchal thinking and society towards not just gender, but also notions of race, sexuality, class, age, religion, and beyond; in other words, the hierarchical and institutionalised domination of a person or group. It is, as eloquently put by Saptiadi et. al. 'a more comprehensive view of how oppression functions'.²⁹ I argue that this view of historical oppression can be read within the pages of the Pendle-inspired fiction of 2010 and 2012. The new narratives established by these authors are victim-centric and all three texts utilise different methods to expose the same oppressive social system, which could be better defined as a kyriarchy over their characters, because this oppression is not just for their gender, but for their class, their age, their appearance, their sexuality, and their positions in society. These categorised targets-of-oppression can be identified through an analysis of each text, of course, but also an exploration of the authors themselves; their lives, their views, and their motivations for writing. It is also possible to gain better insight into the twenty-first century authors, especially through interviews in which they have openly discussed their writings, in comparison with William Harrison Ainsworth and especially the elusive Robert Neill.

Mary Sharratt

Beginning with *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, Mary Sharratt was born in 1964 in America (Minneapolis, to be specific), but has spent a great deal of her life elsewhere. She studied German and in the 1980s lived and worked in Austria with the American-Austrian Fulbright

²⁸ Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss, and Alena Amato Ruggerio, *Feminism in Practice: Communication Strategies for Making Change* (Long Grove: Waveland Press Inc., 2022), p. 39; Kwok Pui-Ian, 'Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza and Postcolonial Studies,' *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 25, no. 1 (2009), 191–97

²⁹ N. A. P. Saptiadi, R. K. Trisnawati, M. F. Agustina, 'Post-structural Feminism to Fight Kyriarchy: A Case of Black Widow', *Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature*, 17: 1 (October 2022), 140-149, p. 141; Natalie Osborne, 'Intersectionality and kyriarchy: A framework for approaching power and social justice in planning and climate change adaptation', *Planning Theory*, Vol. 14, Issue 2 (May 2015), 130-151, p. 132

program, teaching at an Ursuline Catholic girls' school in Innsbruck.³⁰ Following this she moved from Austria to Germany, met her husband there, and then later the pair moved to Lancashire, England, which is where Sharratt discovered the story of the Pendle witches.³¹ Mary Sharratt published *Daughters of the Witching Hill* two years before the quadricentenary events in Lancashire, and so this novel differs from the other two in examination in that it was not commissioned in connection with the 2012 commemorative events. In several interviews on her later novels, she reminisces in brief about her research for *Daughters* and how this shaped and inspired her writing. In a 2021 interview with Susanne Dunlap, Sharratt discussed the course that she undertook at the University of Lancaster as part of her research for *Daughters* entitled 'Late Medieval Belief and Superstition'. It was in this course that she learned about and became particularly (and creatively) intrigued by the importance of faith in this period, 'in everyone's life', and in a way that 'we can't begin to imagine in a secular age'. Perhaps even more important to her writing was what she learned of women, their societal roles and the fact that 'medieval women were far more empowered than Victorian women.'³² The latter became a leading factor in her later writings, for following *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, Mary Sharratt went on to publish further historical fictions or biofictions on prominent historical women, often known for their subversion of the norm through heavenly visions or mystical abilities, such as fifteenth-century mystic Margery Kempe in *Revelations* (2021), and medieval writer and polymath Hildegard von Bingen in *Illuminations* (2012).³³ The book on Kempe was, according to Sharratt, 'the most successful' of all her books.³⁴

³⁰ Michael Lackey, 'Voicing Female Power through Biofiction: A Conversation with Mary Sharratt', *Auto/Biography Studies*, 38:1 (2023), 25-38, p. 25

³¹ Middleton, 'A Novel Approach', pp. 19-20

³² Susanne Dunlap, 'Interview with Mary Sharratt', Season 2, Episode 6 (18 April 2021)

³³ 'Books', *Mary Sharratt* <<https://marysharratt.com/main/books/>> [accessed 10.11.23]

³⁴ Lackey, 'Voicing Female Power', p. 26

All of Mary Sharratt's novels are historical fiction, and her views on the genre can help form an analysis of her writing. First, and most important, is her self-proclaimed mission or motto, which she repeats often and is written across her author's website:

I am obsessed with history, with writing strong women back into history, and how the stories of these women in centuries past merge with the landscape itself.³⁵

This single sentence reveals a lot about Sharratt's writing. As an author, she writes about historical women in order to give them a story, a voice, and a new narrative. She does so with particular attention to setting, too, for 'evocation of place and culture' is a particular passion of this novelist.³⁶ This mission of Sharratt's to write women back into history is of course a feminist one, and as such novels such as *Daughters* can be read as an early modern story told through a modern lens. In discussion with Lackey in 2023, Sharratt had some interesting things to say about historical fact versus historical fiction. The latter, she claimed, is 'anachronistic' by definition: 'If you were only going to write the bare-bone facts, that would be history and not fiction.' Yet Sharratt also claims that history too is anachronistic in that it presents a 'white-male-centred' view.³⁷ In Mary Sharratt's mind, then, traditional or mainstream history projects particularly masculine, patriarchal views, politics, and agendas, and she writes historical fiction to counteract this. The artistic license claimed by this author is deemed necessary due to women's absence from history. In order to write women back into history as is Sharratt's aim, an author is required to fill in the gaps in the historical record.³⁸

Michael Lackey, who has suggested that some scholars might deem Sharratt's work 'inappropriate' for its fictionalisations of certain moments and characters in history, generally

³⁵ Middleton, 'A Novel Approach', p. 20

³⁶ Ibid, p. 20

³⁷ Lackey, 'Voicing Female Power', p. 30

³⁸ Mary Sharratt said, "My work draws on a deep level of historical research, but it's also fiction. The word novel on the cover is a big clue. The novel is a genre that allows the freedom of artistic license and imagination. It's not meant to be a straightjacket." – Lackey, 'Voicing Female Power', p. 31

praises her writing for utilising the past in order to comment upon ‘female empowerment today’. On the inference that her work might be viewed negatively for its inclusion of invented histories, Sharratt responds that such views seem ‘like another way of invalidating and silencing women and other voices who want to talk about the past.’³⁹ This author’s feminist views on history and historical fiction are clear.

Sharratt has published eight novels since 2000, the first being *Summit Avenue*, which is a historical novel based in pre-World War I society and features a female heroine whilst exploring themes of female solidarity, of magic and fairytales, of lesbian romance, and of coming-of-age.⁴⁰ She was also co-editor on a collection of subversive, feminist short stories about female anti-heroes entitled *Bitch Lit*. Of her eight novels, four are what Michael Lackey would call biofictions; that is, fiction centred around the biographies of particular individuals, all women.⁴¹ Michael Lackey is the leading voice on biofiction scholarship, having theorised some ten years ago that how authors were writing did not equate to what scholars were saying about them. Lackey has suggested that authors ‘have been publishing biofiction for more than two centuries’, and that it has become a ‘dominant literary form’ within the last few decades.⁴² Lackey has attributed the term ‘biofiction’ to Sharratt’s more recent novels, namely *Illuminations*. However, the term could be used to loosely describe *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, too.

If the key aim in Sharratt’s writing is to create new narratives for the Lancashire witches of 1612, and if this is done by providing distinctive character-voices for the author’s chosen protagonist(s), then surely this novel is not just historical, but is attempting to be biographical too? Unlike Sharratt’s Hildegard von Bingen, none of the accused Pendle

³⁹ Ibid, pp. 31-32

⁴⁰ Suzanne Kosanke, ‘Summit Avenue (review)’, *Marvels & Tales: Journal of Fairy-Tale Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1 (2001), pp. 126-127

⁴¹ ‘Books’, *Mary Sharratt* <<https://marysharratt.com/main/books/>> [accessed 10.11.23]

⁴² Michael Lackey, ‘The Futures of Biofiction Studies’, *Auto/Biography Studies*, 32:2 (2017), 343-346, p. 343; Lackey, ‘Voicing Female Power’, p. 25

witches have any autobiographical texts or histories depicting their lives in the same way, and so the fiction about them must be based on what is understood and inferred in Potts' 1613 pamphlet, and the rest must be invented. Yet, even in Sharratt's *Illuminations* about Saint Hildegard, there were many gaps in the existing historiography of this figure that required filling in with invented ideas in order to make her 'come alive' for readers.⁴³ Therefore, the author's efforts to retell the Pendle tale from the perspective of the persecuted witch-figure can be categorised in the same way. As Sharratt said:

All biographical fiction about historical figures is historical fiction... I can't think of a single example of a novel in which history is the primary protagonist.⁴⁴

In 2010, Mary Sharratt penned *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, a novel of over 300 pages, split into five parts, featuring two protagonists. The first part is written from the first-person perspective of Demdike and leads the reader through this figure's life until the birth of her grand-daughter Alizon Device. Demdike's narrative is full of nostalgia for the old religion (Catholicism) and pre-Reformation England, as well as an exploration of a matriarchal religion very similar to Margaret Murray's witch-cult.⁴⁵ Moreover, some of the key elements of this character's tale are notions of sisterhood and matriarchy, echoing first and second-wave feminist writings from the likes of Gage and Dworkin, all written with the overarching theme of memory at the forefront.⁴⁶ The next three parts are written in the voice of Alizon Device, with Part II being the longest. Once the narrative switches to Alizon, *Daughters of the Witching Hill* begins to align more closely with references in Potts' 1613 pamphlet. Parts

⁴³ Moreover, on her biographical fiction on Margery Kempe, Sharratt admitted that her key source *The Book of Margery Kempe* was written in third person despite being an autobiographical text, and that it was undoubtedly censored as women's biographies and autobiographies have been 'throughout time... because women are afraid to talk about their actual lived experience.' - Dunlap, 'Interview with Mary Sharratt', Season 2, Episode 6 (18 April 2021) ; Lackey, 'Voicing Female Power', p. 38

⁴⁴ Lackey, 'Voicing Female Power', p. 33

⁴⁵ Murray, *Witch Cult*

⁴⁶ Dworkin built upon the work of both Gage and Murray and claimed the existence of an ancient, matriarchal paganism which the androcratic early modern church attempted to abolish with the 'witch burnings'. - Dworkin, *Woman-Hating*, pp. 140-147

III and IV depict the suffering of the Pendle witches from examination, through to arraignment, then trial, and finally their execution. Like Demdike's, Alizon Device's narrative contains similar themes of sisterhood and female solidarity, but these are more clearly punctuated with contrasting elements of injustice and misogyny, with innocent girlhood and the tragic loss of it. Finally, Part V is a single page in length, and is written in the voice of Demdike, now deceased. It is a brief and ghostly passage in which the narrator states simply, yet affectively, that the Pendle witches of 1612 will be remembered.

Daughters of the Witching Hill

The front and back matter in *Daughters* make clear Sharratt's aforementioned passion for writing women into history, and for evocation of place and culture. This 2010 text has been dedicated 'to the memory of Elizabeth Southern, alias Mother Demdike', and to all of the other victims of the Pendle trials, who are listed by name.⁴⁷ Before the novel begins, Sharratt introduces her text with an extract from Potts' pamphlet, beginning with 'She was a very old woman,' and ending with 'no man escaped her, or her Furies.'⁴⁸ Then, on the next two pages is a reprint of 'A Charme' to cure the bewitched, which was attributed to the Demdike family and recorded by Potts.⁴⁹ Finally, there is a map of 'Pendle Forest' which includes locations for historically lost or creatively invented buildings, including Malkin Tower.⁵⁰ From this front matter, we can surmise several things, the first being, of course, that Mary Sharratt was familiar with Potts' pamphlet prior to writing *Daughters*. She quotes it twice, with both extracts relating to the Demdike family, the first being Potts' description of her, and the second being a 'Charme' or 'Prayer' allegedly used by James Device, her grandson.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. i

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. iii

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. iv-v

⁵⁰ Ibid, pp. vi-vii

⁵¹ Potts (1613), pp. 14-15, 84-85

Sharratt's interest in the trials and how they fit into their 1612 context is clear from her choice of excerpts. Sharratt chose to offer her reader a glimpse into how witches were viewed and stereotyped by early modern thought, with Demdike described by Potts as very old, dwelling in a vast place fit for her profession, a servant of the Devil, and a threat to men. The use of this particular 'Charme' then, with its frequent references to Christian belief - Good Friday fasting, twelve Apostles, Heaven, and angels - introduces a recurring theme throughout *Daughters*, of a group of people loyal to and reminiscent of the 'old religion' (Catholicism), and post-Reformation society's persecution and fear of it. As Purkiss wrote, 'Attacks on Catholicism often took the form of accusing Catholic practices of residual vulgar superstitiousness or even magic.'⁵² This was a practice that Sharratt learned about during her research for the novel and admitted to finding fascination with.

