

**Title:** Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in *Macbeth*  
**Author(s):** Dennis Biggins  
**Publication Details:** *Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1976): p255-277.  
**Source:** *Shakespearean Criticism*. Ed. Lynn M. Zott. Vol. 69. Detroit: Gale, 2003. From *Literature Resource Center*.  
**Document Type:** Critical essay



**Full Text:** COPYRIGHT 2003 Gale, COPYRIGHT 2007 Gale, Cengage Learning

Full Text:

[(essay date 1976) *In the following essay, Biggins studies the links between sex and violence in Macbeth, as well as the association of both with the Weird Sisters.*]

The consensus of critical opinion appears to be that sexuality has little structural or thematic importance in *Macbeth*. Thus, for example, a recent critic can refer to the play as "the purest of Shakespeare's tragedies," in which the Porter's remarks about drink and sex might easily seem incongruous.<sup>1</sup> Some later writers, however, have drawn attention to a sexual element in the exchanges between Macbeth and his wife. Jan Kott remarks that Lady Macbeth "demands murder from Macbeth as a confirmation of his manhood, almost as an act of love," and that the "two are sexually obsessed with each other." Ian Robinson sees a perverse passion as the source of Lady Macbeth's influence over her husband in the murders of Duncan and Banquo: "the scene in which Banquo's murder is envisaged is a kind of love-passage between the Macbeths of which the natural consummation is the murder." D. F. Rauber comments on Lady Macbeth's strategy of questioning Macbeth's manliness in I.vii: "Her attack is saturated with sexuality, and her main weapon is clearly a kind of sexual blackmail: 'From this time / Such I account thy love' (I.vii.38-39)."<sup>2</sup> These are valuable perceptions, but they are mostly isolated and incidental to the critics' main purposes. It is my chief contention in this paper that there are important structural and thematic links between sexuality and the various manifestations of violence in *Macbeth*; moreover, that these in turn are associated significantly with Shakespeare's dramatized treatment of witchcraft.

The atmosphere of upheaval peculiar to the *Macbeth* world is partly created by Shakespeare's evoking violence in terms of sexual behavior and of the supernatural, both seen as perverted and disordered. This evocation is poetically appropriate: if Duncan (and, more equivocally, Banquo) represents the good with its potential for beneficent increase in a divinely sanctioned world-order, then Macbeth and his wife, who reject that order, are fittingly characterized in terms of the sexually aberrant and unfruitful.

In the first place, there are some passages in the Weird Sisters' speeches whose full purport has not been grasped. Everybody agrees that the Weird Sisters are something other, or at any rate something more, than the malevolent old women of Jacobean witch superstition--they are Lamb's "foul anomalies"--yet many of their characteristics are those traditionally associated with European witchcraft. They are not simply common- or garden-variety witches of the kind described by contemporary witch lore, as Thomas Alfred Spalding alleged (although he rightfully rejected the view that they are Norns). There is a demonic aspect of the Weird Sisters, but their powers are too limited for them to be seen in Walter Clyde Curry's terms as full-fledged demons or devils.<sup>3</sup> They occupy a kind of twilight territory between human and supernatural evil-doing. Arthur R. McGee observes that there is much evidence that to Shakespeare's contemporaries "witches, Furies, devils and fairies were virtually synonymous."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless Shakespeare carefully avoids portraying a Macbeth helplessly caught in the grip of irresistible demonic forces; the Weird Sisters' malice is evident in all their traffickings with him, yet nowhere are we shown invincible proof of their power over him. As Robert H. West puts it:

The almost self-evident truth is that we simply cannot be *sure* of much about the Weird Sisters, though beyond a reasonable doubt they are representations of some genuinely superhuman evil. ...[Shakespeare] treat[s] both Macbeth's fall and the Weird Sisters' part in it as awesome mysteries to the ignorant and the learned alike--mysteries that we may all feel and in part observe, but for which not even the most knowledgeable have a sufficient formula.<sup>5</sup>

