King James and the Theatre of Witches

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Subversion upon the Jacobean Stage

By

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Cambridge Scholars Publishing

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This book first published 2021

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Cover Artist Nicola Dennis

ISBN (10): 1-5275-7556-X
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-7556-1

To Bernice and Merwin…

NOTE ON TRANSCRIPTIONS

When transcribing quotations from sixteenth and seventeenth century English and Scottish texts, I have retained the original spellings and orthography. However, I have modernized the *f, s, u,* and *v* usage in order to facilitate ease of reading.

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List of Abbreviations

MS / MSS	manuscript / manuscripts
n.p.	no page numbers listed
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
par.	paragraph (as per MLA citation guidelines)

ABSTRACT

King James and the Theatre of Witches: Subversion upon the Jacobean Stage is a cultural historicist analysis of King James I of England's evolving perspectives regarding witchcraft and his influence upon contemporaneous "witch plays." It examines how the beliefs of one man sitting atop a hegemonic structure influenced Early Modern Britain's dramatic rendition of witches and societal theory and praxis.

Early on during the Stuart monarch's reign in Scotland (1588-1591), James directed a fevered hunt of witches whom he believed were trying to assassinate him, an event that later came to be known as "The North Berwick Affair." He played a direct role in the interrogations, personally approving and, at times, overseeing the horrific torture of some of the accused. Afterward, he published a pamphlet detailing this event (*The Newes of Scotland*), which was disseminated throughout Britain.

In 1597, the monarch also penned a compendium of witchcraft lore (in the form of a dialogue) entitled *Daemonologie,* which in some way acted both as a defense of his methods and as a manual for identifying, interrogating and punishing witches.

The influence of James's ontological musing is apparent. Once the King ascended to the British throne, London-based dramatists endeavored to both paradoxically please their monarch with plays that catered to his interests while at the same time subverting his serious belief in witchcraft lore. King James's works and involvement in witchcraft trials are notably referenced, sometimes satirically so, in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* Ben Jonson's *Masque of Queenes,* Thomas Middleton's *The Witch,* and Dekker, Rowley & Ford's *The Witch of Edmonton*—all of which subversively speak to the King's philosophical engagement with witchlore.

Through an exegesis of this collection of four Jacobean "witch-plays," an examination of King James's role within the witchcraft debates and his involvement with contemporaneous witch trials, this work shows how the monarch's various publications on witchlore transmuted stage and the culture. Taken as a group, these dramas provide a window into the newly emergent humanism of the Renaissance world and its struggle with gender-driven categories—especially regarding the cultural praxis of accusing, torturing and executing "witches."

PREFACE

The purpose of this study is threefold: first, to examine the life of King James and analyze the reasons as to why, in Scotland, he hunted "witches" and then identify what factors inspired him to later protect those falsely accused of witchcraft in England. The second is to synthesize this biographical sketch of the monarch with an exegesis of "witch-plays," bearing in mind the collective body of theatrical work in Renaissance England that formed a subversive, sometimes satirical, cultural response to his polices. The last purpose is to analyze how the performative liminality in the theatre itself may have actuated a personal shift within the monarch.

There has never before been a published study of the relationship between King James's well-publicized witchcraft beliefs and the subsequent theatrical response. Although there are many compilations regarding his involvement in witchcraft trials[1] and some discussion of the intertextual discourse between his *Daemonologie* and the theatre[2], none of these elements have yet been brought together. This study is the first of its kind to examine the subversive quality of the witch-play genre that emerged after James ascended England's throne in 1603 and, as such, adds to the collective body of knowledge for studies regarding King James, early modern witchcraft trials, and the Jacobean stage.

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[1] See Pumfrey's "Potts, Plots and Politics: James I's *Daemonologie* and *The Wonderful Discoverie of Witches*" in *The Lancaster Witches: Histories and Stories.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002; Norman and Roberts's *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches.* Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2000.

[2] See Corbin and Sedge's *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.

CHAPTER ONE

KING JAMES IN SCOTLAND: THE ORIGINS OF THE PARADOX KING

Before we start with a treatment of Britain's witch-play genre and the impact of the monarch's thoughts upon the theatre artists and poets, it is necessary to examine the medieval philosophical origins of King James VI of Scotland's (and later James I of England's) and analyze the King's involvement with several witch trials during his early reign in Scotland.

The monarch's epistemology regarding witchcraft was molded by centuries of medieval beliefs that were informed more from European than British tradition.[3] Throughout the thirteenth century, fear of supposed "witches" grew across Europe. Around the year 1230, the first witchcraft manuals were written for Inquisitors' use.[4] Countryside phenomena such as plague, famine, or climate aberrations were attributed to witchcraft as well as many personal tragedies—the death or illness of a child, loss of livestock, pain, or even impotence (situations later mocked in such plays as Middleton's *The Witch* and Jonson's *Masque of Queenes*). Written works began to proliferate about the phenomenon of witchcraft. One particularly had a measurable effect upon Europe's culture—which, in turn, shaped the thinking of the future King James.