Sharratt's 'Afterword', too, is extremely useful in any analysis of *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, for she details her thought process and her reading list, her key texts being Thomas Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, King James I's *Daemonologie*, and William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.⁵³ Sharratt wrote several things that have clearly played a part on her characterisations of key characters within the novel. Her choice to make Roger Nowell the villain in the end of the novel is because she believes that Roger Nowell arrested the Pendle witches to 'curry favour with his monarch', and called the alleged plot to blow up Lancaster Castle a 'far-fetched extreme'.⁵⁴ Moreover, she refers to *The Lancashire Witch Conspiracy*, a popular history of the trials, by John Clayton,⁵⁵ who suggested that Demdike could have been the illegitimate offspring of an important family, a theory which Sharratt expanded by making her the older, illegitimate sister of her prosecutor, Roger Nowell.⁵⁶ She also discusses the

⁵² Purkiss, 'Charming Witches', pp. 13-31

⁵³ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 329

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 329

⁵⁵ Clayton's text is not a historically accurate one, for it doesn't reference any sources or historiography in its theories, but it does pose interesting theories such as the above which might appeal to an author looking for creative ways to embellish the Pendle tale. - Clayton, *Lancashire Witch Conspiracy*)

⁵⁶ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 332

links between Catholicism and witchcraft again, and in greater detail, showing what an important factor it was within *Daughters*, and especially in the characterisation of Demdike. Moreover, she also links Catholicism to Pagan belief and practice in a way which, as it is written in the novel, feels reminiscent of Margaret Murray's 'witch-cult' theory, despite having not listed this in her 'Afterword'.⁵⁷ On the links that Sharratt makes throughout the novel between Mariology and the 'Queen of Elfhame', Sharratt instead credits two texts; John Webster's *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677) and Emma Wilby's *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits* (2005), as well as the trial of Bessie Dunlop in 1576, whose familiar spirit was a servant of the Queen of Elfhame.⁵⁸ All of the theories and texts mentioned briefly within the 'Afterword' can be seen to have shaped Sharratt's writing of *Daughters of the Witching Hill*.⁵⁹

Despite the historical focus of her resources listed in the 'Afterword', Mary Sharratt explores and encourages several modern and feminist ideals through the early modern setting of 1612 Pendle. Through the voices of her narrators Demdike and Alizon, *Daughters* opens the private sphere of early modern women to the reader as one which is more nuanced than what can be witnessed in the earlier novels. *Daughters* explores autonomy of a fashion that would have been entirely unacceptable in a real 1612 Pendle setting, yet which could have in fact been the case behind closed doors and amongst women. The clearest example of this is her exploration of themes of abortion and the choices made, and relief experienced, by women who do not want children. The first instance of this is when Demdike sees the 'silent thanksgiving' on her daughter's face when she aborts an illegitimate child that she did not

⁵⁷ 'Indeed, looking at pre-Reformation folk magic, it is often hard to untangle the strands of Catholicism from the remnants of pagan belief. I am indebted to Dr Sam Riches at Lancaster University for her course, Late Medieval Belief and Superstition, which made the pre-Reformation Church come alive for me.' – Ibid, p. 330

⁵⁸ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 331; See also: - Ronald Hutton, *Queens of the Wild: Pagan Goddesses in Christian Europe, an Investigation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2023), p. 92

⁵⁹ There were several other texts listed too: Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, 1400-1580*, Thomas' *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, D. S. Brewer's *The Victoria County History of Lancashire: Volume 6*, Gladys Whittaker's pamphlet *Roughlee Hall, Lancashire: Fact and Fiction*, and John Harland and T. T. Wilkinson's *Lancashire Folklore*. – Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, pp. 329-333

want. She ‘took the tansy’, and whilst some would judge and persecute her for this, her own mother did nothing but shield her from the harshness of outside opinions; ‘scrubbing [the blankets] with lye soap till [her] hands were raw, till the last trace of Liza’s blood had vanished out of the wool.’⁶⁰ Sharratt’s tone doesn’t induce shock, nor does it hint to celebration of the act, but rather a sense of quickness and matter-of-factness in the abortion of this unwanted pregnancy. ‘Tansy’, as it happens, is a herb mentioned frequently throughout the novel, and was in fact a form of contraception and abortion written about by St. Hildegard von Bingen, the subject of Sharratt’s 2012 novel *Illuminations*:

What she knew she learned from others, almost certainly women, women who knew that if you did not want a baby, you took this plant... In her text is recorded the first use of tansy... a well-known abortifacient in modern medicine.⁶¹

Moreover, this likens Demdike to the first and second-wave feminist argument that the early modern witch-hunts were due to ‘the Church’s hostility to the practice of medicine and... medicinal knowledge.’⁶²

In addition to such modern, feminist notions as women’s right-to-choose, and indeed their right to aid others in that choice, Mary Sharratt also celebrates popular feminist concepts such as matriarchy in this otherwise patriarchal early modern setting. This goes beyond comments on society, however, to also explore the feminist concept of matriarchal religion as became popular first in the writings of Gage, then Margaret Murray, and then in the rise of ‘Wicca’ and the ‘Goddess Movement’.⁶³ Sharratt’s Demdike is nostalgic for the old religion, yes, but also for traditions which are more inviting and magical than the strictness of seventeenth-century Puritanism. *Daughters* displays clear links between a Roman Catholic

⁶⁰ Ibid, p. 19

⁶¹ John M. Riddle, ‘Contraception and Early Abortion in the Middle Ages’, in *Handbook of Medieval Sexuality*, ed. by Vern L. Bullough and James A. Brudage (New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 269

⁶² Dworkin, *Woman-Hating*, p. 118

⁶³ The focus upon Goddess-worship, a socio-political movement inspired by the work of Gage on the concept of a female deity. – Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex & Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988)

Christianity, and a female-led witch-cult as prescribed by Margaret Murray. For example, in her reminiscing, Demdike says, 'My soul's home was not with this harsh new God, but instead I sought the solace of the Queen of Heaven and whispered the Salve Regina in secret.'⁶⁴ This concept of the Virgin Mary being 'Queen of Heaven', whilst originating outside of scripture, became a common Catholic symbol which 'dominated the art and devotion' of the Middle Ages.⁶⁵ Yet during the Reformation, this imagery was cause for contention, with Reformation Protestantism attempting to eradicate the 'Queen of Heaven' concept and in many places all Marian imagery.⁶⁶

In *Daughters* then, the 'Queen of Heaven' is often conflated with the 'Queen of Elflame', and so religion as it is depicted in Sharratt's novel is a matriarchal one. The spells performed by Sharratt's Demdike, those taught to her by her familiar Tibb, which she then passed down to her children and grandchildren too, were 'ancient... maybe even older than the old religion. Heathen magic it might have been'.⁶⁷ The term 'heathen' used by the author once more suggests an inspiration from the work of Margaret Murray, who describes her 'witch-cult' throughout her writings as heathen. Murray's 'heathenism' is intricate in that it described both her theorised Dianic Cult, with its ties primarily to Greek mythological deities, and also the 'heathen' armies and kings from Scandinavian countries who invaded England in the Middle Ages.⁶⁸ Sharratt's use of 'heathen' through her narrator Demdike suggests a generalised view of this ancient form of magic as something pre-Christian in origin, but like in Murray's writing, it is an umbrella term and does not specify clear origins or belief systems. Of course, by the latter half of the twentieth-century, the witch-cult theory

⁶⁴ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 13

⁶⁵ Gary Waller, *The Virgin Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern English Literature and Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 32

⁶⁶ Lilla Grindlay, *Queen of Heaven: The Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin in Early Modern English Writing* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2018), p. iii

⁶⁷ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 58

⁶⁸ Murray, *Witch-Cult*, pp. 13-14, 18, 85, 240

was discredited within early modern witchcraft scholarship,⁶⁹ with thinkers like Trevor-Roper arguing instead that witch persecutions were influenced by learned demonologists, and later scholars favouring the theory that accusations in fact came from below, from neighbours.⁷⁰ The inclusion in *Daughters* of a matriarchal religion is one which celebrates femininity and female power in an androcentric society which would deem it as threatening, and as such adds to the new, more powerful narrative created by Mary Sharratt for the accused Pendle witches in which they were victimised for their knowledge, specifically their feminine strength, and not their weakness.

In *Daughters*, the theme of matriarchy, exists because of the absence of male influence, and because of the strength of female-bonds and friendships. On the absence of masculine authority, the fact that Demdike and Chattox were the heads of their families would not have gone unnoticed in the early modern period. Widowed women, simply for being widowed, would have been deemed more likely to stray from what society deemed acceptable because of the lack of male influence and authority in their lives. An old, widowed woman like Demdike or Chattox, with no husband to mind her for several years, and the authority over two generations, would have of course been more likely to be reputed a witch in the early modern period than a married woman, or a young girl with a strong father-figure to guide her. For in a patriarchal society, even the lowliest of men still had power and authority over the women in his life. Peter Laslett has estimated that in this period, 12.9 per cent of households were headed by widowed women.⁷¹ These women who lived at their own hands generally provoked the most concern and fear. Sharratt's Demdike defines her own household, her and her daughter, as two 'masterless women living in a tower'.⁷² That they are

⁶⁹ However, Wicca and neo-Paganism was on the rise. – Helen A. Berger, *A Community of Witches: Contemporary Neo-Paganism and Witchcraft in the United States* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), pp. 3-15; Laurel Zwissler, 'In Memoriam Maleficarum: Feminist and Pagan Mobilisations of the Burning Times' in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*, Eds., Laura Kounine and Michael Ostling (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016)

⁷⁰ Malcolm Gaskill, 'Witchcraft and Evidence in Early Modern England', *Past and Present*, no. 198 (2008), 33-70, p. 33

⁷¹ Peter Laslett, quoted in - Capp, *When Gossips Meet.*, p. 36

⁷² Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 24

masterless means that they stand outside of patriarchal society, and as such are suspect, the reputed witches of Malkin Tower. What's more, they stand together, loyal to each other against the society which marginalises them. Such loyalties, in a distinctly feminine space, are threatening to masculinity in Sharratt's novel because there is strength in such solidarity.

In Potts' *The Wonderful Discoverie*, during Chattox's examination she said that a man named Robert Nutter desired her daughter Anne Redfearn, and whilst in the Redfearn home he wanted 'to have his pleasure of her', and was angry when she 'denied' him.⁷³ Elsewhere in the pamphlet Anne Redfearn is accused of bewitching Robert Nutter, ultimately causing his death, and yet this dispute is not discussed again. In *Daughters*, Sharratt embellishes this brief passage, using it as a tool to highlight gendered and class injustice within the novel. Sharratt exercised creative license in this, changing Robert Nutter to Robert Assheton, the 'Landlord's brat' who said, 'if she didn't let him have his way' he would turn the Chattox family out of their cottage.⁷⁴ This adjustment in the story was perhaps Sharratt's way of adding another layer of severity and danger to the situation in that not only could the married Anne Redfearn lose her reputation and her husband after such an incident, but she could also cause her whole family to be evicted from their home. Her abuser holds power and authority over her, and as such Anne Redfearn can do nothing to fight against such unjust treatment; 'We've no witness. It's Annie's word against his. Who do you think the Constable will believe?'⁷⁵ Demdike, the narrator and witness to the Chattox family's distress, is ever the voice of reason, her inner monologue constantly clarifying and exposing the injustice of the patriarchal system in 1612. Robert Assheton had acted in such a way 'because he knew he could get away with it. The law of the land only protected the rich.'⁷⁶

⁷³ Potts (1613), p. 34

⁷⁴ Sharratt *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 105

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 106

⁷⁶ Ibid, p. 106

It was in fact this instance of injustice which acted as Demdike's *peripeteia*, the turning point in her tragic story. Prior to this, Demdike was a charmer and a cunning woman, refusing to 'work woe', but it is here, at witnessing the distress being experienced by her friends, her fellow women, that Demdike's journey toward a malefic, harmful magic takes place in the form of clay pictures. Through her inner monologue and dream imagery, Sharratt depicts this turning point in her narrator's story, and also her *anagnorisis* - her awareness of her turning, and her justification of it;⁷⁷

If there was one kind of justice for the high and mighty, could there not be another justice for the poor? What was the use of having these powers if I didn't use them to help my best friend's daughter?⁷⁸

This friendship in *Daughters* is so important for how it contrasts with the gendered divides and injustices that are frequent and undeniable throughout. In one of Demdike's frequent flashbacks, the character narrates her own shame when, having had an affair whilst married, she was pilloried by the constable and had sheep dung thrown at her face repeatedly. Chattox, her then friend who 'forged her own way in life', faced the wrath of the masses to stand with her friend in a show of strong, female strength and solidarity; 'My first husband was an adulterer... Nobody put him in the stocks, but when I threw that cold bucket on him, his member did shrink.'⁷⁹

Female bonds equate to strength in Sharratt's novel. The female characters are at their happiest and most fulfilled when standing beside and defending one another, just as with Demdike and Chattox, the character of Alizon Device and her best friend Nancy, or indeed Demdike and her granddaughter Alizon. When the female characters do not or are unable to

⁷⁷ For a breakdown of Aristotle's definitions of both tragic terms, see an excellent summary by Boitani - Piero Botani, *Anagnorisis: Scenes and Themes of Recognition and Revelation in Western Literature* (Leiden: Brill, 2021), pp. 11-16

⁷⁸ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, pp. 106-108

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 39-40

support each other, that is when tragedy strikes. The accusations which occurred in Potts' 1613 pamphlet between the Demdike and Chattox families are explained in *Daughters* to be the result of Demdike's failure to stand by her friend Chattox when she had begun to gain a negative reputation. This was one of the main causes of the trials in Sharratt's retelling.

The other cause was when Alizon, following the death of her dearest friend and hardship faced by her impoverished family, was feeling her most isolated. Sharratt's Alizon represents the destruction of girlhood in *Daughters*, and this destruction of her innocence occurs when she is alone, separated from the female connections which the character cherishes. This loss of innocence is aided by JP Roger Nowell, who enters the story late on in the novel, and appears as untouchable in the narrative of Alizon Device. He is handsome and benevolent, and she certainly saw herself as beneath him; 'I shaped each word careful as I could so that he might understand my speech, coarse as gravel compared to his.'⁸⁰ He also begins by treating Alizon with sympathy and kindness which encourages Alizon to let her guard down. He feeds her, sits her by the fire, and asks for her help untangling 'this abominable business of witchcraft' with an earnest tone that leaves Alizon 'well flattered'.⁸¹

It is not until Sharratt's rewritten Roger Nowell achieves what he wants from Alizon Device, the accusation of other witches, that he turns on her, and Alizon is faced with the consequences of her isolation. His actions then become predatory and dark;

The look he was giving me made me swallow a scream. His eyes were heavy lidded, his lips parted and wet... The mirror revealed his back arching over me... His fingers that had never known a hard day's labour found the lacings of my kirtle. If I cried out, who would come?

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 165

⁸¹ Ibid, pp. 248-249

This interaction ends before it truly begins, with Nowell seeming to fight off temptation and instead proclaiming that he has discovered the place where Alizon would suckle her ‘imp’. Nowell does not search her himself, and sends her to a group of nameless women to be shorn and searched. Yet this short scene is perhaps the most frightening thus far in Sharratt’s retelling, for Alizon is more afraid than ever before in her narrative, and Roger Nowell’s characterisations change so suddenly that he becomes villainous. Once distinguished and fair, he suddenly becomes forceful and aggressive, and undoubtedly aroused by his own actions and by his power over this young, helpless girl. Mary Sharratt does not feel the need to include any further or more extreme form of assault here, for the threat of it is enough. Alizon’s realisation of her own social standing, her powerlessness, and her fate is sharp and poignant, as can be seen within the rhetorical question that she asks in her panic. If Alizon Device were to cry out for help and therefore act out against Roger Nowell, a man with such power and authority over her, no one would come.⁸²

The destruction of girlhood in *Daughters* occurs not only because of Roger Nowell’s ministrations, but also because of social structures which deem her less-than and Other, and thus allow for her mistreatment. The interaction between Alizon Device and the pedlar John Law, which was the catalyst for the other accusations and arraignments in 1612 Pendle, does not occur in *Daughters* until around seventy percent of the way through the novel. In Sharratt’s retelling, John Law is not a helpless pedlar but a stubborn and misogynistic figure who judges and insults Alizon without knowing her; ‘How did you get them pennies, lass? Did you steal them or did you earn them on your back?’ In Alizon’s narrative, this is the worst insult that she has ever received; ‘I’d been called a witch and beggar... but this was the first time anyone had dared called me a whore... I’d never so much as kissed a man.’⁸³ Mary Sharratt was clear, at least up until this point, to protect Alizon’s innocence in that way.

