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MASTER THESIS

**FEMALE SEXUALITY IN THREE JACOBEAN WITCHCRAFT
PLAYS: *SOPHONISBA, THE WITCH AND THE WITCH OF
EDMONTON***

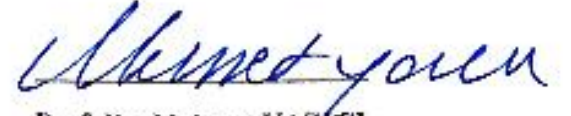
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Title of Thesis: **FEMALE SEXUALITY IN THREE JACOBAN WITCHCRAFT PLAYS: *SOPHONISBA, THE WITCH AND THE WITCH OF EDMONTON***

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STATEMENT OF NON-PLAGIRISM

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

JAKOBEN DÖNEMİ ÜÇ BÜYÜCÜLÜK OYUNU; *SOPHONISBA, CADİ* VE *EDMONTON CADISI*'NDA KADININ CİNSELLİĞİ

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Bu çalışma, Jakoben Dönemi üç büyücülük oyunu olan John Marston'ın *Sophonisba*'sı, Thomas Middleton'ın *Cadı* oyunu ve William Rowley, Thomas Dekker ve John Ford'un ortak çalışması olan *Edmonton Cadısı*'na özel olarak odaklanarak kadının cinselliği ve büyücülük arasındaki belirgin bağı açıklamayı amaçlar. Erken modern dönemde, eğitilmiş elit kesim arasında kadının zayıf cinsiyet algısına ilişkin olarak, bu oyunlar şeytanın ortağı olarak görülen sıra dışı kadınlara karşı kadınlardan nefret eden bir tutumu yansıtmaktadır. Cadı figürü, erkek egemen otoriteler tarafından çizilen sınırları ihlal eden, cinsel açıdan sapkın kadın olarak sunulmaktadır. Erkek egemenliğine ve otoritesine tehdit olarak algılanan cadının kontrol edilemeyen doğası ve ölçsüz cinsel aktiviteleri, onun kötülüğünün, diğer bir deyişle karanlık büyülerinin kaynağı olarak yansıtılır. Karanlık büyüsü ve başa çıkılmaz davranışlarıyla cadı, doğaya ve Tanrıya karşı gelmektedir ve böylece erkek otoritesini de alaşağı etmektedir. Bu bakımdan, bu tez bahsi geçen oyunlarda, büyüyü doyum-suz cinselliğinin bir ifadesi olarak kullanıp, erkek egemenliğini tehdit

eden cadı figürünü ele almaktadır. *Sophonisba* oyununda Erictho, klasik bir cadı olarak kadınsal şehvetin dehşetini temsil etmektedir. Bedensel şehvet ile erkeğin gücünü zayıflatır ve böylece sihirli yeteneklerine bağlı olarak erkek otoritesini güçsüz bırakır. *Cadı* oyunu, Hekate ve onun kardeş cadı karakterleri ile cinsel açıdan tatmin olmuş kadın tehlikesine ve cinsel geleneklerin saptırılmasına dikkat çekmektedir. Bu kadınlar cinsel açıdan deneyimli ve özgürlerdir; onlar da sihirleri ve büyüleriyle erkeğin gücünü zayıflatırlar. Son oyun, *Edmonton Cadısı* Mother Sawyer'ın bedeni üzerinden şeytanileştirilen ve saptırılan kadın bedeninin dehşetini sahnelemektedir. Onun bedeni toplumda var olan kötülüklerin kaynağıdır ve bu karmaşık beden Edmonton toplumuna kötülük yaydığı kadar cinsel karmaşa da yayan bir salgın gibi davranılmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: büyücülük, kadının cinselliği, cadı, Jakoben tiyatrosu

ABSTRACT

FEMALE SEXUALITY IN THREE JACOBEOAN WITCHCRAFT PLAYS: *SOPHONISBA, THE WITCH AND THE WITCH OF EDMONTON*

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This study aims to explain the clear link between witchcraft and female sexuality with a special focus on the dramatic representation of the witch figure in three Jacobean witchcraft plays: John Marston's *The Wonder of Women* or *The Tragedy of Sophonisba*, Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, and the collaborated work of William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, entitled *The Witch of Edmonton*. Concerning the perception about woman as the weaker sex among the educated elite in the early modern period, these plays mirror the misogynistic attitude towards marginalized females as the devil's partners. The witch figure is presented as a sexually perverted female that transgresses the boundaries put by the male authorities. Perceived as a threat to male power and authority, the witch's uncontrollable nature and unruly sexual activities are reflected as the sources of her *maleficium*, which means to do harm by practising dark magic. With her dark magic

and unruly behaviours, the witch acts against nature and God and so she becomes a heretic that overthrows the male authority. From this point of view, this thesis evaluates the witch figure that uses witchcraft as an expression of her insatiable sexuality, which threatens the male power in the mentioned plays. Erictho in *Sophonisba*, as a terrifying classical witch, represents the horror of female lust. She emasculates male power with her carnal lust and so weakens male authority in connection with her magical abilities. In *The Witch*, Hecate and her sister witches point the danger of sexually satisfied women and the perversion of sexual standards. They are sexually experienced and independent women; they also emasculate male power through their spells and charms. The last play, *The Witch of Edmonton* dramatizes the horror of the female body that is distorted and demonized through the body of Mother Sawyer. Her body is the cause of some mischiefs in the community and this unnatural body of the old witch is treated like an infection that contaminates malice as well as a sexual disorder in the Edmonton community.

Key Words: witchcraft, female sexuality, a witch, Jacobean drama

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this thesis is to evaluate witchcraft as an expression of female sexuality with special focus on three Jacobean witchcraft plays: John Marston's *The Wonder of Women* or *The Tragedy of Sophonisba*, Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, and the collaborated work of William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, entitled *The Witch of Edmonton*. Within this context, this study builds around the relation between witchcraft and female sexuality by presenting the witches' sexuality as a threat to male dominance because of its deviant, incestuous, and promiscuous nature. Marginalized as sexual deviants, these females threaten the natural order by inspiring their disordered attitudes through their bodies, their language, and their perverted lifestyles. While Erictho in *Sophonisba* represents the horror of carnal lust and deviant sexuality, Hecate and her coven in *The Witch*, embody the role of a dangerous female union whose perverted sexuality transgresses the boundaries of society. The last play, *The Witch of Edmonton* presents the horror of the female body that inverts the sexual boundaries determined by society through the body of Mother Sawyer.

Witches were feared, disgusted, and marginalized from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the 17th century. Reginald Scot, the author of a sceptical work called *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584), describes them as: "[...] lean and deformed, shewing melancholy in their faces, to the horror of all that see them." (320). This horror and otherness of them, and their perverted and demonic nature, made the witches dark figures; they stay out of stereotypes in both literature and the drama in early modern England. On the other hand, the very image of the witch recalls such terms as ambiguity, darkness, violence, and lust in all spheres of art. In Jacobean drama, the theme of witchcraft, which was a top issue in the early seventh century, and these marginalized women as witches became rich materials for the dramatists. Some playwrights used these women and the theme of witchcraft in their plays by presenting female witches who are in parallel with the image of the typical witch of that era as Sharpe describes in his book, *Instruments of Darkness* the witch as: "[...] a member of the undeserving parish poor was frequently seen as a

representative of that section of local society which would be given irregular church attendance, petty theft, drunkenness, sexual immorality and scolding, abusing, and troubling their neighbours.(63) For example, in Shakespeare's famous play, *Macbeth*, three weird sisters represent the stereotypical witch image: old, ugly, poor women who cause misery to the others. Erictho in *Sophonisba* is a marginal woman who is profane and sexually immoral like Hecate and her coven who are perverted in their lifestyles in *The Witch*. Mother Sawyer, in *The Witch of Edmonton*, troubles her neighbours with her bad tongue. In other words, the weird sisters of *Macbeth*, Hecate and her sister witches in *The Witch*; an old woman, Mother Sawyer in *The Witch Of Edmonton* and Erictho, a mythological witch figure in the form of a woman in *Sophonisba* are all in parallel with this stereotypical witch image of Jacobean society.

For the drama of the age, Jacobean drama presents a different world from the Elizabethan age; it has its own characteristic with its dark and violent atmosphere. It is as if facts in life were expressed more realistically than Medieval or Elizabethan drama. Either read or watched on stage, one can realize the dark nature of the plays. There are violent deaths, lustful desires, a sense of melancholy, cynical or pessimistic characters, and stories of revenge and every kind of atrocity. Even the joyful plays of Shakespeare changed accordingly in the reign of King James I such as *King Lear* or *Macbeth*, which are very dark, violent, and pessimistic plays about life. Actually, this change began to appear in some of Elizabethan works of literature that present a desire to achieve superhuman power such as *Doctor Faustus*. "The dream of power, among other forms that it assumed, produced an extensive Elizabethan literature of blood and bombast, violence and melodrama." (Haydn 20). These themes continued during the reign of King James I, and created a genre called "Revenge Tragedy" (Hackett 135). For instance, in Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, the Duke dies in agony because of a poisonous kiss, and in *The White Devil* by John Webster the wife of Duke Bracciano is also murdered by poison. Every night before going to sleep, she kisses the portrait painting of her husband. Doctor Julio and his assistant poison the painting in order to kill her. Much like her, Duke Bracciano is poisoned by the helmet he

wears, and dies in agony on stage. Themes of blood and violence are also found in Webster's other play, *The Duchess of Malfi*. In this play, the Duchess's brother, Cardinal kills his lover with a poisoned Bible, and Ferdinand, her brother again, imprisons the Duchess and tortures her; he even orders Bosola to strangle her with her kids just because of her marriage with her steward. Hackett renders these violent dispositions on Jacobean stage:

To some extent these torturous deaths, designed to prolong and display agony, reflect the real-life theatre of cruelty of the Elizabethan and Jacobean regimes. Traitors had their bodies broken on the rack, or were suspended from prison walls by manacles; at their public executions they were cut down from the gallows while not quite dead to be disembowelled and castrated. By such means the government staged its power, and it may be that such real-world practices desensitised sixteenth- and seventeenth-century audiences to violence on stage; or perhaps it was in some way therapeutic to see cruelties acted out in the relatively safe space of drama. (137)

The appearance of witches on stage is not surprising in this atmosphere because they are the symbols of evil and satanic powers. Actually, the witch hunts and the public executions together with torturing of the accused witches bloodily reflect the early seventeenth century as a very dreadful time. In this period, the witch-craze reached its highest level with thousands of witch-trials and consequently executions of innocent people, mostly women "like 80 per cent". (Sharpe *Instruments of Darkness* 169). As a result of this violence and panic, the existence of witches and witchcraft became a menacing issue for society's well being: "For Jacobean society witchcraft presented a real and frightening danger which posed a threat to everyone from highest to the lowest in the land." (1) This threat created anxiety in society by causing many injuries both mental and physical including the death of those accused as witches. Thus, witchcraft, together with the attitude of violence in society, became a very threatening issue for everyone. This fear created a stereotypical witch on stage; Willis summarizes this image in the society as such: "Witches were typically women, usually old, poor, uneducated, who used familiar or 'imps'- spirits who appeared to them in the form of small animals- to cause

sickness, death, or other misfortunes to their neighbours. They practised *maleficium*- harmful magic.” (136) This term *maleficium* was used in trials mostly because of the printing of texts called as “theoretical disquisitions” on witchcraft (Scarre 18). These texts were like a source book for witch hunters to catch and burn the malefic creatures. Like the text of *The Malleus Maleficarum* (1486) by Kramer and Sprenger, they were written by male writers that helped officials in discovering witches, but the problem in these works is that they associate witches (*maleficium*) only with women due to their moral weaknesses that cause their susceptibility to the devil (Carroll 304). And generally, as Willis states above, they have their pets, called “familiar”, as their partners in doing harmful magic. These pets, which are “half animal, half demon beings that most witches in England were thought to own”, were perceived as the agents of Satan. (Sharpe *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* 64). Most notably, “familiar[s]” were believed to suck blood from witches who had “a teat” like thing in their private areas called as witches’ “mark” (Sharpe *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* 64). This sexual perspective to witches’ relation to their “familiars” is one of the main points of this thesis that will be explored in more detail in the chapters.