Although the Weird Sisters may wear their witchcraft with a difference, they nonetheless exhibit many of its trappings. What has not hitherto been noticed is their claims to participation in those sexual malpractices which are standard evidences of witchcraft with the demonologists. In I.iii the First Witch (I use this label for convenience) announces her enmity toward a sailor's wife who had refused her chestnuts. The Witch refers to this woman as a "rumpe-fed Ronyon" (l. 6).<sup>6</sup> These abusive terms have been variously explained, but they may be used here to express, among other things, sexual antagonism. As Nares suggested, *rumpe-fed* "means, probably, nothing more

than *fed*, or fattened in the *rump*,"<sup>7</sup> or full-buttocked. The usual gloss of *ronyon* is "a mangy, scabby creature" (Muir, New Arden ed., p. 12), although the other Shakespearean instance (*Wiv.*, IV.ii.163) couples the word with *witch*, *hag*,<sup>8</sup> *baggage*, and *polecat*, the first two of which are interesting in relation to *Macbeth*, and the last two of which have marked sexual meanings in Elizabethan-Jacobean English, including Shakespeare's.<sup>9</sup> The Witch derisively sees her enemy as a sexual object whose role she intends to usurp, as her later remarks confirm. She states that in retaliation for the slight offered her by the sailor's wife, she will follow the latter's husband to Aleppo.

And like a Rat without a taylor,  
Ile doe, Ile doe, and Ile doe.  
(9-10, 18-25)

There are a number of single or double meanings here that contain sexual components referring specifically to witchcraft or demonic practices. The more or less generally accepted interpretation of these lines is as follows: The Witch will assume rat form in order to creep unobserved aboard the *Tiger*, where she will work evil spells on the ship and its master; she will harass him and waste him away by means of her magic, although she cannot destroy either his vessel or himself. I should not wish to deny that the passage has some such meaning, but this coexists with or is subordinate to meanings heralded by the First Witch's announcement of her quarrel with the sailor's wife. Her threats are peculiarly specific in comparison with the Second Witch's generalized maleficence in killing swine. The key statement here is "Ile dreyne him drie as Hay" (l. 18), which most editors leave unexplained, assuming, apparently, that its meaning is self-evident. Furness, in the *New Variorum*, quotes Hunter (1853): "This, it was believed, it was in the power of witches to do, as may be seen in any of the narratives of the cases of witchcraft" (p. 35). This is hardly an enlightening comment, possibly owing to the writer's excessive reticence, although it is unclear whether or not he really understands the line. Dover Wilson, in the *New Cambridge* edition (p. 101), supposes that the reference is to the Witch's imposing thirst upon the sailor. This may be its surface meaning. But the line also undoubtedly refers to her intention of draining the unfortunate man of his semen, through her grossly inordinate exploitation of him as a succubus.

The belief that witches and the demons they served and were served by could experience sexual relations with one another or with ordinary mortals of both sexes was an old one. St. Augustine mentions "Silvanos et Panes, quos vulgo incubos vocant ... et quosdam daemones, quos Dusios Galli nuncupant," as having sexual intercourse with women.<sup>10</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas explains how offspring may result from the unions of demons with humans:

Si tamen ex coitu daemonum aliqui interdum nascuntur, hoc non est per semen ab eis decisum, aut a corporibus assumptis, sed per semen alicujus hominis ad hoc acceptum, utpote quod idem daemon qui est succubus ad virum fiat incubus ad mulierem. ...<sup>11</sup>

Demons, being sexless like angels, could assume either the male or the female role in sexual intercourse with humans, as St. Thomas states, and thus collect as succubi semen from men for later implanting as incubi in women.

Later writers on witchcraft and demonology develop these ideas. In a work commonly known as the *Formicarius* (c. 1435), the German friar Johannes Nider expatiates learnedly on the existence and nature of incubi and succubi. His argument is conducted in the form of a dialogue between Piger and Theologus. The latter explains that the demons who act as incubi and succubi do so out of their malicious joy in harming man's body and soul.

Causa autem quare Daemones se incubos faciunt vel succubos, haec esse videtur, ut per luxuriae vitium hominis utriusque naturam laedant, corporis videlicet, & animae, quae in laesione praecipuè delectari videntur.<sup>12</sup>

The formidable Sprenger and Kramer, who jointly compiled one of the most influential of all European witchcraft treatises, the *Malleus Maleficarum* (c. 1486), see insatiable lust as the driving force in witches' coitus with demons.