⁸² Ibid, pp. 257-258

⁸³ Ibid, p. 225

Demdike's character had of course been married, and she had also been pilloried for cuckolding her husband. Elizabeth Device had had several partners in and out of wedlock. Yet Alizon Device is depicted with a sense of innocence and girlish purity. Rather than flirt with boys, she fantasised about fairytale-like true love throughout the novel, and these fantasies were always coloured with a hopeful tone. Alizon was innocent enough to believe that such dreams would come true for her. In the lead up to her altercation with John Law, her innocence had been very slowly taken away from her. Her best friend died, her own brother began to work malefic witchcraft, former friends turned their backs, and her beloved grandmother became so frail that she could no longer charm, and so the Demdike family fell into poverty, and Alizon's reputation began to fray. These moments of hardship experienced by the narrator built and gained momentum, and the crescendo can be experienced in the very moment that John Law takes that last shred of dignity that Alizon had been holding onto, her own innocence and belief in a better future in which true love might save her. Before this point Alizon had wholly rejected the powers gifted to her as Demdike's kin for fear of the damage they could cause. Then John Law calls Alizon Device a whore and suddenly she takes on the identity of a witch: 'I'd lamed a man, struck him mute, left him paralyzed in half his body.'⁸⁴ Thus, Alizon Device is the oppressed victim of the kyriarchy in which she lives because of what sets her apart in society; her class, her misfortunes, and her family's reputation as something Other.

Sharratt's witch-figures Demdike and Alizon Device have been rewritten to represent key feminist notions. Demdike is the symbol of female-strength and knowledge, the matriarch of a woman-centric community, and charmer blessed by a matriarchal Goddess. This character's narrative is one which celebrates female bonds, beliefs, and spaces, and allows Demdike to be the protagonist in her own history, a history which is distinctly

⁸⁴ Ibid, p. 226

feminist, for she is the proto-feminist witch-figure reclaimed. The Alizon Device rewritten in *Daughters* is in many ways, the opposite. She represents innocence, having rejected the opportunity to become a witch-like charmer like her grandmother, Alizon's tragedy seems all-the-more unfair for it. Sharratt developed Alizon's narrative in order to portray the cruelty of an early modern kyriarchy towards an innocent girl; Alizon's family, her class, and her own gender make her a target for oppression and persecution, and Alizon's voice is the one which retells the Pendle-witch story so harrowingly for the modern reader.

2012: Commissioning Jeanette Winterson and Livi Michael

Two years after *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, Jeanette Winterson and Livi Michael published two novellas which offer even more new perspectives on the 1612 Lancashire witch trials, and two new narratives for its victims. These novellas were commissioned as part of a year-long effort to commemorate the 400th anniversary of the Lancashire witch trials of 1612 by the Lancashire County Council, Green Close, museums, academics (especially those of Lancaster University), artists, and writers.⁸⁵ Whilst the locality did, before 2012, see a certain amount of footfall in terms of tourists interested in the area's mystical past, the efforts of the local council, alongside heritage group Green Close, during the quadricentenary accentuated its witch-filled history. Witchcraft historian Robert Poole had edited *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories* ten years earlier, and in 2011 published an introduced and modernised version of Thomas Potts' 1613 pamphlet, marking him as a local expert in the subject. He was involved in and consulted on the commemorative events, working with local artists and communities to map out the potential route the accused might

⁸⁵ For a more complete study of the 400th anniversary commemorations, see: - Todd A. Bridges, *The 400th Anniversary of the Lancashire Witch Trials: Commemoration and its meaning in 2012*, (Essex: University of Essex, 2016)

have taken to Lancaster Castle.⁸⁶ This route, the *Lancashire Witches Walk* became a 52-mile-long walking route and tourist attraction, complete with art and poetry installations from Stephen Raw and poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy to mark key locations. An industry was built upon the foundations of the witch trials, mostly, but not entirely, with regards to tourism.⁸⁷ Scholars showed a keen interest in the commemorations too, with several academics of Lancaster University combining their efforts to organise a large conference, and a special issue of the journal *Preternature*, both titled (and dedicated to) ‘Capturing Witches’.⁸⁸ Furthermore, a number of other academics published historical accounts and analyses of this moment in history to coincide with its quadricentenary, and author Christine Goodier published the guide to the Pendle trials, *1612: The Lancashire Witch Trials*.⁸⁹ The cultural interest in the Pendle trial was significant, with several celebrated authors also getting involved in the commemorative event; Jeanette Winterson, Livi Michael, Blake Morrison, and Carol Ann Duffy were all commissioned to create works of their own styling, and BBC re-released Simon Armitage’s 2011 documentary, all based upon the 1612 trials.⁹⁰

The two 2012 novellas being examined here were both commissioned as part of this larger commemorative moment; Jeanette Winterson’s *The Daylight Gate* and Livi Michael’s *Malkin Child*. As in *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, both of these texts feature a female protagonist who was involved in the 1612 Lancashire witch trials, offering up new narratives

⁸⁶ Robert Poole, Ed., *The Lancashire Witches: Histories and Stories* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002); Poole in Potts (2011); ‘Lancashire Witches 400’, *Green Close* <<https://greenclose.org/lancashire-witches-400/>> [accessed 13.10.19]

⁸⁷ The website, ‘Visit Lancashire’, boasts of the beautiful landscape, the awesome Pendle Hill, the Heritage Centre, and the Castle. The theme of witch prevails in almost every aspect. They have walking trails, a driving trail, guided (and ghost) tours of the area, including Lancaster Castle, where one can ‘find out how the accused witches spent their final weeks.’ - *Visit Lancashire* <<https://www.visitlancashire.com/inspire-me/pendle-witches>>; *Visit Pendle* <<http://www.visitpendle.com/things-to-do/pendle-sculpture-trail-p841900>>

⁸⁸ ‘Capturing Witches’, *Lancaster University* <[http://www.research.lancs.ac.uk/portal/en/activities/capturing-witches-histories-stories-images\(3f92dce8-e1b7-4975-ac87-2a5c1c06fbd\).html](http://www.research.lancs.ac.uk/portal/en/activities/capturing-witches-histories-stories-images(3f92dce8-e1b7-4975-ac87-2a5c1c06fbd).html)>; ‘Capturing Witches’, *Preternature: Critical and Historical Studies on the Preternatural*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2014)

⁸⁹ Goodier, *1612*

⁹⁰ Carol Ann Duffy was commissioned to write a poem on the 1612 trials which was then inscribed on markers across Pendle, along the newly mapped out ‘Pendle Witch Trail’, which was to engage visitors and take them on a walking (or driving) route that the 1612 accused witches likely would have been made to walk before their imprisonment at Lancaster Gaol. – Carol Ann Duffy, ‘The Lancashire Witches’ (2012); ‘Lancashire Witches 400’, *Green Close*

for the victims of an oppressive kyriarchy. Also like *Daughters*, both texts could be classed as biofiction, for *The Daylight Gate* and *Malkin Child* also feature a historical figure as their protagonist, and in doing so Jeanette Winterson and Livi Michael have written not solely a fictional re-telling of a particular historical moment, but also a fictional biography of a particular historical figure. This is because both authors, whilst they have not put it so plainly as Mary Sharratt does in her ‘motto’, aim to write as women, for women, and in a way which provides voice to the voiceless in history. For Winterson, that voice is the enigmatic Alice Nutter, a more fantastic character in whom Winterson can place the complex tropes she favours, as discussed below. For Livi Michael, the new narrative she writes is for the misunderstood Jennet Device, which fits in well with Michael’s passion for writing books for children, stories about girls and women, and always with notions of class as a core theme.

Livi Michael has written twelve books for children, five of which are categorised on her website as ‘For Older Children’, with *Malkin Child* included in this category; three of the five are works of historical fiction. She has also produced four novels which she called her ‘earlier novels’ and said ‘my early novels chart the conflicts and challenges faced by women in a changing world.’⁹¹ Following these, she published the Succession Trilogy, historical fiction based during the War of the Roses, the first of which was published in 2014, and her most recent novel is *Reservoir*, published in March 2023. Livi Michael has also written a play entitled ‘Singers not Sinners’, a female-led play based in 1701 Lancashire.⁹² All of her works seem to be based in the north of England, primarily Lancashire or Manchester, and most feature female protagonists, historical settings, and characters from the working class. A Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing for Manchester Metropolitan University, Michael wrote

⁹¹ ‘Earlier Novels’, *Livi Michael* <<https://livimichael.co.uk/>> [accessed: 17.02.22]

⁹² *Livi Michael* <<https://livimichael.co.uk/>> [accessed: 17.02.22]

that her doctoral research examined political fiction of the 1930s, and that she has a professional interest in medieval literature and history.⁹³

Her first novel, *Under A Thin Moon*, is a feminist and postmodernist text which deals with four female characters living in a council estate in Ashton-under-Lyne of Greater Manchester, where Michael was raised by her grandmother.⁹⁴ By the time Michael had written her third novel, she wrote of returning to the same estate in which she grew up and feeling a disconnect with the women that she met there;

It wasn't that I couldn't empathise with these women, or felt no rage on their behalf – I simply couldn't find a narrative position from which I could write authentically about their experience. What was I – researcher? Voyeur? Or someone claiming their experience as my own?⁹⁵

The discomfort caused by this visit was the reason, according to Michael, that she moved from realism to children's fiction, historical fiction, and fantasy. She did not abandon class as a key theme within her writing, and she primarily writes from a female, working-class perspective because that is what she knows and is inspired by; 'My politics are driven from where I come from. It is an emotional bias that stays with you all your life.'⁹⁶

Jeanette Winterson, too, has spoken of her politics, and how these have influenced her writing. Winterson was raised in a Pentecostal family, and her parents had hoped that she would become a famous evangelist. At the age of fifteen Winterson shocked her family and 'disturbed the members of their fundamentalist Pentecostal church in Accrington Lancashire',

⁹³ 'Dr Olivia Michael – Staff Profile', *Manchester Metropolitan University*

<<https://www.mmu.ac.uk/english/staff/profile/index.php?id=28>> [accessed 12.10.23]

⁹⁴ Sharon Monteith, 'On the streets and in the tower blocks: Ravinder Randhawa's "A Wicked Old Woman" (1987) and Livi Michael's "Under a Thin Moon" (1992)', *Critical Survey*, Vol. 8, No. 1, *Diverse communities* (1996), 26-36, p. 26; Livi Michael, 'Word search and rescue', *Big Issue North* (12 April 2023)

<<https://www.bigissuenorth.com/features/2023/04/word-search-and-rescue/>> [Accessed 15.10.23]

⁹⁵ Livi Michael, 'Word search and rescue', *Big Issue North* (12th April 2023)

⁹⁶ Livi Michael, quoted in - Bernadette Hyland, 'Livi Michael draws on her northern, working class roots to bring the Lancashire Witches back to life', *The Guardian* (11 September 2012) <<https://www.theguardian.com/uk/the-northerner/2012/sep/11/blogpost-lancashire-witches-pendle-livi-michael>> [accessed 20.09.19]; Livi Michael, 'Word search and rescue', *Big Issue North* (12th April 2023) <<https://www.bigissuenorth.com/features/2023/04/word-search-and-rescue/>> [Accessed 15.10.23]

when she fell in love with a female friend.⁹⁷ Her upbringing would have been decidedly different from the majority because of this, for as she said in a 1989 interview when discussing her writing about this fundamentalist childhood, for most readers this would have been another world entirely, and not something that they could easily relate to. Growing up, Winterson was surrounded by an overtly fundamentalist family in which Scripture was memorised, and people spoke in tongues and healed the sick; ‘miracles’ that Winterson says she bore witness to but cannot explain. These memories impact her still, for although she is not religious, she claims an important ‘spiritual dimension’ to her life.⁹⁸ This can of course inform any analyses of the supernatural and spiritual themes present within *The Daylight Gate*.

Moreover, given the harsh way in which Jeanette Winterson was, at fifteen, stripped of the life and family that she had known, as a result (at least partially) of falling in love, and a queer love at that, some of the other key themes within Winterson’s writing can be identified. As admitted by the author, ‘there is something autobiographical in all of the books, it’s just that the lens is tilted rather differently, the filter is denser.’⁹⁹ So, it is not a stretch to read Winterson’s texts for her own views and politics. She has an extensive bibliography of works, with twenty-five texts listed on her website. With some critical texts and essays, and a few short story collections, seventeen out of the list of twenty-five are novels, and out of these seventeen novels, fourteen are based elsewhere, in time, place, or reality.¹⁰⁰ This is, the author has admitted, a conscious decision. Jeanette Winterson admits to strong political opinions and feels that a writer should not ‘sit on the fence’ when it comes to their ideals, but rather than bring her readers directly up against the political issues of the day, which she

⁹⁷ ‘Writers Revealed – Author Jeanette Winterson talks about her work’, *Jeanette Winterson* <<https://www.jeanettewinterson.com/video>> [accessed 16.10.23]

⁹⁸ Ibid

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ ‘Books’, *Jeanette Winterson* <<https://www.jeanettewinterson.com/books>> [accessed 16.10.23]

believes ‘clogs the mind’, Winterson writes with the aim of taking her readers out of what they know, so that they are safe to explore said issues in a reality unfamiliar to them.¹⁰¹

Historical fiction, especially when it involves notions of the supernatural as in *The Daylight Gate*, seems an excellent space in which to tackle such issues in this way, and so this novella is not simply a re-telling of the Lancashire trials through the voice of Alice Nutter, but a re-telling through the voice of a transgressive, queer heroine in a violently oppressive landscape. Of course, by openly placing within a historical story more modern ideals, the author needs to invent and re-create so that such a story can be echoed through time in this way. On this, Winterson has uttered similar sentiments to Mary Sharratt, that historical fiction is still fiction, as she noted:

People have an enormous need, it seems to me... to separate history, which is fact, from storytelling, which is not fact, and they want to know which is which. The whole push of my work has been to say that you cannot know which is which.¹⁰²

It is these additions to the original Pendle story which allow for these new narratives to be created for the female victims of an early modern kyriarchy, and all three texts have been written as a means of re-telling the story of the Pendle witches with a voice and agency that was never afforded them before. Furthermore, in the case of both *Malkin Child* and *The Daylight Gate*, these new narratives were commissioned for that very purpose, so as to add to the commemorative events and actions of 2012, the quadricentenary of the Lancashire witch trials.