In the referenced plays above, women are accused as witches that are depicted as morally weak, distorted, and horrific females. This is not a coincidence as there was already prejudice against women in the Jacobean society so that accused women were actually the products of patriarchal society. For instance, *Macbeth* opens with the appearance of three women as witches, which creates an immediate horror because of the negative witch image in the culture. Carroll in the introduction of his book, *Macbeth, William Shakespeare* says that:

In Shakespeare’s culture, the typical accused witch was an independent woman who did not conform to cultural stereotypes of the ideal women [...] Such women were assertive, vocal, often suspected of having mysterious powers to heal or harm; to name them as witches, then is to define them as deviant, even criminal by the standards of the dominant culture (19).

In *Macbeth*, as a well known witchcraft play from the Jacobean period, three witches are not ideal women, on the contrary, they are deviants that root the wicked thoughts into Macbeth's mind. They break the peace, and invert gender roles through their appearances and language. They say in the first scene "Fair is foul, foul is fair" (Shakespeare 1. 2. 16), which suggests their contradictory nature in the play. The most important thing about the weird sisters of Shakespeare is that they are "independent" women. This means that they are uncontrollable, open to the devil's temptations, which is the basis of the link between witchcraft and women.

The root of this attitude towards disobedient women actually dates back to the biblical story of Adam and Eve. Eve does not obey the command of God and therefore, they are dismissed together from the Garden of Eden. (*New International Version*, Gen. 3. 1-24) This image of Eve makes all women weak, faithless creatures, especially in Christian society in the early modern period. For instance, William Perkins, a theologian from the Jacobean era, presents women as "morally and intellectually weaker", and connects women with witchcraft by giving Eve as an example in his work on witchcraft (qtd. in Sharpe *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* 43). This misogynistic attitude of the educated elite led to the scapegoating of women who transgressed cultural boundaries:

From the earliest twelfth century and to the present day, a belief in witchcraft has led to, at best, demonization and scapegoating and at worst, state- or church- sanctioned executions. Witches have always readily served to define the negative side of culturally sanctioned boundaries of good versus evil, natural versus deviant, and have been punished accordingly. (Carroll 300).

In fact, the church regarded witches' being and witchcraft as a demonic organization ruled by the devil; their union is something like "an alternative, anti-Christian religion" that should be suppressed urgently so that their authority can stay secure (Scarre 49). Scarre argues that with the support of the church, the secular authorities tried to protect their ruling by taking harsh measures against this so-called demonic intervention to their authority (49).

These authorities did not only make witchcraft as a capital punishment, but also they mostly marked women and their feminine nature as the basis of witchcraft by taking Eve as an example:

The majority of regimes were to publicise women's alleged obsession with sex and their highly sensual nature as the fundamental deviant feature of their make-up. This characteristic, these hierarchies considered, not only caused men numerous anxieties, but also, more notably, threatened to weaken the existing social structure. Most authorities were, accordingly, to issue propaganda to emphasise the evil purposes of women's sensuality, in an attempt to further encourage their populaces to link women, in particular, to witchcraft. (Dawson 50)

It is a very debatable topic why women were chosen as the representation of witchcraft; Christina Lerner, for instance, questions whether witch-hunting was actually a woman hunting in her book, *Enemies of God* (1981) by affirming that women are "sexual beings", and they cause fear in the society because of their disordered nature (qtd. in Natrella 6). On the other hand, Mary Daly, a feminist, published a book called *Gyn/Ecology: Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (1978), in which she suggests that witch hunts aimed to eliminate any powerful women in order to purify the society from their existence (qtd. in Natrella 3). Indeed, from the historical sources and literature of the 16th and the 17th centuries, there were misogynistic attitudes expressed towards women, regardless of their social standing; women, in the patriarchal system, were the mother of the house, and her only duty was to run the household business and to give childbirth (Purkiss 97). Those who had a voice of their own and lived outside the norms of society were perceived as a threat to social order. In her book *Still Harping on Daughters: Women and Drama in the Age of Shakespeare*, Jardine says that in Elizabethan and Jacobean literature the ideal woman was the silent one; if she had no voice, then she would be a devoted "wife, daughter or sister" and not harmful to the

patriarchy (107). However, if a woman has a voice, and if she scolds, then she “[...] breaks the social order: she is strictly disorderly. Discordant, disruptive, unruly, she threatens to sabotage the domestic harmony which depends upon her general submissiveness.” (Jardine 106). In order to prevent this threat, authorities like the church and the state think that women should be “controlled and subordinated” (Dawson 50). This urge of suppressing women by male rulers or populace shows that women were actually feared by them. Any marginalized woman meant that she was a danger to society's harmony because, like an infection, she could infect women in society with her disorderly nature. Therefore, marking and othering the erratic woman as a witch or as a part of demonic forces, created a safe space for the members of the patriarchal system.

The connection between witchcraft and female sexuality actually goes back to the writings of the Middle Ages. For instance, Thomas Aquinas, a theologian from that time, dealt on the pact between women and demons, and suggested a sexual relationship between them and even “fathering children on them” (Sharpe *Instruments of Darkness* 18). *The Malleus Maleficarum*, written by the clerics Kramer and Sprenger in 1486, discusses wicked women's misdoings that are in contrast with the good ones. This work, also called *Hammer of Witches*, was used as a source book to discover and identify witches until the decline of the witch – craze (Corbin and Sedge 2). The clerics present women as weaker than men so that they are more prone to the temptations of Satan; they describe women as: “more feeble both in mind and body, it is not surprising that they should come more under the spell of witchcraft” (Kramer and Sprenger 101). However, the most important point in their lengthy work is their speculation concerning female sexuality:

But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, a rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect

she is an imperfect animal, she always deceives. For Cato says: When a woman weeps she weaves snares. And again: When a woman weeps, she labours to deceive a man. (Kramer and Sprenger 102)

In the quotation, women are treated as the weaker sex, the “defect” in the body of the first woman made them deceitful against men. This misogynistic attitude of the clerics links femininity to witchcraft: “therefore a wicked woman is by her nature quicker to waver in her faith, and consequently quicker to abjure the faith, which is the roof of witchcraft.”(102). Broedel in his book, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft* evaluates *The Malleus Maleficarum* as such: “From women’s unsatisfied sexual desires sprang their unequaled malice: the most malicious women were the most lustful; and the most lustful of women were witches, whose sexual appetite was insatiable...” (177). Another text by John Knox, a Scottish reformer, provoked the misogynistic attitudes towards women in early modern England in his work called *The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558). Written in a period in which women were ruling states like Queen Elizabeth I in England or Queen Mary Stuart in Scotland, this work attacks the female rule as it is against the natural order because women are weaker than men; they have no ability to rule, if they rule, they only bring “disorder”, “ruin”, and confusion” to society. (Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women”)

Woman in her greatest perfection was made to serve and obey man, not to rule and command him [...] woman in her greatest perfection should have known that man was lord above her; and therefore that she should never have pretended any kind of superiority above him, no more than do the angels above God the Creator, or above Christ their head. So I say, that in her greatest perfection, woman was created to be subject to man. (Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women”)

This unnatural ruling creates a threat to the church, to society, to the male ruling in general. And, Knox evokes in his work “[...] the literal and

metaphorical link between *whore*, *shrew*, and *witch* as a configuration of female monstrosity.” (Neumeier 32). Their “inordinate lust” to dominate men made them murderers; even they killed “their own “husbands and children”. (Knox, “The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women”) This fear of female power is also seen in the writings of King James I. Like many of his contemporaries, King James I was influenced by witchcraft and the supernatural; his inclination was to believe that witches really existed and they should be stopped as their very beings were against the divine rule (Carroll 305). He even wrote a text called *Daemonology* in which he condemned witches and their practices and comments on women witches: “ [...] that sex is frailer than man is, so is it easier to be entrapped in these gross snares of the Devil, as was over well proved to be true, by the serpents’ deceiving of Eve at the beginning” (qtd in Carroll 326). Spoto discusses in her article, “Jacobean Witchcraft and Feminine Power” that *Daemonology* treats witchcraft as a threat to his divine rule, and presents witches as disobedient ones to the authority of King James I (55). And, Spoto also claims that James’s comparison of adultery with witchcraft draws a parallel between sexuality and inversion of power (55).

The same approach is seen in the witchcraft plays because these misogynistic writings of early modern England affected the minds of Jacobean. Whether they criticize the witchcraft issue or not, both Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists use the theme of witchcraft by connecting it to the problem of women in their plays. In *Sophonisba*, *The Witch*, and *The Witch of Edmonton*, there is always at least one woman who contrasts the stereotypical woman image of Jacobean society. These women are powerful witches in the eyes of other characters as they apply them for aid. Although witches in these plays are lonely, marginalized, and discarded figures, they are needed because they have magical powers. Actually, this power is feared; they are described as horrific creatures. For instance, in *Sophonisba*, Erictho was described as such that she has a “heavy hell-like” face and has “the spirits of horror” (4.2.103-22) or in *The Witch* Hecate says “Call me the horrid’st and unhallowed’st things/That life and nature trembles at” (2.2.200-2). And Mother Sawyer is feared of her epidemic malice in *The Witch of Edmonton* (4.1.). These witches are horrific because they can do all the evil deeds because

of their malefic nature which came from the pact done between the witches and the demon. This demonic intervention increased their horror in the society and made them sinful creatures because by sealing a pact with Satan, the witches become disobedient not only to God, but also to society, or to the state as King James I stresses in *Daemonology* (qtd. in Spoto 55).

The connection between the image of a witch and sexuality can be seen in *Sophonisba* when Erictho uses witchcraft to have sex with Syphax; in *The Witch of Edmonton* it can be seen in Mother Sawyer's demonic sexual relation with her dog; in *The Witch*, it can be seen in Hecate's incestuous relationship with her son. Accordingly, these witches have sex for pleasure not for reproduction. These were all perverted acts against the divine rule considering the social norms of 16th and 17th centuries. This perversion shows that witches were free from social norms put by the authorities so that witches had power over them, especially over "male sexuality":

A witch was identified through her visible rejection of a society's moral code and her actions against commonly held standards for women; promiscuity was perhaps the most dangerous and subversive activity for women to engage in during the witch-hunts, as the most common attribute in portrayals of witches is their exaggerated sexuality, and perhaps more dangerously, their power over male-sexuality. (Spoto 58)

Spoto suggests that "promiscuity" seen in witches was perceived as a threat to the male dominion because it also means that these women were free from social norms which made witches' sexuality a very dark and deviant one. In other words, female sexuality becomes wicked sexuality if it is not done according to the expectations of society. Thus, any female power in society was perceived as "feminine deviance", which also means "sexual deviance" because of society's treatment of women as sexual beings (Broedel 179).