Omnia per carnalem concupiscentiam, quae ... in eis est insatiabilis. Prouerb. penultimo, Tria sunt insatiabilia, &c. & quartum quod nunquam dicit, Sufficit, scilicet os vulvae. Vnde & cum Daemonibus, causa explendae libidinis, se agitant.<sup>13</sup>

The Weird Sisters have characteristics of both witches and demons, so that there is nothing incongruous in the First Witch's avowed intention of acting as succubus to the sailor, although the treatises on demonology mostly discuss this practice as the work of devils.<sup>14</sup> In the colloquy between the Sisters in I.iii there is a mingling of the motifs of unnatural evildoing and of lust that are to recur later in the play with reference to *Macbeth* and his wife. That "Ile dreyne him drie as Hay" refers to sexual impotence is confirmed by a parallel use of the simile in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. In Book III, canto ix, stanza 5, the narrator comments on the deficiency in the old miser Malbecco that makes him keep a jealous eye on his lovely young wife.

But he is old, and *withered like hay*,  
Vnfit faire Ladies seruice to supply;  
The priuie guilt whereof makes him alway

Suspect her truth, and keepe continuall spy  
 Vpon her with his other blinked eye;  
 Ne suffreth he resort of liuing wight  
 Approach to her, ne keepe her company,  
 But in close bowre her mewes from all mens sight,  
 Depriu'd of kindly ioy and naturall delight.<sup>15</sup>

The First Witch seeks to render the master of the *Tiger* impotent by sexual exhaustion, so that his wife, too, may be "Depriu'd of kindly ioy and naturall delight." The Witch's motives are purely those of revengefulness and malice. Nider's Theologus cites the opinion of "Gvilelmus" as to the maleficence prompting incubi and succubi to seek human partners: "quod verisimiliter nec succubi, nec incubi, amore concubitus, nec desiderio voluptatis, talia viris & mulieribus faciant, sed potius malignitatis studio, videlicet ut utrimque pollutant eos & eas spurcitia" (p. 626). Like the Porter's demon drink, the succubus plays havoc with a man's sexuality: it "equiuocates him in a sleepe, and giuing him the Lye, leaues him" (II.iii.39-40).

The Weird Sisters' proposed vengeance on the sailor's wife embraces another maleficent activity that witches were alleged to practice. This is the prevention of lawful sexual relations between man and wife, technically labeled ligature or, more picturesquely in English witchlore, "tying the points." The authorities have elaborate accounts of this variously manifested process. Nider's Theologus remarks it as one of the seven principal ways in which *maleficiati* work harm, "ne vi generativa uti valeant ad feminam, vel viceversa femellae ad virum. ..." Piger later comments on the same topic:

inter sexum utrumque, matrimonii sacramento conjunctum, nonnunquam experti sumus *odia* talia suscitari per maleficia, & similiter infrigidationes generativae potentiae, ut nec redditio, nec exactio debiti matrimonialis locum pro prole valerent habere.<sup>16</sup>

Theologus explains that although God does not allow the Devil to work directly on the human understanding or will, he does permit him to act on the bodily senses and powers, whether internal or external (p. 564). He describes, after "Petrus de Palude," the various ways in which the Devil can act on the powers of imagination, fancy, and generation in order to prevent coition:

... *Secundo modo*, hominem potest inflammare ad actum illum, vel refrigerare ab actu illo, ahibendo occultas virtutes rerum, quas optime novit ad hoc validas. ... *Quarto*, reprimendo directe vigorem membri, fructificationi accommodi, sicut & motum localem cujuscunque organi. *Quinto*, prohibendo missionem spirituum ad membra, in quibus est virtus motiva, quasi intercludendo vias seminis, ne ad vasa generationis descendat, vel ne ab eis recedat, vel ne excitetur vel emittatur, vel multis aliis modis.<sup>17</sup>

The First Witch's intended course of action against the sailor and his wife economically combines the *maleficia* of the succubus with that of the devilish practitioner of ligature. As Daneau remarks, witches practice ligature "to thintent they may sow discorde and contencion betweene them, betweene whom ought to be sounde and great agreement" (sig. E.viii<sup>r&y</sup>). Boguet observes that besides its offense to God, a further consequence of copulation between a succubus and a man is that

par ce moyen la semence naturelle de l'homme se pert, d'où vient que l'amitié, qui est entre l'homme & la femme se conuertit le plus souuent en vne haine, qui est le plus grand malheur, qui pourroit arriuer au mariage.<sup>18</sup>

