

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
University of Abderrahmane Mira of Bejaia  
Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of English



**The Influence of Late Elizabethan and Early Jacobean Witchcraft  
Phobia on Shakespeare's Plays:  
*Macbeth & The Tempest***

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a **Master degree in  
English Language, Literature and Civilization**

**Candidate:**

➤ Ms. Lydia Boughanem

**Supervisor:**

Mrs. Houria Ouali-Halil

**Penal of Examiners:**

➤ Supervisor:.....Mrs. Houria Ouali-Halil

➤ President:.....Dr. Ounissa Chioukh

➤ Examiner:.....Ms. Assia Mohdeb

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## Abstract

This work explores the influence of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras witchcraft phobia on Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*. The aim of this paper is to depict the context in which Shakespeare wrote these plays. In other words, the present paper tries to present the Golden Age of the English history from another perspective and to prove the existence and the practice of witchcraft during the age of Shakespeare. This paper analyzes the two works in the light of the New historicist theory, and tries to present the two plays; *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* as historical documents.

**Key Words:** Witchcraft phobia, Elizabethan era, Jacobean era, *Macbeth*, *The Tempest*, New Historicism, History, Context.

# *Dedication*

*This thesis is honestly dedicated to:*

*My beloved parents*

*My sweet sisters & only brother*

*My dear grandparents*

*My uncles & aunts*

*The memory of my aunt*

*And all those who love me.*

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*'I, myself, wasn't quite sure  
whether or not I was  
bewitched''*

(Favret-Saada 435).

# **General Introduction**

By the end of the medieval era which was represented as a gloomy phase of the European history in general and Britain in particular, significant changes in all the fields took place. The European continent entered a new era of prosperity and flourishing called the Renaissance. The wave of the Renaissance landed on the English lands coming from Italy covered a long period of time which is divided into three phases, the Beginning of Renaissance, the Flowering of Renaissance which is the Elizabethan Age, and the Decline of Renaissance which is the Jacobean Age.

The Elizabethan era was characterized by peace, prosperity, and progress. Elizabeth brought glory to England by defeating one of the most powerful navies in Europe at that time, the Spanish Armada. Henceforth, England became the most dominant western maritime power, consequently, it gained power over-seas' trade. Moreover, Elizabeth went further when she encouraged the "sea dogs" and merchants expansion to find new trade routes to increase her wealth and to expand the empire. Because of her wise policy, England's economy flourished. This period also saw a number of achievements whether in the domestic or in the foreign spheres. However, Elizabeth's policy allowed her subjects freedom of belief and worship when she made an end to the violent and bloody clashes that existed between the Protestants and the Catholics. The Elizabethan era witnessed the peak of English literature and drama. England became a cultural center where professional theaters were built for the first time. The works of Christopher Marlow, Thomas Kyd, Robert Greene, and William Shakespeare defined the London theater by attracting theatregoers to enjoy their masterpieces.

Following the death of Queen Elizabeth I, King James I of Scotland became the King of England. At the time when James ascended to the throne, there was unification of two realms, England and Scotland. The Jacobean era was regarded as prosperous. However, although there was progress in various fields, the country faced many problems. Due to the debts inherited from Queen Elizabeth and the extravagant lifestyle of James I, England faced



a series of financial failures which led to increase the tensions between parliament and the crown. The period of the first Stuart ruler was also known for its religious struggles. Upon the arrival of king James to power, the struggle between the Catholics and the Protestants intensified and rose again. Because of being Protestant, the life of his Majesty was under the threat of Catholic conspirators. Generally, this period was considered to be a time of extravagance and luxury that left its trace in arts and literature. The Jacobean period witnessed the fine works of John Milton, Ben Jonson, and their rival William Shakespeare. King James recognized the importance of arts to the life and legacy of his nation. He displayed a great love for learning, particularly theater. In fact, the Elizabethan and the Jacobean periods saw a remarkable growth in literature which was characterized by energy and originality so that it was known as the Golden Age of English literature. But life in late Tudor and early Stuart England did not always reflect such splendour.

During the Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras, people strongly believed in spirits and occultism. At that time, the majority of people from all ranks believed in the actual existence of supernatural entities like evils, ghosts, and witches. It was at that time that the idea of witches riding around on a broomstick became popular. People were obsessed by magic and the supernatural that they believed that earthly events could be caused by superior and supernatural powers. People thought that there is something mysterious hidden beyond the real world. For that, they blamed unexplainable events and referred them to the works of witches. The witch mania grew and strengthened as a result of ignorance, until it reached its zenith and became a belief. A common belief regarding witches was that they are people who had made an alliance with the Devil "the diabolical pact" in exchange for supernatural powers to accomplish devilish plans. It was believed that witches had the power to command nature. Hence, they could raise storms to bring about bad weather, cast a spell to harm someone or make him sick, as well as, they had the power to see into the future through their magical

charms. Consequently, during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, when any disorder occurred in society, witches would be the obvious target. Witchcraft is the practice of spells and the summon of spirits, it existed in most communities of the world throughout history.

The practice of witchcraft and the hunting of witches were very common during Renaissance England. The terror which witches caused and the hatred of their deeds led to their hunting and persecutions. These persecutions were justified by the fact that a convicted witch was believed to have made a pact with the Devil against God and human kind as well. For that, witch-accusation in Protestant England reached its peak, and those found guilty were regularly punished by torture to death. Witchcraft persecution began with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and increased during the reign of King James I, by passing acts and laws that forbid any practice of the "dark forces". King James was particularly obsessed and superstitious about witches. This obsession was apparent when he wrote a book on the topic called *Daemonologie* in 1597. He was very known for his opposition to witches, because they were Satan worshippers and he was God's lieutenant. This opposition made them eternal enemies. Therefore, witchcraft was considered as a crime against God.

The belief in witchcraft had been a prevalent theme of many theatrical productions. The playwright William Shakespeare grew amidst an era which was dominated by supernatural beliefs. He was one of the most notable authors of this period. He was famous in the Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras as well. Shakespeare's drama explores various shades of society and of human character. Many of his plays have magical and supernatural elements woven into them. Thus, a close study of these plays reveal the belief of the existence of witchcraft within Renaissance England.

The aim of the present dissertation is to demonstrate the impact of the Elizabethan and the Jacobean beliefs on Shakespeare's writings. It explores the influence of late Elizabethan and early Jacobean eras witchcraft phobia on Shakespeare's drama. This paper aims to depict the context in which Shakespeare wrote his plays. Our aim is to analyze two different plays; *Macbeth* which is a tragedy and *The Tempest* which is a comedy in a way that they mirror the real situation of the English monarchy when the two plays were written and performed. Our endeavor is to prove that all the facts, related to supernatural, mentioned in the two plays fit into Renaissance idea and Shakespeare's age's image of witchcraft.

The intention in writing this research paper is to dive deeply into the Golden Age of England to explore its dark side which is the practice of witchcraft amidst the height of the English Renaissance. The supernatural and witchcraft were repeated subject matters in most of Shakespeare's writings, that pushed us to ask why such a writer who lived in the most glorious and prosperous age marked by artistic and scientific innovations, dealt with such themes. It is the question of why that supplied our motivation to conduct this research.

Among all of Shakespeare's plays, we have selected *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* as a sample for the present analysis. The reason behind our choice was that Shakespeare dealt with the theme of witchcraft in two different ways. Magic represented in *Macbeth* is the antithesis of the one depicted in *The Tempest*, the first is dark magic and the second is the white one. For the purpose of this research, we have opted for New Historicism as a theory for our analysis which it fits our objective.

New Historicism is a school of literary criticism, first developed in the 1980s by the American English critic Stephen Greenblatt. He was the first to develop this theory then later it gained its widespread influence. Greenblatt asserts that a literary text should be analyzed in the context in which it was written, and that writers are the products of their time. New

historicists acknowledge that literary texts could be viewed as historical documents since they are impacted by the socio-historical milieu of their production. This theory gives importance to literature as a relevant archive.

We have opted for New Historicism because we think that it will fit our objective since it aims at presenting literature as a mirror of history. Literature is thought to be a pure reflection of the historical world. Thus, Shakespeare wrote *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* to highlight and depict the beliefs linked to witchcraft during his lifetime.

Throughout the analysis, the present study aims at answering three main questions, the first one will be on to what extent did people of Shakespeare's age believe in witchcraft? Since witchcraft seems to be a common feature in Shakespeare' era, the second question will be on whethwer witchcraft did really exist in early modern England or was it just superstitions? The last question seeks to check whether *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* worth to be considered as historical documents ?

### **Review of the Related Literature**

Like all of Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* have intrigued generations of literary critics. Many researchers and critics attempt to explain and interpret these plays in different point of views and stand points. We cannot review all the works that have studied the two plays; for this reason, we will review the most important ones that are directly related to our topic.

One of the most important critics of *Macbeth* in the twentieth century was Oxford professor A. C. Bradley in his book *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904). Bradley calls the witches the most potent agency in *Macbeth* for exciting "the vogue fear of hidden forces operating on minds unconscious of the influence" (271). He grants the witches "contribution to the

atmosphere of Macbeth can hardly be exaggerated" (Ibid), but he thinks that they have much opportunity in influencing the actions of the play, especially Macbeth. As the quotations show, Bradley's opinion seems that it focuses on the idea that the witches are responsible for introducing the dark ideas to Macbeth's head so, they are responsible for his actions.

Coriat Isador in her book entitled *The Hysteria of Lady Macbeth* (1912) refers to Lady Macbeth to be a victim of psychic disorder triggered by terrifying events "but a victim of a pathological mental dissociation... and is due to the emotional shocks of her past experiences. Lady Macbeth is a typical case of a repressed sexual impulse, the desire for a child based upon the memory of a child long since dead" (Coriat 86). Lady Macbeth urges Macbeth to kill Duncan to reveal her repressed emotions and desires as a kind of revenge.

The last critic is Willard Farnham's *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier: The World of His Final Tragedies* (1963). He gives a great importance to the historical background about witch beliefs in Shakespeare's age. He supports the idea that the weird sisters in *Macbeth* are not simply old women who made alliance with Devil for supernatural powers. He adds, they are supernatural beings themselves, "fiends in the shape of old women" (99), he adds that they are "women devils" (95), in a picture of "superhuman" (100). Farnham refers to the witches as supernatural being rather than human beings with supernatural powers.

Like *Macbeth*, *The Tempest* also has been under studies and was viewed from different lents. In Robert B. Pierce's article "*Understanding The Tempest*" (1999), Pierce's opinoin about the island was that "whatever evil remains is impotent, and goodness returns to action...there is a re-birth, a return to life, a heightened, almost symbolic, awareness of the beauty of moral humanity" (374). This quotation shows that despite the turmoils that exist in the play, by the end of the it, a kind of compromise arose between all the characters even though they were enemies at the beginning. So goodness defeats evil.

If we look to critical opinions of Prospero's magic, we find that it was considered as rough magic. Frank Kermode suggests that Prospero's magic is described as rough because it is "unsubtle by comparison with the next degree of the magic's enlightenment" (396). Prospero's magic is dependent on his books, as well as, he could not act without the help of his spirit Ariel; he does not perform himself, whereas, in a journal article entitled "*Why Does Prospero Abjure His Rough Magic,*" Cosmo Cornfield believes that Prospero's control of magic to be "not goetic; but...not very holy either" (33). In fact, Cornfield's view seem to be rational because Prospero does not practise black magic to project harm on people. In addition, it is not holy since he seeks revenge upon his brother Antonio and Alonso. Prospero's art is unable to affect history or even change it. In the same vein, Jan Kott maintains, "Prospero's staff makes the history of the world repeat itself on a desert island. Actors can play that history in four hours. But Prospero's staff cannot change history. When the morality play is over, Prospero's magic power must also end. Only bitter wisdom remains" (325).