Within this framework, the first chapter builds around the play, *Sophonisba* with special focus on the witch, Erictho as the emblem of carnal

lust. In *Sophonisba*, the witch, Erictho represents the horrific nature of female sexuality. She is presented as a very powerful classical witch and as a threatening sexual being to the patriarchy in contrast to the chaste woman, Sophonisba. In the play, the connection between witchcraft and sexuality is depicted through the body of her as well as her language, living space, spells, and the use of 'infernal music'. For example, in the 'bed trick' scene, Erictho's language and attitudes mirror the age's view of marginalized women: a lustful woman, who tricks men by disguising as another woman, and who bewitches them to fulfil her carnal lust. After she deceives Syphax, Erictho says: "We in pride and height of covetous lust/ Have wished with woman's greediness to fill/ Our longing arms with Syphax' well strong limbs..." (5.1. 13-15). This quotation from the play makes Erictho the emblem of carnal lust. Along with this, her despising attitude such as laughing at him in this scene frightens Syphax because it suggests that the witch has the power over male sexuality. This power makes her a threatening female being. These all indicate the strong relation between witchcraft and female sexuality in this play. As seen in the writings of the early modern England; if it was not done for proliferation, the sexuality was seen as a demonic act. Erictho is a woman who acts against the accustomed order, and thus she is marked as a witch, especially for her sinful acts such that she has the freedom of sex and acts perversely in contrast with the obedient and virtuous Sophonisba. This perversity connects her to deviance because "[...] disordered sexuality is identified with the devil, inverted gender roles and sexual dysfunction with witchcraft" (79) as Broedel suggests in his analysis of *The Malleus Maleficarum*. In *Sophonisba*, Marston's Erictho inverts the conventions of the society such as being an obedient woman; her inversion shows the culmination of the uncontrolled woman and thus it signals her identification with the devil.

The second chapter is about *The Witch* and deviant females; Hecate and her sister witches. In *The Witch*, Hecate and her coven are marginalized as perverted, amoral, and lustful females. These witches are fantastical figures, but they are also horrific because their marginalized union is a threat to the male dominated society. They are "the wretched things" as Sebastian calls,

and “flat tumblers” or “the rascals” as Almachildes calls. These misogynistic attitudes towards Hecate and her coven are not coincidences. They are powerful females. Their sexual freedom disturbs the patriarchal society. In fact, the witches are associated with dark sexuality; Hecate has an incestuous relationship with her son. And, her familiar, Malkin is also presented as a sexual counterpart of Hecate in act one, scene one. The other witches have, too, aberrant relationships. Garrett in her article, “Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge in Early Modern England” comments on their sexual perversity:

Hecate and her mischievous cohort embody the most aggressive, unanchored possibilities of woman’s sexuality. Their appetites must be furnished with indiscriminative sexual access (to partners human or bestial), the pleasures of “spoiling” young boys, the ability to have intercourse with young men without their consent [...] (48-9)

The witches of *The Witch* act according to their sexual desires without the consent of men and thus, they have the power over male sexuality. The witches use their supernatural power to satisfy their lust. Neumeier says: “The play’s central concern is thus the social threat to the community posed by the witches’ realization of desire without the fear of consequences.” (41). This freedom of satisfying their unruly desires accompanies *maleficium* which means doing harmful magic such as “the use of waxen effigies and the laming of cattle”, which were typical accusations in witch trials during the early 17th century (Corbin and Sedge 15). Thus, there is a connection between *malefic* spells and dark sexuality in the play, which links the theme of witchcraft to female sexuality. The most striking example of the link between witches’ malefic spells and their demonic sexuality is a spell that causes Antonio’s impotency. As a result, in *The Witch*, Middleton shows that witchcraft becomes a threat to society based on the witches’ uncontrollable and wicked sexual desires.

The final chapter of this thesis deals with the deviant body of Mother Sawyer and the play, *The Witch of Edmonton*. In *The Witch of Edmonton*,

Mother Sawyer is an old, poor, and lonely woman, who is abused by her neighbours and finally executed because of witchcraft accusations. Although she is the part of the sub-plot, her pact with the devil-like dog is at the core of *The Witch of Edmonton*. In the play, there is a strong connection between witchcraft and female sexuality; she is both called as “a hot whore” and as a “witch” (4.1. 24-25). This misogynistic attitude towards Mother Sawyer stems from her deviant and infectious body. Through her body, the play shows the horror of female sexuality, which is perverse, transgressive and so heretic. Firstly, the witch’s body is presented as an ugly and distorted one in act two scene one. Then, the devil in the form of a black dog, wants her body and her soul in return of her wishes to take revenge from her abusers. The pact is sealed through his suckling of Mother Sawyer’s blood. Although their relationship is an emotional comfort for the excluded member, Mother Sawyer, their interaction signals a sexual intimacy as well. Her familiar, Tom uses her teat for the suckling. This can be interpreted as the relationship between a mother and a newborn as it signals a child’s suckling of her mother. From this perspective, this image distorts the mother image in the community. On the other hand, the place of this teat, as a witch’s mark, was mainly discovered in witches’ private areas in witchcraft accusations of this period. Sharpe says: “[...] the mark was normally discovered in pudenda or anus of female witches, the fact that the familiar sucked from so private a place adding a sexual dimension to the witch’s relationship with her familiar.” (*Witchcraft in Early Modern England* 64). Indeed, the place of the witch’s mark and the dog, Tom’s suckling of it in the play suggests sexual intimacy between the witch and her “familiar”. In some scenes, Mother Sawyer expresses her “black lust” for her familiar (5.1. 4-12), and asks for sexual intercourse by transferring the dog into a devil-like man (4. 1. 154-60). Through this perverted sexual union, Mother Sawyer gains power and so sexual satisfaction, which suggests that the witch’s *maleficium* comes from her sexual relationship with her devilish dog as Woods also comments: “The power of witchcraft could originate with a feminine body and nature, where suckling and sexual frolicking enable supernatural power” (Woods 159) Thus, Mother Sawyer’s threat comes from her sexually active body. This sexually perverted body of her inverts sexual standards by causing anxiety and fear in

the community of Edmonton because her deviant body becomes an infectious one that the males should prevent its outbreak so that their women will not be influenced by this perversity.



CHAPTER I

SOPHONISBA AND THE EMBLEM OF CARNAL LUST: ERICTHO

1.1 The Wonder of Women: or the Tragedy of Sophonisba

The Wonder of Women: or the Tragedy of Sophonisba is an early Jacobean play by John Marston written most probably between 1604 and 1606. The play dramatizes some historical events which happened during the Punic War as adapted from Appian's *Roman History*, Book VIII (Corbin and Sedge 5). The play is full of references to Roman mythology and Roman culture like sacrifices, funerals, and the marriage ceremony. As a result, the mixture of Roman and Carthaginian culture is seen in the play (Corbin and Sedge 5). The play is written in the early Jacobean society, thus it reflects the norm of its own age despite its different setting and time. In this mixture, as a reader or as an audience, one can realize the corruption and insincerity represented by the characters such as Hasdrubal, Bytheas, Carthalon, and Hanno. Thus, the play involves the themes of corruption and insincerity in the political sphere of Carthage. This political sphere is a patriarchal one, it treats woman as a political object and as a commodity represented by a noble woman, Sophonisba. On the other hand, the theme of lust and its connection to witchcraft is central to the play. Lust is treated as the weakness of man while female lust and sexuality is presented something dangerous for the males that is dramatized by the witch figure, Erictho. In addition to this, female cunning, whether found in the witch figure or in a noble woman, is something that weakens the male authority and power.

Sophonisba is about the story of the Carthaginian Princess Sophonisba, who is lustfully pursued by Syphax though she is married to Massinissa. Both men are kings in Libya, and the play is actually about their sexual rivalry for Sophonisba. The play opens with the marriage ceremony of Sophonisba and

Massinissa. Meanwhile, Carthage is under the attack of Roman forces led by General Scipio. For vengeance against Sophonisba's choosing Massinissa instead of him, Syphax sides with the Romans. However, by handing over Sophonisba to Syphax, Senators of Carthage decide to betray Massinissa, who leaves his bride in their wedding night and now fights for Carthage. Because of her vows to her husband, Sophonisba does not want to be with him even though Syphax reports Sophonisba that her husband is dead, which is false. His speech is full of lust; he even forces her to be with him. Here, Sophonisba behaves very cunningly; she lies to Syphax in order to gain time to escape. With her cunning, Sophonisba makes Vangue, Syphax's Ethiopian servant, sleep by a sleeping pill. Then, she escapes through a vault with the help of her maid, Zanthia. However, Syphax realizes her escape because of Zanthia and kills his servant, Vangue and finds Sophonisba. Syphax's immoral actions become so obvious that he lecherously wants to have sex with Sophonisba, he even tries to rape her. However, he wishes that Sophonisba loves and wants him as he does. Again rejected by Sophonisba, Syphax summons Erictho, the witch, to make a charm on Sophonisba so that she can have sex with him. However, the witch disguises in the form of Sophonisba and instead, she has sex with him. Syphax, recognizing that he has been deceived by the witch becomes very angry whereas Erictho mocks at him with her sinister laughter. On the other hand, Massinissa unites with the General Scipio and defeats both Syphax and Carthaginians. However, Syphax's manipulative acts cause the suicide of Sophonisba at the end of the play. He claims that Sophonisba has seduced him. Although she reunites with Massinissa, Sophonisba kills herself because of these accusations. Thus, she protects her chastity and honour. In this sense, Sophonisba becomes a martyr, who cleans both her name and Carthage. Yet, the play is full of politics; Sophonisba becomes a commodity; an object for the state's affair rather than a martyr as presented. In the play, there is a clear-cut distinction between the characters; either good or bad such as the contrast between virtuous Sophonisba, as "the wonder of women", who embodies personal integrity, honesty and chastity, and the witch, Erictho as the emblem of lust, who embodies sexual depravity. These two women mirror each other; they both use their femininity to deceive the man either by their sexuality, speech or cunning. Although they belong to the different categories

in the play, their misogynistic treatment by society is dramatized by Marston so clearly that one can catch the Jacobean attitude concerning the idea that women in nature are deceitful whether as the witch or as a princess.

Although *Sophonisba* is not a well-known play, the play has importance for its age because of its innovative style comprising musical and visual stage directions; Sturges comments about the style of Marston as "he feeds and directs the readers' visual imagination about the physical realization of the play, not its literary and narrative features, by the inclusion of full and colourful stage-directions..." (ix). Marston creates this visual imagination by incorporating music or musical effects and by staging dumbshows or by stage directions that were unusual for the drama of the period. Actually, the role of music and using musical instruments are so impressive in the play, *Sophonisba* that they create an emotional effect in some scenes. This style is very significant in associating the mood of the characters or changing of the atmosphere with music as it creates another magical ambience to the whole play. This kind of atmosphere in the play reminds of incantations and ritual music, which are very effective for the theme of witchcraft in the play. In this play, music is like a vehicle to bewitch others, or even the audience. The most striking part about magical music is Erictho's scenes. Infernal music is used in her scenes as it reminds of darkness and of hellish things as well as of the underworld.