Livi Michael sees herself as a ‘Northern writer’,¹⁰³ and it was her ability to ‘bring the history and landscape of the region to life’ that led to her being approached by the Lancashire

¹⁰¹ Writers Revealed – Author Jeanette Winterson talks about her work’, *Jeanette Winterson* <<https://www.jeanettewinterson.com/video>> [accessed 16.10.23]

¹⁰² Ibid

¹⁰³ ‘Yes, I think I’m a northern writer – haunted in a particular way by its landscapes and by certain voices. My grandmother, for instance, spoke a Lancashire dialect that no longer exists.’ - Adele Geras, ‘An Interview with Livi Michael’, *The History*

Literature Festival to write a children's book from the perspective of Jennet Device.¹⁰⁴ The text, which was to be published by Foxtail Press, was to be released on the anniversary of the Trials, and so, according to Livi Michael, she only had a few months in which to complete her manuscript.¹⁰⁵ In November of that same year (2012), in an interview with Adele Geras, Michael said that this could have been a 'huge story', and discussed having to research key historical factors, geographical and social, including the Reformation and the rule of King James I and VI for the text, but that she was limited to a 20,000 word book.¹⁰⁶

Like Winterson and Sharratt, Livi Michael takes creative liberties with the Pendle tale for literary purposes. This author, like many of us, upon reading Thomas Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, questioned why a nine-year-old girl would testify against her own family and thus send them to the gallows. Michael believes that, as the Demdike family were impoverished and would have spoken a distinctive, localised vernacular, and as young Jennet would not have attended school in order to learn 'the King's English', the words written in Potts' pamphlet which were allegedly in the voice of Jennet Device could not have possibly been completely her own:

Did Potts translate Device's words for her? Or was she trained, in the four months between being removed from her family and her appearance in court, to speak differently?¹⁰⁷

This, Michael admits, was the starting point for *Malkin Child*. As she wrote in her 2023 article for *Big Issue North*, 'There are many gaps in the historical evidence, but gaps, as any

Girls (7 November 2012) <<https://the-history-girls.blogspot.com/2012/11/an-interview-with-livi-michael-by-adele.html>> [accessed 20.09.23]

¹⁰⁴ Some of the proceeds of *Malkin Child*, Hyland wrote, were to go to a Lancaster-based charity linked with the Lancashire Literature Festival called 'Stepping Stones', which was formed to aid children facing witchcraft accusations in Nigeria. - Hyland, *The Guardian* (11 September 2012); 'Pendle Witch daughter's tale *Malkin Child* is county's bestseller', *Lancashire Telegraph* (6 September 2012) <<https://www.lancashiretelegraph.co.uk/news/9914904.pendle-witch-daughters-tale-malkin-child-countys-bestseller/>> [accessed 20.09.19]

¹⁰⁵ Foxtail Press is a small publishing house set up by the Lancashire Literature Festival - Michael, 'Word search and rescue', *Big Issue North* (12th April 2023)

¹⁰⁶ Adele Geras, 'An Interview with Livi Michael', *The History Girls* (7 November 2012)

¹⁰⁷ Livi Michael, 'Word search and rescue', *Big Issue North* (12th April 2023) <<https://www.bigissuenorth.com/features/2023/04/word-search-and-rescue/>> [Accessed 15.10.23]

writer will tell you, are useful things. Where the evidence ends, the story begins.’¹⁰⁸ For Jeanette Winterson, many of the artistic liberties taken are used to add to the gothic horror of *The Daylight Gate*, and this horror was not only intentional, but requested. This text was written for Hammer Horror, or Hammer Films, a British film studio division which has produced several horror films since the 1930s, who commissioned Winterson to write a novella in the same genre, which would later be made into a film.¹⁰⁹

Malkin Child

Livi Michael’s *Malkin Child* is a story written to be accessible to younger readers and is told entirely from the perspective of Jennet Device.¹¹⁰ This text is written in a child-like, Lancastrian vernacular and follows a disjointed rhythm in a stream-of-consciousness style. Jennet Device tells *her* story, flawed as it is, beginning with her biased, yet plain, descriptions of her home and her family. The novella then takes the reader through the various events detailed in Potts’ pamphlet, but from the child’s perspective. Michael is careful in her choice of language and imagery to repeatedly remind the reader that Jennet Device was in fact, a child, and so despite the evidence provided by her in court, she was an innocent victim during this period. We see Jennet’s version of the altercation between Alizon Device and John Law, her experience of the Good Friday gathering at Malkin Tower; the rest of the text is dedicated to the examination and manipulation of Jennet Device by Roger Nowell, who cares for her and coaches her until the August Assizes. Following her testimony, Michael writes of the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ As Owen Williams wrote, ‘Not to be outdone by Rob Zombie’s “Lords Of Salem”, Hammer is turning its attention to some witch trials closer to home. The trials of the Pendle witches in 1612 are on their way to the screen, via an adaptation of Jeanette Winterson’s excellent novel “The Daylight Gate”.’ Though there has been no talk of a film-adaptation since 2013. - Owen Williams, ‘Hammer Opens The Daylight Gate’, *Empire* (10 October 2013) <<https://www.empireonline.com/movies/news/hammer-opens-daylight-gate/>> [accessed 04.04.22]; Geoff M. Boucher, ‘Rethinking Love as Passion: Jeanette Winterson’s “The Daylight Gate”’, *Literature*, 1 (2021), 44-57, p. 45; Brian Finney, ‘Taking on Hammer Horror: Jeanette Winterson’s “The Daylight Gate”’, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (20 November 2013) <<https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/taking-on-hammer-horror-wintersons-the-daylight-gate/>> [accessed 04.04.22]; See also: *Hammer Films* <<https://hammerfilms.com/pages/the-hammer-legacy/>> [accessed 04.04.22]

¹¹⁰ The age range of Michael’s intended readership is not specified, but this is a novella written in a child-like voice, rather than an obvious children’s story or nursery book, so I would hazard a guess that it is aimed at pre-teen readers.

subsequent loss and isolation experienced by this child who could not have known any better. Jennet's character is associated at all times with a naïve girlhood, and most importantly, with a fragile innocence, which set her up as prey to the manipulative villain of the novella. Roger Nowell is presented to the reader as the epitome of masculine privilege and patriarchal authority. Through the eyes of Jennet Device, the reader experiences the exploitative nature of this patriarchal figure as he manipulates and controls a young girl, eventually leaving her broken as he metaphorically takes her innocence from her.

Unlike Sharratt's novel, Livi Michel's *Malkin Child* contains much less front and back matter, but the fact that this is primarily a story for children explains this, for it would be much less necessary (or indeed interesting) for her intended audience to read about her resource list and motivations in this way. However, the novella does have three pages of additional matter after the story. In her very brief acknowledgements, Livi Michael thanks historians Robert Poole (who produced the 2011 edition of Potts' pamphlet) and Chris Goodier (who published the 2012 'guide' to the trials), as well as Colin Penny, manager of the museum at Lancaster Castle who recently co-authored a history on the same, for a 'fascinating tour'.¹¹¹ The next two pages link *Malkin Child* more clearly with the 2012 commemorative events, with one entitled 'Find out more...', directing readers to www.lancashirewitches.com in order to find out more about Jennet Device and the trials, and the final describing the work of charity 'Stepping Stones Nigeria' (which has close affiliations with the Lancashire Literary Festival), to protect Nigerian children from 'modern-day witch hunts'.¹¹²

That *Malkin Child* contains fewer author's notes than Winterson and Sharratt's text complements the novella itself, for whilst *Daughters of the Witching Hill* and *The Daylight*

¹¹¹ Michael, *Malkin Child*, p. 115; Potts (2011); Goodier, *1612*; Colin Penny and Graham Kemp, *A History of Lancaster Castle* (Lancaster: Palatine Books, 2022)

¹¹² Michael, *Malkin Child*, pp. 117-119

Gate deal with a variety of complex topics like social and sexual transgression, queer theory, gendered violence, and religion, *Malkin Child* has only one key focus, the narrative of a young, lower-class girl who had her innocence stolen by a powerful man. Whilst the Jennet Device depicted in Potts' 1613 pamphlet could be deemed something of a villain for her testimony against her own family, the new narrative developed by Livi Michael makes clear that, for this author, it is important to remember her youth and innocence. The heroine of *Malkin Child* is the epitome of girlhood, and the reader witnesses the corruption of this girlhood by the novella's villain, Roger Nowell, who is her opposite, a high-powered, patriarchal male. By making a heroine out of this girl who would have undoubtedly suffered as a result of the Lancashire witch trials despite not being executed with the rest of her family, Livi Michael affords her a victim status, and a narrative which exposes the brutality of the abuse and oppression that she suffered.

Jennet Device's participation in the persecution of her own family remains a mystery, but such accusations were not infrequent in early modern witch trials. Younger children were often deemed 'victims' of witchcraft, and as has been explored in the novels of Ainsworth and Neill, malefic harm against children has been a common theme in depictions of the literary witch-figure in the past. Yet the accusers themselves have not always been viewed as victims. As Poole said, Jennet's testimony was 'vital' to the prosecution of the Pendle witches, and so it would seem that she was villainous in her actions.¹¹³ This is certainly how Mary Sharratt writes of Jennet Device. Historians have discussed the attraction such accusations might have held for children, perhaps especially girls for whom power and attention was something that they might never have experienced in the early modern period. When making such accusations then, children 'became the centre of a dramatic ritual of prayer and healing... [and] treated with affectionate concern.'¹¹⁴ Jennet Device as created by

¹¹³ Poole in Potts (2011), p. 27; See also – Levack, *Witch Hunt*, p. 349

¹¹⁴ Keith Thomas, quoted in - Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, p. 203

Sharratt is a nasty child who cannot be trusted, even by her own family. Alizon cannot talk privately with her near, as she watches on ‘from her perch in the corner as though she wanted to commit every word to memory so she could blab it about Colne Market.’¹¹⁵ This characterisation certainly echoes the theory that Jennet Device actively participated in the trials due to the attention that it would bring her. The Jennet portrayed in *Daughters* is separate from the rest of the Demdike clan, Jennet is ‘that cold Puritan’s daughter’, not truly family, and is treated unsympathetically by the author throughout.¹¹⁶ Robert Poole suggested that whilst her family was being held at Lancaster Gaol, Jennet was likely being cared for by Roger Nowell or similar, which is what occurred in *Daughters*.¹¹⁷ When Jennet was brought into the courtroom to testify against her own mother, Sharratt wrote in the voice of Alizon Device:

Quite the little lady she looked, her dull hair curled into ringlets and tied up in a velvet band... So tiny was our traitor they had to stand her upon a table so the gentlemen of the court could get a gawp at her... What cold cruelty could move a nine-year-old girl to condemn her own mother?¹¹⁸

Jennet Device, repeatedly depicted as ‘cold’ and ‘cruel’ by Mary Sharratt, got much less attention in *The Daylight Gate*. Here, the character of Jennet is something of an afterthought, and is primarily used as a means first, of representing the clear class divide between the Demdike family and those masculine villains of the novella; and second, as evidence of the horrific, misogynistic abuse by such men. Jennet, described at all times as wild, hungry, and unkempt as is befitting of her class, ‘ragged... Pinched and starved’, is only significant as a symbol of the perverted abuse so prevalent in Winterson’s text.¹¹⁹ As Helgren stated, ‘girls’

¹¹⁵ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 160

¹¹⁶ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill* p. 191

¹¹⁷ Poole in Potts (2011), p. 27

¹¹⁸ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 305

¹¹⁹ Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, p. 31

voices are often difficult to recover in the historical record', and both Sharratt and Winterson portrayed the nine-year-old Jennet as a side character within their heroine's stories (jealous sister, for Sharratt, and desperate victim, for Winterson), rather than make attempts to recover her voice in their texts.¹²⁰

Livi Michael, however, attempts to combat the difficulties associated with such a voiceless historical figure by providing a new set of circumstances which would explain her historical role. In *Malkin Child*, Jennet Device is a victim, not because she was accused, but because she was manipulated into accusing, thus leaving herself completely alone at the end. This manipulation was able to occur because of her place in society. Michael's Jennet is an innocent girl, uneducated and without any advantages afforded higher classes, and cannot be blame for the power that the novella's villainous Roger Nowell had over her. Jennet Device's class, which we know is an important theme to the author, is expressed through the author's linguistic choices.

Livi Michael's approach to language and dialect within *Malkin Child* attempts to include a Lancastrian vernacular, and a child-like voice permeated with fantasy throughout, whilst still being accessible to a young, modern-day reader. On writing her first novel *Under A Thin Moon*, Michael discussed her difficulties in finding a narrative voice that reflected the area in which her novel was based, but in a way that did not make her characters sound 'stupid, ignorant or comic', as, she states, can be a common effect in literature when dialect is juxtaposed with 'standard English.'¹²¹ It is clear that she had had the same aim in *Malkin Child*. It is through this child-like perspective that Jennet is given a voice, and a reason for her participation in the condemnation of her family. Michael's choice of language reminds readers that this historical figure is a child, and should be viewed as such, and in the

¹²⁰ Jennifer Helgren and Colleen A. Vasconcellos, 'Introduction', in *Girlhood: A Global History*, Ed. by Jennifer Helgren and Colleen A. Vasconcellos (London: Rutgers University Press, 2010), p. 3

¹²¹ Livi Michael, 'Word search and rescue', *Big Issue North* (12 April 2023)

representation of Jennet Device as innocent, the blame is placed instead on one Roger Nowell. The clearest example of this can be witnessed at the beginning and end of the text. The novel begins as a fairy tale would, with the line, '*A long time ago, in the Forest of Pendle, there lived a family*'. This continues for six lines, as though the reader is about to experience a children's tale of magic and mystery. The font itself is italicised, in order to differentiate between this omniscient narrator, and the narrative of Jennet, which interrupts in the first person with, 'it's *my* story!'¹²² Here we experience the voice of a petulant child, the tone is exasperated and impatient, and the emphasis on 'this' and 'my' make clear that Jennet's story will not be the fairy tale it began as. In this short prologue, the character of Jennet Device literally takes control of her own narrative. The reader is presented with a new narrative of this historical moment, one from a victim who was not executed, who in fact was involved in the persecution of the Pendle witches, but who remains a victim nonetheless.