The present research paper will be divided into three chapters. The first chapter entitled "An Overview of Elizabethan and Jacobean England" will introduce the reader to the Golden Age of English history, in which pertinent information about the socio-historical background of England will be afforded. Subsequently, we will reveal the dark side of the English Renaissance which is overshadowed by the belief in witchcraft. The second chapter is under the title of "Common Beliefs Regarding Witchcraft During Elizabethan and Jacobean Eras". This chapter will focus on the definitions and the origins of the supernatural and witchcraft throughout history, then we will move to the relationship between witchcraft and the English monarchs from King Henry VIII to King James I. The last point I will tackle in this chapter will be concerned with the literary theory we have selected to study the chosen plays. It will be devoted to define and explain New Historicism. The last chapter will be under

the title of " Witchcraft in *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*: Text in Context". In this chapter, we will introduce the author's biography then we will provide the reader with summaries of the two plays. Finally, we will move to apply the theory on the plays which is our objective in conducting this research.

# Chapter one

*An Overveiw of Elizabethan and  
Jacobean England.*



## **Introduction**

The Middle Ages is known for being a disastrous period that plagued Europe in general and England in particular. After a long period of darkness and ignorance of those dark Ages, a new era in the timeline of England made its appearance. It was the middle Renaissance. This latter is associated with the period of Elizabethan and Jacobean rule. It is often thought to be the most glorious period in English history. The Elizabethan reign was an era of peace and prosperity, whereas the Jacobean one was an age of discovery and expansion. In this chapter, we will deal briefly with the socio-historical background of the Elizabethan era followed by the Jacobean one, then we will shed some light on the dark side of these two important eras of the British history.

### **I. An Overview of Elizabethan England**

When Queen Mary died in 1558, her half sister Elizabeth I came to the throne of England. Her coronation was celebrated against the devastation and horrors of her predecessor, Mary Tudor. The Elizabethan Age was the period associated with the reign of Queen Elizabeth I from 1558 to 1603. Her reign was acknowledged to be the Golden Age in the English history since it witnessed great achievements of England's regime. In other words, this era was known as an age of political peace, social stability, economic achievement, and religious tolerance.

Elizabeth I was the last monarch of the Tudor dynasty. She was the daughter of Henry VIII and his second wife Anne Boleyn. At the age of 25 years, Elizabeth became the Queen of both England and Ireland, she ruled for 45 years. She was known for her intellectual skills. She spoke several languages, studied mathematics, astrology, alchemy, politics, history, geography, architecture, and literature.

## **I. 1. Society and Economics**

Elizabethans were used to live in an established social hierarchy. They believed that it was part of God's plan for the universe (Divine Order). This social order was called the Great Chain of Being. It was a belief that everything in the universe had its specific place. Renaissance thinking regarding the Chain of Being was that it started from the highest point (the Almighty God) followed by spirits (Angels), then humans. Elizabethan people were praising their Queen by giving her the highest position in the chain, progressing downwards to nobles, ministers, then common people. They believed that disorder would occur if anyone tried to change his position in the hierarchy. This belief helped rulers to avoid rebellions. Therefore, it helped in reinforcing the concept of the Divine Right of Kings as part of the Great Chain of Being. In other words, the Elizabethan belief in the Chain of Being and in the Divine Right of Kings meant that monarchy was ordained by God. Thus, rebellion against Kings was viewed as a sin not only against the state, but also against Heaven and God Himself. For that, the kings and queens were believed to be God's representatives on earth, with semi-divine powers and absolute authority over their subjects.

Despite the fact that Queen Elizabeth was protected by the belief in the Divine Right from any civil rebellion, her reign faced an external threat from Spain. The Spanish King Philip II believed that he had a claim to the English throne through his marriage to Elizabeth's half sister Mary. He intended to conquer England and overthrew the Queen. In 1588, the Spanish Armada set sail north, to overthrow Queen Elizabeth.

In 1588, the English navy scored a historical victory over the Spanish invasion, consequently, England increased its maritime power which led to gain overseas trade. Having a great fleet and being encouraged by the Queen herself, the Elizabethan Age witnessed a

series of geographical explorations and discoveries that resulted in establishing the first colonies in America, and opened a new era of overwhelming trade.

Under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, England gained a great economic hegemony over Europe; England's greatest trade rivals were also its greatest enemies. England benefited from the Atlantic trade and the first settlements in North America. Elizabeth and her advisors considered trade the most important foreign policy matter. Consequently, she herself encouraged voyages of discovery, traders, and sailors like John Hawkins, and Francis Drake to settle abroad to found colonies and trading companies. This latter opened a new era in the English trade, these companies were the Muscovy company in 1555, the Eastland company in 1579, the Levant company in 1581, the Barbary company 1585, and East India company in 1600. England imported goods from North America, Africa, and India and re-exported them to Europe with higher prices. Britain played a leading role in investing in expensive clothes and jewellery. In fact, 90% of English clothes were exported to the markets of Northern and central Europe, to the countries that did not have a direct overseas trade. An other improvement was the establishment of stock exchange (The Royal Exchange in 1565). It was the first in England and one of the first institutions in Europe. Under the leadership of the Queen, England became a wealthy nation, leading the way to the development of the empire over the next centuries.

## **I. 2. Religion**

Christianity is the most important religion in Europe. It gave birth to two major sects: the Catholics and the Protestants. During Henry VIII' s reign, the Church of England became truly English by breaking away from the Roman Catholic Church and marked the birth of the Anglican Church. When Elizabeth came to the throne, it was believed that she was in favour of the Protestants because her first act as a Queen was restoring Protestantism as an official

religion. Her decision came because Elizabeth was suspected of supporting protestant rebels against Mary Tudor, so that she was imprisoned for one year by Mary herself. Therefore, after her coronation, Elizabeth kept away Mary' s Catholic ladies-in-waiting and replaced them by her protestant relatives. She also excluded Catholics from holding any public or official position.

The religious situation in England was confused, but Elizabeth conducted a peaceful answer to the problem of the English Reformation by establishing the Church of England. She opted for a moderate Protestant Church (the Anglican Church) which was a kind of compromise between Catholics and Protestants to prevent any religious conflicts. Moreover, she arranged a book of sermons consists of Biblical teachings and taught people that rebellion against the crown was a sin against God. She made the Church under her authority by considering herself as the supreme governor of the church and that the church is a part of the state.

Despite all these strategies, the throne of Elizabeth had been under severe assaults from the foreign Catholics. The Spanish threat was from Spanish colony of Netherlands, but after defeating the Armada, the Spanish Catholic threat was reduced. So the remaining threat was that of Mary of Scots, known as Mary Stuart. This latter was found involved in numerous plots and conspiracies to depose Elizabeth and replace her by the Catholic Queen Mary Stuart. For this reason, Elizabeth imprisoned Mary in England for more than 19 years. In fact, the imprisonment of Mary Stuart pushed her followers to revolt in 1569, the rebellion was called as the Revolt of Northern Earls. As a result, she was executed in 1587. Elizabeth was afraid of Catholics because she saw them plotting with England greatest enemies (King Philip II and Queen Mary Stuart) to overthrow her. That pushed her Majesty to change her view towards Catholics; thus, she arrested bishops and kept Catholic Lords away from parliament. Catholics were repressed and they were obliged to take the oath of supremacy of the Queen otherwise

this would be considered as a treason and then the one who disobeyed would be punished. "All parishioners must attend church on Sunday and holy days under penalty of a shilling fine for each absence"(Watkin 20). Jane Moore adds, "Religion is part of the fabric of life, like sleeping and working and breathing, and the Sunday church service is a central activity. After 1559 the church attendance is compulsory: if you are absent (a recusant) you are fined"(13).

By the end of 1585, most Elizabethans believed that to be a Catholic was to be an enemy of both the Queen and England. Henceforth, the Protestants became the powerful majority and the Catholics became the minority group.

### **I. 3. Literature**

The Elizabethan era is often painted as the Golden Age of English literature. It was given a lot of importance. The spirit of exploration and adventure fed the imagination of writers and paved the way for the flourishing of literature. Besides Elizabeth's interest and love of arts, she gave artists a great consideration which led to the full flowering of English literature. Although the early Elizabethan literature was written in Latin, the English language soon took its position as the preferred and the dominant language of literature.

Both Renaissance and the English Reformation had a great influence upon literature. Thus, many iconic figures made their appearance at that era. Edmund Spenser, who was called the poet's poet and the child of Renaissance, was one of the best known English poets. Spenser in his famous work *Faerie Queen* made multiple references to the Queen in which he celebrates the success of Elizabeth's rule.

The translation of classical works into the English language made literature more accessible for the Elizabethans, for instance, George Chapman translated Homer's Iliad and odyssey into English.

Christopher Marlow, a great poet and playwright of Elizabethan literature, was known for his use of blank verse. His poetic style was memorable as his plays were the foundation of the Elizabethan drama. Marlow had greatly influenced William Shakespeare who was the most famous writer of this period.

Shakespeare was widely acknowledged as the world's greatest English language playwright. His plays were famous that the Queen herself attended the first performance of his "*Midsummer Night's Dream*". At the Queen's invitation, Shakespeare's theatre company became Queen's official theatre company and was known as Lord Chamberlain's Men. Although plays had been acted for many generations, no permanent playhouse was erected in England until 1576 when The Theatre and The Curtain were built.

The Queen's interest in literature and the introduction of theatre companies led England to witness a new era of drama. In general, the Elizabethan reign was considered to be a brilliant era, not just in literature, but also in all aspects of life. Elizabeth ruled the country for 45 years, although her parliament made pressure on her to get marry and name a successor, she preferred to save her country from any foreign threat. In 1603, Queen Elizabeth I died without leaving an heir, so the English crown went to her relative James VI of Scotland who had a claim over England.

## **II. An overview of the Jacobean England**

After the death of the virgin Queen in 1603, her cousin James VI of Scotland who became James I of England became the King. Lifestyle during the Stuart reign was like the previous one, and even somehow it seemed to be the same. However, the Stuart monarchs were less successful than the Tudors.

## II. 1. Society and Economics

The Jacobean era refers to the period associated with the reign of the Stuart King James I from 1603 to 1625. James was the king of Scotland from 1567, when he inherited the English throne, he united the two crowns under the same monarchy.

His coronation was celebrated and welcomed by both the Protestants and the Catholics, because he was a Protestant and his mother, Mary of Scots, was Catholic. So people aimed that with the coming of this king, religious freedom would arise. Like in the Elizabethan society, there was also a social hierarchy in Jacobean England on the basis of the Great Chain of Being. At the top of this social ranking, there was the King. James believed strongly in his divine right as a ruler and that he should be seen as supreme governor. In *The Trew Law of Free Monarchies* (1598), James I argues that even a wicked monarch should not be judged by his subjects, he wrote "The wickedness therefore of the King can never make them that are ordained to be judged by him, to become his judge"(66). In return, he is expected to rule his subjects with wisdom and justice. In 1610, in a speech to parliament, James asserts on the divine right of Kings, "The state of monarchy is the supremest thing upon earth: for kings are not only God's lieutenants upon earth, and sit upon God's throne, but even by God himself they are called gods"( Moore 39).

Although James' policy towards foreign affairs was that to avoid involvement in the continental conflicts, especially with Spain. With the death of Queen Elizabeth I and King Philip II, the new monarchs wanted to make an end to the years of tension and war. Hence, in 1604, they signed a peace treaty at the Somerset House Conference in London. Unfortunately, the two sides failed to obtain any concessions at all. James' reign faced several conspiracies and plots to dispose him. The most significant and famous attempt was the Gunpowder plot under the house of parliament in 1605.

Regarding economics, during the Jacobean era, there was an emergence of tobacco industry, it was very consumed at that time. A great achievement was also seen in the field of settlements. Although Queen Elizabeth had sent many voyages to explore new territories, the foundation of the first colonies in North America had begun during the Jacobean era: Jamestown in Virginia in 1607, Newfoundland in 1610, and Plymouth plantation in Massachusetts in 1620 so, America became a British colony. Sponsoring this kind of voyages led England to face a severe economic depression. King James asked parliament for financial supports, but the result was a series of failed negotiations which led to the economic depression.