The witchcraft theme is attributed to one character, the enchantress Erictho. The witch becomes a devil in the form of a human who has an intercourse with a human to satisfy her desires. In this sense, she resembles the witches of continental Europe; more demonic, horrifying and dangerous than local witches of England such as Mother Sawyer or Hecate. Using a classical witch, Marston presents a powerful enchantress who is a mixture of a classical and a contemporary witch, which pleased extremely the taste of Jacobean audiences (Corbin and Sedge 7).

1.2 The Witch, Erictho

The authors of *The Malleus Maleficarum* argue that “the word woman is used to mean the lust of the flesh. As it is said: I have found a woman more bitter than death, and good woman subject to carnal lust.” (101). This misogynistic approach of the clerics Kramer and Sprenger is in parallel with the dramatic work of Marston’s *Sophonisba*. Erictho, the terrifying enchantress, represents the insatiable female “carnal lust”. Throughout the play, she inverts the traditional role of an obedient woman of Jacobean era. She denies gods: “I do not pray, you gods: my breath’s ‘You must’.” (4.1. 138). She embodies “the lust of the flesh” in the play. Her sexuality is presented as the source of her magical abilities, which reflects her magic and spells as an expression of her sexuality. Although she appears in a few scenes, and seems irrelevant to the story line of the play, her scenes “are essential part of Marston’s argument, for the witch is the play’s most potent emblem of lust and appetite in action and agent of Syphax’s moral, if not physical destruction.” (Corbin and Sedge 13). Erictho has sex with Syphax by trickery; she has sex with the corpses of the dead people in graveyards as Syphax suggests in these lines:

[...] But when she finds a corse
New graved whose entrails yet not turn
To slimy filth, with greedy havoc then
She makes fierce spoil and swells with wicked triumph
To bury her lean knuckles in his eyes.
[...]
[...] But if she find some life
Yet lurking close, she bites his gelid lips
And sticking her black tongue in his dry throat (4.1. 112-16, 118-20).

These perverted sexual tendencies give way to the subversion of the cultural standards. This threatening sexuality leads the witch to a marginalized

position in the play; she becomes the Other, who does not belong to anywhere, and an outsider to the patriarchal society as Sharpe, in his analysis of women and witchcraft in *Instruments of Darkness* also stresses that: “such women, many of them widows or women otherwise living outside the conventional hierarchies of family or household, [...] were [...] perceived as being outside normal patterns of control.” (172). It is true that she lives in a cave away from the civilized world. She has her own rules: “Here in this desert the great soul of charms, /Dreadful Erichtho lives, whose dismal brow/Contemns all roofs or civil coverture.”(4.1. 97-99). Her inhabitant is also described by Syphax as such:

There once a charnel-house, now a vast cave,
Over whose brow a pale and untrod grove
Throws out her heavy shade, the mouth thick arms
Of darksome yew, sun-proof, for ever choke;
Within rests barren darkness; fruitless drought
Pines in eternal night; the steam of hell
Yields not so lazy air; there, that’s my cell. (4.1. 162-68)

“A vast cave” is an important image that indicates her marginalized position in the play. On the other hand, it is a very dark cave in which “rests barren darkness” and the sun cannot penetrate. As noted earlier, Erichtho is a deviant witch and she practices her demonic doings and magic there which makes her ‘cell’ so dreadful that even it is called “a charnel-house”. Also, infernal references like “the steam of hell” make her cave unsafe. She is depicted as a powerful witch, who has power over nature and does horrible things: “her deep magic makes forced heaven quake/And thunder spite of Jove...” and “Then she bursts up tombs/From half-rot cerecloths then scrapes dry gums/For her black rites...” (4.1. 106-112).

Her physical appearance is as much terrifying as her cave and her horrific doings. She seems to be the most horrible one among the witches on stage in Jacobean period. Actually, she is a classical, timeless witch that appears in some literary works. For instance, In Lucan’s *Pharsallia*, a Roman epic poem

on the civil war between the Roman state and Caesar, she is described as a very horrific and powerful creature that raises people from death. Her face is presented as a dreadful and mighty woman who has no faith in gods or any other divine beings (Lucan 66). Marston uses this work as a source book for the witch character, so the descriptions of both works follow the same dreadfulness: “A loathsome yellow leanness spreads her face/A heavy hell like paleness loads her cheeks.” (4.1.102-3) These portrayals, both her outer view and her cave, associate Erictho to the underworld, the world of the dead.

Even the use of music suggests her demonic position in the play. In act four, scene one, infernal music is played in many parts during the scene, especially during the sexual intercourse between the witch and Syphax. So, the power of music seems so similar to the power of magic practised by the witch because of this infernal music, which “represents demonic power and the dark working of witchcraft.” (Austern 60) Also, the music is played firstly when the witch enters into the stage through trap doors, beneath the stage. This entrance indicates that both the witch and the music come from the underworld or from hell: “The accompanying music, described as infernal, is a perfect match for the enchantress of the underworld. The adjective ‘infernal’ also implies the psychical spot whence the music comes, which is from hell, from under the stage.” (Wong 115) Therefore, the use of musical instruments in this play highlights both the witch’s deviant nature and her dark sexual desires.

Yet, her association with the world of the dead and the devil is not just about her outer view, her cave or her “demonic status”; she is also associated with the devil because of her uncontrollable lust. In *The Malleus Maleficarum*, it is written that “witches hold the worst kind of association with devils, with especial reference to the behaviour of women, who always delight in vain things” (Kramer and Sprenger 230). In *Sophonisba*, then, the link between a female and demonic is not a coincidence because of this misogynistic treatment in the culture. For instance, In the ‘bed-trick’ scene, Erictho is presented as a lecherous woman; she satisfies her sexual desires with Syphax. After the intercourse, Erictho mocks at Syphax, and says:

Know we, Erictho, with a thirsty womb,
[...]
We, in the pride and height of covetous lust,
Have wished with the woman's greediness to fill
Our longing arms with Syphax's well-strung limbs. (5.1. 8, 13-15)

In the extract above, Erictho treats Syphax as a commodity, which means the inversion of gender roles considering the traditional ones of the Jacobean period. To satisfy her 'thirsty womb', Erictho seduces Syphax; she takes his sperms so that he will be the father of her demonic children. This woman image; a lustful female or an unnatural mother is totally in parallel with the image of witches in Marston's own period; the association of "the woman's greediness" with demons or the belief in demonic pact between demons and women witches. "In her deception of Syphax by a bed-trick she adopts the role of succubus, a devil in female form, who seduces and betrays men." (Corbin and Sedge 7). This approach of linking a lustful female to the deviant sexuality in the play makes Erictho a sexual deviant, who uses witchcraft to fulfill her desires. And, she aims to take semen from "blood of kings." (5.1. 8-9). Stealing semen is not a strange idea for Jacobean. *The Malleus Maleficarum*, as a leading source for witch hunters, states the same idea: "A Succubus devil draws the semen from a wicked man" and "But when the wickedness of man began to increase, the devil found more opportunity to disseminate this kind of perfidy." (Kramer and Sprenger 231). Accordingly, it is not a coincidence that a lustful female figure and "the wickedness of man" come together in *Sophonisba*. Syphax wickedness is his lust, which makes him weak in the face of the witch and makes him an easy prey for the greedy witch. This connects Syphax's desires to deviant sexuality. The most striking common feature of Syphax and Erictho is their lust and dark sexuality. As noted in the introduction part, in those ages, there was a strong connection between demonism and sexuality. If it was not done for proliferation, the sexual relationship was seen as a demonic act. Syphax, for the audience, is a damned man, who is in contact with demonic powers. As for Erictho, she is a woman who acts against the accustomed order, and thus she is marked as a

witch, especially for her sinful acts such that she has the freedom of sex and acts perversely. In this sense, Erictho's lines in act five, scene one, when she disguises as Sophonisba to make love with Syphax, are in parallel concerning their lustful nature when Syphax forces Sophonisba to make love with him:

Syphax: Do, strike thy breast; know, being dead I'll use
With highest lust of sense thy senseless flesh,
And even then thy vexed soul shall see,
Without resistance, thy trunk prostitutey
Unto our appetite. (4. 1. 58-62)

This association between Syphax and Erictho makes men, especially who are more wicked than the others, the victim of women's uncontrollable appetite. Besides, the witch's sexual intercourse with Syphax and her stealing semen from him reveal the fear that the witch, or any lecherous female, can control men's sexuality. This fear and disgust towards the witch are seen in these lines of Syphax after their intercourse:

Can we yet breath? Is any plagued like me?
Are we? Let's think. O now contempt, my hate
To thee, thy thunder, sulphure and scorn'd name.
He whose lifes loathed, and he who breathes to curse
His very being, let him thus with me
Fall 'fore an altar sacred to black power... (5. 1. 22-27)

In this scene, Erictho receives the masculine strength of Syphax, which leads to his emasculation. This is because Erictho, as a terrifying and aged woman, usurps Syphax's power through the sexual union; she takes his masculine power of youth and physical energy. Through this power Erictho feels "full and "young" (5.1.18-20), which shows that women who were desirous were seen as a threat to male power in Marston's time. In this play, a desirous woman applies to witchcraft to bewitch and to command a man, who obeys her and does whatever the witch wishes. After their intercourse, Syphax was

angry, as seen in the quotation above, because the witch makes him a weak man by draining his masculine power. The womb of Erictho becomes his tomb because of her diminishing Syphax's strength in this way.

Besides, in the mentioned scene, Erictho insists to have no light during the sexual intercourse. This indicates loss of sight for Syphax, which leads later to his loss of self. Even though Syphax is a villain, he says: "Heap curse on curse, we can no lower fall!" (5.1. 38) In this sense, the witch usurps Syphax's manliness, his power and his status. He becomes the victim of demonic forces, he is at the bottom, he is doomed to hell as Erictho says, and becomes equal to demons because of his sexual union with the witch. By connecting the witch's sexuality to darkness, to the underworld, the absence of light in this scene indicates Syphax's loss of identity as it limits his sight and darkens his world. Thus, Erictho, as a threatening female figure, blinds and tricks Syphax and so emasculates male power on stage.

The shape- shifting of the witch in the 'bed-trick' scene is another indicator of the link between Erictho's demonic status and her insatiable sexuality. Like the devil, she can change her physical appearance, which makes her body deviant and monstrous. Neumeier in his article, "Trying "Other" Bodies: The Witch, The Black And The Old" argues that in the early modern period, the witch's "shape-shifting" suggests "female changeability and deception as well as the need for its containment, as the witch incorporates the female transgressions of the Renaissance ideals of chastity, silence and obedience." (31-32). By turning herself into the shape of Sophonisba, Erictho subverts Sophonisba's obedient female image. Because Sophonisba is presented as a virtuous character; she is silent: "Is our sex' highest folly, I am silent." (2.1.137). She conforms to the perspective of the patriarchy: "no low appetite/ Of my sex' weakness can or shall o'ercome" (1.2. 175-6). Sophonisba accepts the role given by her patriarchal society; she also sees her sex so weak that she becomes silent and wishes that she "were no woman" (1.2. 86), but at the same time, Sophonisba is aware of the society's pressure on women, and she knows she has to obey and act according to patriarchal norms. She says:

I wonder Zanthia why the custom is
To use such ceremony such strict shape
About us women. Forsooth, the bride must steal
Before her Lord to bed: and then delay
Long expectations, all against known wishes.
I hate these figures in locution,
These about phrases forced by ceremony.
We must still seem to fly what we most seek,
And hide ourselves from that we fain would find us.
Let those that think and speak and do just acts (1. 2. 6-15)

In the play, Sophonisba plays the role of a chaste maiden and wife determined by “the custom”. In the first scene of the play, there is her marriage ceremony which is a very ritualistic and ceremonial one, which Sophonisba questions about their necessity in the quotation above. Sophonisba and Massinissa are about to consummate their marriage, but here the sexual activity is watched by the patriarchal order; the royals of Carthage. A chaste maiden waits her groom and does everything in accordance with her society’s expectations. With Massinissa’s departure, Sophonisba cannot do the sexual role given to her by the society. On the other hand, Erictho has the freedom of choice; she can be with anyone she wishes for. She is antithetical because she embodies the opposite traits of the extremely good character, Sophonisba: “Sophonisba and Erictho are characterized according to a familiar antithesis of the perfect woman and the witch” (Woods 172). Whereas Sophonisba uses her cunning to protect her chastity from Syphax, Erictho uses her cunning to have sex with Syphax. Even though they are both deceptive in their role, they are not in the same boat. Sophonisba is very clever, she deceives Syphax with her feminine cunning and gains time to escape, she does not aim to harm the male authority, whereas Erictho’s deception does harm Syphax’s authority by diminishing his manliness. Therefore, even though they mirror each other, Erictho is the one who threatens male authority because of her deviant and perverted nature.