The manipulation experienced by Michael's Jennet is realised by the character following her testimony at the Assizes, when suddenly people begin to turn on her, and her confusion and indignation is clear within her narrative;

I hope no one ever gives me a look like that again!... There was pity in it, and bad feeling, and something else – sort of sly.¹²³

Witchcraft sceptics of the early modern period, such as John Webster, believed that accusations of witchcraft came from children who were 'taught' to tell particular stories in testimony; the typical assumption from such sceptics was that 'children were the unwitting instruments or mouthpieces for... adults'.¹²⁴ Jennet Device is conveyed as one such 'instrument' or 'mouthpiece' in *Malkin Child*. As Michael suggested in her 2012 interview

¹²² Michael, *Malkin Child*, p. 7

¹²³ Michael, *Malkin Child*, p. 99

¹²⁴ Witmore, *Pretty Creatures*, p. 173

with Bernadette Hyland, Jennet is manipulated by her flattering puppeteer, Roger Nowell; she is coached on exactly what to say, and in what fashion, and in her innocence, she believes that her obedience will save her family from doom.¹²⁵

Roger Nowell, then, is the villain in Michael's novella, and this is something that all three texts have in common. For these twenty-first century authors, Roger Nowell represents patriarchal authority, misogyny, and cruelty. In *Malkin Child*, Roger Nowell is the exact opposite of the heroine. Jennet is the impoverished girl-child, innocent and filled with childish fantasy about happily-ever-afters in which her absent father would come for her 'on a big white horse, or in a shiny carriage.'¹²⁶ Nowell represents masculine authority and education in a patriarchal world, and he exploits Jennet at every turn until she sees him as the longed-for father-figure she dreams of; 'When I said the right thing his face lit up – it was like standing in the warm glow of the sun after a cold dark winter'.¹²⁷ This simile, comparing Nowell to sunlight, only makes his eventual betrayal of the heroine all the more brutal as a result, for in *Malkin Child*, Jennet is innocent girlhood, and through her new narrative, Nowell becomes the monstrously cruel villain. David Punter said that 'Accusations of witchcraft are made – always and without exception – against the weak, the vulnerable, sometimes the confused'.¹²⁸ In both *Daughters* and *Malkin Child*, the protagonists are not confused per se, but they are vulnerable, especially to the machinations of the villainous Roger Nowell.

¹²⁵ Livi Michael, 'Word search and rescue', *Big Issue North* (12 April 2023)

¹²⁶ Michael, *Malkin Child*, pp. 14-15

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 79

¹²⁸ David Punter, 'Figuring the Witch', *New Directions in Children's Gothic: Debatable Lands*, Ed. by Anna Jackson (New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 79

The Daylight Gate

In *The Daylight Gate*, Winterson portrays a vulnerability amongst the accused witches, who are victims of a violent misogyny within the retelling, but there is a strength and power in her protagonist which sets this text apart from the other two in discussion. Jeanette Winterson's *The Daylight Gate* follows the story of that enigmatic figure, Alice Nutter, probably because of the opportunities her mystery provides for embellishment and story development. This text begins when the 1612 witch-trials did, with the so-called bewitching of the pedlar John Law by Alizon Device. All of Winterson's novella occurs during the examinations and trials of the Pendle witches, and follows Alice Nutter as she experiences a dark, androcentric Pendle filled with monstrous men who abuse poor and desperate women. Through Alice Nutter's actions and memories, the reader experiences a youthful, queer romance with Demdike and a current romance with wanted Jesuit Christopher Southworth. We also see the lowly Demdike clan trying to perform acts of malefic, gory witchcraft in their desperation for some semblance of power, and several Faustian-pacts with a 'dark gentleman' which do not in fact seem to offer any true power. Winterson also introduces the reader to a Roger Nowell threatened by the protagonist, a foolish Thomas Potts with the catchphrase 'witchery popery', and a supply of abusive, sadistic masculine characters.¹²⁹ In Winterson's queer, gothic rewriting, Alice Nutter is a wealthy, independent, and sexually transgressive figure whose perspective allows for the exploration of themes which no other author thus far had inserted into the Pendle tale. As a clear example of lesbian, gothic fiction, Winterson's novella is full of uncanny, supernatural tropes, abject horror, ghosts, and of course witchcraft. Yet this text subverts traditional gothic literature in that the Other, that is the socially transgressive character(s) within the story, is

¹²⁹ Winterson also writes well-known historical figures John Dee, Edward Kelley, and William Shakespeare into the plot, writing that 'it pleases' her to imagine these connections. – Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, p. xi

not the villain. The monstrous in Winterson's retelling is masculinity, and men are the villains throughout the tale.

Jeanette Winterson's front and back matter in *The Daylight Gate* is also less extensive than Mary Sharratt's, but still offers some insight into her influences. Jeanette Winterson dedicated *The Daylight Gate* to Henri Llewelyn Davies, 'Her own witch and mine.'¹³⁰ Davies was a psychic astrologer who died in May 2011, and had a professional relationship, and one could assume a friendship, with Jeanette Winterson. As Elizabeth Wilson stated, she was 'consulted by well-known women novelists', and Winterson went further by encouraging consultation between Davies and her fans, for Davies herself promoted the fact that she wrote 'monthly horoscopes on the writer Jeanette Winterson's very large and impressive official website', which included monthly poetry for each star sign.¹³¹ It is clear that Jeanette Winterson placed at least a little stock in the unknown and metaphysical aspects of the world. More recently, Winterson wrote of her experiences with ghosts that she claims have been haunting her Georgian home in Spitalfields, London. Her article, published in *The Telegraph* in September 2023, does not delve into the dates of these experiences but does make clear that her first encounter occurred prior to her opening of the small store at the base of her 1790s townhouse. This shop, we know from a 2010 article in *The Guardian*, was opened in or around 2005, and so it can safely be assumed that Jeanette Winterson believed in ghosts before and whilst writing them into *The Daylight Gate*.¹³²

¹³⁰ Ibid, p. i

¹³¹ Wilson discusses the obituary of Henrietta Llewelyn Davies from The Daily Telegraph on 20 May 2011 - Elizabeth Wilson, 'Atheists can embrace the power of Tarot', *New Humanist*, 21 February 2012 <<https://newhumanist.org.uk/articles/2758/atheists-can-embrace-the-power-of-tarot>> [accessed 09.11.23]; 'Horoscopes – Jeanette Winterson's Website', *Henri Llewelyn Davies*, 18th March 2009 <<https://henrillewelyndavies.blogspot.com/>> [accessed 09.11.23]

¹³² Jeanette Winterson, 'I Didn't Believe in Ghosts... Until I started Living With Them', *The Telegraph*, 21 September 2023 <<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/life/jeanette-winterson-ghost-stories-night-side-of-the-river/#:~:text=until%20I%20started%20living%20with%20them,-The%20novelist%20was&text=I%20bought%20a%20small%20Georgian.just%20before%20the%20French%20Revolution.>> [accessed 09.11.23]; Jeanette Winterson, 'Once Upon a Life: Jeanette Winterson', *The Guardian*, 13 June 2010 <<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2010/jun/13/once-upon-a-life-jeanette-winterson>> [accessed 09.11.23]

The Daylight Gate also contains a short introduction in Winterson's voice in which the author discusses the trials and a little of their contextual background, referencing Potts' *Wonderfull Discoverie* and King James' demonological treatise by name, as well as mentioning the Gunpowder plot of 1605. Her catchphrase for the caricature created of Thomas Potts, 'Witchery popery popery witchery' was, she writes, 'how the seventeenth-century English understood matters treasonable and diabolical.'¹³³ Not all of her characters understand matters in this way. These attitudes are reserved for the novella's villains, those oppressive male figures who utilise their own positions of power for nefarious purposes. This statement in fact sets her heroine, Alice Nutter, apart from 'the seventeenth-century English' not solely in attitude but in time itself, and thus further emphasises this idea that Winterson is writing this historical fiction through a modern lens. Such creative additions as are depicted especially through the characterisations of Alice Nutter, are, Winterson writes, 'necessary speculations and inventions.'¹³⁴

The charity-refused occurrence between Alizon Device and John Law, a scene which occurs so late in *Daughters*, is at the beginning of *The Daylight Gate*, just like the events unfolded in 1612. Winterson's second chapter, the one entitled 'John Law', introduces the reader, albeit briefly, to both Alizon Device and Demdike, and neither character is offered a particularly positive first impression. The 'witch' Alizon it seems was attempting to flirt with John Law for pins, but he was immediately fearful of her; his language frantic, 'He didn't want to kiss her. He wouldn't give her pins. He heard the first owl. He must get away.' The staccato form portrays the pedlar's fear, emphasised further when Demdike appeared suddenly and strangely, out of the foliage and holding a dead lamb, the sharpness of John Law's fear is once again prevalent; 'He knew her: Alizon's grand-dam. Old Demdike... He ran.' Just like Pendle is 'the dark place', Demdike and her granddaughter are immediately

¹³³ Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, pp. ix-x

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, p. x

introduced as Other. Demdike is ominous and immediately witch-like, for why is she holding a dead lamb? Alizon moves from flirtatious to vexed within the space of a paragraph, and yells ‘...FANCY! BITE FLESH TO THE BONE!’ The contrast between her ‘smiling, flouncing her skirt’ and the violent yelling, as made clear with its capitalisation, is sudden, threatening, and unpredictable.¹³⁵ Yet it is not Alizon Device or Demdike, despite their characterisations within this chapter, that are the truly villainous figures within the novella. Rather, it is masculinity which is the truly monstrous aspect within Winterson’s text. This is because of the frequent, brutal depiction of misogynistic violence against women in *The Daylight Gate*.

If Mary Sharratt inferring the threat of sexual assault at the end of *Daughters* made Roger Nowell seem more villainous, Jeanette Winterson’s extreme and repeated depictions of this threat make clear that it is masculinity, and the social structure which gives masculinity its power and authority over women, which is the subject of real fear and horror in her gothic novella. From the outset, Winterson depicts rape and sexual assault in brutal and concise terms which highlights its frequency in this society; ‘He was quick. He was in practice.’ Winterson’s uses sharp sentences and syntax to depict a scene of quick brutality, and suggests this was a common occurrence; ‘Wet as a marsh in there for you now, Harry. They’re all dry, the Demdike women.’¹³⁶ Winterson’s first depiction of patriarchal authority is of sadistic, monstrous men who view women as witches, to be abused, objects, to be used, but not as beings of agency. The rapist, and not the suspected witch, is the monstrous figure here.¹³⁷ He is described as bestial, through animalistic simile and profane, violent imagery; ‘lean-faced like a rat. He was playing with her breasts with both hands.’¹³⁸ In Christian teaching, the rat is

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 4

¹³⁶ Similarly, in the very Gothic ‘Well Dungeon’ at Lancaster Castle, where the accused Pendle witches spend months in darkness and squalor, awaiting trial, ‘The gaoler takes one or the other for sex most days’. – Ibid, p. 91

¹³⁷ The rapist in discussion is Winterson’s invented character ‘Tom Peeper’, who is behind much gendered violence throughout the novel.

¹³⁸ Ibid, pp. 10-14

symbolically associated with ‘the Devil’, but it is also, most commonly, associated with filth, ‘a transmitter of disease’.¹³⁹ This created character is grotesque in his misogynistic abuse and oppressive, patriarchal sense of superiority and thus entitlement over those he deems his inferior. The accused witches, of course, are debased the most completely for their otherness.

In addition to the depictions of physical assault and abuse, the chauvinistic dialogue present within this crucial chapter, such as ‘You were born with your legs open’, and ‘she’ll suck it if she wants to get home alive’ does not merely expose a corrupt kyriarchy in the early modern period, but resonates with Winterson’s modern reader too.¹⁴⁰ This is a theme commonplace, not solely in the twenty-first-century Pendle-witch literature, but also in other texts by Jeanette Winterson. In 1989, in an interview prior to the publication of *Sexing The Cherry*, Winterson said that ‘although the book isn’t an allegory in the strict sense, it does have many parallels with the sort of thing we’re living through now’. The author goes on to say that she wants to write about ‘the big questions’ or ‘big problems’ that everyone faces, like love and death, but in a non-polemical way. For whilst she has strong political opinions, particularly about women’s rights, she would rather take her readers to a place that is unusual to them in which they can find out ‘truths and understandings’ that help them in their own world, which is why she says that she tends to avoid writing or setting her texts ‘in the present’.¹⁴¹

Such misogynistic language, then, lends itself to modern issues, as explored in studies like Laura Bates’ 2018 *Misogynation: The True Scale of Sexism*. As Bates states, ‘we live in a world in which the ubiquity of the male gaze constantly packages women for sexualized consumption’. *Misogynation* examines the extremities of everyday sexism in media, social

¹³⁹ Hope B. Werness, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism in World Art* (London: The Continuum International Publishing Group Ltd., 2006), p. 343; Hans Beidermann, *Dictionary of Symbolism: Cultural Icons and the Meanings Behind Them* (New York: Facts on File, Inc, 1992), p. 279

¹⁴⁰ Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, pp. 12-13

¹⁴¹ Writers Revealed – Author Jeanette Winterson talks about her work’, *Jeanette Winterson* <<https://www.jeanettewinterson.com/video>> [accessed 16.10.23] n

media, and through interview-informed personal experiences, and it exemplifies several modern-day examples of the same kind of dialogue associated with Tom Peeper, where men subject women to street harassment by yelling derogatory terms such as ‘slut’, ‘sexy’, and ‘pussy’.¹⁴² The frequent and abhorrent scenes of rape and assault which progress with the story also echo modern-day experiences. It would seem as though almost every female character experiences some form of assault, sexually-fuelled debasement, or rape within the novella, for it is not only suspected witches roaming alone in Pendle Forest who are attacked, but also those witches being overseen by the gaoler at Lancaster Castle, who are ‘taken’ for sex daily by someone in charge of their care. More brutally still, young Jennet Device is habitually abused by her father (Tom Peeper once more); her abuse too is depicted with such plain and therefore shocking language to make it seem all the more real and realistic for the reader: ‘He was undoing his breeches. She didn’t want it in her mouth.’¹⁴³ As stated by Bates, in the UK in 2018, her findings were that over 85,000 women are raped and over 400,000 assaulted annually.¹⁴⁴

The monstrous characters within Winterson’s *The Daylight Gate* are thus made the more monstrous for the fact that they echo the experiences and knowledge of the author’s modern readership. These oppressive, masculine figures within the novella are typical of female, gothic literature in that they are ‘inhumanly destructive’, and it is usually the innocent woman who is tormented by the ‘demonic, heterosexual male’.¹⁴⁵ By conveying a narrative which exploits this tradition, Winterson develops a narrative of abused female martyrs in a patriarchal world which resonates within her contemporary readership. Moreover, the

¹⁴² Laura Bates, *Misogynation: The True Scale of Sexism* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd., 2018), p. 11

¹⁴³ Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, pp. 10-14, 90-91, 207-208

¹⁴⁴ Bates, *Misogynation*, p. 28

¹⁴⁵ Ruth Bienstock Anolik, Ed. *Horrible Sex: Essays on Sexual Difference in Gothic Literature* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company Inc., 2007), pp. 12, 14

monstrous masculinity featured in the novella is a gothic trope supported by the dominant and oppressive religious structure portrayed.