## **II. 2. Religion**

When James came to England, he wished to unite the church of England (the Anglican) with the Reformed Church of Scotland (the Presbyterian) under the Protestant umbrella.

James had been brought up as a Protestant, but his mother Mary Stuart was Catholic. Hence, he lived amidst Protestantism and Catholicism. James thought of himself as a peacemaker; however, he was under the pressure of the members of the House of Commons who were strongly anti-Catholic. At that time England lived a lot of religious problems between Catholics and Protestants, which culminated in the series of conflict between the King and the parliament; therefore, the sentiment of hostility against Catholics had increased again. They felt so raged and furious against the King and his parliament. Thus, they plotted to attack the parliament and blow up the King in the Gunpowder plot. In fact, the plot was discovered as a result, coercive Laws against Catholics were issued. They were viewed as enemies of the King, so enemies of God. They were considered as a threat to the state and were prohibited of journeying more than five miles from their homes. It seemed that living in these days was



very difficult for both Catholics and Protestants. However, while the Catholics were marginalized, the Protestants were under the threat of plots.

### **II. 3. Literature**

Jacobean literature is linked to the Elizabethan one; they were in the same level of development. Men of talent and knowledge found honourable place in James' court. During his reign, English literature reached the very high point of literary achievements. Numerous translations of the ancient classics became available for common people. In 1611, James himself translated the Bible instead of having to rely on a priest to explain it in Latin.

Ben Jonson, the dominant literary figure of James' reign, was influenced by the translated classical works. This influence left its trace on Jonson's dramatic works that followed classical models. Besides to Jonson, John Donne was viewed as the first to introduce to metaphysical poetry. In drama, the leading literary figure of the Jacobean era was William Shakespeare. During this period, Shakespeare wrote most of his masterpieces. The Jacobeans were very fond of theater. King James himself displayed a great love for arts, particularly drama so that, he invested in theatre by asking Shakespeare's company to be his official theatre and became known as King's Men; thus, many works have been produced under his patronage.

### **III. The Dark Side of the Elizabethan & the Jacobean reign**

Both the Elizabethan and the Jacobean reigns are acknowledged to be the Golden Age of the English history. At that time, England witnessed an age of progress, trade expansion, and explorations that brought prestige to the kingdom. However, during the late sixteenth and the early seventeenth centuries, England faced many obstacles. In fact, this Golden Age was not really glorious, but it had its dark side. Late Tudor and early Stuart reign were tensional eras characterized by different malaise which affected all aspects of life.

The English society was characterized by multifaced conflicts; the war with Spain caused turbulent impact on every aspect of society. Wars during Elizabeth's reign were estimated to have cost over £ 5 million. The war against Spain was very costly that it caused the drain of country's economy which led to a severe economic depression.

In the 1590s, a series of poor harvest registered. In fact, from 1594 to 1597 there had been successive terrible harvests. This situation was combined with the population increase of 25% at that time which created episodes of widespread famine and disease (plague) that devastated the population of England. This situation led to increase polarization of society in which it became divided into the wealthy class and the poorest people who were about to fall into vagrancy. Living in the terror of the civil war and rebellion for food, the Tudor government passed relief acts to help miserable poor, and find a financial source to fill the economic gaps. According to David McDowall, in his book *An Illustrated History of Britain* (1989), the Queen's solution weakened the government instead of raising it up,

Elizabeth weakened the quality of government by selling official posts. She did this to avoid asking parliament for money. And although her government tried to deal with the problem of poor and homeless people at a time when prices rose much faster than wages; its laws and actions were often cruel in effect (McDowall 67).

When King James I rose to power in England, he had inherited a debt of £ 350,000 from Queen Elizabeth. By 1608, the debt had risen to £ 1,400,000 and was increased by £ 140,000 annually. It was also during the Jacobean era that the bubonic plague which reached England resulted in severe loss of lives.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, England was an institution of enslavement *par excellence*. Elizabeth played a leading role in the introduction of slave trade and the black marginalized community into England.

The Elizabethan and the Jacobean England was a man's world, women were considered to be subordinate to men and were expected to obey man. Women were not allowed to read, there were only 5% female literacy at that time. The nobles were the one who could afford an education at home. They were not allowed to read classical works or medieval romance; however, they read legendary women in the Bible that could just improve their morals. In other words, women receive a specific education that allow them to be good housewife. This shows the overwhelming discontent of the marginalized English women. A common belief at that time was that ugly women with abnormal abilities were accused of being witches.

The supernatural was an integral aspect of the middle and late Renaissance worldview. Thus, sorcery and witchcraft were common practices in England. During this era, the belief of the existence of witches was influenced by the legends passed down from generation to generation, These witches were believed to be the dark forces of society. The belief and the practice of witchcraft was in its peak during the Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras. People of this period were in fear of witches and their harm. The royal power were living in fear of being ousted from their privileged seat. They feared that witches would dethrone them; for this reason, thousands of persecutions took place in England.

The belief in witchcraft has been a repeated subject matter of literature of the age. Renaissance literature; namely Elizabethan and Jacobean drama gave a lot of importance to the issue of supernatural since it was a common belief that had an impact on the social life.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter was devoted to the historical background of the Elizabethan and the Jacobean rule. In this chapter, we have tried to highlight the pertinent information about the reign of both monarchs, especially when it comes to the social life, economics, and the religious life. In this chapter, we have included a section concerned with the discontent of the Elizabethan and the Jacobean societies. The next chapter will be concerned with the supernatural and witchcraft as common features of England at that time.

# Chapter two

*Common Beliefs Regarding Witchcraft*

*During Elizabethan and Jacobean*

*Eras.*

## **Introduction**

Like the rest of the European world, England believed in supernatural and practised witchcraft long before Christianity came to England. People thought that there is something mysterious hidden beyond the real world. For that, they blamed unexplainable events and referred as works of witches. In southern France and Switzerland, witch hunt began in the early fourteenth century. Women were more accused of being witches; thus, the common belief is that these women would make diabolical pacts with evil spirits. They would reject religion and the holy sacraments and take part in the witch Sabbath by paying honor to the prince of darkness, in return they are armed by supernatural powers. According to traditions and folklore, the Devil Mark would appear on the new witch as a sign that the evil pact was done.

This chapter will initially highlight and explore the concept of the supernatural and witchcraft, in the sense that it will define the notion of witchcraft and superstition, and view these concepts from a religious eye. Then we will move to the common beliefs regarding witchcraft during the Renaissance era, essentially late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries England which is the main focus of this research. The third point that we will tackle in this chapter is the relationship between witchcraft and literature, since literature is the byproduct of its time.

### **I. Definition and Origins of Witchcraft**

Witchcraft is a traditional practice. Its roots go back to the ancient times. This practice has got a worldwide echo from different societies. It is certainly an ideological concept, based upon a system of beliefs, related to religion and superstitions which guide the way individuals view the world. So the individuals' view could be shaped either by religions or by superstitions which are related to a specific community. Each community has its own

superstitions in which people believe. Thus, the concept of superstition is related mainly to folklore and tradition.

The belief in superstition is associated with luck. It is based on irrational thinking and knowledge, but not on human reason or specific knowledge. Such beliefs are resulted from ignorance, the fear of the unknown and the fortune, which lead people to believe in what is called divination.

### **I. 1. Divination**

Divination is the art of obtaining information about things that are normally unknowable. Divination, analogous to prediction and prophecy, gives information about what is going to happen either in the near or in the distant future; if we cite an example of divination, we may say horoscope.

So, if it was possible to divine and predict what the future had in store for us, our lifetime would be easier, we would have the power to fight the unknown. People who could predict the future are special people with special abilities. They have supernatural powers which allow them to communicate with the spiritual world that could not be seen or felt by natural humans.

The process of prediction is done through the help of the spirits, either they are good or evil. So the one who has the ability of prediction is called a medium. This latter has contact with spirits which would become servants for the medium. He is called a medium not a witch or a magician because he does not practise witchcraft or magic. In fact, the medium is predicting the future, he is a mediator or the link between the concrete world and the spiritual one, between the present and the future, between the individual and his destiny, through the aid of the spirits that enable their masters even to speak with the dead.

Passages from the Bible in both Exodus and Deuteronomy are often used as illustrations. The story of King Saul and his visit to a necromancer -the one who speaks with the dead and spirits- for assistance in a communication with the soul of the prophet Samuel is a perfect example. According to the Bible, during this meeting, the prophet Samuel told king Saul that God was displeased because he had asked for counsel from dead rather than trusting God Himself. It is also said that the spirit of prophet Samuel had prophesied the death of King Saul and his son. In fact, the next day, the son was killed in a battle against the Philistine army, then the king had committed suicide (230-231).

So one may say that the existence of the spiritual world is a reality, like the existence of one of the humans and animals. The world of spirits, namely the evil is portrayed in different ways. The different perceptions of evil are swinging between those who regard evil as unreal and classify it in the category of superstition, and those who believe in the existence of evil deducing their view from the context of the different religious identities they believe in.

## **I. 2. Evil**

Evil is generally what is normally wrong or bad, harmful or wicked. Hence, evil spirits are believed to be strong and they may do almost anything evil for a person, so it is the opposite of good. The concept of evil cannot be restricted by one specific definition as Jeffrey Russell explains in his book *The Devil: Perception of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (1977),

The perception of evil is a direct, immediate experience to something done to an individual. You experience evil immediately done to you; by empathy you experience evil done to those you love, to your friend and neighbours, or even to those you do not know personally at all (Russell 19).



So the perception of evil depends on individual's view; however, the meaning of evil is almost generally negative since doing evil is a crime against humanity; therefore, against religion. Regarding theodicy, evil is portrayed in different ways and in order to analyze the concept of evil, it is important to make reference to the varied views of the major world religions.

According to the Christian faith and the Bible, the origins of evil are associated with that of angels. At the beginning, Devil was one of the angels, he was called Lucifer (angel of light), he followed his self-destination which was to disobey God; subsequently, he was exorcised from Heaven to Hell and became known as Satan.

According to the Christian religion, the only work of the Satan is to lead mankind to temptation. This view is illustrated in Genesis, when Satan metamorphoses himself into a serpent, to lead mankind into temptation. He pushed Adam and Eve to disobey God by eating the forbidden fruit. Another personification of Satan, according to biblical documents, is that of Jesus and his apostles talking to Satan.

Regarding Islam, Satan is the same with the Devil, which is called Iblis or Shaytan. the Quran says that Iblis was not one of the angels, but this spirit was God's creation from fire. After God had created Adam, he ordered all the spirits to bow to Adam, in fact they all did except Iblis -who was one of the Jinn- disobeyed and promised to lead mankind into temptation and evil. In return, God declared the fall of Iblis from Heaven to Hell. Another spirit appeared in the Quran is the Jinn. These spirits, according to Quran, could be either good or evil. They have a great importance in the process of divination and prediction. In other words, with the help of these spirits, a medium could predict and foresee the future.

Unlike the previous religions, the notion of evil is not really discussed in the Old Testament. The Jewish theology believes that God had created both angels and Devil to perform their tasks, and to realise the wishes of God.

Indeed, the existence of evil within religions is a reality and not just a superstition as it was viewed by some communities; however, there is a slight difference regarding the basis of supernatural, Bruce Hood asserts in the following quotation taken from his book *Supersense: From Superstition to Religion* (2009) that "All religions are based on supernatural beliefs, but not all supernatural beliefs are based on religion" (113). We deduce that religion asserts the existence of supernatural power, whilst it forbids its practice as it was the case with black magic and witchcraft.

### **I. 3. Definition of Witchcraft**

Witchcraft is a phenomenon that existed as old as mankind, but before dealing with its origins and the worldview towards its existence, let us introduce some relevant definitions of it. Witchcraft is what is called in Latin *maleficia*. It is the practice of supernatural mythical power with the aid of devil and evil spirits. It is the belief in magical abilities and spiritual rituals. The meaning of the concept varied according to cultural and social features of each community; however, what is certain is that witchcraft is supernatural and irrational, and even science is unable to explain such phenomenon. Magic is the process that could not be easily explained through any logical analysis, Dale B. Martin in his book entitled *Inventing Superstition* (2009) claims that "the term magic is misleading, often used to describe activities which are, in fact misleading of nature" (10).