Consequently, the theme of witchcraft is presented as a representative of Erictho's deviant sexuality in *Sophonisba*. The witch threatens the patriarchal environment of the play with her cave, with her denying of gods, with her language, and most importantly with her seductive and lustful nature. Her description by Syphax along with her language link the witch to the world of the dead and to dark magic. This connection makes her a deviant creature and a heretic woman. Because of these associations, Erictho's sexuality becomes dark and deviant one, too. She only aims to please herself; she takes the masculine power of Syphax after leaving him weak and helpless. This indicates the male anxiety over female power; the fear of female sexuality that emasculates masculine energies. In conclusion, the witch's lust is presented as something that must be avoided; otherwise, it will cause the loss of manliness, loss of authority and loss of self.

CHAPTER II

THE WITCH AND THE DEVIANT FEMALES

2.1 The Witch

The Witch is a very popular play about witchcraft with an Italian setting despite its complicated plot structure. It is a tragicomedy written by Thomas Middleton, and it is thought to have been written between 1615 and 1616. As an English dramatist, Middleton wrote mainly tragicomedies during the reign of King James I, in which he draws a realistic world that is very dark and horrifying whereas his dealing with the serious events of his time like witchcraft issue, is very entertaining. These plays, such as *The Witch*, *A Fair Quarrel*, and *The Old Law*, are “neither precisely comic nor precisely tragic”, but they are ironic as they presented ordinary problems of common people (Schoenbaun 8). *The Witch*, as a tragicomedy, reflects some serious event in the Jacobean court life by combining laughter and gloom. It presents its audience two different worlds; the world of Jacobean society and the world of witches who were so popular figures on stage at that time. Though they do not appear quite often on stage in *The Witch*, the witches themselves and their sex-centred spells play a key role during the play. Along with the popular theme of witchcraft, the play offers the theme of lust, revenge, and death that were so common in the drama of the Jacobean period. *The Witch* is also criticized for its relation to Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*. The witches’ scenes in both plays have some resemblances. Their scenes, and most notably their songs, in *The Witch* were believed to be added to the text of *Macbeth* later (Schafer xiv).

Despite its Italian setting, *The Witch* mirrors some current events happened in Jacobean court life. First of all, the play comes from the real life scandal; the Earl of Essex did not consummate his marriage because of impotence caused by witchcraft (Schoenbaum 8-9). The parallel story occurs

in the play; Isabella marries Antonio, a powerful noble man, but before that she was betrothed to Sebastian who has gone away as a soldier. He is reported to be dead, which is false. However, Sebastian comes back on Antonio and Isabella's wedding day, and he secretly tries to gain back his fiancée. He goes to the witches to make Antonio impotent in their first night. In the meantime, Antonio has a mistress, Florida, who is jealous of Isabella, so she joins the plot against Isabella, who now has a problem in consummating her marriage because of Antonio's impotency. The other source in the play is Machiavelli's *Florentine History*, which is used in the plot of the Duke and the Duchess (Schafer xiii). The Duke's abhorrent request from the Duchess to drink from the skull of her father, whom the Duke has killed in a battle, induces the Duchess to take revenge from her husband. For this revenge, the Duchess uses Almachildes, who is in love with her waiting woman, Amoretta, to kill the Duke. Seduced by the Duchess, Almachildes performs her wish, but later it turns out that the Duke is actually the intriguer testing the Duchess's love. The last plot is about the secret relation between Aberzanes, a gentleman and Francisca, Antonio's sister. Francisca expects an illegitimate child from Aberzanes but tries to hide it by defaming others because of her anxiety of losing fame in the eyes of the society.

Middleton's other source for the part of witches is probably Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft* for the characterization of Hecate, the chief witch, and her coven, and their magical practices such as using infant's fat, their night flying, charms of love for sexual desires of the males, or causing barrenness and impotency (Corbin and Sedge 15). Scot's work is a sceptical one in its dealing with witchcraft issue, but it renders a lot of information about the practices of witchcraft, which gives Middleton a good deal of material in the witches' scenes (Schafer xiii). Along with Scot's work, *The Witch* reflects the conventional idea found in witchcraft discourses that witches are sexualized females in connection to their wicked nature. Because of this, the play is full of sexual charms, and full of references to the witches' sexual activities and sexual desires of the males, which make *The Witch* a sex-oriented play.

The witches in this play, are attractive and funny females due to their merry songs, dancing and night flying, and comical scenes while preparing

their spells. Although the existence of these funny creatures adds a celebratory atmosphere to the play, Hecate and her sister witches are wicked; they intend to harm others by casting evil spells on stage. These practices of the witches are the reflections of whole witchcraft beliefs in both Elizabethan and Jacobean society. In the play, continental witchcraft beliefs and rituals are mixed with the local ones: “They co-exist in the play alongside more characteristically English ingredients of witch-lore, such as the familiar, the use of waxen effigies and the laming of cattle...” (Corbin and Sedge 15). Scenes like Hecate’s incestuous relation with her son, Firestone comes from the continental beliefs in witches’ incestuous nature while her “familiar” Malkin, which is a cat, reflects the local beliefs in witchcraft. The other example can be their ritual in which they gather and make charms by singing songs that is called as Sabbath, and their night flying. As a part of continental witchcraft literature, this Sabbath includes “infanticide, transvection, and sexual deviance”, which is only found in *The Witch* in this period (Garrett “Witchcraft and Sexual Knowledge in Early Modern England” 46). These practices are mixed with the local culture in England, which comprises their otherness from the society, Hecate’s old age, and the witches’ *malefic* nature along with their using of herbs. This perversion and *maleficia* in their world reflect these witches as lecherous and dangerous creatures that spread horror to society.

As for the people of the court of Ravenna; nearly all the characters in the play are sexual intriguers. They are already corrupted in their society or in the Jacobean court life. Without references to the world of witches in the play, the human world seems much more dangerous and evil. In their cunning plots and evil deeds, they go to the home of witches to demand sexual charms: “They are grotesque, comical figures: lustful, unattractive hags to whom high-ranking members of the court of Ravenna come to purchase supernatural aid to fulfil their personal desires.” (Austern 201) Therefore, it can be said that both worlds, the world of the witches and the humans, are in interaction with each other. However, the witches are accused of all the mischief in the world of humans. It is true that Hecate and her sisters are guilty of crimes like murder or laming the animals or adultery, but they freely express their malice.

On the contrary, human characters deceive and manipulate others; they are presented as hypocrites.

Lastly, *The Witch* is a play that puts female characters to its center. These females are categorized according to their social standing like the obedient wife, the witches or “strumpets”, the prostitute (courtesan) or an immoral young girl and the high ranking powerful woman in the court of Ravenna. Despite this categorization, there are misogynistic attitudes towards them in the play. They are all judged by their chastity or by their lifestyle. They are either innocent or guilty concerning their chastity; there is no other option for them. And, as Woods suggests, any intrigue, or any sexual perversion of the females in the court of Ravenna aligns them with Hecate and her sister witches (243). At the end of the play, however, social order is restored, all the evil intentions of females are forgiven and they turn to their normal life by accepting the life enforced by the patriarchal order except Hecate and her coven. That is because of the existing belief in witches’ wicked and uncontrollable nature. The play reflects this perception at the heart of it by engaging every evil intention to the witches. Even though human characters have more evil intentions than the witches, they are treated as the most sinful characters in the play as they are heretics that have made a pact with the devil by selling their souls to him, which seems the greatest sin than murder or rape in the play: “Tis for the love of mischief I do this, /And that we’re sworn to- the first oath we take.” (1.2. 181-82) Thus, as the partners of the devil, the witches are presented to the audience as the sources of *maleficium* and are regarded as sexual deviants.

2.2 Hecate and Her Coven

In *The Witch*, Hecate and her coven are presented as a social threat to the male dominated court of Ravenna due to the witches’ sexual desires, which they experience freely and daringly. These witches, as corporate females, are marginalized as the Other because of their being perverted, amoral and lustful females. Especially, Hecate’s sexual desires for her son, Firestone, and her intimacy with her familiar, Malkin overthrow the sexual

standards of the Jacobean culture. This unruly image in the play transgresses the motherly role and shows the male anxiety over an aged woman whose sexual desires and sexual experiences disturb the males. Also, Hecate's role in the play is to cause impotency of Antonio, which suggests her being a powerful female; even she has power over male sexuality. Besides, Hecate is not alone; she has sister-witches who are as perverse as she is. They have, too, aberrant relationships, such as spoiling young boys. This female union increases the anxiety about female power in the play because their world is free from any social expectations, and they have magical power to achieve their desires without the help of anyone contrary to the males in the play. Because of this power, they are treated as "whoreson kind girls" (1.1. 94). This misogynistic attitude towards them makes the witches disgusted creatures. But this repulsion is not about *maleficium* they practice on their first scene, but it is about their uncontrollable sexual desire. At this point, witchcraft practices in the play are directly linked with their perverted sexual activities.

In *The Witch*, Hecate and her coven are only seen in three scenes (1. 2, 3. 3, 5.2) However, their influence on the characters is great. The witches' world consists of five witches and a cat, and a son. Hecate is the older and the chief witch accompanied by the other creatures of darkness; Stadlin, Hellwain, Puckle and Hoppo. They are horrific creatures as presented in act one, scene two. For instance, Hecate introduces herself to Almachildes as a powerful, horrific witch "That life and nature trembles at" (201). Although they practise dark magic and do malefic deeds by casting spells to harm others such as melting wax images or cooking dead infants, they are also funny and grotesque creatures; they live on their own; free from any social bond. They seem less terrifying, less dark, and less violent figures on stage than Erictho or Mother Sawyer.