The Weird Sisters' proposed sowing of discord between the spouses looks forward both to Macbeth's murderous acts of disorder and to their ultimate issue in barrenness and estrangement between his wife and himself. The Witch's course of revengeful action for a trivial gesture of exclusion--the sailor's wife's refusal of her chestnuts--is a parodic anticipation of Macbeth's murderous wresting of the crown from the Duncan who had named as his heir not Macbeth but Malcolm. Here, too, the witchcraft theme coalesces with the themes of fruitfulness and offspring, which are associated particularly with Duncan and Banquo, and of unfulfillment, sterility, and the destruction of progeny, associated with Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. The latter, in her disillusioned fretting after the attainment of her goal, voices her baffled sense of failure to achieve fulfillment through destruction. Her language is markedly sexual.

Nought's had, all's spent,  
 Where our desire is got without content:  
 'Tis safer, to be that which we destroy,  
 Then by destruction dwell in doubtful ioy.  
 (III.ii.4-7)

Rauber comments: "the 'all's spent' operates both on the levels of failure to accomplish purpose and of sexual impotence" (*Criticism*, 11 [1969-70] 62). But there is more to the passage than this; "had" includes the idea of satisfying carnal possession, "all's spent" suggests a useless discharge of sexual energy (literally, of semen), and "our desire is got without content" further implies failure to achieve sexual satisfaction. As I shall try to demonstrate later, "destruction"--the murder of Duncan--has earlier in the play been envisaged with growing emphasis as a quasi-sexual act (compare also Kott and Robinson, quoted above). Baffled desire is a recurring motif of *Macbeth*. In the powers of witches "hominem inflammare ad actum illum, vel refrigerare ab actu illo," there is another parallel with the Porter's drink:

"Lecherie, Sir, it prouokes and vnprouokes: it prouokes the desire, but it takes away the performance. Therefore much Drinke may be said to be an Equiuocator with Lecherie: it makes him, and it marres him; it sets him on, and it takes him off; it perswades him, and dis-heartens him; makes him stand too, and not stand too. ..." (II.iii.32-39).

The reference to sexual *maleficia* is strengthened by other sexual meanings in the Witch's lines. In *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1929) G. L. Kittredge explains "like a Rat without a taylor, / Ile doe, Ile doe, and Ile doe" merely as the Witch's intending to assume rat shape in order to slip on board the *Tiger* unnoticed, then to bewitch the craft and lay a spell upon the captain (p. 13). Muir cites this explanation in his note, adding that it "is doubtless correct" (New Arden ed., p. 12). But the demonologists held that demons could assume animal shapes for the purpose, *inter alia*, of copulation with humans as incubi or succubi. In English witch lore the domestic animal familiar is a common phenomenon. "We find that animals of all kinds were regarded as familiars: dogs, cats, ferrets, weasels, toads, rats, mice, birds, hedgehogs, hares, even wasps, moths, bees and flies" (Summers, p. 101). The power of witches to assume animal shapes is frequently asserted by the authorities--for example, by Bodin and Boguet. These metamorphoses were often undergone by incubi and succubi. Boguet writes of a witch's copulation with the Devil: "Françoise Secretain a confessé qu'il auoit esté accouplé avec elle quatre ou cinq fois, & que pour lors il estoit tantost en forme de chien, tantost en forme de chat, & tantost en forme de poule" (p. 19). The familiars addressed by the Witches in the opening scene of the play, "*Gray-Malkin*" and "*Paddock*" (II. 8, 9), may be incubi as well as attendant spirits. From the beginning, the connection between inverted sexuality and the turning upside-down of moral categories is established.

Nicolas Remy points out that whatever guise the devils assume, some defect invariably gives them away: "insolita, atque insigni aliqua nota, quae naturae immanitatem prodat, conspicuos se ostendunt."<sup>19</sup> Thus the rat's lack of a tail will denote its demonic origin. There may be a further significance in this deficiency. Discussing the various metamorphoses of witches, Boguet mentions cases of the appearance of wolves without tails (pp. 139, 149). Summers comments: "The sexual power of a wolf was popularly supposed to lie in his tail. ... A wolf without a tail was sexually considered exceptionally unlucky and malign."<sup>20</sup> It is possible that Shakespeare's tailless rat is intended to suggest similar sexual malignity in the succubus-incubus exchange of roles.