Witches used magic spells and called upon spirits for help. They are pagans doing the devil's work. In other words, the dark art which is the Black magic is the summoning of evil spirits for evil purposes. Witches involve the manipulation of supernatural power in order to place a curse onto someone. Bertrand Russell says in his *Unpopular Essays* (2009) that "such people benefit from the manipulation of superstitions fear and the suffering of others" (103). Witches could inflict diseases on people, soil crops, and bring about bad weather. They could

spread fear throughout community because they can project harm to mankind. Jeanne Favaret-Saada asserts, "now witchcraft is spoken words, but these spoken words are power, and not knowledge or information...in witchcraft, words can wage war" (94). People accused of witchcraft did in fact try to harm their enemies by magical means.

Archeologists assert that witchcraft is one of the oldest religions in the world. Its origins date back to those of humanity and Paleolithic period; the man at that time used these arts for his struggle for survival to protect himself from the other humans and animals. A discovery of cave paintings that date back to the Stone Age show that the man of this period practised some rituals and spiritual charms. Neanderthals and Co-Magnons were the first to practise witchcraft approximately 30,000 or 40,000 years ago to protect themselves from wild animals and from people of other tribes.

The process of witchcraft had to perform specific rituals in Sabbaths (midnight gatherings), in which the witch obeys to the Devil and becomes his servant. In return, the Devil puts a mark on the witch's skin as a brand of membership and provides the witch with supernatural power to accomplish their maleficent and devilish tasks. Talking about the relationship between witches and demons, Brain P. Levack in his book entitled *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (2006) asserts,

The connection between magic and the demonic pact became closer in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when the translation of many Islamic and Greek books of magic led to a dramatic increase in the actual practise of threat and when ecclesiastical writers became more explicit in their condemnation of it (37).

In defining witchcraft, daemonologists go to make distinction between two types of witchcraft. They say that the act of manipulating mysterious forces is not always for

containing maleficent works. Levack made distinction between the black magic and the white one. Regarding the black art he says,

This type of magic would include the killing of person by piercing a doll made in his or her imaged, inflicting sickness on a child by reciting a spell, bringing down hail on corps by leaving a based sword in a room, and causing impotence in a bridegroom by tying knots in a piece of heather and leaving it in his proximity (Ibid 04).

Contrary to the black forces he adds,

White magic can be productive, in the sense of helping corps to grow or women to bear children: it can be therapeutic, in the sense of healing a person who is ill; or it can be protective; in the sense of preventing some misfortune from occurring or warding off some evil spirit or witch (Ibid 06).

The concept of white magic is related to the herbalists, wise women and witchdoctors. These people had magical knowledge and mysterious power to cure people. They were believed to be the antithesis of witches and maleficia.

Witches are generally portrayed as being ugly and old women. They are described as corn-like, with snuggle teeth and hairy lips. They are often with physical disabilities or abnormalities in their body. What is certain about witches is their possession of supernatural power as Levack claims, "in all witch-believing societies witches are regarded as individual who possess some sort of extraordinary or mysterious power to perform evil deeds" (Ibid 04).

The process of witchcraft continues despite the fact that it was forbidden by religion. The Islamic faith strictly forbids any magical activity and considers witchcraft as a sin and a crime not only against human kind, but also against God Himself. In fact, Christianity also has turned to Bible to condemn witchcraft. Both Exodus and Deuteronomy have passages

alluding to God's displeasure with witches and their devilish works. King James Bible describes witchcraft as a sin that should be punished by death "you shall not permit a sorceress to live"(Ibid 65).

Paganism and ignorance are not the real causes that pushed people to believe in witchcraft. During the Renaissance period, namely late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, England witnessed a real threat of witches and the practice of witchcraft; therefore, we are going to focus on this issue in the following section.

## **II. Witchcraft during the late Tudor & early Stuart reigns**

The belief and the practice of witchcraft and supernatural in Europe could be traced to the classical antiquity and it continued till the Age of Enlightenment. However, during the late sixteenth until the early seventeenth centuries, the English society was very fascinated with mysterious phenomena. At that time, the belief in witchcraft was widespread. The practice of such rituals has been yet existed hundreds of years before Christianity reached England. With the arrival of this new faith, the ancient pre-Christian shamanistic practices had been collapsed, but it was still practised by the minority. However, sooner the English people left Christianity in favour of their old pagan religion.

Being influenced by old legends which were spreading throughout Britain, the British life was overshadowed by superstition. Therefore, a veritable witch-mania characterized the reign of Tudor and Stuart dynasties. The Protestant Reformation in Europe, especially in England, brought about a change in the way witchcraft was viewed. Before these reforms, the practice and the belief in witchcraft was seen as superstition. Saint Augustine of Hippo, an early influential and theologian in the Christian church, believed "witches to be powerless, and it was an error of the pagans to believe in some other divine powers than the one God" (Weiskotten XIX). This idea was largely accepted by the church; hence, the Christian church

did not consider witchcraft as a real power and threat. In fact, the official position of the church was to deny that witchcraft existed; however, it confirmed that people were practising this superstition. Rodney Stark says, "in the beginning, the church used the term superstition not only to condemn various forms of magic, but also in the modern sense that these beliefs and practices were irrational and false" (228). The increase of unexplainable events, diseases, death, poverty, and misfortune pushed people to ask why are they suddenly being ill? Why did their animals die? Why are their houses burnt?...etc. Consequently, the problem of why led people to search for an answer; thus, being influenced by folklore and old legends, the blame was targeted to witches.

The witchcraft phobia was inherited first in people, and then in the church; that fear forced the church to act. The terror which a witch caused and the hatred of her deeds pushed the church to consider these dark forces as a sin, " there was no sin more offensive to God than witchcraft" (Karmer 221). Furthermore, the use of witchcraft had been deemed as heresy by Pop Innocent VIII in 1484. Robins Rossell in *The Encyclopedia of wWtchcraft and Demonology* (1959) confirms, "witches made an agreement with the devil to deny the christian God" (550). So witches were no longer the subject of folklore and medieval myth, they were a tangible representation of the devil. Levack says, "the early Christian church insisted that all magical activity involved the power of the pagan gods, who were considered to be demons" (05).

Outbreaks of witchcraft hysteria swept England and subsequent executions had appeared with the Reformation. Rodney Stark in his book *For the Glory of God* (2003) attributes the Protestant Reformation as one of the causes of witch-hunt,

Empirically and theoretically, the Protestant Reformation and the witch-hunts were inseparable. Indeed... when Protestants took their Reformation to new religions and

nations, they often took witch-hunting with them... By the same token, when Catholics reclaimed an era. They continued to witch-hunts... in all of these religious struggles, Satan was always on the other side (251).

During the period of Reformation, there was an increase in the awareness of the presence of the Devil. This thinking was inherited by the Protestant reformers, Martin Luther and Jean Calvin. In fact, they adopted the traditional view towards the Devil; however, they emphasize on the presence of the danger of Devil. "We are all subject to the devil, both in body and goods", wrote Luther, "and we be stranger in this world, whereof he is prince and god" (Levack 112).

Luther and Calvin were not preoccupied by witchcraft. But Luther said that all witches should be burned. Calvin in his part insisted on the death of the witches. The reformers focused on the danger of the Devil and that witches are Satan worshipers and agents; thus, their aim was to purify the world by declaring war against Satan. Therefore, a war against witches was declared through the introduction of witch persecution as well as prosecutions.

## **II. 2. Kings Vs Witches**

### **II. 2. 1. King Henry VIII**

The discourse of witchcraft had transferred to the political arena. As a result, official legislation against the practice of witchcraft started in England with the reign of King Henry VIII. In 1542, King Henry passed the Witchcraft Act against conjuration, witchcraft, sorcery, and enchantments. It was the first English law against witchcraft. Henry's fear of witchcraft was caused by his second wife Anne Boleyn. Historically speaking, Anne Boleyn was executed because she was found guilty of treason in a conspiracy with her brother and lover.

King Henry claimed that Anne was a witch and that she had used witchcraft to make him fall in love with her, and then he feared that she would harm and bewitch him.

Anne Boleyn had been accused of being a witch because it was believed that women with physical abnormalities, or those who were particularly gifted were viewed as witches. In fact, Anne had a sixth finger growing from her fifth small one, she was strong and tall more than other women; besides, she had a prominent mole on her neck -devil's mark- as a proof of her involvement.

The fear of being involved in a conspiracy or a plot pushed King Henry to execute his wife Anne. Consequently, few years after her death, he passed the first law against witchcraft in 1542. This Act was repealed in 1547 during the reign of King Edward VI. Unlike his father, Edward was more liberal in his thinking about witchcraft as did his half sister Queen Elizabeth.

## **II. 2. 2. Queen Elizabeth I**

The Elizabethan Age is acknowledged of being a prosperous era. It is an era of intellectual development. Several books in religion, astrology, alchemy, and magic were published thanks to the introduction of the printing press. Analogous to the previous periods, the reign of Elizabeth was characterized by a strong belief in the supernatural and witchcraft. Elizabethan people believed that natural disasters as earthquakes, floods, storms, and the outbreak of the bubonic plague were the works of witches. "Spiritualism...formed one of the major interests of the Elizabethan period" (Wilson 65).

Elizabeth's stance and leniency towards witchcraft could be explained either by the fact of being a woman since the most accused witches were women, or by being a daughter of an accused witch, Anne Boleyn. In 1547, Henrican statutes were repealed, including the Act of



1542 on witchcraft, thus, the legal situation regarding witchcraft turned back to the one of pre-1542.

In 1562 the Queen Elizabeth issued an act on witchcraft, condemning any form of magic or mysterious behaviour. According to Marion Gibson, the Act states,

Anyone who should use, practise or exercise any witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery, whereby any person shall happen to be killed or destroyed, was guilty of felony without benefit of clergy, and was to be put to death (Gibson 3-4).

In fact, this Act was only against conjuration, enchantments and witchcraft; however, it did not define sorcery as heresy. So the religious view was not involved in the condemnation of witchcraft because it was not considered as heresy. In a way, this Act protected those who practised witchcraft from religious persecutions by the church. Elizabeth's leniency towards witches was viewed even during the investigatories where torture was not allowed. So, the Act passed in 1562 was not really applied by the authorities. As the fear of witchcraft increased, it became legal to kill a witch because of Witchcraft Act passed in 1563, when the accused witch confessed that she is in fact a witch, this one would be hanged. Marriane Hester refers to witch-hunt appeared particularly starting from this period as the result of social changes and the increase of witchcraft,

Existing social structures, beliefs and relationship were undergoing transformations including, potentially, also men's and women's role. At that particular time a number of economic, political, legal, ideological and religious factors combined, which allowed and also prompted persecution for witchcraft (107).

The real cause hidden behind Elizabeth's leniency towards witchcraft was her interest in astrology, mathematics, philosophy, and alchemy. During this time frame maths, astrology

and alchemy were viewed as black magic and they were forbidden because of the misunderstanding.

John Dee was brilliant in these fields; thus, he was involved in prediction by using astrology, magic and occultism through alchemy. Dee had a reputation of being a magician and he was accounted as being adapt at necromancy. He was viewed as the father of modern witchcraft. During the reign of Queen Mary, Dee predicted by using astrology the death of Queen Mary and that Queen Elizabeth would replace her in 1558. Such royal prediction was extremely illegal at that time. Consequently, Queen Mary put Dee in jail for three years, until Elizabeth came to the throne. Dee's predictions were in fact realized, Elizabeth freed him and made him as her personal adviser and astrologer. Despite the fact that magic and witchcraft were damned and forbidden at that time, Elizabeth considered Dee's activities as white and good magic. The relationship between Dee and the Queen was very good, they were friends. Peter Rogers in "*Queen Elizabeth I- Witch Queen of England*"(2012), refers to the closeness of this relationship,

To reveal the closeness of this relationship, there are numerous account of Elizabeth going to visit John Dee at his home. On 10th October 1580 she called to offer condolences on the death of his mother. King and queens don't normally call at the home of ordinary people. Other various incongruity during Elizabeth's life add to the evidence that she was his student in the occult as well as simply seeking his evidence of other matters (Rogers 1).