Apart from her role as a chief witch, Hecate was already in the minds of the Jacobean audience as a dark feminine figure. In mythology, Hecate is the goddess of magic and witchcraft as well as the moon and the night. Darkness and mystery are attributed to her because she is also associated with spirits, death and the underworld as the goddess of the crossroads. However,

Hecate seems to be a very complicated goddess. In earlier references to her, she has a positive image in Ancient Greek mythology. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, she is described as a sacred goddess who dines with kings, who helps people in wars, contests, and whomever she prefers, she grants victory (429-37). In *The Witch*, this goddess changes to a very dark witch figure, who is now associated with death, the underworld as well as femininity as the goddess of the moon, and frightens everyone and everything on earth. For instance, when the Duchess questions her ability in murdering Almachildes by using magic; she describes her abilities as a goddess with references to death:

Can you doubt me then, daughter?
That can make mountains tremble, miles of woods walk,
Whole earth's foundation bellow and the spirits
Of the entombed to burst out from their marbles,
Nay, draw yond moon to my involved designs? (5.2. 25-29)

In addition to these horrific descriptions of her, Hecate is also feminine that is seen in her association with the moon, which gives light to her "involved designs". Spoto says that "The fashioning of the moon as feminine is commonplace in European literature" (64). In *The Witch*, the moon, too, symbolizes the witches' femininity and the silver light that guides their dark spells. In the play, they are gathered by moonlight for their joyful rituals and so that they cast spells in hidden and dark environment, and do whatever they wish "in moonlight nights" (1.2. 22). Its silver light gives them the energy for their sexual activities; Hecate says: "The moon's a gallant; see how she brisk she rides!" and Stadlin answers: "Here's a rich evening, Hecate." (3. 3. 1-2) And Stadlin adds that "There was a bat hung at my lips three times/ As we came through the woods..." (6-7) This "rich evening" of the moon is a perfect time for their erratic sexual activities as Stadlin expresses in her speech. And again Firestone gathers some magical herbs for their spells, but her mother warns him by asking: "Were they all cropped by moonlight?" (3.3. 29) For the evil spells, the darkness of the moon is needed, on the other hand, its light is also needed for their erratic sexuality.

Despite their dark magic and wicked nature, Hecate and her sister witches are also presented as a comical and merry coven; they dance, sing songs, feast and do night flying as Hecate says: “When hundreds leagues in air we feast and sing, /Dance, kiss and coll, use everything.” (1.2. 28-29) They use music and a different language to cast their evil spells on stage. Actually, in *The Witch*, music is like a tool to be familiar with the witches’ invisible world beyond the stage and to witness their magical practices. Their music creates the magical atmosphere that is necessary to practise *maleficium*. For instance, Hecate and her coven sing a joyful song to make a charm for killing Almachildes, and they do this by dancing around the cauldron (5. 3. 60-76). Hecate, too, admits the power of music in casting their malefic spells: “At any mischief; there’s no villainy/ But is a tune methinks” (5.3. 79-80). In some scenes, this “tune” is used as the part of their Sabbath; they sing songs which contain some dialogues about their sexual activities. In contemporary literature, Sabbath was explained as a female gathering in which they practice “bizarre sexual occupations that involved the accused witches, along with demons and sometimes even animals”(Spoto 58). In *The Witch*, these so-called perverted sexual activities of witches are reflected on stage. For example, in act three, scene three, the witches sing altogether, like in a musical, while practising their night flying. These musical dialogues are full of sexual references; Hecate says to her familiar, Malkin: “There’s one comes down to fetch his dues; / A kiss, a coll, a sip of blood”(49-50). These lines suggest Hecate’s erratic relation with her demonic pet, Malkin; it sucks Hecate’s “blood” and even kisses her. She also describes their feelings and the pleasure of being in Sabbath while “going up” with Malkin:

Hecate: Now I go, now I fly, Malkin, my sweet spirit, and I.

O what a dainty pleasure ‘tis

To ride in the air

When the moon shines fair.

And sing and dance and toy and kiss;

Over woods, high rocks and mountains,

Over seas, our mistress’ mountains,

We fly by night ‘mongst troops of spirits;

No ring bells to our ears sound,
No howls of wolves, no yelps of hounds.
No, not the noise of water's breach
Or canon's throat our height can reach. (3.3. 62-75)

The quotation suggests that the witches take delight in being free, they do not care about the civilized life below them. They only care about their sexual desires and their pleasures.

Hecate's erratic relation with her "familiar" is not the only thing that reflects the witches as deviant creatures on Jacobean stage. Almachildes's going to the witches's place to ask for a love-charm is another dramatization of their perverted sexuality. In act one, scene two, when Almachildes nearly arrives, Hecate expresses her lust for him, and even she confesses that "I have had him thrice in incubus already." (198) This sexuality between them, which is without the consent of the man, indicates Hecate's power over Almachildes's sexuality. Later in the play, it comes out that he is drunk during his visit to the witches, and like Syphax in *Sophonisba*, he expresses his disgust, and his anger towards himself by saying that he wants to beat himself, but he also admits that he enjoys them (2.2. 1-5).

As seen in Almachildes's case, *The Witch* reveals the male anxiety over female sexuality. Hecate, with her dark magic, makes Antonio to be unable with the spell of impotency. For this spell, the image of a snake is used, which symbolizes the devil as well as fertility, and temptation because of the Biblical story of Adam and Eve (Esche 27). Like Eve, Hecate becomes rebellious against God because of her pact with the devil. Therefore, it is normal that Hecate uses the snake, which is the agent of the devil, to cause impotency of Antonio. After Sebastian's ask for spell to prevent the consummation of the marriage, Hecate says she can "strike a barrenness in man or woman" through using the skins of snakes. (1. 2. 153) and then she uses the knotted snake-skin on stage. Later, it is seen that the spell works well by causing Antonio's "barrenness". At this point, Hecate becomes a great danger, who can emasculate the sexual power of the males whenever she wishes. Garrett says that "Middleton's witches occupy a realm in which men's sexual desires and

consent are wholly at the mercy of women...” (49). Indeed, causing Antonio’s loss of manliness, and becoming an incubus to lie with Almachildes indicate that Hecate and her coven use witchcraft to emasculate the sexual power of the male characters.

Along with their sexual power, the witches of *The Witch* are experienced and sexually satisfied women, which means that they cross the boundaries of society, they invert the traditional woman image, whose only role is to keep her household duties and to give childbirth. If any woman is outside of this image, then she is a potential whore or a potential witch accordingly. Besides, this woman is the potential enemy to the church, to the state or to the king. The witches, Hecate and her coven have this potential as their evil and deviant nature are mirrored on the stage. For example, the conversation between Stadlin and Hecate about their sexual activities, shows the opposed image of the witches for the Jacobeans:

Hecate: What young man can we wish to pleasure us
But we enjoy him in an incubus?
Thou knowst it, Stadlin?

Stadlin: Usually that’s done.

Hecate: Last night thou got’st Mayor of Whelpie’s son
I know him by his black cloak lined with yellow;
I’ll have him the next mounting... (1.2. 28-36)

In their conversation, it is seen that they fit the traditional view about the witches; they do whatever gives pleasure to them. Their evil nature directly links them to perverted and dark sexuality. This is also seen in Hecate’s incestuous relation with her son, Firestone. Their conversation about their sexual relationship is the indicator of Hecate’s horrific sexuality:

Firestone: Mother, I pray give me leave to ramble
abroad tonight with the Nightmare, for I have a great mind
to overlay a fat parson’s daughter.

Hecate: And who shall lie with me then?

Firestone: The great cat
For one night, mother. 'Tis but a night –
Make shift with him for once.

Hecate: You're a kind son!
But 'tis the nature of you all, I see that.
You had rather hunt after strange woman still
Than lie with your own mothers. (1. 2. 93-101)

Hecate's unrestrained sexual desire is so excessive that she has to be content with her "familiar" for one night and "make shift" with it because of her son's leaving the home. This erratic relation between them distorts the mother image and causes uneasiness in this theatrical world. The inversion of motherly figure is also reflected by the image of the cauldron, which is a household tool that is inverted by the witches to a deadly vessel, in which they practice dark magic like boiling "the dead body of a baby" so that they use its fat to "transfer" their "flesh into the air"(1.2. 18-20). In this cauldron, Hecate also prepares a love potion on stage to "have" a young boy and to "spoil" his virginity, which indicates the connection between witchcraft and deviant sexuality in the play. The inversion of this cauldron image stems from the witches' crossing the boundaries of the household and thus become more prone to be a witch (Spoto 58), and by extension, to be a whore. Correspondingly, the witch figure, Hecate transgresses the line between a mother, who looks after children, cook and clean for the family, and a whore, and so becomes an "uncanny" figure.

Interestingly, Middleton's *The Witch* does not only marginalize Hecate and her coven, but it also highlights other women characters as the ones who are prone to lust and sin. The Duchess, Francisca and Isabella are all accused of lust. No matter what social background they come; they are "possessions" of males. Even Isabella, for Fernando, means "Performance of an honest duteous wife" by marrying Antonio (1.1. 16). And Gaspero calls the mistress

of Antonio, Florida as “the poor whore”, whom Antonio will go on to have an affair despite his marriage, just as Almachildes addresses witches as “whoreson kind girls” (1. 1.). Finally, Sebastian summarizes the male point of view towards females in the play with these words: “O honesty’s a rare wealth in a woman” (2. 1. 208). Apart from the witches, these females are always on the verge of being lascivious women or vice versa. Their actions are parallel with those of the witches because they have malefic deeds like that of Hecate and the others; even they are sometimes more dangerous than the witches. For example, Francisca gives away her child without showing any sadness. As an adulteress, she seems to be uninterested in her newborn child; she only plots how to ruin Isabella to clear her name. The same thing happens in the world of witches; the dead child is given to Stadlin by Hecate: “[...] each action of handing over the child leads to abuse; in the case of witches, the abuse is that of mistreating the corpse; in the case of the court characters; the abuse is that of abandonment.” (Esche 58) Like in the case of Francisca, the Duchess is put in the same category with the witches by the mother and the daughter relationship between them. When the Duchess goes to the witches to take revenge from her husband, the Duke, she calls Hecate as “mother” and Hecate, too, calls her as “daughter” (5.2. 25-32). Unlike the male characters, the Duchess does not hate the witches, on the contrary, she seems to accept them as her partners in evil doings as she expresses in this line: “Mischief is mischief’s friend.” (4.1. 94) This closeness between Hecate and the Duchess makes the Duchess a witch figure, too. Besides, the Duchess’s relation with Almachildes is in parallel with that of Hecate and him. They both intend to have sex with Almachildes, Hecate does this in incubus while the Duchess intends to do it by blindfolding him and then putting another woman instead of her. The Duchess’s aim is to seduce Almachildes so that he can perform her evil intentions. She also tries to flirt with The Governor, who can protect the Duchess and offer her a good status after the death of the Duke. In this sense, Hecate and the Duchess are both murderous and lustful, one deceives others with her spells, the other deceives with her cunning plots. Therefore, the audience or reader comes to the point that they do not know who is the witch and who is not. However, in the play, one thing is clear that this likeness puts all the female characters in the same

category with that of the witches. The belief in women's wicked nature is reflected on all the females of *The Witch* as Almachildes says after deceived by the Duchess: "How are you born? / To deceive men!" (3. 1. 1-2) This misogyny in the play shows that female power and female sexuality create a perilous atmosphere due to their weaker nature. Thus, if any woman crosses the line between a lustful woman or an obedient wife, then she directly becomes sexually available, and correspondingly, becomes a witch or a witch-like figure that embodies a danger to the welfare of the society in general.

In the case of the witches; their threat is their excessive sexual desires and their emasculating power over male sexuality through using witchcraft despite their being comical and attractive figures. This threat is widened with their female union, which is fully opposed images to the patriarchal court of Ravenna. Their chief witch, Hecate, as the goddess of the moon, experiences her femininity in a frightening way and inverts the role of a traditional housewife with the images of dark magic. Hecate's and other witches' unruly nature align them with the devil and make the witches sexual deviants.