Certainly the thrice-repeated verb *doe* has sexual meaning, besides denoting more general maleficence. *Do* in the sense of "copulate with" is a common Shakespearean usage, mostly in transitive constructions, to be sure: "Villain, I have done thy mother (*Tit.*, IV.ii.76); "... what has he done?--A woman" (*MM*, I.ii.83-84); "Do't in your parents' eyes" (*Tim.*, IV.i.8). But *do* is sometimes used intransitively in this sense: "Isbel the woman and I will do as we may" (*AWW*, I.iii.19-20); "You bring me to do, and then you flout me too" (*Tro.*, IV.ii.26). The last instance, in which a woman (Cressida) uses *do* in its sexual sense, parallels the First Witch's employment of the verb.<sup>21</sup>

The sailor will be subjected to the Witch-succubus' unremitting coital exactions day and night for a year and a half; he is to "liue a man forbid." While *forbid* doubtless has as its primary meaning "under a curse," as Theobald glossed it, the secondary sense of "*forbidden* [to have conjugal relations with his wife]" seems also to be present. Muir suggests, after earlier editors, that "dwindle, peake, and pine" refers to the Witch's use of a waxen image to make the sailor waste away; more probably it alludes to the debilitating effects of the prolonged sexual assault she plans for him. The "Barke" seems to be both literal and figurative; at the figurative level its significance is plural. In general terms of supernatural maleficence it indicates the Weird Sisters' limited powers: the Witch cannot destroy either the body or the soul of the master of the *Tiger*, but she will give him a rough time. As critics have noted, there is here a proleptic parallel, and contrast, with Macbeth, whose bark *will* be lost. The particular significance of the tempest-tossed ship draws a further parallel, and implies an added contrast. When the Witch says that the sailor's "Barke cannot be lost," she is also expressing the demonologists' contention that while witches could successfully practice ligature upon married couples, they could not undo the sacrament of marriage. This notion is stated by Hecate in Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, a play that seems to have been influenced in its witch scenes by Scot's *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, and very possibly by *Macbeth* also.

we cannot disjoin wedlock;

'Tis of heaven's fastening. Well may we raise jars,  
Jealousies, strifes, and heart-burning disagreements,  
Like a thick scurf o'er life, as did our master  
Upon that patient miracle; but the work itself  
Our power cannot disjoint.<sup>22</sup>

Similarly, the First Witch in *Macbeth* cannot destroy the sacramental bond between the sailor and his wife, whereas the crimes of Macbeth and his lady eventually result in an isolation of one from the other that mutely points to the self-destruction of their relationship.

Addressing the Weird Sisters, Banquo says "you should be Women, / And yet your Beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so" (I.iii.45-47). In Elizabethan-Jacobean folklore a woman's possessing a beard betokened a witch.<sup>23</sup> In *Macbeth* this physical anomaly perhaps also emphasizes, in the light of the Weird Sisters' plans for the sailor, their demonic bisexuality.

It is interesting to note that elsewhere in Shakespeare, witchcraft is associated with sexual domination and unnatural sexual infatuation. In *1 Henry VI* Talbot refers several times (and Burgundy once) to Joan La Pucelle as a witch and sorceress, and in V.iii. she confirms their descriptions by summoning her demon familiars. After she has beaten him in fight on their first encounter, Charles the Dauphin is

smitten with passion for her. When Joan asserts that "Christ's Mother" has helped her to overcome him, Charles replies, "Who'er helps thee, 'tis thou that must help me. / Impatiently I burn with thy desire; / My heart and hands thou hast at once subdu'd" (I.ii.106-9). In "Who'er helps thee" there is an implied suggestion as to the real origin of Joan's power. The ghost of Hamlet's father sees Claudius' conquest of Gertrude as a kind of bewitching:

... that incestuous, that adulterate beast,  
With witchcraft of his wits, ...  
    ... won to his shameful lust  
The will of my most seeming virtuous queen.  
(*Ham.*, I.v.42-46)

Brabantio likewise claims that Othello has won Desdemona by enchantment: "For nature so preposterously to err, / Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense, / Sans witchcraft could not" (*Oth.*, I.iii.62-64).<sup>24</sup>