It was believed that John Dee had contact with spirits, because a plaque on the house where he lived in Mortlake High Street states that " John Dee the renowned necromancer lived here". Being her adviser and astrologer would allow Elizabeth to be protected from any threat., conspiracy or plot throughout the prophecies of Dee. "She had sufficient occult

methods of protection put in place...countless plots and countless plotters who would no four work to keep their activities secret, yet not one succeeded" (Rogers 1). So that could be what made the reign of Elizabeth lasted more than 45 years of glory.

There is no definitive and tangible evidence that Queen Elizabeth I was involved in witchcraft and prediction, but what is certain is that Renaissance beliefs in the existence and the practice of witchcraft were evident in witch trails and execution that were increased with the coming of King James I to power.

### **II. 2. 3. King James I**

After the death of Queen Elizabeth I in 1603 without leaving an heir, her cousin King James VI of Scotland traveled north to take ownership of his kingdom. When James became a Monarch, England has been suffering from a religious turmoil. This struggle was between Catholics and Protestants. The Jacobean people, among whom there were Puritans, were very religious and God fearing. The puritan's goal was to purify themselves, their faith, the church and their communities from any appearance or threat of Devil. The Puritans justified the existence of Devil in the community. For them God would protect his servants and believers; hence, any harm occurred in community, the Devil and his servants would be blamed. The idea is that God never arises harm and never punishes his people if they are God worshippers. This thinking exemplifies the existence of a theocracy in the puritan society.

Regarding the Puritan view towards witchcraft, they believed that witches should be punished for the pact they made with the Devil against the church and against God. So, the punishments of witches was due to the fact that witches deny the existence of God and became Devil worshippers. In fact, witchcraft was damned, because it was seen as a threat to the church, but not because of its being harmful to people. With the coming of James I, magic was seen partially as a threat to the political rule; thus, the King took a personal interest since

a plot against his life seemed to be part of witch conspiracy. Cedric Watts in the introduction to *Macbeth* claims,

The completion of James's marriage to Princess Anne of Denmark and the return of the couple to Scotland (1589-1590) had been repeatedly delayed by storms at sea; therefore, in Denmark and Scotland, witches were blamed for the bad weather. The Earl of Bothwell was said to have conspired with witches in the hope that James would drown (12).

In 1590's, North Berwick Witch Trails, a coven of witches admit that they have tried to drown James by arising the storm; moreover, one of the witches whispered to James I the words that his bride said to him in his wedding night. For James witchcraft was like Roman Catholicism, it is a political as well as a spiritual menace to his rule.

According to historical records, James spent more than six months of his life in Denmark learning about the practice of witchcraft and witch-hunt. When James I was in Denmark, he met with a Danish Lutheran theologian Niel Hemmingsen, an expert in demonology. Hemmingsen had written a book on the topic of witchcraft around 1575. James I was so fascinated by what he had learned, he adopted the idea of the demonic or satanic pact. James was so fearful of witches, witchcraft, and the threat of evil. As a result, he wrote a book called *Daemonologie*, published in Edinburgh in 1597. It was the first book on witchcraft penned in English language. King James became the only monarch in history to publish a treatise on witchcraft.

*Daemonologie* was written in form of three divided books that serve as a guide explaining how to detect witchcraft and how to be protected from it. This script included also a description of witches regarding the devil's mark and the swimming test. James in his book identified the crime of witchcraft with that of treason, as he insisted on the punishment of

witches. This treatise, *Daemonologie*, was the result of James' interest in witchcraft which he described as a high treason against God, this means that all the means of horror were justified during the investigations. Historians say that the king wrote his *Daemonologie* during the witchcraft hysteria of 1590-1591 and the one of 1596-1597; however, it was not printed until the autumn of 1597.

King James I was believed to be the Devil's greatest enemy in the world. Throughout his treatise on the Divine Right of Kings, *The Threw Law of Free Monarchy* (1598), the king was chosen by God. King James was the representative of God on the earth; therefore, all the enemies of God are enemies of James. So, if King James was God's representative on earth, then who could be a more likely victim of the devil's arts than he? The king's role as God's chosen for combating the Devil and his followers on earth made James and his servants as God's lawful lieutenants to resist witches and witchcraft.

It is said that during the North Berwick Witch Trails of 1590, witches confessed their participation in nocturnal assemblies of more than 200 witches, where the Devil was personally present. In this Sabbath, the witches asked the Devil why he hated James, the answer was that James was his greatest enemy in the world since he was God's lieutenant. So that, James took part in some of the interrogations, he took a personal role in the examination of the accused North Berwick witches and authorized to torture suspected witches. When James became the king of England, he repealed the Elizabethan Act of witchcraft. In his view, this Act was by no means strict enough in prosecuting the witches, he ordered that the Elizabethan statute on witchcraft to be replaced by a harsher one. Subsequently, in 1604 James realised his statute against witchcraft. The Act was very harsh regarding accusation, but those who had the Devil's mark on their skin would be present and loathe to confess without torture. James's willingness to stamp out witchcraft in all forms was apparent; he ordered that all those who practise witchcraft, sorcery, enchantment, or charm should be put to death. James's Act made

witchcraft during the Jacobean time an offence. He went further concerning witchcraft. When he wrote *James Bible* in 1611, he referred to witchcraft, he associated witches with antichrists.

As the fear of witchcraft increased in England, the accusations included even those with knowledge of herbs. They believed that these herbalists were like the other witches, they had made pacts with the Devil, either explicit or implicit. Therefore, the spreading fear about the black magic and the white one in the community led to witchcraft hysteria.

In August 1612, king James ordered that the Pendle witches (three generation of family) should be marched through the streets of Lancaster all together and hanged. In fact, the Pendle witch trail remain among the most famous witch trails in the English history.

### **II. 3. Witch-hunting**

Witch persecution was practised latter in England than in other areas in Europe. This idea was illustrated within the historical trails of western Europe. The involvement of the church coupled with the laws forbidding the practice of witchcraft led to the execution of thousands of accused witches.

From 1484 until 1750, many witches were tortured, burnt and hanged across western Europe. The punishment differed within different societies; however, torture was the common form of punishment for the majority of witches. They were forced to walk naked along the streets and then severely beaten and burnt alive. Mavor Moore asserts in her book entitled *Stratford Paper on Shakespeare* (1962) that "200,000 suspected witches were put to death in Europe during the witch hunt between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, and many more badly tortured, all in the name of the Christian church"(141).

During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, the punishment of witches in England was hanging which was not the same in Scotland. In Scotland, the procedures used for punishment were believed to be the most severe, including thumb screws and leg irons as forms of torture.

Witch persecutions were not really in effect until 1563. When the Elizabethan Act of Witchcraft was passed in 1580s, 13% of assize trails in Essex were for witchcraft, in which sixty four witches were accused and 53 were found guilty. However, another active center of witch-hunting was Scotland, where up to 4,000 people were burnt, it was more than double the execution rate in England.

With the coming of King James I, the process of punishment changed to a harsher one where all means of torture were allowed. A belief widely held in England was that a witch would not sink in the water, then this had been taken as a test and a proof on witch accusations. The water was used when people were baptized; hence, the ordeal by water means that the pureness of the water would reject the impurity of the witch. If the witches sank, they were held to be innocent, if they did not sink they were guilty of witchcraft. Therefore, witches were handled harshly and were put under severe and awful torture to gain a confession of their craft. In fact, this swimming test was described in James's *Daemonologie*. If we cite a real example of the swimming test, it would be the one of Mary Sutton of Bedford. She was tossed into a river with her thumbs tied to her opposition big toes, Mary floated, and therefore she was burnt.

Statistics regarding witch persecutions and trails were proofs of the existence of witchcraft in England at that time. In the following, we are going to present some scores regarding witch trails in the British history. In 1591, is in the North Berwick Witch Trails, Anne Sampson, an accused witch was examined by James VI himself. This one stripped and shaved in search for the devil's mark, then tortured with the witch bridle. It was the same case

with Dr Fian, the king had pulled of Fian's finger nails, then two pins were pushed into the wounds. At the end, the two were strangled then burned. Moreover, Mother Samuel from Huntingdonshire was tortured to confess the death of Lady Cromwell in 1590. Another trail was that of nine witches who were hanged at Market Bosworth, Leicestershire England for causing epilepsy in a boy in 1616 (Lawrence & Roberts 203-223).

It is believed that witches under torture would confess even if they were not real witches. In other word, the witch would say what the juridical authorities want to hear. However, without being tortured, in 1621, in response to the local minister Henry Goodcole, Elizabeth Sawyer, an English witch confessed that the Devil appeared to her on several occasions and that after threatening her she granted for fear unto the Devil his request of her soul and body.

It was not surprising that people in England believed in witches at that time, since it was a common belief, but what was surprising was that these beliefs had been transferred to America with the puritans. This view was proved by the witch trails. Starting with Windsor, Connecticut in 1647, historians recorded that more than 46 people were accused and 11 were put to death for their crime. However, in Virginia, in 1655, a law called Norfolk country passed. The law considered accusing people of witchcraft without proofs was a crime.

The Salem witch trails that took place in Massachusetts in 1692 stemmed from James I fear of witchcraft. Thus, more than 150 people were accused and 18 were put to death. Regarding the Salem witch trails, Levack says, "In a study of the well-known witch-hunt that took place at Salem Massachusetts, in 1692, Chadwich Hansen has argued that at least three of the women prosecuted for witchcraft were in fact practitioners of sorcery" (14). Therefore, this would have been taken as a proof that witchcraft in fact did exist in America, women being tortured would confess the existence of witchcraft.



## **II. 4. Women Vs Witches**

The women's position during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries England had not changed comparing to their early predecessors. Although the throne was in women's hands (Queen Mary and Queen Elizabeth), women were viewed as subordinate, subservient, and dependent creatures to their parents then their husbands.

During the witchcraft hysteria, one popular witch belief closely related to this period was that women were considered as witches. According to Karlson, "The history of witches is primarily a history of women" (xii). It was believed that women were the gateway of Satan to complete his works. Moreover, J. A. Sharpe justified women involvement into maleficia by stating that

women are more easily disposed to be witches, women were credulous and not thus easily deceived; they had an over developed sense of curiosity...they have, since eve, had a greater capacity to fall, a greater tendency for wrath and a greater appetite for revenge; and they are of a slopping tongue and fall of words (Sharpe 155).

In England, the number of accused women was more than that of men despite the fact that they were oppressed and illiterate. Mac Farlanne documents, "in England more than ninety percent of those formally accused witchcraft were women" (160). This what explains the association of witchcraft and women and why women were the ones who were more accused.

## **III. The Relationship between Literature and Witchcraft**

Elizabethan and Jacobean eras were influenced by occultism and witchcraft which left their trace in literature; mainly in drama. Dramatists of this period include magic as a main

feature of their plays. It is the paranoia regarding witchcraft that pushed to its embodiment in the works of art and literature.

History and literature are inter-dependent. Thus, they are intertwined. Literature serves as a mirror of the time of its production. In order to analyze history and civilization, we should refer to literature, for that, a new literary theory arose in 1980s which is New Historicism. It is a literary theory or an approach of literary criticism that teaches and investigates that a work of literature should be considered as a product of the time, place, and historical circumstances of its composition rather than as an isolated entity. Stephen Greenblatt asserts that scholars should analyze literary works by interpreting and understanding the climate of their production. This theory aims at understanding history through literature. In other words, literature projects history.