CHAPTER III

THE WITCH OF EDMONTON AND THE SEXUALLY PERVERTED BODY OF MOTHER SAWYER

3.1 The Witch of Edmonton

The Witch of Edmonton is a well-known witchcraft play composed in 1621 by William Rowley, Thomas Dekker, and John Ford. Set in the rural community of Edmonton, the play is about a marginalized haggish-like woman, Elizabeth Sawyer, who turns to witchcraft through sealing a pact with a demonic dog because of her being mistreated by the community members. In this sub-plot, the audience witness Mother Sawyer's loneliness and her alienation from the community, and finally her becoming a witch. With this demonic pact, Mother Sawyer sells both her soul and her body, which indicates that her body is sexualized and perverted in connection with her *maleficium*. This perverted body is treated like an infection to all women in Edmonton.

The source of the play for Mother Sawyer's part is a pamphlet, *The wonderful discoverie of Elizabeth Sawyer*, written by Henry Goodcole. (Neumeier 43). In this sense, *The Witch of Edmonton* is a different play from *Sophonisba* and *The Witch* because it uses local sources for the theme of witchcraft. Also, the play presents the local ideas about witchcraft issue by drawing a typical witch image found in the witchcraft literature of the age. Thus, together with the real life story of the witch, Mother Sawyer and her tragic execution, and the local life the community such as its social structure are integrated into the play.

Mother Sawyer is firstly seen in act two, scene one, alone on stage while she complains about her neighbours who accuse her of being a witch. Her first soliloquy suggests that the local community blames Mother Sawyer for their misfortunes and their own misdeeds, and it is this community that makes her the witch:

Mother Sawyer: And why on me? why should the envious world
Throw all their scandalous malice upon me?
'Cause I am poor, deformed, and ignorant,
And like a bow buckled and bent together
By some more strong in mischiefs than myself,
Must I for that be made a common sink
For all the filth and rubbish of men's tongues
To fall and run into? Some call me witch,
And being ignorant of myself, they go
About to teach me how to be one; urging
That my bad tongue—by their bad usage made so —
Forspeaks their cattle, doth bewitch their corn,
Themselves, their servants, and their babes at nurse.
This they enforce upon me, and in part
Make me to credit it; and here comes one
Of my chief adversaries. (2.1. 1-16)

These lines alone summarize the witchcraft beliefs and practices in such a small community. She is a poor and a lonely woman, totally othered from the community life, and so she is at the bottom of the social hierarchy. Abused as a witch by her neighbours because of her poverty, Mother Sawyer has no option other than turning to witchcraft; she desires to have a supernatural power to take revenge all including Old Banks, who beats her just because she gathers sticks from his land. She is also abused and mocked by Cuddy Banks and his morris- dancer friends. Because of these, she thinks that magical power will be her weapon to protect herself from her abusers. Then, the devil appears in the form of a dog and asks her soul in return for her wishes. The demonic pact takes place between them through suckling Mother Sawyer's blood. Now, she can take her revenge from others with the help of the dog. However, this pact between them comes with a price; now she is not only a disgusted creature, but also a heretic that rebels against God and so the state. In the play,

her heresy is directly connected to her deviant body. Because, as the reflection of the contemporary perception about witches' sexual intercourse with the devil, their partnership is presented as sexual intimacy; there are some references to their sexual activities in some scenes, which reflect Mother Sawyer and her body as something deviant and demonic. On the other hand, their intimacy indicates that Mother Sawyer has nobody to love and to share her life, the companion of the dog diminishes her loneliness. Although she is a witch, the dramatists show that she is also a miserable woman, who needs love and care but ignored by the community.

Meanwhile, the major plot of the play follows as such: at the risk of losing his inheritance, Frank Thorney marries secretly to the servant girl Winnifride, who is pregnant now. But the father of the child is her master, Sir Arthur, which Frank does not know. Although Winnifride is presented as blameless and innocent woman, she deceives Frank in this matter. She is very cunning and thinks about her fame and position in the community unlike Mother Sawyer, who ingenuously expresses her feelings and doings without the fear of conventions. But Winnifride's plans do not go as she expects. The Thorney family has some financial problems, because of this, Frank needs to marry Susan Carter, a wealthy daughter of Old Carter, for her dowry so that he would save his family from ruin. Thus, he bigamously marries Susan by denying his marriage to Winnifride with a letter to Sir Arthur. Later, the dog is seen on stage, who influences Frank's mind by urging him to kill Susan. Then, he murders Susan so as to escape with Winnifride. Frank's mental situation becomes worse because of his guilty conscience. However, in the end, Frank's crime comes out and is punished with a death sentence. On the other hand, Mother Sawyer is also found guilty of witchcraft; she is accused of all the troubles in the play, she is responsible for spreading her perverted sexual desires and harming their cattle, and for causing the madness of her neighbour, Anne Ratcliffe, who kills herself. Mother Sawyer is questioned by the Justice and others, which recalls a real witch-hunting cases. To all accusations, she gives an answer which is a remarkable one: "A witch! who is not?" (3. 1. 103). By confessing her being a witch, Mother Sawyer is sentenced to death and at the final scene, she is on her way to execution with

the cursing of villagers while Frank, who kills Susan, is sent to execution with farewells because of his repentance. He tries to gain sympathy from others as he repents his sins and begs for forgiveness before his execution. The people of Edmonton forgive Frank in the depths of their hearts, but as the root of his misdeeds, they mark Mother Sawyer. At this point, Mother Sawyer becomes a scapegoat for all the mischief and evil in the play. She embodies “what is evil, corrupting, or destructive”, and she sweeps away “the burden of such social threats as [...] she is removed from that community.” (Garrett "Dramatizing Deviance: Social Theory And "The Witch Of Edmonton" 339). This “burden” is her “destructive” and corrupting” intimacy with her “familiar” that disturbs the patriarchal environment in the play.

Consequently, in *The Witch of Edmonton*, the witch becomes a complex character; she is the agent of the devil for the characters in the play, but for the audience, she is both “helplessly human and most witch-like” figure. (Neumeier 44) She is a lonely woman, who has nobody, so the companion of the dog for her is very pleasing even though Tom takes her soul as well as her body. Despite this desperate situation of her, Mother Sawyer is still a threatening figure, who lives outside the boundaries of the community of Edmonton.

3.2 The Witch, Mother Sawyer

Danny Dawson in his article, “The Witch: Subversive, Heretic or Scapegoat?”, comments about the elderly victims of the witch hunts in the early modern period as such:

Patriarchal society hoped and expected all women to be under the control and discipline of either a father or a husband. An old woman would generally fall outside this community requirement, in turn diminishing greatly her ability to avoid group suspicion. Having no partner or family to support her, this female would be poor and live in isolation on the outskirts of the village. The remoteness and independence of this existence only served to further increase fear within the community of this alleged uncontrollable, embittered individual. (56)

In *The Witch of Edmonton*, the female threat stems from Mother Sawyer's "uncontrollable" and isolated condition as well as her deviant body. As a woman outside of the patriarchal control, she experiences her sexuality under her own control. This disorderly nature of her is presented firstly through her cursing tongue at the beginning of the play because Mother Sawyer is not a silenced woman unlike the traditional woman image of the age, which makes Mother Sawyer a potential prey for the devil and so his perverted requests. She is not under the control of "either a father or a husband" as Dawson suggests in the quotation above. She is isolated and independent from the community, which means that Mother Sawyer is a potential danger for the male authority. In this sense, Mother Sawyer's *maleficium*, in other words, her ability to harm others, comes from her being unruly woman, but her relation to witchcraft is bound to her body as it is sold to the devil's agent, Tom. Then, the wicked body of the witch is presented as a leading source of the disasters and misfortune in the play. This perverted bound of her to the devil, in the form of a dog, links demonic doings to women's unruly sexuality. Without the devilish dog, Mother Sawyer has no magical power, she cannot hurt anybody. Her only weapon to her abusers is her language; her cursing tongue. Her "familiar" does not only act as her tool to take revenge, but also he gives Mother Sawyer love and strength. With this demonic power, Mother Sawyer brings sexual disorder to the community. Unlike Erichtho and Hecate, Mother Sawyer does not directly emasculate male sexual power, but her infectious sexual desires, her transgression of the mother figure and her demonic body reflect her as an emasculating force in the Edmonton community, especially for the women who might follow her as seen in the case of Anne Ratcliffe, who goes mad and dies.

Mother Sawyer is a different type of witch among the others discussed in this thesis. She is old, poor and deformed woman; she is not sexually attractive or she does not have any magical talents. She is not an educated woman, she is not called as a great magician, or an enchantress that is seen in Erichtho or Hecate. The audience do not hear any magical music, or see any cauldron. There is no magical ritual except "the morris dance" performed by Cuddy Banks as a free time activity. Although Mother Sawyer is a witch, she

has no magic; she is just an old and ignorant, haggish-like woman, who begs food or other things from the community of Edmonton. And she is aware of her lack of power and questions how others have achieved magical powers just before the dog appears: “But by what means they came acquainted with them/I am ignorant. Would some power, good or bad, /Instruct me which way I might be revenged...” (2.1. 104-6). However, what makes Mother Sawyer unique among the other contemporary witches discussed in this thesis is that the audience face the process of her becoming a witch, her sealing a pact with the devil, and how she gains power through her deviant body as Woods says: “[...] she is not empowered by culture or scholarship but by her body.” (Woods 158) Mother Sawyer’s body is at the core of the play. Firstly, her body is presented as an ugly and distorted one in act two scene one: “like a bow buckled and bent together” (4). Later, the pact is sealed between the devilish dog and her through his suckling Mother Sawyer’s blood. Her body is presented this time as a part of the deviance; the dog assures this by saying: “now thou art Mine own.” (2.1. 119) With the act of sucking Mother Sawyer’s blood, accompanied by thunder and lightening, her image becomes so terrifying and annoying because the dog sucks her blood like a suckling child: “The perversion of the maternal body in *The Witch of Edmonton* was therefore intrinsically uncanny in that it transformed the familiar act of maternal suckling into the unfamiliar performance of the suckling familiars” (Woods 161). This “uncanny” atmosphere on stage makes Mother Sawyer a subversive woman, who transgresses the traditional mother image and causes uneasiness in the Edmonton community.