In *Daughters*, magic is always secondary to religion. The seemingly supernatural elements within Sharratt's novel are linked to the prevalence of the 'old Religion' and the links that Sharratt develops between it and what she calls the 'betwixt' path, between heaven and hell, where the Queen of Elfhame resides, and are never truly prescribed to 'magic' itself.¹⁴⁶ On the other hand, magic in *The Daylight Gate* is an entity in of itself, a Gothic feature which permeates Winterson's retelling through frequent ghostly apparitions, grotesque moments of horror, and the appearance of a Devil-like 'Dark Gentleman'. Interestingly, in Winterson's novella, religion does not hold the same sway as magic does. Christian religion is always throughout the text associated with masculinity, and thus with villainy. In *Daughters*, several key characters are active participants in their own faith, saying prayers and dreaming of the 'Queen of Heaven'; in *The Daylight Gate*, religion is a means of oppression rather than something to be practiced. Catholicism is only discussed as a reason to persecute someone, most often in the same breath as 'witchcraft', but of course the Jesuit character of Christopher Southworth suffers extreme torture for his faith alone. He was captured by those monstrous, masculine authorities and brutalised in much the same way as the witches; tortured, raped, and castrated. The current faith then, the staunch Protestantism/Puritanism that Winterson associates with 'hypocrisy', is more a vehicle for the rampant, violent kyriarchy within the text than it is a complex belief.¹⁴⁷ This certainly echoes Winterson's own views on faith, for although she was raised Pentecostal, by a family who thought she would be a famous evangelist, Winterson does not agree with organised religion

¹⁴⁶ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 288

¹⁴⁷ Writers Revealed – Author Jeanette Winterson talks about her work', *Jeanette Winterson* <<https://www.jeanettewinterson.com/video>> [accessed 16.10.23]

or typical notions of God.¹⁴⁸ Her complex relationship with religion can be seen in her 2011 memoir *Why Be Happy When You Could Be Normal?*, in which Winterson portrays her mother as a religious fanatic who associated her own daughter with the devil and subjected her to a three-day-long exorcism on discovering her relationship with another female; ‘So Winterson is intimately familiar with persecution for supposedly being bewitched by the devil.’¹⁴⁹ Naturally, then, her depiction of religion will be about the dominant and negative power-structures it legitimises and not faith itself.

Winterson’s construction of Alice Nutter is one which subverts the oppressive kyriarchy within the text. Unlike the many female characters of *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, Jeanette Winterson only creates one positive narrative in *The Daylight Gate*, that of Alice Nutter who for the most part stands out and alone as a subversive and transgressive character. She is too good and kind to be likened to almost all of the masculine characters within the novella, for they are the truly monstrous. Yet she is also too powerful and too transgressive, socially and sexually, to be like the other feminine characters. Her very personage is something other, something more. She rides through the Forest of Pendle, sitting astride, and with a pet falcon on her shoulder. That she rides astride is not entirely shocking because it is made clear that she only does so whilst alone, thus it is a small rebellion, a secret one, and easily dismissed, but the falcon is a unique choice for this heroine.¹⁵⁰ Her falcon, which would later in the novel be her suspected familiar, makes her seem more powerful and Other, indeed more witch-like, and yet separate from those accused witched Winterson called the ‘riff-raff’, who are far more lowly in comparison. Interestingly, it is details like Alice Nutter’s falcon which make Winterson’s heroine more easily comparable to the Alice Nutter

¹⁴⁸ Winterson said, ‘I can’t paint God. God is outside of my imagination. What I do feel is a great sense of spiritual force and a great moving intelligence that surrounds us’ - Ibid

¹⁴⁹ Brian Finney Brian, ‘Taking on Hammer Horror: Jeanette Winterson’s “The Daylight Gate”’, *Los Angeles Review of Books* (20 November 2013)

¹⁵⁰ Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, pp. 8-9

from Ainsworth or Neill's novels. The falcon is a symbol which has long been associated with the mythical Circe, Greek Goddess of death and fearsome, man-killing witch.¹⁵¹

Winterson's choice of pet gives Nutter a familiar worthy of a powerful witch-figure, destroyer of (and therefore a threat to) men, and the natural leader of a coven of witches in the same way that both William Harrison Ainsworth and Robert Neill made her so.

Throughout *The Daylight Gate*, Alice Nutter is associated with the colour magenta. It is the source of her wealth, the colour of her clothing, the colour she associates with her own love and sexual desire. Magenta, which has been described as an 'intense crimson', did not exist until some two centuries after the Pendle trials.¹⁵² That Winterson associates this colour so frequently with Alice Nutter further strengthens the character's disparity by painting her and her transgressive desires in such an intense and in fact quite futuristic colour in a rigid and often black-and-white early modern society. Furthermore, if magenta is seen as an intense crimson, then it is a colour Biblically associated with passion, with anger, and indeed with sin. Isaiah 1 reads:

Though your sins are like scarlet,
they shall be as white as snow;
though they are red as crimson,
they shall be like wool.¹⁵³

We know that Jeanette Winterson was raised reading scripture, and so she would of course be aware of such connotations. In many ways, Alice Nutter's character is the very epitome of what can be deemed sinful with regards to Biblical teachings, especially early modern teachings in a period of growing fervent Puritanism. When talking about an earlier novel, *Sexing the Cherry*, Winterson said of Puritan England that 'hypocrisy was rife' and the

¹⁵¹ Werness, *Continuum Encyclopedia of Animal Symbolism*, p. 171

¹⁵² E. Cardeira, J. P. Silvestre, and A. Villalva, Eds. *Colour and Colour Naming: Crosslinguistic Approaches* (Portugal: Universidade de Lisboa, 2016), p. 92; John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000)

¹⁵³ Isaiah 1: 18 in *Holy Bible: King James Version*, p. 470

Puritans believed ‘that they knew what was best, and that people shouldn’t go to the theatre, they should have any fun... There’s a sort of new moralism in England at that time.’¹⁵⁴ This author is clearly critical of Puritan attitudes, and has made clear throughout her career her passion for women’s rights, rights which were non-existent in 1612 Lancashire. Moreover, Winterson has herself experienced negative judgement from a religious community based on her lifestyle choices. Thus, by allowing her heroine to be so closely linked with the progressive yet sinful colour of magenta, the colour of her power and of her queer love, Winterson rewrites the enigmatic Alice Nutter as a figure in defiance of the society which wants to oppress her, and indeed all women.

Diane Purkiss has said that the witch has been ‘constantly cast and recast as the late twentieth century’s idea of a proto-feminist, a sister from the past’.¹⁵⁵ The Alice Nutter of *The Daylight Gate* is one such character. By setting her apart, by modernising her social status and her sexuality, Winterson has created that witch-figure claimed by feminist-thought as a direct ancestor, transgressive and subversive, and persecuted for their defiance. Mary Sharratt’s *Daughters of the Witching Hill* develops the character of Demdike in a similar way. Though perhaps more subtle in her transgressions, Demdike falls under the same feminist witch-figure stereotype in her rejection of masculine authority, her entirely feminine powers and knowledge of herbs and midwifery which, beginning with Gage in the nineteenth-century, has for a long time been the common misconception associated with all early modern accused witches, that such medical and scientific knowledge, or deep knowledge of the natural world, was the reason for said accusations. Ehrenreich and English have examined the treatment of female healers in this period. The Church and demonologists asserted that wise or cunning persons could harm as well as heal, and viewed their healing abilities as magic,

¹⁵⁴ Writers Revealed – Author Jeanette Winterson talks about her work’, *Jeanette Winterson* <<https://www.jeanettewinterson.com/video>> [accessed 16.10.23]

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in – Adam Anczyk and Joanna Malita-Krol, ‘Women of Power: The Image of the Witch and Feminist Movements in Poland,’ *The Pomegranate*, 19:2 (2017) 205-232, p. 210

rather than a basic natural or medical knowledge. A cunning woman could be accused of witchcraft after attempting to heal someone (even of bewitchment), a gossip could be charged with harming an infant during its mother's lying-in period, or a midwife could be blamed if a mother died in child-birth.¹⁵⁶ As such, both authors develop a new narrative for their respective protagonists, one in which these historical and historically oppressed women have voices and agency. They are fully developed characters of strength and rebellion, knowledge and a distinctly feminine power.

In contrast, Livi Michael does not create a proto-feminist heroine in *Jennet Device*. Higginbotham said that 'although female children occupied a crucial and contested position in the early modern sex-gender system, our critical frameworks have not known how to account for them.'¹⁵⁷ By ignoring the early modern 'girl', or at least, by forcing her into the umbrella category of 'women', early modern gender studies run the risk of treating the female figures of the period as one generalised identity, rather than separate and individual actors in history. Livi Michael, in writing *Malkin Child* has rejected such generalisations by reminding readers that *Jennet Device* was, in fact, a nine-year-old girl, and despite history remembering her solely for her testimony in Potts' 1613 pamphlet, she should have had a life-story, for she did exist. So, like the heroines in *Daughters of the Witching Hill* and *The Daylight Gate*, *Jennet* is given a new narrative and a rewritten history in which she is visible when before her agency has been dismissed; she is loud when before she is voiceless, and for *Jennet* specifically, she is also the victim when before she may have been seen as the antagonist.

The end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first century experienced a huge upsurge in fiction inspired by the 1612 Lancashire witch trials, and therefore by Thomas

¹⁵⁶ Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, *Witches, Midwives and Nurses: A History of Women Healers* (New York: Feminist Press, 2010), pp. 44-49

¹⁵⁷ Jennifer Higginbotham, *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Sisters: Gender, Transgression, Adolescence* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013), p. 1

Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie*. After almost three centuries of only two, male-authored novels, *The Lancashire Witches* by Ainsworth, and Neill's *Mist Over Pendle*, by 2012 there were an additional two novels, two poetry-collections, and one commissioned poem written about these trials. There are several reasons for this. The growing interest in the early modern witch trials in both academic and popular thought has certainly inspired artists of all disciplines to consider new perspectives on the early modern trials. This coincided with the more anthropological approach to the subject in which the actual lives and emotions of the accused witches became the favoured lens through which to study the history of these trials. Moreover, the witch-figure became a feminist icon and a symbol of female strength and rebellion. This spilled, and continues to spill, over into literature, television, and film.¹⁵⁸

Geraldine Monk and Blake Morrison's Pendle-inspired poetry collections of the 1990s are certainly worth examination, *Interregnum* especially was created as a collection of experimental and radical, feminist poems on the 1612 trials, and given that it was published in the aftermath of second-wave writings like Dworkin's *Woman-Hating*, an exploration of these poetic interpretations of the trials through the feminist lens would certainly add to scholarship on representations of the Pendle witch-figure.¹⁵⁹ Following Sharratt's *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, which the author was inspired to write given her move to the area, the quadricentenary events held in 2012 Lancashire to commemorate the trials inspired several of the twenty-first century literature; *The Daylight Gate* and *Malkin Child*, of course, but also *The Witch & her Soul* (2012) by Christine Middleton, and Carol Ann Duffy's commissioned poem 'The Lancashire Witches', which can still be read, verse by verse, on markers along the

¹⁵⁸ For example, though there are too many to list: Anna Biller, *The Love Witch* (Anna Biller Productions, 2016); Constance M. Burge, *Charmed* (Warner Bros., 1998-2006); Nora Ephron, *Bewitched* (Columbia Pictures, 2005); See also:- Christopher E. Bell, Ed. *Hermione Granger saves the world: Essays on the feminist heroine of Hogwarts* (London: McFarland & Co. Inc., 2012); Katherine McLoone, 'Feminist Pop Culture Heroes,' in *Encyclopedia of Heroism Studies*, Eds., Scott T. Allison, James K. Beggan, George R. Goethals (New York: Springer, 2023), 1-12; Kosmina, *Feminist Afterlives of the Witch*

¹⁵⁹ Morrison, *Pendle Witches*; Monk, *Interregnum*)

Lancashire Witches Walk.¹⁶⁰ Richard Shannon's 2008 play *Sabbat* about the trials was also re-released in text form and on production in Lancashire 2012 as part of the commemorations.¹⁶¹ In 2014, Camille Ralphs released the small poetry collection *Malkin: an elegy in 14 spels* about the trial.¹⁶² Then in 2019, Stacey Halls published *The Familiars*, a novel about Alice Gray, one of the accused witches of Samlesbury in 1612, and an examination of this novel, especially alongside Middleton's treatment of another Samlesbury witch, Jane Southworth, would certainly provide interesting insight into how the Samlesbury witches are viewed four centuries after their names were published in Potts' pamphlet.¹⁶³ Moreover, in 2022, Elizabeth Lee published a novel called *Cunning Women*, which focuses on the story of a Lancashire-based cunning woman in 1620, in the aftermath of the infamous trials, and Nick Stead has published a 2023 retelling of the 1612 events called *The View from Gallows Hill*.¹⁶⁴ A critical study of these texts too, as they relate to and recreate their respective trials, would certainly provide worthwhile insight into the development of the witch-figure in historical fiction, for it would seem that even after the 2012 commemorations, the Pendle witch-figure remains prevalent in memory and thought.