New Historicism is a school of literary criticism which first developed in 1980s. Stephen Greenblatt was one of the first to use the term "New Historicism". This theory started with the publication of several essays and books by Greenblatt including "*Renaissance Self-Fashioning*" in 1980 which paved the way to the growth of this approach. Unlike Old Historicism which says that history is necessary background material for literature and its study, New Historicism insists on the fact that literature forms the picture of the world and it retraces an accurate and objective image of any historical era.

Cultural poetics, often called New Historicism in America and Cultural Materialism in Great Britain, advocates that a literary text shows signs of the time and the society of its production. According to New Historicism, history is important as sociology and politics; thus, this interpretative approach deals with power struggles within social system.

The Renaissance scholar Greenblatt, in his influential essays and books about New historicism, focuses on the idea that history and literature are disciplines that should be

analyzed together. This view is shared between all the New Historicist; they all agree that literature offers a unique kind of knowledge and an accurate view of what really occurred. It is literature that depicts history; hence, we may discover the worldview and the beliefs of any group of people thanks to their literature.

Throughout providing the previous information about the relationship between literature and history, and how they are independent to one another; our endeavor is to prove that a literary text could be the result of its historical circumstances. For this reason, our research will be centred on analyzing Shakespeare's plays *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* from a New Historicist eye.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, We have tried to explain and define the notion of witchcraft. We have provided the reader with pertinent definitions of the concepts of supernatural and witchcraft. Then, in the second section, We have dealt with the common beliefs regarding witchcraft during the late Tudor and early Stuart dynasties, where we have shed light on how the rulers dealt with witches and witchcraft. The last part was devoted to the literary approach which we have opted for in this research which is New Historicism. For that, the next chapter aims at showing how my chosen literary texts picture the reality of witchcraft during the English Renaissance.

# Chapter three

*Witchcraft in Macbeth and The  
Tempest: Text in Context.*

## Introduction

This chapter will deal with the analysis of witchcraft in Shakespeare's plays *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*. In the analysis, we are going to focus on the existence and the practice of witchcraft in Shakespeare's days, and how Shakespeare had been influenced by these beliefs when he wrote his aforementioned plays. In this part, we are going to make use of the chosen theory, New Historicism, on the chosen plays. In other words, we will reveal the hidden side of the English history (witchcraft) through Shakespeare's plays, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* by appealing to New Historicist theory of Stephen Greenblatt. This chapter will show how the issue of witchcraft is depicted as a real historical phenomenon in Shakespeare's England. Our aim here is to present the two plays as historical documents that are based upon actual events occurred at that time.

History is shaped by people who lived it. They are like witnesses. So, Shakespeare was not just a dramatist, he was also a historian who drew the picture of the life lived during his time period through his plays. Shakespeare himself was shaped by his own historical era. He was influenced by social phenomena and the common beliefs. In this research, we try to find the inclusion of the historical background in his writings.

The hysteria of witchcraft that reached England during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries had left an impact on the writers of that era, mainly on Shakespeare who had portrayed and transferred the issue of witchcraft from state to stage, then to page. But, before going further, it is evident to refer to some biographical elements of the life of the playwright Shakespeare.

### III. 1. William Shakespeare's Biography

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford Upon Avon, a small town in south western England. He was the son of John Shakespeare and Mary Arden. Tradition gave his date of birth on 23 April 1564, and he was christened at the parish church. Little is known of Shakespeare's early life; he attended the Stratford Grammar school for classical education where he learned Latin, scriptures, and logic, but he had no university education. It is thought that Shakespeare had left school at the age of fourteen (14) to help his family earn money through working in his father's glove business. When he had 18 years old, he married Anne Hathaway, with whom he had three children; two daughters, Susanna and Judith, and a son Hamnet who died in 1596 because of plague.

Elizabeth I became a Queen six years before Shakespeare's birth. During her reign, England became a cultural centre in which literature thrived. Shakespeare was exposed to theatre as a child at the age of eight (8) when travelling theatre companies visited Stratford. He was fascinated by the show. How he became involved in London's stage is uncertain, but Michael Wood, a London historian famous for writing and hosting television documentaries on history, culture, and politics suggested in a 2003 documentary, *In Search of Shakespeare*, that Shakespeare may have joined the Queen's Men when they performed in Stratford, and travelled with them in 1583. However, his real appearance in London was in 1592. According to Jane Moore, in her book entitled *William Shakespeare: an Overview of his Life, Time, and Works* (2008) claims, "he was first mentioned by the playwright Robert Greene in his pamphlet *Groatsworth of Wit* as a young upstart crow", she adds, "two months after Greene's death, his editor Henry Chettle apologizes publically to Shakespeare for the insults"(8).

When Shakespeare arrived to London, he began his career. From 1590 to 1592, he wrote *Henry VI* part 1, 2 and 3. By 1592, *Henry VI* part 1 was produced by Lord Strange's

Men at the Rose Theatre. In 1593, he began writing sonnets, and his long narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* was published and was dedicated to the young Earl of South-ampton, as he did with his second poem *The Rape of Lucrece* in 1594.

There was little playing in 1593, theatres were closed during the severe outbreak of the bubonic plague; however, the 1594 was a busy year for Shakespeare. When the plague ceased, the theatre companies were re-organized, and Shakespeare became the leader of the Lord Chamberlain's Company (Elizabeth's official company). This year also witnessed the death of Christopher Marlow and Thomas Kyd, so Shakespeare was left without a rival. He had already written *Titus Andronicus*, *Two gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's lost*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. Afterwards, he wrote his great plays *Romeo and Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Richard II*, and *The Merchant of Venice*. Shakespeare was both a dramatist and a poet; he wrote plays in poetry; meanwhile, his sonnets expressed his love for a beautiful young man and a dark powerful lady.

In 1596, London authorities banned public plays in the city, so the company moved to the Swan theatre on Bankside. Later on, in 1598, Shakespeare and his friends built and opened their own playhouse "The Globe" on the south bank of the Thames. In fact, in 1644, the Globe was demolished by the Puritans. The company had often performed before Queen Elizabeth I and King James I. One of the first acts of King James I was to promote the company to be his own; henceforth, the company became known as the King's Men. In 1590s, when he began his career, the English bard concentrated on comedies; however, in the early years of James I reign he wrote his tragedies, including *Macbeth* in 1606. His comedies took a darker tone and became sombre.

Although Catholicism was against law at that time, Shakespeare may have been Roman Catholic in heart. His parents lived during the reign of the Catholic Queen Mary, so

they were Catholics; thus, Shakespeare may have received Catholic teachings. In his play *Hamlet* Shakespeare hints to Catholicism; the ghost of Hamlet's father suffers in purgatory which is not a Protestant belief, but a Catholic one. Moreover, taking into consideration the Gunpowder Plot led by Catholics, William Catesby, the father of the head conspirator, Robert Catesby, was a friend of John Shakespeare.

In his last years he wrote rarely; a number of rival writers and dramatists appeared; particularly Ben Jonson, introducing new styles of drama. The 1611 witnessed the first recorded performance of *the Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth* and *Cymbeline* and the first production of *The Tempest* which was his last play as a solo writer.

Shakespeare died on 23 April, 1616, at the age of 52, and was buried in the place of his baptism, Holy Trinity Church. He left 37 plays, some long poems, and 154 sonnets. He also introduced more than 1700 new words into the English language, and his works have been translated into 118 languages, including sign language.

### **III. 2. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* Plot Overview**

*Macbeth* is one of Shakespeare's great tragedies. It was written around 1606. It is true that the play is very short compared to his tragedies, but it is full of details and important historical events. The play is divided into five acts, and each one is divided into scenes. The play opens in a wild landscape in medieval Scotland. Suddenly, Three old, ugly women, the witches, appear out of a storm planning for their meeting with Macbeth, a Scottish general, after his glory in the battlefield.

When Macbeth meets the witches, they hail him by a title he already holds, thane of Glamis. Then they prophesy that he will become thane of Cawdor then a king. Banquo, another Scottish nobleman, asks the witches about his fortune, they say that he will be father



of king but not a king, then the witches vanish. These predictions have inspired Macbeth's mind to realize his dreams and feed his ambition. This powerful motivating forces make Macbeth's life changed upside down and lead to his tragic downfall.

### **III. 3. *Macbeth*: Text in Context**

Soon after the Scottish monarch King James I ascends the English throne, a Shakespearian drama about Scottish history appears. One of these plays is the tragedy of *Macbeth*. There are analogous similarities between the plot of *Macbeth* and Jacobean England; thus, the play is thought to be based irrefutably on historical facts. From the beginning of the play till its end, Shakespeare's expressions are full of supernatural elements. Throughout *Macbeth*, Shakespeare depicts the existence of witchcraft within both the Elizabethan and the Jacobean England. Such beliefs pushed him to the inclusion of the supernatural in his writings. "Shakespeare and his contemporaries bountifully illustrate the superstitious credulity which guided their contemporaries conduct moulded many of phenomena" (Littledale 529). In analyzing and interpreting *Macbeth*, we came to conclude that it reflects a period of time when the belief in witchcraft and the practice of witch hunting were very popular, and that Shakespeare grew up in this time and clime.

The play begins with the appearance of three women in a strange and wild place, planning about their next meeting:

Witch 1: When shall we three meet again?

In thunder, lightning, or in rain?

Witch 2: When the hurly-burly's done;

When the battle's lost, and won.

Witch 3: That will be ere the set of sun.

Witch 1: Where the place?

Witch 2: Upon the heath.

Witch 3: There to meet with Macbeth (Act I, Scene 1. 31).

From this passage, we understand that the witches prefer to meet in thunder, lightning or in rainy weather. The bad Weather (sombre day) is believed to be associated with witches. They are connected with disorder in nature. In England, a common belief regarding witches is that they can bring about the bad weather. Shakespeare draws from a number of primary sources, he is inspired by the obvious and evident events regarding the English popular sentiments that witches could control the weather, he writes:

Witch 2: I'll give thee a wind

Witch 1: Th'art kind.

Witch 3: And I another.

Witch 1: I myself have all the other,

And the very ports they blow,

All the quarters that they know

I'th 'shipman's card...

Yet it shall be tempest-tossed.

Look what I have (Act I, Scene 3, 34).

So, from the beginning, we recognize that they are not good witches because they raise storms as kind of revenge; hence, we may expect that they are going to bring harm to Macbeth.

"The Weyward Sisters" presumably foresee the future, since the third witch prophesies that the battle will end by sunset and that Macbeth will be at that time upon the heath, in his way to meet king Duncan. "There to meet with Macbeth" (I.1). When the sisters meet Macbeth, they hail him with three titles:

Witch 1: All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Glamis!

Witch 2: All hail, Macbeth! Hail to thee, Thane of Cawdor!

Witch 3: All hail, Macbeth! That shalt be King hereafter (Act I, Scene 3, 35).

They have knowledge of prophecy by their necromantic science. After the death of Macbeth's father, Macbeth had inherited his title thane of Glamis. However, regarding the two titles, he had never allow himself to think of becoming a king one day. Macbeth is a good, brave, and loyal soldier who never thinks of treason or betraying his king, he says;

I dare do all that may become a man

Who dares do more, is none (Act I, Scene 7: 46).

Moreover, when his wife Lady Macbeth hears the news of witches prophecies, she fears that her husband's qualities never allow him to dethrone the king and murder him.

Lady Macbeth: Yet do I fear thy nature:

It is too full o'th'milk of human kindness (Act I, Scene 5: 41).

Witches' prediction becomes true; therefore, Macbeth becomes thane of Cawdor. This upgrade has influence on Macbeth and pushes him to think about the possibility of becoming

the king. So the three sisters by their predictions have manipulated Macbeth's mind and fill it with wicked thought which is to murder the king. It seems as if the witches have, by some charms or magical powers changed Macbeth's mind to a guilty one, but for Lady Macbeth, it is the supernatural powers that chose Macbeth to be the king, Lady Macbeth says,

All that impedes thee from the golden round

Which Fate and metaphysical aid doth seem

To have thee crowned withal (Act I, Scene 5: 41).