The parallel between the Weird Sisters' program of harassment for the sailor and Macbeth's subsequent course after he meets them has often been noted. This parallel extends to the sexual aspect of the Witches' maleficence. Their spiritual seduction of Macbeth will deprive him of true manhood. His violence against Duncan is a more extreme form of the Witches' violence against the master of the *Tiger*. The "terrible Dreames" (III.ii.18) that afflict Macbeth after the murder of Duncan correspond to the Witch's oppression of the sailor, for nightmares were thought to be caused by the assaults of incubi and succubi.<sup>25</sup>

The unnatural reversal of sexual roles characterized by the Witch's treatment of the sailor is echoed in the scenes where Lady Macbeth rouses herself and her husband to commit the act of regicide. As the critics I quoted at the beginning of this paper remark, Lady Macbeth's murderous appeal to Macbeth is couched in sexual terms. She goads him into action by scornfully questioning his manhood, which she evokes equivocally as both virility and valor. Macbeth fails to realize that it is not merely the "Iugling Fiends" who "palter with vs in a double sence" (V.viii.19, 20). The slaying of Duncan is, indeed, to be the proof of Macbeth's manliness in this particular double sense, of sexual potency and courage. At first it appears that Lady Macbeth will herself take the initiative in the crime, with Macbeth functioning as a mere agent of her murderous will (as the assassins of Banquo in turn later function on behalf of Macbeth). In her invocation of the powers of darkness (I.v) she begs to be sexually transformed, dewomanized into an inhuman (yet somehow masculine) destroyer. She entreats the demons to usurp her body, transforming its natural life-giving powers to unnatural purposes, as the succubi-incubi exploit and abuse their victims.<sup>26</sup> When she exclaims, "Come to my Womans Brests, / And take my Milke for Gall, you murth'ring Ministers" (I.v.48-49), the invitation does not merely announce her desire to free herself from natural bonds of mutuality, tenderness, nurture, and all the other life-enhancing associations that the image of breast-feeding carries with it, although this is a major aspect of the lines. As W. Moelwyn Merchant has shown, "take my Milke for Gall" means "'bewitch my milk for gall, possess it and complete the invasion of my body at its source of compassion.'"<sup>27</sup> But this is not the only meaning of these words. There is at the same time an evocation of a hideously perverted sexual relationship; as the succubus receives a man's seed to use it for evil purposes, as the First Witch will drain the sailor dry, so the demons, at once lovers and sucklings, are invoked by Lady Macbeth to take her milk and leave gall in its place, or perhaps, to take it away for conversion into gall.<sup>28</sup> The monstrous birth produced by this unholy union is the murder, the "Nights great Businesse" (I.v.69), which is finally accomplished by Macbeth--but only after she has aroused him to it as to an act of ghastly love.

It may be asked where Shakespeare acquired his knowledge of the sexual aspects of witchcraft. There are dangers on both sides in evaluating the extent of his reading, although the unlearned Shakespeare is less heard of nowadays than formerly. For a mind as quick and an imagination as fertile as his, Scot and King James's *Daemonologie* provide all he needed to know; yet he may well have had access to other writers, including some of the continental authorities.<sup>29</sup>

It is not only in Lady Macbeth's soliloquy that the murder of Duncan is pictured as a deed of quasi-sexual violence. Very early in the play the imagery establishes a link between sexuality and the physical violence of rebellion. The Captain evokes Macdonwald's rebellious nature in the first of the play's many images of fruitfulness and increase (here it is the spawning of evil that is expressed): Macdonwald is "Worthie to be a Rebell, for to that / The multiplying Villanies of Nature / Doe swarme vpon him" (I.ii.10-12). Of this man, fecund in evil qualities, the Captain further remarks, "And Fortune on his damned Quarry<sup>30</sup> smiling, / Shew'd like a Rebells Whore" (II. 14-15). Macdonwald's paramour, the strumpet Fortune, ultimately betrays her lover. A few lines later we are told that Macbeth "(Like Valours Minion) caru'd out his passage" (I. 19). The usual gloss of *Minion* here is "favorite," and this is certainly a frequent meaning of the word in Shakespeare. But it often has a sexual implication, mostly with feminine but sometimes with masculine referents: "Mars's hot minion" (of Venus: *Tmp.*, IV.i.198); "You minion, you, are these your customers?" (to Adriana: *Err.*, IV.iv.57); "minion, your dear lies dead" (to Desdemona: *Oth.*, V.i.33); "this your minion, whom I know you love" (to Olivia, of "Cesario": *TN*, V.i.118); "O thou minion of her pleasure!" (to the Friend: Sonnet 126, l. 9). So, too, "Valours Minion" carries sexual overtones: Macbeth disdains meretricious Fortune in his triumphant slaughtering of the rebels, for he is the chosen lover of Valor.