In 1450, Heinrich Kramer, an inquisitor of the Catholic Church[5] penned an extensive work entitled *The Malleus Maleficarum and the construction*

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[3] For a more detailed record of the history regarding witchcraft in the medieval era, please refer to Appendix II: *History of Witchcraft during the Medieval Era*; for the record pertaining to British witchcraft history, refer to Appendix III: *History of Witchcraft in England.*

[4] See: Antoine Dondaine, 'Le Manuel de l'Inquisiteur (1230-1330)' in *Les Hérésies et l'Inquisition, XIIe-XIIIe siècles/ documents et é tudes*, ed. by Yves Dossat (Aldershot: Variorum, 1990)

[5] Although Sprenger's name is attached to the work, the authorship was predominantly Kramer's. The Inquisition, formed in thirteenth century wrote the first manuals pertaining to witchcraft. "Witches," as they were believed to have signed contracts with Satan, were declared heretics; in 1258, Pope Alexander IV

of witchcraft. Elizabeth Tucker notes that the authors "deliberately set out to increase the frequency of witch persecution" (44), and increase it, they did. Pope Innocent VIII granted the men the authority to detect and exterminate "witches,"[6] while commanding the local authorities not to "molest" or "hinder" their investigations "under pain of excommunication or worse" (qtd. in Broedel 15). As witch trials and convictions spread across the continent, so, too, did witchlore: witchcraft became synonymous with Devil-worship; witches' Sabbaths were thought to infiltrate the countryside; beings known as incubi or succubi were believed to visit innocent civilians at night. All of this lore later gave rise to an important theatrical tradition—evoking eventual references in the Jacobean witch-plays treated later.

This *Malleus Maleficarum,* published in Germany in 1487, devotes many pages to a description as to why women were more susceptible to temptation from the Devil, one which deeply informed the future King James's thought (and one that the Jacobean playwrights discussed would eventually reject). An example from *The Malleus* illustrates this case:

> [Women] have slippery tongues, and are unable to conceal from their fellow-women those things which by evil arts they know...they are feebler both in mind and body, [and so] it is not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft; [they] are more carnal [and since the Devil is a male,] they must abominably copulate with the demons that abound...their intellect and understanding of spiritual matters is like a child's and cannot approach that of men; [they] inflict various vengeances, either by witchcraft, or by some other means...If the world could be rid of women, we should not be without God in our intercourse. For truly, without the wickedness of women, to say nothing of witchcraft, the world would

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agreed that the Inquisition could try witches and in the 1320's Pope John XXII "expressed a particular horror of witches and claimed that he feared for his own life at their hands" (Kors & Peters 77). For more information, please refer to Appendix II.

[6] "It has recently come to our ears, not without great pain to us, that in parts of upper Germany…many persons of both sexes give themselves over to devils, male and female, and by their incantations, charms, and conjurings, and by other abominable superstitions…ruin and cause to perish the offspring of women, the foal of animals, the products of the earth…as well as men and women…that they afflict and torture with dire pains and anguish…and hinder men from betting and women from conceiving, and prevent all consummation of marriage…they do not fear to commit and perpetuate many other abominable offences and crimes, at the risk of their own souls, to the insult of the divine majesty and to the pernicious example and scandal of multitudes" (*Papal Bull of 1484* par. 4).

> still remain proof against innumerable dangers. (qtd. in Kors & Peter 124-26)

In line with this reasoning, many excruciating devices of were specifically invented for and used in the interrogations of female "witches":

For reasons pertaining to geography and culture, England was far more lenient on supposed "witches" than her continental neighbors.[7] In Scotland, the land of James's birth, witchcraft beliefs were more similar to those upon the European continent than to England's. The country possessed a long history of witch persecution, oftentimes for expedient, political purposes.[8] And so, a historical precedent regarding the belief in supernatural plots against the Scottish throne was set—a belief that, of course, later sets the stage for *Macbeth* and the Three Sisters.

In 1563, King James's mother, Mary Queen of Scots, initiated a statute against witches one year after her cousin, Queen Elizabeth of England, did the same. Ironically, Mary herself was rumored of witchcraft, as it was believed (with reason) that she had murdered James's father. According to Julian Goodare, Scotland's "witchcraft act was not in itself a panic measure, but it soon led to panics" (5). Serious witch-hunts emerged in 1568 (40 were accused) and in 1577, 30 witches were executed (Burns xxvii). The two-year-old James Stuart inherited the throne of Scotland in 1567 right in the midst of this chaos,[9] and it is no wonder that witchcraft became a subject that would obsess him his entire life.

However, one definitive event shaped James's thinking regarding witchcraft for many years to come. The most influential episodes that shaped the King's perceptions of the demonic (and it is made reference to in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*) was his notorious 1589 trip to Denmark, when he, the 24-year-old King of Scotland, went to rescue his future Queen Anna, who, on her way to marry her future husband, was

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[7] The tradition of English law had more checks and balances built into the system and required a 23-member jury to indict and a 12-member jury to convict. Torture was only permitted when authorized by the monarch and execution took place by hanging, not burning. Please refer to Appendix III for more details.

[8] One example will suffice: in 1479, King James III accused his brother, The Earl of Mar, of trying to murder him through the use of witchcraft. Around a century later, Lady Glamis was similarly accused of using charms against James V. James VI used a similar tactic against his cousin, Bothwell, during the "North Berwick Affair," accusing him of leading a coven of witches who were attempting to assassinate him.

[9] In 1587, Queen Elizabeth finally executed her cousin, Queen Mary (for treason and plotting against Elizabeth's life) after Elizabeth's forces apprehended Queen Mary as she was fleeing persecution in *her* country.

stranded due to a freakish, raging and violent storm. This tempest was so unusual, that the Danish Naval Admiral (Peter Munk) blamed it on Copenhagen witches.