So in a way, the witches are responsible for the murder of Duncan. The plot of Duncan's murder seems to be a response to reality. In 1605, King James I was under the threat of the Gunpowder Plot, in which a group of Catholics tried to murder him. Similarities between the Gunpowder Plot and Macbeth's conspiracy are found. The Gunpowder Plot is a Catholic attack to dethrone King James I, and the other plot is a supernatural attack performed by Macbeth to dethrone king Duncan. In his *Basilikon Doron* (1599), King James advises his son that witchcraft should be classified among the horrible crimes that he should never be forgiven.

If we take into consideration the reality that James I and the witches are eternal enemies, we may deduce that Shakespeare hints that Gunpowder Plot is, in fact, led by supernatural powers, or a group of witches who promise the plotters the throne. George Lyman Kittredge in his book *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (1956) claims;

The English government had, at least since 1300, been concerned with 'witches'-with sorcerers, because they might attempt to kill the king, with prophets (including astrologers), because they might forecast the hour of his death. The Duke of Buckingham, accused of treason in 1521, had been encouraged by a prophecy that he

would be King, although he had been warned that the prophet, a Carthusian monk, 'might be deceived by the devil'. In 1558, Sir Anthony Fortescue was arrested for sorcery, having cast a horoscope which state that the Queen 'should not live passing the next spring', and in 1580, Nicholas Johnson was accused of making her Majesty's picture in wax (Kittredge 26).

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare refers to James I as Duncan. He paints the character Duncan as a good king who rules his kingdom with wisdom, and takes care of his subjects and praises them. His kindness appears with the captain who reports Macbeth's news when he orders his servants to cure the bleeding captain, "Go get him surgeons"(Act I,Scene 2, 32).

He also thanks Macbeth and Banquo for their glory when he says,

The sin of my ingratitude even now

Was heavy on me. Thou art so far before,

To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,

That the proportion both of thanks and payment

Might have been mine! Only I have left to say,

More is thy due than more than all can pay (Act I, Scene 4: 39).

Shakespeare, through his description of Duncan as a good ruler, reinforces the idea that *Macbeth* is written to please King James I.

The belief in many deities and polytheism is not only associated with the Greek mythology. Elizabethan and Jacobean people seem to believe in other gods rather than The one and The only God. This can be seen when Shakespeare referred to the goddess of fortune which was sided with the rebellions, but it was defeated by Macbeth in the first act, scene 2.

And Fortune, on his damnèd quarrel smiling,

Showed like a rebel's whore; but all's too weak:

For brave Macbeth ( well he deserves that name)

Disdaining Fortune (32).

Shakespeare also made reference to another goddess that helped Macbeth in the battle, it seems to be the goddess of war,

The Thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict,

Till that Bellona's bridegroom, lapped in proof. (Act I, Scene 2: 33)

Finally, Shakespeare introduces Heccat the goddess of magic and destiny who has power over the three witches. Marion Gibson and Anne Esra say, "In early modern drama Hecate is regarded as the Greek and Roman goddess of witchcraft. Associated with night, the moon, liminal space, sorcery, crossroads, magic, and the dead" (126). In the play, it seems that heccat is the leader of the other witches so that she blames the witches about their prediction to Macbeth, she says:

How did you dare

To trade and traffic with Macbeth

In riddles and affairs of death;

And I, the mistress of your charms,

The close contriver of all harms,

Was never called to bear my part,

Or show the glory of our art? (Act III, Scene 5: 72)

The belief in superstitions is also portrayed in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The English people during the age of Shakespeare believed that the hoot of owls are alarms of death. Lennox says to Macbeth that the owl had not stopped hooting in the night of the murder of king Duncan.

New hatched to th'woeful time. The obscure bird

Clamoured the livelong night (Act II, Scene 3: 54).

During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries England, a common belief regarding witchcraft appeared, it was that witches who use small animals for supplying venom to accomplish their devilish tasks. Shakespeare did not ignore this ritual; he affirms:

Witch 3: Scale of dragon, tooth of wolf

Witches' mummy, maw and gulf

Of the ravined salt-sea shark,

Root of hemlock digged i'th'dark,

Liver of blaspheming Jew,

Gall of goat, and slips of yew

Silvered in the moon's eclipse,

Nose of Turk, and Tartar's lips,

Finger of birth- strangled babe (Act IV, Scene 1: 75).

Shakespeare chooses the character Lady Macbeth to refer to the diabolical pact, when she summons the black powers.

Lady Macbeth: Come you spirits

That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,

And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full

Come to my Woman's breast,

And take my milk for gall, you murth'ring minister,

Whenever in your sightless substances (Act I, Scene 5: 42).

Christina Lerner in her book, *Witchcraft and Religion* (1984), explains the actions of Lady Macbeth as follows, "The witch became a witch by virtue of personal arrangement with the Devil who appeared to his potential recruit in some physical forms" (3).

A portrayal of witches is given by Shakespeare, in which he describes the English witches as being wild, old and ugly women. They resemble neither to women nor to men; they are women with masculine features. In England, people usually believed that old widows with ugly faces and abnormal abilities were accused of being witches. Shakespeare describes the three witches as follows,

Banquo: How far is't called to Forres? - What are these,

So withered, and so wild in their attire,

That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth,

And yet are on't- Live you? Or are you aught

That man may question? You seem to understand me,

By each at once her choppy finger laying



Upon her skinny lips. You should be women,

And yet you breads forbid me to interpret

That you are so (Act I, Scene 3: 35).

Macbeth adds addressing to witches, "How now, you secret, black and midnight hags?" (Act IV, Scene 1: 76). The witches are unnatural; being female but breaded. Ugliness is not the only characteristic of witches, Shakespeare accuses witches of treason because they do not speak clearly about the visions. They talk in riddles towards Macbeth, as their predictions are like puzzles,

Macbeth: Accursed be that tongue that tells me so

For it hath crowed my better part of man;

And be these juggling fiends no more believed,

That palter with us in a double sense,

That keep the word of promise to our ear,

And break it to our hope (Act V, Scene 8: 101).

During the age of Shakespeare, people used to live in an established hierarchy. This hierarchy was organised through the great chain of being. English people strongly believed in the chain of being, they believed also that any disorder that occurs in the chain would occur in the social and political arena. *Macbeth* particularly conceptualizes the social and political order in which Shakespeare refers to the disorder occurred in the Chain of being. The character Macbeth is going beyond the boundaries when he kills king Duncan. Therefore, a reversal appears and things went upside down as Shakespeare says in *Macbeth*, "Fair is foul,

and foul is Fair" (Act I, Scene 1: 31). The legitimate king is killed by the tyrant Macbeth who will become the king, while king's sons are the accused.

The old man describes the world as being turned upside down, where owls kill falcons, and horses revolt against man.

Old man: On Tuesday last,

A falcon, tow'ring in her pride of place

Was by a mousing owl hawked at and killed.

Ross: And Duncan's horses (a thing most strange and certain)

Beauteous and swift, the minions of their race,

Turned wild in nature, broke their stalls, flung out,

Contending 'gainst obedience, as they would

Make war with mankind (Act II, Scene 4: 58).

Duncan's horses are symbol of his people and subjects. Shakespeare compares the revolution of horses against their master to the one of Macbeth against his king.

In England, people think that King James I is the representative of God on earth. Thus, the King is protected by the Divine Right of Kings. James I recognized that the belief in witchcraft and the devil is particularly an opposition to the monarch. Any rebellion against him would lead to a tragedy. This principle strengthened the basis of the divine right of kings. Shakespeare depicts the Jacobean belief concerning the fact that kings are chosen by God when Lady Macbeth said:

All that impedes thee from the golden round

Which Fate and metaphysical aid doth seem

To have thee crowned withal (Act I, Scene 5: 41).

He also refers to the divinity of kings through describing the night when Duncan was murdered; lamentation, yelling, and screams are heard during the night as if all the world protests on this crime.

Shakespeare makes an interesting reference to biblical stories. He makes parallels between *Macbeth* and the story of King Saul and the witch of Endor in the Book of Samuel. Jane Jack has explored this parallel in *Macbeth, King James and the Bible* (1955), quoted in Peter Stallybrass' article "*Macbeth and Witchcraft*", she writes,

Like Saul, Macbeth hears from the witches the confirmation of what he most fears. The crisis of the story is the victory of the witches: the resolution of the story is the judgement passed on Macbeth at the end - the same judgement passed on Saul: So Saul dyed for his transgression, that he committed against the word of the lord. Which he kept not and in that he sought and asked counsel of a familiar spirit (8).

Elizabethans and Jacobean blamed unexplainable events and associated them to the works of witches. There is no proof that witches cause sickness, plague or famine, or that they cause disasters, but through this play, we may assert that these wicked works are those of witches. The following scene condemns the corruption of the English society.

Witch 1: I'll drain him dry as hay;

Sleep shall, neither night nor day,

Hang upon his penthouse lid;

He shall live a man forbid;

Weary sev' nights nine times nine

Shall he dwindle, peak, and pine;

Though his bark cannot be lost,

Yet it shall be tempest-tossed

Look what I have (Act I, Scene 3: 34).

Shakespeare takes the raw material of history and shapes it to suit his artistic purposes. His show of eight kings is based on King James I's genealogical tree and cultural heritage. The witches prophecy to Banquo that he will be father of kings, but not a king "Thou shalt get kings, though be none" (Act I, Scene 3: 36). In the second meeting between Macbeth and the witches, these last summon spirits for a performance. In this performance, Macbeth sees series of boys who seem to be kings some with two- fold balls the others with treble sceptres followed by the ghost of Banquo. This show symbolizes James I origins that goes back to his grandfather Banquo. Shakespeare starts with boys with two-fold balls, it is a reference to kings that rule Scotland and England, including James, then he carries on with those who bear treble sceptres; these are the kings who rule Scotland, England, and Ireland; thus, the union of Scotland and England is specifically prophesized by *Macbeth*.

Macbeth: And yet the eighth appears, who bears a glass

Which show me many more; and some I see

That two-fold balls and treble sceptres carry.

Horrible sight. Now I see 'tis true,

For the blood-boltered Banquo smiles upon me,

And point at them for his. (Act IV, Scene 1: 78).

Throughout this play, Shakespeare depicts his characters from the Scottish history; Duncan, Banquo, Macbeth... are familiar to the Scottish King James. "Certainly Shakespeare intended to flatter King James I by his characterization of his ancestor, Banquo"(Wright xiv). So, Shakespeare is clever enough to attract King James' attention and please his Majesty.

Another scene in *Macbeth* which is also thought to be written to please King James is the one of the English doctor. James I took a keen interest in supernatural and his Divine Right. During his reign, he used to cure victims of scrofula (a tuberculous disease of the lymphatic glands) in a religious service, in which the King touches the patient in his neck so as to be healed. A traditional belief appeared at that time was that direct contact with the monarch would effect a cure, for that this disease was known as "The King's Evil". In fact, this kind of activities were associated with white magic which English people believed that it could be productive and therapeutic. In this concern, Shakespeare writes:

Malcolm: Come the King forth, I pray you?

Doctor: Ay, sir: there are a crew of wretched souls

That stay his cure: their malady convinces

The great assay of art; but, at his touch,

Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand,

They presently amend.(Act IV, Scene 3: 87).

Malcolm: 'Tis called' The Evil'

A most miraculous work in this good King,

Which often, since my here- remain in England,  
I have seen him do: how he solicits Heaven,  
Himself best knows, but strangely- visited people,  
All swol'n and ulcerous, pitiful to the eye  
The mere despair of surgery, he cures,  
Hanging a golden stamp about their necks, (Ibid).

Throughout *Macbeth*, Shakespeare pictured the society of early modern England where the belief and the practice of witchcraft were not merely folklore, but a reality that plagued social and political life.

### **III. 4. Shakespeare's *The Tempest* Plot Overview**

*The Tempest* was one of Shakespeare's last comedies. It was written and performed around 1611; however, it was not published until the publication of the first Folio in 1623. Like *Macbeth*, *The Tempest* is also divided into scenes.