This linking of martial violence and savage bloodshed with sexuality and love is extended in Rosse's later description of Macbeth as "*Bellona's* Bridegroom" (l. 54). In his role as newly wedded mate of the war goddess, Macbeth is said to have subdued the Thane of Cawdor, another traitorous rebel (and so perhaps, like Macdonwald, another paramour of Fortune), "Curbing his lauish spirit" (I.ii.57).

The usual gloss for *lauish* here is "insolent," but at least one other Shakespearean occurrence of the word (*2H4*, IV.iv.64) is in a context that supports the meaning "licentious, lascivious." Since *spirit* is used to mean "semen" in the opening line of Sonnet 129 (see Partridge, s.v.), it is at least possible that Rosse's phrase includes a sexual implication: as one wedded to Bellona, Macbeth outperforms Cawdor and terminates his liaison with Fortune. Lady Macbeth's "High thee hither, / That I may powre my Spirits in thine Eare" (I.v.26-27) employs the same kind of pun: in her mood of masculine aggressiveness she sees herself as impregnating Macbeth's consciousness with her own ruthless ambition for sovereignty.<sup>31</sup>

There is a similar metaphor of fertilizing through the ear in Cleopatra's "Ram thou thy fruitful tidings in mine ears, / That long time have been barren" (*Ant.*, II.v.24-25). A submerged instance of this metaphor may be present in Banquo's "That trusted home, / Might yet enkindle you vnto the Crowne" (I.iii.120-21). In *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London: Methuen, 1957), Professor M. M. Mahood supports Coleridge's interpretation of *enkindle* here: "The modern editors gloss *enkindle* as 'incite,' a figurative use of the sense 'to set on fire'; but Coleridge thought the image was taken from the kindling, or breeding, of rabbits. Coming from Banquo, the words gain strong irony from this connotation, which fits well into the play's pattern of sterility-fertility images" (p. 139, note 2). Further support for this reading may perhaps lie in its extending the metaphoric use of the idea of fructification through what is heard: the Weird Sisters have, in effect, poured *their* spirits into Macbeth's ear.

The exchanges between Macbeth and his wife that lead up to Duncan's murder, tensioned as they are by an eroticism that is sometimes submerged, sometimes overt, but continuously present, culminate in the decisive act of violence, which is envisaged as a kind of rape. In one of the play's moments of charged proleptic irony, the saintly Duncan himself provides a bridge between the opening scenes' association of violence with sexuality and that of the later scenes presenting Macbeth's transformation into a murderer. He says to his welcoming hostess, of Macbeth: "his great Loue (sharpe as his Spurre) hath help him / To his home before vs" (I.vi.23-24). Duncan is praising both Macbeth's loyal service and his marital devotion--his love for him and for Lady Macbeth--but there is a deeper significance in his words. They not only are unconsciously ironical (since we know that Macbeth has another motive for swiftness besides the ones Duncan gives him) but they also serve to develop the thematic link between sexuality and crime. Macbeth's "black and deepe desires" (I.iv.51) include murderous impulses that are "sharpe as his Spurre." The latter phrase is an image of sexual passion, as well as of ambition (as in "I haue no Spurre / To pricke the sides of my intent, but onely / Vaulting Ambition": I.vii.25-27).<sup>32</sup> Macbeth has hastened home under a stimulus that is both keenly erotic and deadly.