James succeeded in his mission and ended up fetching Anna, but they could not get back to Scotland due to *another* storm, so they weathered the winter in Denmark. Stewart theorizes that during this time James met and conversed with the noted Lutheran theologian, Niels Hemmingsen (124), who may have had a substantial impact upon the impressionable king.[10]

When the royal couple set sail back to Scotland:

> By a marvelous chance, the king's ship was driven by a wind which blew directly contrary to that which filled the sails of the other vessels; and the king and queen were both placed in extreme jeopardy. (Spalding 112)

The bizarre weather caused the King's ship to be carried in a different direction from the others. This happenstance added to the growing notion that the storm was summoned through an act of witchcraft. After learning of this incident, it was clear to the Denmark court that *maleficarum* was afoot. They took into custody five or six "witches" upon the suspicion that they had sought to harm the King and Queen.

These witch-trials, which started in Copenhagen in 1590 and continued in North Berwick, Scotland throughout 1591, were recorded and news of them spread throughout the British Isles. Indeed, in *Newes from Scotland*, the earliest known tract on Scottish witchcraft (and later, an important source for Shakespeare's *Macbeth*), James recounted the vivid details of his adventure and he had it distributed throughout both England and Scotland.

The *Newes* starts off with an earnest plea to the reader to accept the verisimilitude of its story and states how every word had been recited by "his Maiestie himself":

> All which examinations (gentle Reader) I have heere truelye published, as they were taken and uttered in the presence of the Kings Maiestie, praying thee to accept it for veritie, the same beeing so true as cannot be reproved. (*Newes From Scotland* 86)

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[10] Burns refutes this notion, claiming that there is no direct evidence to support this claim (64). However, there is little doubt that Denmark had a long tradition in blaming witchcraft for her troubles. In 1543, witches were made the scapegoat for a poor Danish naval attempt; in 1562, the death of a state councilor was attributed to them; in 1566 more innocents were blamed (and persecuted) for the loss of ships off the coast of Visby; governmental and ecclesiastical authorities also accused King Eric XIV of Sweden of engaging witches to help his military campaign against Denmark (Stewart 124).

Whether or not the majority of *The Newes's* readers accepted the story at its face value is impossible to ascertain. However, there is no doubt that *Newes from Scotland* had a profound impact on many. Eventually, over 300 people were implicated in the North Berwick Affair and approximately 100 executed for raising the ferocious storms.

It may be that the King, at first, was skeptical that witches were to blame for the wreckage of his ship, but (as the King later claims in his *Newes from Scotland*) upon interviewing with one of the accused, Agnes Sampson, she "declared unto him the verye woordes which had passed between the Kings majestie and his Queene at Oslo in Norway the first night of their marriage" (15). Afterward, James "swore by the living God, that he beleeved all the Divels in hell could not have discovered the same; acknowledging her words to be most true" (15). All doubt in the King's mind was eradicated and he fell firmly into the belief that nefarious, preternatural matters were afoot.

As the Danish rounded up their "witches," King James ordered the Scottish to do the same. And so, the unlucky mishap of weather led to King James's first massive (and infamous) witch-hunt. Throughout 1590-91, at least 70 Scottish "witches" from North Berwick were imprisoned, tortured, and brought before court. When a jury acquitted one of the accused (Barbara Napier, a noblewoman), the King, furious, charged the jury with "an assize of error" and forced them "to yield themselves to the King's will" (qtd. in Robbins 277), condemning the previously declared-innocent woman.

Made evident in Thorpe's nineteenth century compilation of Great Britain's State Paper Department Archive, specifically the May-June 1591 entries, the King, even at this early date, was "giving orations on the subject" to his peers (and probably elders) whom he lambasted for "thinking such matters [as witches] mere fantasies." This dialectic between belief and non-belief systems becomes a motif that follows him throughout his career in England and is indicative of a larger societal tension (and one that members of the English theatrical community, particularly Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton, will eventually satirize).

But in 1591 Scotland, James involved himself in the legal proceedings and the inquisitions themselves. As noted in *The Newes from Scotland,* "the Kings Maiestie, who in respect of the strangenes of these matters, tooke great delight to bee present at their examinations" (94).[11] The sovereign eventually took a direct hand in the interrogations, personally approving

[11] The particular phrase to pay attention to is "great delight." It wasn't just that the King was terrified of being assassinated. He greatly enjoyed witnessing (perhaps participating in) the torture of innocent women.

and, at times, overseeing horrific torture of some of the accused. He even displayed pride in his ability to detect some of their "fraud" (Barber 6).

Some of the interrogations of the "witches" that James supervised were particularly brutal. The case of Agnes Sampson[12] is a prime illustration:

> Agnis Sampson which was the elder Witch, was taken and brought to Haliruid house before the Kings Maiestie and sundry other of the nobility of Scotland, where she was straitly examined…by special commaundement this Agnis Sampson had all her haire shaven of, in each parte of her bodie, and her head thrawen with a rope…she would not confesse anything untill the Divels marke was found upon her privities, then she immediatelye confeesed whatsoever was demaunded of her. (*Newes from Scotland* 12-13)

This sexually invasive torture (and subsequent execution) of Agnes is particularly poignant because she was a healer and midwife.[13]

Gellis Duncane is another example of a woman made to suffer because of her healing skills. Gellis was a maid who was well known in her village for taking a "hand to help all such as were troubled or greeved with any kinde of sicknes or infirmitie" (*Newes from Scotland* 88-89). According to the *Newes from Scotland,* she performed so many miracles of nature, that her employer*,* David Seaton, grew suspicious. He took it upon himself to:

> torment her with the toruture of the Pilliwinckes upon her fingers, which is a greevous torture, and binding or wrinching her head with a corde or roape, which is a most cruell torment also...