On the other hand, Mother Sawyer inverts gender roles with her promiscuous attitude towards the devilish dog. Mother Sawyer says that she has given up herself to his “black lust” for his “familiar” without which she would be “lost” (5.1. 5-6). The dog, Tom is her “best love”, and she exclaims her desires for him in these lines: “I’m on fire, even in the midst of ice, / Raking my blood up till my shrunk knees feel / Thy curled head leaning on them. Come then my darling.” (5.1. 10-12). These words of Mother Sawyer suggest that she has sexual attraction towards the dog, her power comes from her sexual intercourse with him. Although the black dog sucks her blood from

her arm, later in the play it is seen that the suckling place is changed to the private place of Mother Sawyer in accordance with the popular approach in witchcraft discourses. To suck the witch's blood, the dog uses her teat, which is called as a witch's mark in witchcraft discourses. The place of the teat and its sexual emphasis in the play makes this old woman a perverted demonic female: "Comfort me; thou shalt have the teat anon" (4. 1. 153). Familiar with this real case of Sawyer and other similar events, the dramatists picture the sexual interaction between Mother Sawyer and her "familiar" on stage by giving voice both to the dog and the witch. The original source of Mother Sawyer's plot follows the same perverted image, but it is more horrific as Sawyer confesses that: "The place where the Divell suckt my bloud was a little above my fundiment, and, that place chosen by himselfie; and in that place by continuall drawing, there is a thing in the forme of a Teate, at which the divell would sucke mee." (qtd. in Garrett 55). In the play, the place of the mark and its relation to the devil's agent directly link witchcraft to Mother Sawyer's sexuality, which means that magical powers of the witch is derived from her lust and so her deviant intercourse:

Mother Sawyer: I am dried up
With cursing and with madness, and have yet
No blood to moisten these sweet lips of thine.
Stand on thy hind- legs up -kiss me, my Tommy,
And rub away some wrinkles on my brow
By making my old ribs to shrug for joy
Of thy fine tricks... (4.1. 154-60)

These lines suggest that Mother Sawyer needs the devilish dog to gain strength and youth. The suggestion of bestiality in this play points Mother Sawyer as a subversive and heretic woman, who crosses the boundaries set by patriarchal order. She is presented to the audience as a very lustful old woman because she longs for a sexual union with her "familiar"; the dark, devilish dog, which is the agent of Satan. Pearson, in the article "A Dog, a Witch, a Play: *The Witch Of Edmonton*" argues that this scene transforms Mother Sawyer's

“familiar” into a devil-like man if he does what she wishes for (standing up on his knees) as this image, which is like half man-half animal, is a common figure in the discourses of witchcraft (98). Therefore, Mother Sawyer’s familiar becomes her lover. This alone creates fear and anxiety in the community of Edmonton that is why she needs to be destroyed in order to establish the patriarchal order in Edmonton even though her crimes do not urge an execution. Thus, her unruly sexuality frightens the society and makes her an “instrument of mischief” (5. 2. 21) as one of the countrymen admits in these lines:

Third Countryman: Our cattle fall, our wives fall, our daughters
fall, and
maid-servants fall; and we ourselves shall not be able to stand
if this beast be suffered to graze amongst us. (4. 1. 12-14)

This man seems terrified in the face of the horrific female figure. At first appearance, Mother Sawyer is presented as the weakest member of the society; however, she takes the role of a powerful female during the play. This female is so powerful that they cannot “stand” against her. Woods argues that “Sawyer fills the role of both mother and lover and represents the uncanny condition of the maternal body made perverse and unfamiliar” (160). I agree with Woods that Mother Sawyer’s position in the play suggests her being both mother and lustful woman considering her intimacy with her “familiar”. What fears the community is in fact this perverted nature of the witch. To burn her house and to prove her being a witch, in act four, scene one, some men in the village come near to Mother Sawyer’s house. Actually, in this scene it is seen that the males in the community want to protect the women from this danger by executing the deviant as one of them expresses: “Rid the town of her, or else our wives will do nothing else but dance about other country maypoles” (3. 1. 10-11) For instance, with the help of the dog, Tom, Mother Sawyer causes the madness of Anne Ratcliffe along with the other women in the village (4.1. 197). Anne “become[s] nothing but the miserable trunk of a wretched woman” (4. 1. 206-7) as Old Banks says. He interprets this event as an

emasculatation of male strength: “We were in her hands as reeds in a mighty tempest. Spite of our strengths away she brake...” (207-8). In this sense, Mother Sawyer becomes a great danger to male power and to the women in patriarchal regime. A bad example for a submissive woman, Mother Sawyer must be burned so that her *maleficium* and corrupted sexuality should not surrender their women. Consequently, the witch image in this play transgresses the boundaries of the community with her exceptional demonized sexuality. This transgression makes Mother Sawyer the wicked witch that ruins the communities’ harmony.



CONCLUSION

In this thesis, the witch figure in three Jacobean witchcraft plays, John Marston's *The Wonder of Women* or *The Tragedy of Sophonisba*, Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, and *The Witch of Edmonton* written by the dramatists William Rowley, Thomas Dekker and John Ford, has been discussed within the framework of the connection between witchcraft and female sexuality. The witches in these plays are presented as sexual deviants that transgress the boundaries put by patriarchal order. Being an antithesis to the traditional obedient woman in the Jacobean period, the witches' existence creates a threat by causing anxiety and fear in society because they use witchcraft to satisfy their uncontrollable sexual desires or to emasculate male sexual power.

The idea of witches as sexual transgressors was not an unfamiliar idea to Jacobean audience. There was already a clichéd way of thinking towards women rooted back to the Middle Ages. Whether royals or commoners, women were treated as the weaker sex that were much more prone to the temptations of the devil. As seen in the Biblical story about Adam and Eve, women were seen as deceitful creatures, who would use their cunning or witchcraft to deceive men. For instance, in *Macbeth* by Shakespeare, the females of the play, Lady Macbeth and the weird sisters as witches, are presented as the reasons of Macbeth's downfall. Or, in the medieval writings of religious men, women are treated as weak, and easily tempted ones; their wicked nature is seen as the proof of their turning to witchcraft, which also suggests their uncontrollable sexual desires and sexual perversity. The best example of this kind of misogynistic writing is *The Malleus Maleficarium* (1486) by Kramer and Sprenger that was used as a guidebook to define and to catch a witch. In the Jacobean period, this misogyny was fostered by King James I, who himself wrote a text on witchcraft lore called *Daemonology* (1597). In it, the King connects women and witchcraft, and treats witchcraft as the inversion of male authority (qtd. in Spoto 55).

Accordingly, the dramatists of the mentioned plays mirror this treatment by choosing the popular theme "witchcraft". In parallel with dark and violent

nature of Jacobean drama, these three witchcraft plays offer the horrific and the deviant females to the audience. In *Sophonisba*, Marston presents the classical witch, Erictho as the emblem of carnal lust. She is a terrifying witch, who lives in a cave and is in contact with the underworld. Being away from the civilized life and associated with death, Erictho becomes the marginalized and the feared female that creates a danger for the patriarchal environment of *Sophonisba*. Her threat stems from her uncontrollable lust, and her sexual power over Syphax. Erictho deceives Spyhax; she disguises as Sophonisba by using her magic, so that she can have sex with Syphax to satisfy her lust and to have a child from the blood of kings. After the intercourse, Syphax exclaims his disgust and remorse in the face of the witch's trick because she emasculates Syphax's manliness by stealing his semen, and so destroys his manliness. Her supremacy over Spyhax is also shown by Erictho's sinister laughter and mocking. Unlike the obedient and silenced woman, Sophonisba, Erictho experiences her sexuality as she wishes; even she has sexual intimacy with dead people. She is not controlled by male authority; on the contrary, Erictho has power over male power. With this terrifying and perverse image, the witch overthrows the society's accustomed orders and so becomes the devil-like creature. In short, Erictho's deviant sexuality and her carnal lust are in contact with her dark magic and witchcraft; her *maleficium* causes man's loss of power and loss of identity.

In *The Witch*, Middleton mirrors a contemporary court event through the theme of witchcraft. In this play, the perverted lifestyles of Hecate and her sister witches, and their sexual charms and spells play a key role despite their limited scenes. Their realm is away from the civilized life, they have their own rules. As corporate females, they are presented as a dangerous female union whose perverse sexual activities are totally in contrast with the society's sexual standards. As a chief witch, Hecate is presented as a horrific and powerful witch. She emasculates male power; she causes impotency of Antonio. Because of this, Antonio loses his manliness and his self confidence; he cannot consummate his marriage with Isabella. On the other hand, Hecate is a mythological figure; she is the goddess of magic and witchcraft as well as the moon, which symbolizes femininity and the silver light that guides the

witches' dark workings. The moon gives them the energy they need for their sexual activities. As a dark feminine figure in the minds of Jacobean audience, Hecate is also has erratic sexual relations both with her son and her "familiar", the cat Malkin. This incestuous and bestial nature of her sexuality makes Hecate a deviant female, who transgresses the boundaries and becomes a threat to male power. This threat is triggered by the other witches in her coven. These witches are as perverse as she; they spoil young boys in their night flying. This deviancy of them is in contact with their malefic nature. Recalling witches' Sabbath, in their scenes, the cauldron image is used, which suggests that they overthrow household tools as subversive females. The witches dance around it by singing songs, which is full of sexual hints, and harmful spells or sexual charms. Although they are horrific and dangerous females away from manly control, they are also merry and comical figures. Their horror comes from their experienced and satisfied sexuality that crosses the boundaries of the society. In the play, the other female characters, who act against the male authority, are on the verge of becoming a witch or a lustful woman like the Duchess or Francisca, which suggests that there is a thin line between a witch and an obedient woman in the patriarchal environment of *The Witch*. As a result, what makes these perverted females a dangerous union is that their excessive sexual desires, their deviant sexual relations and their emasculation force over male sexuality through using their dark magic.

Mother Sawyer, a typical elderly witch found in witchcraft discourses, causes fear and anxiety in the rural community of Edmonton with her deviant body in *The Witch of Edmonton*. Marginalized and finally executed as a witch, Mother Sawyer is actually a sympathetic character; she is alone, and has nobody to love other than the devil-like dog, Tom. Exposed to violence by her neighbours because of her deformed appearance and poverty, Mother Sawyer wants to take revenge from her abusers; she makes a pact with the devil-like dog, Tom, in return for her soul and body. As a witch, she is not a great enchantress or a magician; she is an ignorant old hag, but her sexualized body that is sold to the devil, becomes a source of her *maleficium*; her body does not only harm villagers' cattle or crop, but it also harms the women by spreading sexual deviance like an infection. This infection comes from Mother

Sawyer's erratic sexual relation with her "familiar" dog, who sucks her blood like a suckling child by using her "teat". While the inversion of the motherly role creates horror on stage with this act, it also presents Mother Sawyer as a subversive woman who inverts gender roles. In the play, Mother Sawyer expresses her lust for the devilish dog; she takes power and youth through the sexual intercourse with her "familiar". Later in the play, it is indicated that the place of the teat is in the private area of the witch, which was a common image in the discourses of witchcraft in the early modern period. This sexual emphasis and Mother Sawyer's promiscuous attitude towards her "familiar" reflect her a sexual transgressor that infects the women of the Edmonton community. Thus, the witch's *maleficium* comes from her deviant body. Because of this perception, she is treated like an epidemic causing all mischiefs and evildoings in the play even though she does not involve in other characters' misdeeds. As Mother Sawyer's perverse body brings misfortunes to the Edmonton community, for the villagers, she must be burned or hanged so that their wives or daughters shall not be affected by the witch's unruly behaviour. As a result, the witch, Mother Sawyer is seen as a threat to the male authority in Edmonton because of her erratic sexual life and her subversion of the traditional woman image.

Consequently, these three witchcraft plays of Jacobean period have a common approach to the theme of witchcraft. If any woman behaves erratically, or does the things that do not fit the accustomed order, then she becomes a wicked creature, a witch, who threatens the patriarchy. This threat is generally interrelated to the uncontrollable female sexuality in the plays. Because the witches' malefic nature makes them prone to the temptations of the devil, they are sexually available and free to make sex with anyone or anything. As seen in *Erictho*, and *Hecate* and her sister witches, this freedom is reflected as something dangerous; as an emasculating force over male sexuality. Or this freedom means the horror of a sexualized body of an old woman that is perverted and demonized as seen in *Mother Sawyer*. Thus, the existence of these marginalized women shows that being a witch means being a sexual transgressor in these three Jacobean witchcraft plays.

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