¹⁶⁰ Alex Bevan, 'Walking with the Lancashire Witches' in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Gothic*, Ed. Clive Bloom (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 1049-1062

¹⁶¹ Richard Shannon, *Sabbat* (London: Oberon Books Ltd., 2012); 'Drama Marks the Pendle Witch Trials', *BBC*, 7 April 2012 <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-lancashire-17645854>> [accessed 07.06.2023]

¹⁶² Camille Ralphs, *Malkin: an elegy in 14 spels*, illustrations by Emma Wright (Wakefield: The Emma Press, 2015)

¹⁶³ Stacey Halls, *The Familiars* (London: Zaffre, 2019); Middleton, *The Witch & her Soul*

¹⁶⁴ In addition to the Pendle-inspired fiction mentioned, there has also been a recent surge in fiction written about other early modern witch trials, especially in East Anglia with *The Witch Finder's Sister* and *The Manningtree Witches*. - Elizabeth Lee, *Cunning Women* (London: Penguin, 2022); Nick Stead, *The View From Gallows Hill* (Huddersfield: Twisted Fate Publishing, 2023); Beth Underdown, *The Witch Finder's Sister* (London: Penguin Books, 2017); A. K. Blakemore, *The Manningtree Witches* (London: Granta, 2021)

Conclusion

Four Centuries of the Lancashire Witch-Figure

The aim of this thesis was to analyse the construction of the Lancashire witch-figure in historical record and historical fiction between 1612 and 2012. This study has been completed by using three categories of analysis for the six key works under examination. The first, establishing a historical awareness of the socio-political climate of 1612 Lancashire, and framing the events which occurred before and during the Lancashire witch trials. The second category of analyses was to examine each key text through a gendered lens, considering how the female witch-figure was constructed by each author, and how that reflected or rejected notions of gender in both the early modern period, and the time in which each author wrote her. Finally, the third category for analyses was to utilise the contexts of each individual text to inform a close-reading methodological approach to each work, assessing how the constructed witch-figure became a vessel for metaphor, in which each author placed their own ideals. The characters of Potts' pamphlet began as objects in this pamphleteer's story; constructed witch-figures, monstrous, villainous, and without reproach. They had no true history of their own, for even their written confessions cannot be proven to be theirs. Their voices, actions, appearances, and life-stories were entirely created, and so any analysis of their experiences and identities would be hindered by the construction of them in the author's voice. Over time, the identity of the Pendle accused began to shift. This shift was influenced most by the fictional retellings of the Lancashire trials, which began with *The Lancashire Witches: A Romance of Pendle Forest* in 1848, and the story continues to be reworked and reinvented today. Whilst there have been different artistic modes used in representations of the 1612 trials including poems, poetry collections, and plays, the focus of this thesis has been historical fiction, namely the historical fiction which provides new perspectives and

representations of the Pendle-accused witches, over a four-hundred-year period, culminating in the novellas commissioned and published for the 2012 quadricentenary commemorations in Lancashire.⁹⁷²

Each of the fictions under examination have very clearly built upon the original story constructed by Thomas Potts in his pamphlet. Potts wrote his witchcraft pamphlet with a readership (or audience) in mind, as did these authors of fiction. Potts said that because, in Lancashire and Northern England all eyes were on these trials, and also because so many members of the public actually attended these trials, Potts' 'honourable... Lords, the Judges of Assize', thought it necessary to publish these records 'to the whole world'.⁹⁷³ The officials behind these trials aimed to inform the public of these proceedings in a way which could be carefully controlled, so as to avoid any discontentment from the public over the verdicts, and to gain the attention and favour of the King for the abilities which they displayed, to root out witches, Catholics, and treasonous plots. Potts constructed the accused within *The Wonderful Discoverie* as stereotypical witch-figures, villainous and beyond redemption, calling them 'the principall authors and actors in this late woefull and lamentable Tragedie',⁹⁷⁴ comparing this allegedly factual account of court proceedings to the dramatic works of his contemporaries. By placing these trials alongside works of fiction, using their cultural context in order to dramatise this pamphlet, Potts' language (inadvertently) encourages the reader to question the validity of his work. Thomas Potts, in 1613, was the first author to creatively and dramatically construct the Pendle witch-figure, and it is from his work that all further interpretations gained their inspiration.

⁹⁷² The works of literature not examined within this project are those texts of differing modes, the novels which feature one of the accused Samlesbury witches as protagonist, rather than the Lancashire witches, and the works which came after 2012. – Monk, *Interregnum*; Morrison, *Pendle Witches*; Middleton, *The Witch & her Soul* (Lancaster; Shannon, *Sabbat*; Ralphs, *Malkin: an elegy in 14 spels*, illustrations by Wright; Halls, *The Familiars*; Elizabeth Lee, *Cunning Women* (London: Penguin, 2022); Nick Stead, *The View From Gallows Hill* (Huddersfield: Twisted Fate Publishing, 2023)

⁹⁷³ Potts (1613), pp. 13-14

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 14

I have argued that each author was inspired by their own surroundings, backgrounds, beliefs, and the historical moments in which they were writing when creating their fictions. All five works offer new perspectives on the Lancashire witch trials, including new characterisations of the key figures within them. As identified in Chapter 3, these key figures are Demdike, Alizon Device, Jennet Device, Alice Nutter, and Roger Nowell. There are similarities across these texts with regards to the important themes and the developments of these characters which suggests that each author had read the Pendle-inspired fiction which came before them when writing. I believe that Robert Neill had read Ainsworth's text (regardless of his claims otherwise), and that his character choices are often so different to Ainsworth's because of his determination to maintain a separation between *Mist Over Pendle* and *The Lancashire Witches*. Mary Sharratt, whilst she did not recognise her predecessors in her 'Afterword', did develop certain similarities to the previous two novels in *Daughters of the Witching Hill*. Both Sharratt and Ainsworth's works had Alizon Device as the beautiful and innocent heroine (though of course Sharratt's also contains narrative from Demdike), and they both feature Jennett Device as a jealous, nasty child who stands in opposition to the beloved protagonist. Moreover, all three texts contain scenes of merriment associated with pre-Reformation pageantry, something which was not mentioned in Potts' pamphlet, but was a dominant feature in Ainsworth's novel. In 2012, then, both Jeanette Winterson and Livi Michael were commissioned and released their novellas around the same time, and so it would be highly unlikely that they read each other's texts before publication. However, Winterson, like both Ainsworth and Neill, saw the opportunity for creative license within the enigmatic figure of Alice Nutter. For Winterson, she was a transgressive, queer heroine; for Ainsworth, she had the potential of a redemption arc as the mother of his 'well-born', angelic protagonist Alizon; and for Neill, Alice Nutter was just mysterious enough, and sufficiently well-placed in society, to become a more realistic and villainous arch-witch in his retelling.

Michael's novella shares similarities with both Ainsworth's and Neill's in the Lancashire vernacular associated with the Demdike family, though for the male authors this was something of a negative addition, whilst Michael is careful to make it feel natural instead of satirical. Finally, all three of the twenty-first century texts went against the creative choices of the male authors by making JP Roger Nowell their villain, thus offering the accused witch-figure a chance for a fully realised story of their own, as protagonist of their own history, complete with an oppressive antagonist.⁹⁷⁵

All five texts treat important themes and characters very differently, just as all five have a different view of witchcraft. Neill wrote of 1612 Pendle as an area of dangerous women who called themselves witches, but used poison, rather than magic, to harm and kill. Michael's novella seems similar in that no actual magic is ever witnessed by the protagonist, but young Jennet Device is very clear that her family believe themselves to be witches. This theory exists in scholarship about the early modern trials. As Quensel argues, witchcraft was a social construct which became reality in the minds of both accusers and accused because of its prevalence in the mentality of the period.⁹⁷⁶ Like Neill and Michael's work, in *The Daylight Gate* many of the accused witches believe themselves witches, but that does not make them so, the protagonist said:

They will not be escaping Malkin Tower by broomstick however much Master Potts wants to see them fly over Pendle Hill.⁹⁷⁷

However, this novella is a gothic tale, and was commissioned by Hammer Horror, and as such is full of ghosts and grotesque magic.⁹⁷⁸ In *The Lancashire Witches* witchcraft is real

⁹⁷⁵ Though Nowell was not depicted in an entirely positive light in Ainsworth's novel, either.

⁹⁷⁶ Stephan Quensel, *Witch Politics in Early Modern Europe (1400-1800)* (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2023), pp. xi-xii, 175-178

⁹⁷⁷ Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, p. 51

⁹⁷⁸ There is a 'Dark Gentleman', a Satan-like who is not closely linked with Christianity, but did make a compact with Alice Nutter and Demdike, and the heroine Alice wields alchemy in a way which is perceived as witchcraft, too. Then in both Ainsworth and Sharratt's novel, witchcraft is real. - Owen Williams, 'Hammer Opens The Daylight Gate', *Empire* (10 October 2013)

and witches are entirely evil. Conversely, in *Daughters* witchcraft and charming, or cunning-craft, are one in the same, but the intention behind it determines its value as good or evil, and it is always tied to religion.⁹⁷⁹

Both Ainsworth and Sharratt recognised the importance of religion for the lives of early modern peoples, especially in Lancashire, a county known for Catholic recusancy and clinging to the pageantry of pre-Reformation society. For Ainsworth's text, this is portrayed in the Prologue, which dedicated several chapters to the Pilgrimage of Grace. It was this which framed the trials of 1612 in Ainsworth's novel.⁹⁸⁰ Moreover, *The Lancashire Witches* is full of detailed scenes of pageantry associated with 'merry England'; events which occurred in pre-Reformation England, which Hutton has called the 'Ritual Year'.⁹⁸¹ May Day celebrations, Mummers' plays, Morris Dances, and more, are written of fondly in Ainsworth's text.

Ainsworth's novel reminisces about 'merry England' in a similar way to Sharratt's, but for Ainsworth, the focus is on the activities and pageantry associated with pre-Reformation England, whereas in *Daughters* Sharratt discusses these activities as they related to Catholicism.⁹⁸² However, in *Daughters*, the memories of the 'old ways' and loyalty to Catholicism blend in with other beliefs in Demdike's narrative of the faerie Queen of Elfhame and sprite-like figures (who become the witch's familiar), merging Catholicism with a matriarchal religion more akin to the theories of feminists like Gage and Dworkin, the anthropological theories of Murray, and neo-Pagan Goddess belief.⁹⁸³

⁹⁷⁹ The Chattox family use magic, at least initially, for revenge, whereas Sharratt's protagonist Demdike uses this power for blessing and healing, and her power is closely associated with her religion.

⁹⁸⁰ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, pp. 1-48

⁹⁸¹ Ronald Hutton, *The Rise and Fall of Merry England: The Ritual Year 1400-1700* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 7-11

⁹⁸² Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 11

⁹⁸³ Zwissler, 'In Memorium Maleficarum' in *Emotions in the History of Witchcraft*; Murray, *Witch Cult*; Hutton, *Triumph of the Moon*; Gage, *Woman, Church & State*; Dworkin, *Woman-Hating*; Daly, *Gyn/Ecology*; Marguerite Rigoglioso, 'Interview with Starhawk', *Feminist Theology*, 13:2 (2005), 173-183

The other three novels do not put as much stock into religion. In *Mist Over Pendle*, the traditions of the 'Ritual Year' are also celebrated, but here they are less related to religion and more about the traditions of Lancashire peoples. Religion is prevalent in many of the characters, but dismissed by his hero and heroine, who represent notions of moderation and anti-extremism, a much more modern notion than would have been adopted by anyone in 1612 Pendle.

Malkin Child, written from the child's perspective, deals with Jennet Device's confusion over the necessity of religion. Michael's protagonist, whilst in Nowell's home, is taught a prayer to say before bed, calling on angels. Jennet's reaction to this prayer emphasises her youth and indicates that Michael believes religion was not important for everyone equally in this period.

Which is downright creepy, if you ask me. Who wants four angels looming over them while they're asleep, waiting to take their soul off?⁹⁸⁴

The very literal interpretation of this prayer shows that she had little experience with religion prior to this. This depiction reflects the decree of Henry VIII in 1543 in the 'Act for the Advancement of True Religion', forbidding the lower classes (men and women) from reading the Bible, and women of any class from reading it aloud.⁹⁸⁵ Whilst this Act was withdrawn upon the King's death, restrictions were re-issued again during the reign of Queen Mary I.⁹⁸⁶ This notion in *Malkin Child*, that religion exists beyond Jennet Device's comprehension, could be because of such laws which forbade the lower classes from engaging with religion.

⁹⁸⁴ Michael, *Malkin Child*, p. 63

⁹⁸⁵ 'No woman or artificers prentices journeymen servingmen of the degree of yeomen or under, husbandmen nor labourers, shall read the New Testament in English. Nothing shall be taught or maintained contrary to the King's instructions.' - Laura Gowing, *Gender Relations in Early Modern England* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2012), p. 113

⁹⁸⁶ Elizabeth Williamson, *The Materiality of Religion in Early Modern English Drama* (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2009), p. 171

In contrast, in Winterson's novella, religion does exist in a substantial way, but as a system of authority, not belief; the justification behind patriarchal abuse.

This abuse is directed primarily towards women. Midlefort said that during the early modern period 'women seemed... to provoke... an intense misogyny at times', attracting themselves to oppression and scapegoating, which in turn led them to being accused and persecuted as witches.⁹⁸⁷ Winterson writes of a society which allows villainous men the power and authority to abuse women whom they have deemed inferior due to their gender alone, but feel especially justified once said women are suspected of witchcraft. The violent abuse is always committed by masculinity, but femininity is not the only victim. Winterson writes of one good male character in the novella, Christopher Southworth, who is good because he too has been victimised by the same misogyny as the accused witches. In a flashback, Winterson recounts the capture and torture of Christopher Southworth, the wanted Jesuit who was allegedly guilty of plotting against the Samlesbury witches in Potts' pamphlet.⁹⁸⁸ The Gothic grotesque is vividly present here, and the monstrous within this scene is masculinity; whilst the torture is brutal and gory in every aspect, the most disturbing element is the sexual abuse committed against Christopher:

They stroked his penis and balls... The men were excited by him. They... bugged him... While one of the men held his penis the other cut it off. Then they cut off his balls.⁹⁸⁹

In *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir stated that 'no one is more arrogant toward women, more aggressive or scornful, than the man who is anxious about his virility.'⁹⁹⁰ Feminist and psychoanalytical theories suggest that male violence, especially sexual violence, can be the

⁹⁸⁷ Midlefort, *Witch Hunting in Southwestern Germany*, p. 184

⁹⁸⁸ Potts (1613), pp. 87-111

⁹⁸⁹ Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, p. 83

⁹⁹⁰ Simone De Beauvoir, *The Second Sex: Translated and Edited by H. M. Parshley* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), p. xxxi

result of ‘castration anxiety’ in the masculine, a fear of losing one’s masculinity in front of, or as the result of, women.⁹⁹¹ If the gendered violence within *The Daylight Gate* is committed by a toxic masculinity with castration anxiety, then Christopher Southworth is the only objectively good male character because of his castration. He becomes a sexual other, a representation of queerness, and is written positively as a result.