The wronged maid would not give her "Maister" the confession he so avidly sought, "whereupon they suspecting that she had beene marked by the Divell...made dilligent search about her, and found the enemies marke" (*Newes from Scotland* 89). Through more sexually invasive techniques

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[12] According to Beasley, "Agnes was accused and 55 charges were made against her: raising the devil in the form of a black dog, digging up bones to make magic witchcraft powder, and commanding the devil to destroy one of James' ships...Interrogated by the king himself, she was deprived of sleep, subjected to barbaric torture for days and under extreme duress she confessed. She was found guilty at her trial stripped, shaved and strangled. Then burned at the stake on January 28, 1591 at Castle Hill, Edinburgh" (pars. 1-2).

[13] Folk healers were often known as "cunning folk" and accused of witchcraft. In previous centuries, there was a European tradition of so called "white magic" in tandem with these practices. Practitioners would combine prayers to Jesus Christ with magical spells in the hopes of healing the sick, but by late 16th century, this practice had long been connected to heresy.

(directly sanctioned by James), they ultimately made her confess and provide names of other "witches"—a standard practice of the day. (In terms of the future playwrights we will treat, of all the Jacobean playwrights to depict witch-characters on stage, Dekker mirrors this process of accusation in *The Witch of Edmonton,* but still does not come close to portraying the actual brutality that had ensued.)

But even after all cases were laid to rest, the repercussions of this event still resonated. A few years afterward, still meditating upon the high winds and shipwreck, the King composed a poem recounting the tempest. James composes his lyric in a somewhat contrived classical style, yet the anger he feels towards the witches (as sublimated towards an attack against the Goddess Juno, a trope for all women), is evident:

> A COMPLAINT AGAINST THE CONTRARY WYNDES THAT HINDERED THE QUEENE TO COM TO SCOTLAND FROM DENMARKE
>
> ...And chaste Dianas coache can haste or staye
> Can change the course of Planets high or lowe
> And make the earthe obeye them everie waye
> Make rockes to danse, huge hills to skippe and playe
> Beasts, foules, and fishhe to followe them allwhere
> Though thus the heaven, the sea, and earthe obeye,
> Yett mutins the middle region of the aire,
> What hatefull Juno, Aeolus entiseth
> Wherby contrarious Zephure thus ariseth.[14]

The King didn't stop his anti-feminist discourse there. This sort of sentiment is present in other examples of James's poetry as well. One piece he wrote is actually entitled, "A Satire Against Woemen." A couple of stanzas sum up his attitude towards the female gender succinctly:

> ...Even so all wemen are of nature vaine
> And can not keepe no secrett unrevealed
> And where as once they doe concaive disdaine

[14] Although it is not the main focus of this work, it is possible that James's sexuality plays a role in this story. If one takes into account James's homoerotic tendencies and the fact that, after years of being denounced for his lack of masculinity, he was about to be married, there may be a link between his marriage and the persecution of witches. It may very well be that James was also sublimating the rage he felt with regard to having marry and to give up his natural tendencies towards men. Later, when he fulfills his natural sexual desires, he turns to protecting innocent women falsely accused of witchcraft, which is, perhaps, another correlation.

They are unable to be reconcealed
Fullfild with talke and clatters but respect
And often tymes of small or none effect.

Ambitious all without regarde or shame
Butt anie measure given to greede of geare
Desyring ever for to winne a name
With flattering all that will them not forbeare
Sume craft they have, yett foolish are indeede
With lying whiles esteeming best to speede.

The title of this piece is most telling. "Women" is spelled "Woemen"—a possible play on the "woe of "men." (This sort of anti-feminist discourse is also one that is later combated by some of the Jacobean playwrights.)

The tract that James eventually published, *Daemonologie,* is theoretically modeled upon *The Malleus Maleficarum.* In it, James continues to address the question of gender: "What can be the cause that there are twentie women given to that craft, where ther is one man?" he asks (*Daemonologie* 43). The answer is unequivocally stated:

> The reason is easie, for as that sexe is frailer then man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Devill, as was over well proved to be true, by the Serpents deceiving of Eva at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sexe... (43)

But, gender arguments aside, the main incentive of the composition of this witchcraft compendium was the King's desire to refute the skeptical arguments that Reginald Scot had previously articulated so dramatically.

Reginald Scot was a member of the English gentry and Parliament who, in 1584 penned the first major theoretical work on witchcraft in English, entitled, *Discoverie of Witchcraft,* published in 1587. It is thought that the author had been deeply affected by the 1582 witchcraft trials that were taking place near his home in Chelmsford. It has been theorized that the author (who had previously only written a tract on the cultivation of hops) was more than deeply shocked by the witch executions in nearby Kent in 1582.

Reginald Scot's book proved to be deeply influential to England's theatrical writers. Both Shakespeare and Middleton make copious reference to it in their respective works: *Macbeth* and *The Witch,* a fact that many later critics take as evidence of clandestine subversion.