*The Tempest* recounts the story of a magician prince called Prospero, and his daughter Miranda who were forced by his brother Antonio to leave his throne and dukedom. A king's lord called Gonzalo helped Prospero by providing him with food, apparel, and some books. Prospero and his daughter landed on an island supposed to be enchanted and inhabited by witches and devils. They lived there for twelve years, till the day when king of Naples Alonzo, his son Ferdinand, Antonio, Gonzalo, and the others were sailing in a ship near the mystic island. Prospero decided to take revenge. Thus, through the aid of his attendant spirit, Ariel, he raised a violent tempest. The sailors were surprised with the most extreme violent storm which scattered the whole fleet.

### III. 5. *The Tempest*: Text in Context

The supernatural was an integral aspect of the Renaissance worldview despite the rise of sciences. The invention of the printing press and the development of astrology and alchemy played the leading role in the widespread of such beliefs. Hence, witchcraft had been often a repeated subject matter of literature of that age. Through his plays, Shakespeare portrays people's life in London, as we have just seen previously in *Macbeth*. He depicts a period of time when the belief and the manipulation of the dark forces was in its peak. However, the second play we are going to deal with is not concerned with the dark arts, but with the white ones. We have taken two plays in opposite direction to show that during Shakespeare's age, both black and white magic were common.

The play opens with a violent storm caused by Prospero to punish his brother Antonio and king of Naples Alonzo for their treason.

Miranda: If by your Art (my dearest father) you have

Put the wild water in this roar, allay them:

The sky it seems would pour down stinking pitch,

But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek, (Act I, Scene 2: 25).

Through this passage, we understand that Prospero has special powers that could rise water and cause tempests. A common belief at that time was that witches seek revenge. In this play, Prospero seeks revenge upon the king and his company because they forced him to leave his dukedom.

Prospero is not involved with the devil. He punishes Alonzo and the others, but he does not cause any serious harm to them. It seems that his purpose is to teach them a lesson.

Prospero: I have with such provision in mine Art

So safely ordered, that there is no soul

No not so much prediction as an hair

Betid to any creature in the vessel

Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink (Act I, Scene 2: 26).

Prospero is not an evil since he does not want to harm them. During the Elizabethan and the Jacobean period, there was two kinds of magic. The black magic which is the art practiced by the weird sisters in *Macbeth*, and the white one which is the art associated to Prospero. White magic is not practised by witches, but it is used by magicians. A common distinction made by Renaissance people was that magicians do not inflict harm on people, and are not involved with the devil. Magicians gain their abilities through studying astrology, alchemy, and other sciences connected to magic, as well as, reading magical books. The most known magician during the Elizabethan era was John Dee.

The character Prospero belongs to this category of magicians. Shakespeare mentions that Prospero has books of magic given by Gonzalo.

Prospero: By Providence divine,

Some food, we had, and some fresh water, that

A noble Neapolitan Gonzalo

Out of his charity (who being then appointed

Master of this design) did give us, with

Rich garments, linens, stuffs, and necessities



Which since have steated much, so of his gentleness

Knowing I lov'd my books furnish'd me

From mine own library, with volumes, that

I prize above my Dukedom (Act I, Scene 2: 31).

The character Caliban also mentions these books of magic and he says that Prospero will not be able to use his magical abilities without the books.

Caliban: Remember

First to possess his books; for without them

He's but a sot, as I am; mor hath not

One spirit to command: they all do hate em

As rootedly as I. Burn but his books (Act III, Scene 2: 68).

When he decides to stop his activities, Prospero decides to bury his books, "I'll drown my books" (Act V, Scene 1: 86). Shakespeare gives importance to the books of magic and their role in the practice of magic. During his reign, King James I ordered that all books of magic should be burned.

Prospero takes a keen interest to stars, astrology, and fortune.

Prospero: What is the time o' th' day?

Ariel: Past the mid season.

Prospero: At least two glasses: the time' twixt six and now (Act I, Scene 2: 34).

In these passages, Shakespeare characterizes the Renaissance interests in these sciences. It seems that Prospero is interested in astrology since he knows the time of the day by looking just to the sun. Regarding fortune he says:

By accident most strange, bountiful Fortune

(Now my dear lady), hath mine enemies

Brought to this shore (Act I, Scene 2: 32).

Shakespeare describes Prospero positively; he is a human with magical abilities. However, his abilities are dependent on his books, his magical garment " And pluck my magic garment from me"(I. 2), and the spirit Ariel.

Shakespeare includes the spirit Ariel to portray the Renaissance belief regarding spirits and necromancy. Ariel is an airy spirit who obeys Prospero's commands. Prospero could never rise the tempest without the help of Ariel.

Prospero: Hast thou, spirit.

Perform'd to point, the tempest that I bade thee;

Ariel: To every article.

I boarded the King's ship: now on the beak,

Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,

I flam'd amazement, sometime I 'ld divide

And burn in many places; on the topmast,

The yards and bore sprit, would I flame distinctly,

Then meet, and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors  
O' th' dreadful thunder- claps more momentary  
And sight-outrunning were not; the fire, and cracks  
Of sulphurous roaring, the most mighty Neptune  
Seem to besiege, and make his bold waves tremble,  
Yea, his dread trident shake (Act I, Scene 2: 32-33).

If we analyze the character Ariel, we find that he is neither good nor evil, he just follows his master's orders.

Prospero: Ariel, they charge

Exactly is performed, but there is more work (Act I, Scene 2: 34).

Ariel has the ability to take different forms on him, he metamorphoses either to another being or to be invisible "Enter Ariel invisible" (III. 2). Thanks to this ability, he knows what the others are talking about and plotting, so as to prevent his master.

Ariel: my master through his Art foresees the danger

That you (his friend) are in, and sends me forth

(For else his project dies) to keep them living (Act II, Scene 1: 54).

There are other examples of the metamorphosis given by Shakespeare:

A noise of thunder heard. Enter divers spirits in shape of dogs

Hounds, hunting then about Prospero and Ariel setting them on (Act V, Scene 1: 84).

Thunder and lightning. Enter Ariel (like a harpy) claps his wings

upon the table, and with a quaint device the banquet vanishes (Act III, Scene 3: 73).

Unlike the weird sisters, Prospero could not predict the future, but through the metamorphosis of Ariel, he could know what the others say or do simultaneously. Caliban claims, "his spirit hears me" (Act II. Scene 2: 56). One common thing between Prospero and the three witches of *Macbeth* is that he could project charms.

Ferdinand: I will resist such entertainment, till

Mine enemy has more power.

He draws, and is charmed from moving (Act I, Scene 2: 43)

Through projecting charms, Prospero could control and manipulate the minds of his enemies as he wishes, "your charm so strongly works' em" (Act V, Scene 1: 85).

My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,

And they shall be themselves (Ibid).

The society of early modern England believed that witches could inflict harm on people by projecting charms, but according to Shakespeare point of view, even those who practise the white magic could also project charms. In this case, Prospero wants just to teach Alonso and his followers a lesson for their treason.

The struggle between good and evil is also present in the play. Sycorax, a malevolent witch, thought to be the owner of the enchanted island, punished Ariel and other spirits by confining them into a cloven pine. When Prospero landed on the island, he freed Ariel and made him his follower, Prospero says:

Thou liest, malignant Thing: hast thou forget

The foul Witch Sycorax, who with age and envy

Was grown into a hoop? hast thou forget her?

This damn'd Witch Sycorax

For mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible

To enter human hearing, from Argier

Thou know'st was banish'd: for one thing she did

They would not take her life: is not this true? (Act I, Scene 2: 35).

Sycorax and her son Caliban are the antithesis of Prospero. While Prospero is described as a human with magical powers, Caliban is described as "part human and part monstrous creature" (Gibson & Esra 45). Shakespeare takes opposite characters; Prospero versus Sycorax and Caliban to portray the Renaissance idea of the struggle between good and evil.

In *the Tempest* as in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare includes the belief in goddess. Ariel mentions the goddess of sea Neptune,

The most mighty Neptune

Seem to besiege, and make his bold waves tremble,

Yea, this dread trident shake (Act I, Scene 2: 33).

Ariel makes comparison between him and Neptune in rising storms. Shakespeare also refers to other goddesses. During the performance of the spirits when they celebrate the wedding of Miranda and Ferdinand, they summon their goddesses: Venus, Paphos, and Mars.

The principle of the Divine Right of Kings is present in *The Tempest*. Shakespeare refers to it when Gonzalo says, "Good, yet remember whom thou hast abroad" (Act I, Scene 1: 31). Gonzalo remembers the boatswain that he had to do his best to save the king's life. When they are about to sink, Antonio says, "let's all sink wi' th' king" (Act I, Scene 1: 25).

The desire of Shakespeare to please King James I, because of his interest in the subject of witchcraft, pushed him to flatter his Majesty in *The Tempest*. In 1590, King James I travelled north to bring his new bride from Denmark. In their return an enormous storm at sea raised. It is believed that the tempest was caused by witches. Cedric Watts in the introduction to *Macbeth* claims, "the Earl of Bothwell was said to have conspired with such witches in the hope that James would drown" (12). By doing so, Shakespeare hints to James conspiracy.

Throughout *The Tempest*, Shakespeare depicts the most interesting period of English history when witchcraft was practised which falls in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In this play, Shakespeare portrays by using oppositional characters the struggles that existed between good and evil.

## **Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, we have tried to analyze the phenomenon of witchcraft in Shakespeare's plays *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*. We have tried to contextualize the findings and study the plays from a new historicist point of view. We have included comprehensive summaries of the two plays, and pertinent biographical information about the playwright William Shakespeare.

# **General Conclusion**

A literary text is believed to be the byproduct of its time. It mirrors human thoughts, feelings, and ideologies of a specific phase of history. History and literature are intertwined; thus, we refer to literature in order to explore the ancient civilizations and cultures. In our case, we are interested in exploring the common beliefs regarding witchcraft during the Elizabethan and Jacobean eras through studying Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*.

Throughout this research paper, we have tried to prove that a literary text could be the result of different historical phenomena. For this reason, the issue of this research was to consider *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* as historical documents. Through his plays, Shakespeare drew the picture of life lived during his age. He recounted the Elizabethan and the Jacobean views towards the belief and the practice of magic and witchcraft.

Dramatists of middle class Renaissance were known for dealing with issues that affect society. Shakespeare wrote his tragedy *Macbeth* around 1606 and his comedy *The Tempest* about 1611 when witch hunt and witch persecutions were at their heyday. Shakespeare is known for pleasing monarchs, either explicitly or implicitly. In *Macbeth* and *The Tempest*, he flatters King James I who was obsessed by witchcraft and demons, that pushed him to write a book, *Daemonologie* 1597, devoted to the issue of witchcraft.

In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare represents the dark forces of society through the three witches. They use magic, temptation, and tricks to create a lack of self-control in human characters as they did with Macbeth; whereas, in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare portrays a society in which two opposite forces are in struggle. He refers to white magic through the character of Prospero who practises the rational forces while he depicts the black magic through the character Sycorax who brings disorder to society.

The work is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the socio-historical background of the Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras which are acknowledged to be the Golden Age of the English history. We have provided the reader with relevant events



regarding society, economics, religion, and literature. Then, we have tried to shed light on the dark side of these periods which were characterized by the practice of witchcraft.

The second chapter is entitled the common beliefs regarding witchcraft during the Elizabethan and the Jacobean eras. In this chapter, we have dealt with the definition of the notions of superstition and witchcraft. Then, we have tried to study the relationship between witchcraft and the monarchs (King Henry VIII, Queen Elizabeth I, and King James I).

The last chapter has analyzed English witchcraft in *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* from a new historicist perspective. Through the analysis, we have intended to depict how Shakespeare portrayed the society of early modern England in his plays. Moreover, how the paranoia regarding witchcraft affected him that he wrote his masterpieces.

To conclude, through this dissertation, we have explored the similarities that exist between Shakespeare's writings and his society. Our endeavor was to present the Golden Age of English history from another perspective and to reveal the existence of witchcraft within the English society under the reign of two remarkable monarchs, Queen Elizabeth I and King James I.

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