Masculinity is not treated quite so harshly in the other two twenty-first century texts. In both *Daughters* and *Malkin Child*, Nowell is the villain. However, whilst Nowell is the epitome of masculine power within these texts, that power is only so threatening because of the class divide between each text’s villain and protagonist. In Michael’s novella, Nowell was able to manipulate the protagonist. He was a fantastic, awe-inspiring figure to the protagonist, seeming so wonderful and clever that she dreamt of him becoming her father, and then frightening her into testifying against her own family under the guise of saving their souls, a concept that she couldn’t quite understand.⁹⁹² In *Daughters*, the same can be said of the dichotomy between Nowell and Alizon Device. Nowell turns on Alizon after treating her with kindness and fairness, and distracting her with good food, the grandeur of his home, and his learning.⁹⁹³ Nowell in both of these texts is the villain because of his power over the protagonists, which can be linked to his gender, of course, but also to his class and status in society, his position as JP.

In contrast, Nowell in Neill’s novel is a mild-tempered, generous hero. Neill celebrates this character for his learning, which went hand-in-hand with his class and position in the early modern period. Moreover, in *Mist Over Pendle*, masculinity is not depicted

⁹⁹¹ Natalia Kaloh Vid, ‘A Sadistic Nurse as a Castrating Mother in the Contemporary Novel’ in *Transgressive Women: Investigating Vamps, Witches, Whores, Serial Killers and Monsters*, Eds. Bridget Sandhoff and Manon Hedenborg-White (Leiden: Brill, 2019), p. 124

⁹⁹² In the novella, Nowell fed her, bathed her, clothed her, plied her with more luxury than she had ever experienced, and then spoke to her of witchcraft and hell. - Michael, *Malkin Child*, p. 77

⁹⁹³ When he read her a passage she said, ‘This seemed a wondrous thing as I’d never heard anybody read from a book just for me.’ - Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, pp. 246-253

negatively in itself. The only masculine character who is portrayed somewhat negatively, as more foolish (though certainly not villainous) is Richard Baldwin, who is this way not because of his gender, but his reliance on the extremist views of Puritanism. Similarly, in Ainsworth's novel, masculinity is not the enemy, but both Roger Nowell and Thomas Potts are written as fickle and negative because of their determination to persecute and prosecute witches. In Nowell, this determination occurs after the land-dispute with Alice Nutter, and in Potts, it is ingrained in him by his loyalty to religion and to the King, 'Master Potts seems to have the 'Daemonologie' at his fingers' ends.'⁹⁹⁴

Whilst the villains of the twenty-first century narratives are representative of masculine power, the male-authored novels villainise the witch-figure. Because, in the tale of the Pendle witches, the only narrative available is the one produced by Thomas Potts, our historical awareness of the events of 1612 relies solely upon the reliability of a male court clerk, writing of a male-led investigation and trial, on behalf of a society of masculine privilege and patriarchal rule. As such, the Pendle case is told through the patriarchal lens of masculine authority and female deviance. As Barstow stated, 'women were accused primarily by men, tried by male juries,... sentenced by male judges, tortured by male jailers,... while being prayed over by male pastors'.⁹⁹⁵ In an early modern Lancashire, women had no power, no autonomy, no control over their own lives. In the novels of Ainsworth and Neill, the witch-figure remains the voiceless villain, and so these male-authored texts present a continued patriarchal view of the trials where the accused witches are constructed to serve a purpose rather than to become realised actors in their own story.

Whilst Ainsworth does rewrite the character of Alizon Device as someone good, an example of innocence and purity, he does this by separating her from the witch-figure

⁹⁹⁴ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 77

⁹⁹⁵ Barstow, *Witchcraze*, p. 17

stereotype. She is beautiful, mild-mannered, and 'well-born', respectful and deferent to the men in the novel, and a total contrast with the witches, such as Demdike who said:

I would rather see men shrink from me, and shudder at my approach, than smile upon me and court me. I would rather freeze the blood in their veins, than set it boiling with passion.⁹⁹⁶

Ainsworth's villainous arch-witch Demdike echoes the witch-figure created by Potts in 1613, who was a threat to all men.⁹⁹⁷ Similarly, Robert Neill's chosen arch-witch Alice Nutter represents the enemy of masculinity too, because she attempts to subvert the patriarchal order. Whilst Ainsworth's villain wishes harm on men because of her wickedness,⁹⁹⁸ Neill's villain does harm because of ambition, subverting her own feminine role as wife and mother in order to wreak havoc on the natural order prescribed by a patriarchal society, becoming the witch as opposed to the good wife.⁹⁹⁹ This plays into typical early modern fears of the witch as monstrous mother and twisted feminine, a threat to masculinity who uses feminine knowledge and spaces to do harm.¹⁰⁰⁰

The witch-figure in these male-authored novels has been constructed very differently from the female-authored texts of the twenty-first century. However, representation in these later works can still be viewed as problematic. Despite the aims of all three authors to offer new narratives to the victims of the 1612 trials, none of them truly represent the accused male witches in Potts' pamphlet, and thus, are in this way more akin to the female-focused attitudes of first and second-wave feminists than more recent, inclusive historiographies of the witch trials.¹⁰⁰¹ This, in a way, reflects Potts' pamphlet in which male witches were

⁹⁹⁶ Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 237

⁹⁹⁷ Potts (1613), p. 15

⁹⁹⁸ Demdike says, 'I live to plague mankind'. - Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 237

⁹⁹⁹ She utilises domestic, womanly tasks like cooking and caring for family in order to poison and murder in order to climb social ladders. - Louise Jackson, 'Witches, wives and mothers: witchcraft persecution and women's confessions in seventeenth-century England,' *Women's History Review*, 4:1 (1995), p. 72

¹⁰⁰⁰ Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, p. 354

¹⁰⁰¹ Rowlands, 'Not 'the Usual Suspects'? , pp. 1-30

primarily involved and accused because of their relations to female ones. By disregarding the male witch-figure, certain aspects of history are being ignored within these historical fictions. The same can be said about the earlier novels by Ainsworth and Neill. In *The Lancashire Witches*, James Device is mentioned, but not developed as a character. He is introduced as something of a brute, with a bad temper, a tendency to be involved in ‘rustic encounter[s]’ (meaning fights), and a cruel nature.¹⁰⁰² Yet he is disregarded within the rest of the text’s plot. In *Malkin Child*, James Device is certainly not as important to the protagonist as the women in Jennet’s family. Her older brother is cruel to her and like in Ainsworth’s novel, is prone to disagreements with neighbours for his behaviours.¹⁰⁰³ In *Mist Over Pendle*, James is described as ‘moon-kissed’, and his only role within the novel is as ‘the idiot’.¹⁰⁰⁴ In Winterson’s novella too, James is mentioned, once more described by violent behaviour, but not developed.¹⁰⁰⁵ It is only Sharratt who develops something of a character for James Device, but here too, he is defined by his simplicity. Like in Neill’s text he is described as an idiot.¹⁰⁰⁶ The character is present throughout the novel, but he is, as he has been portrayed in all five texts, quick to temper and with a propensity for cruelty. As such, none of the novels under examination truly offer the male witches of the 1612 trials a story of their own.

Jennet Device, the child-witness in Potts’ pamphlet, is also portrayed as a side-character in all but one of the texts under examination. In both Ainsworth and Sharratt’s novels, she is constructed negatively as nasty and jealous, especially of her sister Alizon. Neither novel offers this historical figure any grace, and it is especially interesting that Sharratt, who aims to rewrite women’s histories with women at the forefront, would not offer

¹⁰⁰² Ainsworth, *The Lancashire Witches*, p. 59

¹⁰⁰³ Michael, *Malkin Child*, p. 18

¹⁰⁰⁴ In all three of these texts, John Bulcock, the other accused male-witch of 1612, is not mentioned at all, even by name. - Neill, *Mist Over Pendle*, pp. 72-73

¹⁰⁰⁵ Winterson does also mention John Bulcock, but by name only in a list of accused. - Winterson, *The Daylight Gate*, pp. 29-35, 201

¹⁰⁰⁶ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 96

nine-year-old Jennet any redemption in her retelling. In *Mist Over Pendle*, Jennet is pitiable and thus pitied by the novel's narrator Margery. She acts as spy against the Pendle witches on Margery and Nowell's behalf, but Neill does not write her into any sort of redemptive, happy ending. In *The Daylight Gate*, Jennet is a victim of an oppressive and sexually violent kyriarchy, as are all of the accused witches, and so her story is one of general abuse, but not one of any particular agency.

It is only in *Malkin Child* that Jennet Device is given a voice. Jennet in Michael's text can be compared to Alizon Device in *Daughters*. Both characters represent innocence and girlhood, which is taken from them by an oppressive, patriarchal figure.¹⁰⁰⁷ Both protagonists display a tendency toward child-like fantasy, though Jennet in *Malkin Child* fantasises a lot more, and by the end of each text, they experience a tragedy which rips their fantasies from them. This loss of innocence is especially prominent in *Daughters*, which is the only novel to fully explore the 1612 trials *and* executions. These scenes occur in Alizon's narrative, taking the reader through the unjust horrors of this early modern witchcraft trial and execution, through the voice of the teenage girl who has narrated the majority of the novel. Sharratt makes Alizon's fate even more tragic and harrowing. Alizon's fear and panic is clear, as is her confusion over the truth and justice of the trials. Sharratt depicts a scared, young girl who is forced to walk to her own death, and the tone of this scene builds to a quick, brutal and emotionally painful crescendo; 'I prayed as the rope bit deep into my skin. I chanted till he kicked the bench from beneath my feet, leaving me to swing and kick and judder.'¹⁰⁰⁸ The treatment of Alizon in this way was perhaps inspired by Thomas Potts' own construction of Alizon Device in *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, for she was so penitent during her trial that

¹⁰⁰⁷ Arguably, even Ainsworth's novel represents a sense of innocence and girlhood in the development of Alizon Device, but unlike the twenty-first century novels, Alizon is innocent in an unrealistically good and angelic way which does not actually add to or attempt to accurately portray the tragedy which befell her.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Sharratt, *Daughters of the Witching Hill*, p. 324

Potts did not in fact have much to say about her monstrosity as he did with the other accused, instead describing her actions: ‘and there on her knees, she humbly asked forgiveness’.¹⁰⁰⁹

The Daylight Gate, like Sharratt’s and Michael’s fictions, provides a new narrative for the accused Alice Nutter, and here, Alice Nutter becomes not just a fully realised character and symbol of female strength, but also a queer, transgressive, proto-feminist figure. In different ways, and through different historical women, these texts develop new narratives which give voice to the silent victims of history. As Zwissler states:

Women, LGBTQ people,... and others who are marginalized by dominant academic narratives create their own histories because they, like all human beings, need stories that include them as full actors and reflect their equal right to be.¹⁰¹⁰

In a world of male privilege and oppression, the accused Pendle witches became victims of their social standing and of social fears and prejudices. Their voices remain unheard, their stories untold in the historical record published by Thomas Potts. Therefore, in order to give agency to the victims of the 1612 Lancashire witch trials, to allow them to become subjects in their own history, their stories must be reimagined. The same cannot be said of the male-authored fiction of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, for neither Ainsworth nor Neill constructed their Pendle retellings with the agency of the witch-figure in mind. Their novels, regardless of the authors’ views on the validity or absurdity of the actual 1612 trials, actually reflect the same representations of the accused witch-figure as does Potts in his *The Wonderfull Discoverie*. Whilst the literary rewritings of the Pendle case are fictional, and the earlier works retain the negative features of the Lancashire witch-figure, these new, twenty-first century narratives, through the lens of historical fiction, make attempts to remind readers of the true and brutal history behind these tales. These narratives

¹⁰⁰⁹ Potts (1613), p. 143

¹⁰¹⁰ Zwissler, ‘In the Study of the Witch’, p. 119

are developed as a means of giving voice to the real victims of history, the accused witches of the 1612 Lancashire trials, as they become full actors in their own stories, providing agency for abused and oppressed women specifically, at the hands of a corrupt patriarchal system.

Historiographical studies of *The Wonderfull Discoverie* have not paid close attention to its author's hyperbolic interjections, which he used to construct the accused Lancashire witches as the monstrous villains of his story. In applying a close-reading approach to those specific moments of ad-libbing from the pamphleteer, this thesis has developed a new method for understanding how the historical witch-figure is remembered through pamphlets, one which could potentially be applied to more witchcraft treatises from the period. Whilst Ainsworth's life and works have been documented before, no one has yet assessed *The Lancashire Witches* alongside its key resource, *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, and critique has not focused on the author's construction of the witch figure. Neill remains the most enigmatic of the authors under examination here, and perhaps that is why no one has attempted an in-depth analysis of *Mist Over Pendle* before. Whilst the novel has been mentioned by historians of the Pendle trials, no literary critique of the text exists. Of the three twenty-first century fictions, only Winterson's novella has been examined by literary critique, but no one has attempted to analyse this work alongside Potts' pamphlet. Finally, both *Daughters of the Witching Hill* and *Malkin Child* remain untouched by academic analysis. To summarise, not only has this thesis examined *The Wonderfull Discoverie* in a way which has not been done, through a close reading of Potts' authorial interjections, but this work has also developed a new understanding of the Lancashire witch-figure in historical memory. Moreover, the approaches applied to the historical record and historical fictions examined here have the potential to be utilised in a study of any past event which has been retold in the mode of historical fiction. Certainly, the next step in this study is to apply this same methodology to other Pendle-inspired literature which has not yet been examined.

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