Scot makes clear his intentions in the opening epistles he writes to his patrons. Although most printed editions don't include Scot's address to Sir Roger Manwood Knight, the archival manuscript located in Cornell

University includes this relevant material. The author opens with a simple thesis:

> Howbeit, it is naturall to unaturall people, and peculiar unto witchmongers, to pursue the poore, to accuse the simple, and to kill the innocent; supplieng in rigor and malice towards others, that which they themselues want in proofe and discretion, or the other in offense or occasion. But as cruell hart and an honest mind doo seldome meete and feed together in a dish; for a discreet and mersifull magistrate, and a happie commonwealth cannot be seperated asunder. (*The Discoverie of Witchcraft,* 1584 ed. from Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library)

In no equivocal language, this outlines Scot's concern for the wrongfully accused "simple," "poor," and "innocent" (a concern later articulated in *The Witch of Edmonton*). With a passionate integrity, he implores the magistrate to "take no counsell against innocent bloud" (6-7).[15] Even if King James refused to heed Scot's call for mercy and rationality, other writers and culture makers (such as Dekker, Rowley and Ford) later would.

Scot highlights some of the absurd method of accusations—passages that no doubt angered King James, as those methods were the very ones he advocated. In the following quote, Scot shows the common basis (namely that of rumor) of why many "witches" were brought to trial:

> [M]ay it please you to [s]aie what accusations and crimes [neighbors] laie to their charge, namelie : She was at my house of late, she would have had a pot of milke, she departed in a chafe bicause she had it not, she railed, she curssed, she mumbled and whispered, and finallie she said she would be even with me and so one after my child, my cow, my sow, or my pullet died, or was strangelie taken. (9-10)

Reginald Scot is also quick to point out some of the unkind practices regarding the etiology of these accusations. He notes (as Thomas Dekker also will) that the vast majority of accused women were elderly and poor: "If more ridiculous or abhominable crimes could have been invented, these poore women (whose cheefe fault is that they are scolds) should have been charged with them" (19) but James perpetuated such practices.

---

[15] Scot also directly addresses the reader, again clearly laying out his desire and intent:

> And I wish even with all my hart, that I could make people conceive the subtance of my writing, and not to misconstrue anie part of my meaning. Then doubtless would I persuade my selfe, that the companie of witchmongers, &c: being once decreased, the number also of witches, &c: would soone be diminished. (8)

In a tone that would later cause the King much fury (but would later be emulated by the likes of Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton), Reginald Scot mocks absurd beliefs and attempts to counter superstitions with reasoned logic. If witches have so much power, he argues:

> our witches (if they could) [would] destroie all our magistrates. One old witch might overthrowe an armie roiall: and then what neede we any guns, or wild fire, or any other instruments of warre? A witch might supplie all wants, and accomplish a princes will in this behalfe, even without the charge or bloudshed of his people. (36)

To Scot, observation seems paramount to belief. "I for my part have read a number of their conjurations, but never could see anie divels of theirs, except it were in a plaie" (258).

Without doubt, however, Scot's greatest and most important critic was the contemporary King of Scotland and future King of England. At the very onset of James's 1597 volume, *Daemonologie* (written six years after the North Berwick witch hunts), the monarch proclaims his theological position as in opposition to the English skeptic and denounces him as a heretic. He strongly condemns:

> the damnable opinion of...the one called SCOT, an Englishman, [who] is not ashamed in public print to deny that there can be such a thing as witchcraft: and so maintains the old error of the Sadducees, in denying of spirits. (xi)[16]

Within the dialectic between Philomates the "skeptic" and Epistemon, the "erudite," Philomates asks his mentor the crucial question:

> PHI. What thinke yee of these strange newes...I meane of these Witches...No question if they be true, but thereof the Doctours doubtes...that there is such a thing as Witchcraft or Witches, and I would pray you to resolve me thereof if ye may... (152)

As may be expected, Epistemon (voicing the epistemology of James) himself answers that "witchcraft, and Witches have bene, and are, the former part is clearelie proved by the Scriptures, and the last by dailie experience and confessions" (2). In one stroke (that will be parodied decades later upon the English stage), James mocks the "doubts" of "Doctors."

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[16] There's an oft-cited tradition that James ordered all copies of Scot's *Discoverie* to be burnt by the public hangman. Even though we do not have direct evidence of this, it is true that there are no first editions found "in either Lambeth Palace or St. Paul's Cathedral libraries" (Robbins 453).

We see evidence of the King's further disdain for due process in another analysis of his annotations. In the Emendation of *Daemonologie*, we can clearly read how the original title of the sixth chapter of *Daemonologie* was simply, "On the Punishment of Witches." The words "Tryall &" are penned in, almost as if a casual afterthought:

From the Emendation of *Daemonologie* we can see that the King was far more concerned with methods of punishment as opposed to due process of law (a concept that was alien to him).[17] This preoccupation is also highlighted in the following dialogue:

> PHI: What forme of punishment thinke ye merites these Magicians and Witches? For I see that ye account them to be all alike guiltie?
>
> EPI: They ought to be put to death according to the Law of God, the civill and imperial law, and municipall law of all Christian nations.
>
> PHI: But what kinde of death I pray you?
>
> EPI: It is commonly used by fire, but that is an indifferent thing to be used in every cuntrie, according to the Law or custome thereof.
>
> PHI: But ought no sexe, age nor ranck to be exempted?
>
> EPI: None at al [Iif one does not] strike when God bids strike, and so severelie punish in so odious a fault & treason against God, it is not only unlawful, but doubtlesse no lesse sinne in that Magistrate... (King James 78-9)

The above dialectic indicates James's rationalization of execution—which he may have felt, as someone who executed old and young, rich and poor, was important to justify.

The immediate effect of the publication of King James's tract cannot be effectively gauged, as no one knows what *month* during the year of 1597 the book was released. Scholars such as Rossell Hope Robbins directly attribute the 1597 publication of *Daemonologie* to the subsequent burning of 24 Aberdeen "witches" (19)[18] and the "Great Scottish Witch Hunt of

[17] For more information regarding King James's justification of "The Divine Right of Kings," refer to his *Basilikon Doran.*

[18] In Aberdeen, Scotland, such a rabid fear of witches took hold, that accusations ran rampant. From March-October, twenty four men and women were accused of everything from "Dancing with the devil round the town cross" to "making milk

1597" where starting in March of that year, at least 400 people were put on trial for witchcraft and at least 200 executed.[19] However, without knowing the exact month *Daemonologie* was released, it is difficult to assign a definitive positivist attribution to the two events.

The question as to whether the publication of *Daemonologie* instigated the panic or arose as a result from it, is a great debate. If *Daemonologie* was published *after* these witch panics, then it was merely recounting and incorporating folkloric practices and beliefs as set forth by that year's witch scare. However, if it was published *before* them, then it is quite plausible that it was the printing of *Daemonologie* itself that set forth the witch panics. The specific dating of these two events matters a great deal when trying to assess the impact of James's written word upon his country's cultural practices—and later, conversely, the impact of the Renaissance playwrights' words upon him.

Much of what we know regarding "The Great Scottish Witch Hunt" comes from the primary testimony of John Spottiswoode who, in 1597, was a parish minister. He recounted events pertaining to the Scottish Presbytery's involvement in witchcraft persecution, outlining the participation of one of the most notorious "witches," Margaret Aitken:

This summer there was a great business for the trial of witches. Amongst others one Margaret Aitken, being apprehended upon suspicion, and threatened with torture, did confess herself guilty. Being examined [she] made offer to detect all [witches] of that sort, and to purge the country of them, so she might have her life granted. (qtd. in Goodare 59)[20]

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sour" to "using ligature to cause married men to be untrue to their wives" (Robbins 19).

[19] As the English ambassador from Scotland reported: "The king has been lately pestered and in many ways troubled in the examination of the witches which swarm in exceeding number and (as is credibly reported) in many thousands. Anderson confesses that he and other witches practised to have drowned the king in his passage over the water... and the life of the prince has been likewise sought by the witches, as is acknowledged by some of them (qtd. in Goodare 62). This testimony shows how, at least initially, the 1597 witch-hunt resembled the earlier one of 1591 in that "many thousands" of people were tortured into confessing that they were witches seeking to assassinate the King by drowning him at sea.

[20] "For the reason of her knowledge, she said, 'That they had a secret mark all of that sort in their eyes, whereby she could surely tell, how soon she looked upon any, whether they were witches or not:' and in this she was so readily believed that for the space of three or four months she was carried from town to town to make discoveries in that kind" (qtd. in 59).

To save her own life, Aitken singled out those to be condemned to death (and horrifically tortured in the process). Aitken claimed that she could identify other "witches" as "they had a secret mark all of that sort in their eyes." As Spottiswoode claims, "she was so readily believed that for the space of three or four months she was carried from town to town to identify "witches." In an August 1597 letter back to England, the English Ambassador (Robert Bowes) recounts how Margaret Aitken terrified the Scottish citizens, describing "Sabbaths" with 2,300 witches in attendance and how they were said to be swarming by the thousands in the country. (Levack surmises that had the executions not stopped, they may have soon reached that figure.)

Aitken's power alarmed many. Some concerned citizens and / or officials concocted a ploy to test her veracity and decided to bring some villagers before Aitken and record her verdict (she would look them in the eye to determine whether or not they were guilty). However, the next day, they brought the same exact people, dressed differently, before her as a test to see if her verdict was consistent. They were not: she absolved some of the very same people that she had previously condemned only one day before[21] and she was revealed to be a fraud.

In his memoir, Spottiswoode recounts how in the aftermath of the shocking revelation, the King issued an August 12th order to discharge all current witchcraft trial proceedings, except in the case of voluntary confessions—and for generations, the idea that it was the *King* who finally put an end to the horrid Scottish witch-trials was perpetuated.[22]

The basis for this assumption seems to lie with the assertion of a nineteenth century Scottish historian, Alexander Gardner, who, in 1891, credited the King with ending the Aitken affair and revoking "at one stroke all the Commissions of Justiciary…and thus for a time put[ting] a stop to the terror" (264). Kittredge, also seeking to rehabilitate the reputation of

[21] In end she was found to be a mere deceiver (for the same persons that the one day she had declared guilty, the next day being presented in another habit she cleansed), and sent back to Fife, where first she was apprehended. At her trial she affirmed all to be false that she had confessed, either of herself or others, and persisted in this to her death; which made many forthink their too great forwardness that way, and moved the king to recall the commissions given out against such persons, discharging all proceedings against them, except in case of voluntary confession, till a solid order should be taken by the Estates touching the form that should be kept in their trial" (from *History of the Church of Scotland* 66-7 qtd. in Goodare 60).

[22] The act also created a commission that recommended what evidence should be received in these trials.

King James as a bloodthirsty witch-monger,[23] in 1907 copied Gardner and wrote in reference to the Aitken witch-hunt:

> by 1597 James was convinced that matters had gone too far. Indictments were piling upon indictments, there was no telling the innocent from the guilty, and no end was in sight. Commissions of justiciary for witchcraft were being held throughout Scotland, and the king, by a stroke of the pen, revoked them all. (60)

In 1911, Notestein added weight to Kittredge's credence, claiming that the King in 1597 "had become alarmed at the spread of trials in Scotland and had revoked all the commissions then in force for the trial of the offence" (138). Even eight decades later, the thought perpetuates. Levack also quotes Gardner and credits James with ending the witch trials (8).

However, Julian Goodare refuses to credit the King with this stark change of policy. Instead, he believes it was the *petitioners* of the act who made "more effort to ensure that requests for [witchcraft] commissions came before them, instead of being presented to the king via informal court channels that did not necessarily allow for expert scrutiny of the evidence presented" (61). Goodare theorizes that a public response to the Aitken affair was made as many citizens protested the "witnessed miscarriages of justice" (62). Breaking with the Kittredge tradition, Goodare surmises:

> [W]e do not know that [the act] was James's initiative; and even if it was, it was merely a necessary response to the Aitken fiasco. James probably interrogated Aitken, given his enthusiasm for interrogating witches in the summer and willingness to travel to do so. But he never claimed to have doubted her, or to have exposed her. (Goodare 64)

Goodare's research along with other references to the King's actions following the 1597 summer witch-holocaust (and the resulting August 12th order) does not reveal an individual who is at all skeptical of witchcraft or concerned with humanitarianism. Six pieces of evidence attest to this claim:

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[23] In the early to mid 19th century, a passage such as this one from Lynn Linton was not unusual:

> Whatever of bloodstained folly belonged specially to the Scottish trials of this time...owed its original impulse [to King James]; and every groan of the tortured wretches driven to their fearful doom, and every tear or the survivors left blighted and desolate to drag out their weary days in mingled grief and terror, lie on his memory with shame and condemnation ineffacable for all time. (from *Witch Stories,* 1861 qtd. in Robbins 455)

1) On 1 September 1597, the Kirk ordered "a supplicatioun to be maid to his majestie for repressing of the horable abuse by carying a witch about" (from *The Register of the Presbytery* qtd. in Goodare 63).

Although the details of what "horrible abuse" occurred aren't described, one can surmise that the accused "witches" were subjected to devastating treatment. There is no record that the King responded to this public petition: in fact, all available evidence indicates that the King ignored it.

2) A letter dated 5 September from the English ambassador to Scotland sheds further insight upon the King's thinking:

The king has his mind only bent on the examination and trial of sorcerers, men and women. Such a great number are delated that it is a wonder, and those not only of the meanest sort but also of the best. Hereat all estates are grieved, and specially the church, affirming that the form of proceeding is neither conform to the law of God nor man (from *Advices from Scotland,* 5 Sept. 1597 qtd. in Goodare 63).

3) On September 15th, 1597, two weeks after the Kirk's petition regarding the treatment of the accused witches, the King ordered the magistrates of Stirling to send a "prickat wiche" to him at Linlithgow, to be made ready for his personal interrogation at her coming trial.[24] The fact that this woman had already been "pricked" means that she had been subjected to torture—a method that James's *Daemonologie* sanctioned.[25]

4) The Parliament met on 1 November and on 16 December, passed a new act on witchcraft (it only passed three laws in entirety). Unfortunately, all that remains is the title of the act: "Anent [About] the forme of process against witches." We do not know what was stated in this act, whether the Parliament met independently or at the request of the King or whether the act significantly changed witchcraft trial processes. An examination of the aforementioned events, though, would indicate that its purpose was to reform. As the Kirk's complaint about the horrible treatment of "witches" went unanswered and, despite the previous act, it seems that no action had been taken to address the "carrying" issue.

5) In March 1598, a *repeat* grievance was made to the King (six months later), this time by the General Assembly:

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[24] "that schol may be reddy thair that nycht at evin attending our cuming for hir tryell in that depositioun scholhes maid agains Capitane Herring and his wyffe" (King James qtd. in Goodare 67).

[25] It was an accepted belief that a witch could be discovered through the pricking of their skin with various sharp instruments including needles, pins or bodkins (items used to punch holes in cloth). This practice was advocated by King James who described the "witches' mark" (usually a mole or growth of skin) "and the trying the insensiblenes thereof" (*Daemonologie* 80).

> To advyce with his majestie, if the carieing of profest witches from towne to towne, to try witchcraft in uthers, be laufull ordinar tryall of witchcraft, or nocht. (from *Acts and Proceedings of the General Assemblies of the Kirk of Scotland* 937 qtd. in Goodare 69)

It seems that a contentious moral and now political debate regarding the practice of "carrying...professed witches from town to town" was brewing. As the English ambassador indicated, the situation was particularly egregious enough that both the Kirk (which sanctioned belief in witchcraft) *and* the General Assembly were petitioning the King to end certain cruel practices; both bodies were concerned that the proceedings did not, as the English ambassador phrased it, "conform to the law of God nor man."

6) The King did not respond to the 1598 General Assembly request, although he issued a bureaucratic edict that set up a council of ministers to advise, presumably on a case-by-case basis, whether the carrying of witches would be permitted.[26]

Tellingly, James addresses neither moral nor legal ramifications of the practice.

If, as many contend, the Aitken affair was the pivotal event that brought the King around to tolerance, then it does not explain his behavior in the ensuing months.

With the evidence pointing directly towards James's lack of concern about reforming witch-persecuting practices, it is surprising that Goodare does not favor an earlier publication date for *Daemonologie.* He claims, "James's book had been conceived, and written at least in part, as an immediate reaction to the witchcraft trials of 1590-1, but its *publication* clearly represents a reaction to the trials of 1597. In it, witch-hunting has just been happening, it is 'newes'" (63).

However, the annotated print drafts in both the Folger Shakespeare and Bodleian libraries show the careful attention and time it took James to write his book. One can only speculate, of course, but it seems unlikely that, given the fact that the trials lasted until the end of summer, the King would have been able to (as Goodare contends) write a manuscript and then edit *two* manuscripts by the end of the year (then calculated to be March 1598). An examination of the Folger manuscript clearly shows the amount of time

[26] "be ane act of the last parliament, it is remittit to certaine of his hienes counsell, certaine ministers and advocates, to conclude upon a solid order anent tryall of witches, and to advyce whither the forsaid carieing of witches is permissive or not" (from *Booke of the Universall Kirk: Acts and Proceedings of the General Assembly of the Kirk of Scotland* 938-9 qtd. in Goodare 68-69).

James must have spent revising his text by way of several added notes and amendments.

The King's involvement in the Aitken's and the other 1597 trials required much travel by horse and it is doubtful that he would have carried his writing implements with him. Furthermore, it is difficult to believe that he would have had the time to simultaneously both involve himself with witchcraft trials *and* write a carefully crafted book. It seems far more probable that it was the publication itself that set off the second panic.

Goodare sees *Daemonologie* as instigated by the trials instead of vice versa; however, if we examine Notestein and Burns study of early modern British witchcraft, we can trace "the water test" that James advocated to detect witches as a measure of his influence. Burns claims that "there are indications that James's approval of flotation tests in the *Daemonologie* was responsible for their later introduction into the English witch trials" (151) and Notestein writes:

> We shall see that the influence of the *Dæmonologie* can be fairly appraised by measuring the increased use of these two tests of guilt within his own reign and that of his son. Hitherto the evidence of the mark had been of rather less importance, while the ordeal by water was not in use. (Notestein Chap V)

If we apply the same standard to the Scottish Trials, then we see the usage of this water test spread in 1597 and can attribute this to the publication of James's text. As Goodare himself writes:

> The Aitken affair was notable for subjecting witchcraft suspects to the water ordeal. No reference to the swimming of Scottish witches has yet been found for any other period, but the evidence for 1597 is clear. (60) [27]

In the "fleeting" (floating) technique, a "witch" was tied up by the hands and feet and dunked into the water to see if she floated or drowned. This witch-detecting technique was widely used during this panic—again, this technique was one that was advocated in *Daemonologie.* This may be one clue that supports an earlier date for the printing of *Daemonologie* and the setting off of the panic.

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[27] This claim is derived from *The Chronicles of Scotland* in which the author provides an account of the grave 1597 witchcraft panic and describes the usage of the "fleeting" test:

> Ther was many of them tryed by sweiming in the water by binding of ther two thumbs and ther great toaes together for being thus casten in the water they fleeted ay above. (Anderson qtd. in Goodare 60)

James concludes his *Daemonologie* with instructions for the public to use for identifying "witches" in their own community. He describes the aforementioned detection of the witches' mark and then the water-torture method:

> The other is their fleeting on the water: for as in a secret murther, if the deade carcase be at any time thereafter handled by the murtherer, it wil gush out of bloud, as if the blud wer crying to the heaven for revenge of the murtherer…so it appeares that God hath appointed (for a super-naturall signe of the monstruous impietie of the Witches) that the water shal refuse to recive them in her bosom, that have shaken off them the sacred Water of Baptisme, and wilfullie refused the benefite thereof. (81)[28]

As the King recommended this type of water torture in his treatise; as the swimming test was not in common usage in Scotland before 1597; and as other scholars correlate the implementation of fleeting in England with the dissemination of *Daemonologie,* it seems reasonable to argue that James's work was published *before* the 1597 trials and helped to instigate this second Scottish panic.

Based on an examination of the King's actions following the Aitken affair, the time it would have taken to construct his careful manuscript by the 1597 publication date and an analysis of the 1597 witch testing practices, a later dating for *Daemonologie* is probable—it likely was the power of James's language that instigated these Great Scottish Witch Hunts.

However, James's thoughts and political practices regarding witchcraft *do* eventually change when, in 1603, he succeeds Elizabeth and inherits the throne to England. The question as to why remains. Scholars have long sought the reasons and, although many have attributed this Aitken affair as the pivotal locus point of James's shift, the above evidence clearly shows that it was not. For the real reason James shifts, we must now turn to England and a study of witches upon her stage.

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[28] In other words, if the accused was tied and thrown into the water and s/he floated, it was because that witch had thrown off "the sacred Water of Baptism" and the current water was rejecting him or her. Of course, if s/he sunk, s/he'd be drowned. King James did not originate this idea, but he did resurrect and popularize it. This trial by water was a general test for all crimes in 1042-66; in 1219, Henry III had abolished the practice. Before James, the practice had fallen out of favor (Robbins 492-3).