When Macbeth balks at the consummation of his criminal desires, his wife seeks to urge it by an appeal in terms of the same violent eroticism:

Was the hope drunke,  
Wherein you drest your self? Hath it slept since?  
And wakes it now to look so greene, and pale,  
At what it did so freely? From this time,  
Such I account thy loue. Art thou affear'd  
To be the same in thine owne Act, and Valour,  
As thou art in desire?  
(I.vii.35-41)

Here Lady Macbeth explicitly parallels sexual action with murderous action. She appeals to Macbeth's sense of his own virility, in sexual terms. The metaphorical complexity of the passage leaves the reference of line 38 ambiguous: *what* is partly the contemplated murder, but partly also an intoxicated act of sexual passion, shamefacedly repented on the "morning after." Dover Wilson quotes the Oxford editors' gloss on *such* (l. 39): "'so great in promise, so poor in performance'" (New Camb. ed., p. 115). Lady Macbeth scornfully equates Macbeth's quailing from regicide with sexual nonperformance. The drunkenness and hangover images connect this speech with the Porter scene, where drunkenness is linked with lechery and with the impotence paradoxically accompanying the impetus one gives to the other. Macbeth's reply to his wife's sneer is "I dare do all that may become a man, / Who dares no<sup>33</sup> more, is none." She retorts:

What Beast was't then  
That made you breake this enterprize to me?  
When you durst do it, then you were a man:  
And to be more then what you were, you would  
Be so much more the man. Nor time, nor place  
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:  
They haue made themselves, and that their fitnessse now  
Do's vnmake you. ...  
(I.vii.47-54)

At one level of meaning Macbeth's claim refers to his injured sense of honor and noble manhood: "*is none* i.e. must be superhuman or devilish, which it suits Lady M. to interpret as subhuman" (Dover Wilson, New Camb. ed., p. 115). But at the same time there is a continuing undersuggestion of sexual potency and the proper natural expression of it. Murder is like an unnatural, or nonhuman, sexual act, as Lady Macbeth's further taunt also implies.<sup>34</sup> Her *do it* (l. 49) includes the notion of coitus, although its primary reference is to

Duncan's murder; *vnmake* (l. 54) likewise plays upon the double meanings "undo, unnerve" and "render sexually impotent."<sup>35</sup> Building on her earlier soliloquy of erotic self-abandonment to the forces of evil, Lady Macbeth's sexual innuendoes invoking virility as a token of manliness now lead her into an appeal to her mate through horrifyingly violent images of a depraved rejection of womanly ties:

I have giuen Sucke, and know  
How tender 'tis to loue the Babe that milkes me,  
I would, while it was smyling in my Face,  
Haue pluckt my Nipple from his Boneless Gummes,  
And dasht the Braines out, had I so sworne  
As you haue done to this.  
(54-59)

Macbeth's resounding acceptance of her challenge is appropriately ironical in its language of natural increase, motherhood, and virility: "Bring forth Men-Children onely: / For thy vndaunted Mettle should compose / Nothing but Males" (ll. 72-74). His infatuation with her sees nothing strange in thus acclaiming such a tainted source of manly offspring.

All these associated themes of sexuality, witchcraft, and violence are brought together in Macbeth's final soliloquy immediately prior to the murder of Duncan. One would not wish to press unduly the air-drawn dagger as a phallic symbol, although, as I hope to show, Macbeth's regicide has overtones of an act of sexual ravishment. He himself (unconsciously, one presumes) speaks of the murder in this light after it has been discovered. Whereas Macduff announces the crime in religious terms--"Most sacrilegious Murther hath broke ope / The Lords anoynted Temple, and stole thence / The Life o'th' Building" (II.iii.72-74)--Macbeth reveals it to Duncan's sons in the language of procreation: "The Spring, the Head, the Fountaine of your Blood / Is stopt, the very Source of it is stopt" (ll. 103-4). He seeks to justify his murder of the king's chamberlains in words that suggest another act of uncontrolled sexual passion: "Th'expedition of my violent Loue / Out-run the pawser, Reason" (ll. 116-17). Most strikingly of all, Macbeth transfers his act of ravishment to the slain innocents in an image much criticized by commentators, ancient and modern: "their Daggers / Vnmannerly breech'd with gore" (ll. 121-22). One may or may not agree with Dover Wilson's adverse criticism in his note on "Vnmannerly breech'd": "indecently clothed. With this oxymoron Macb.'s hyperbole topples to absurdity. Cf. *TN* III.iv.251, 'strip your sword stark naked'" (New Camb. ed., p. 129). At any rate, the indecorous metaphor is exactly right as an involuntary indication of Macbeth's own feeling about his crime: it implicitly likens the daggers to phalluses whose nakedness is clothed, most improperly, with the royal blood. Dover Wilson appositely cites the *Twelfth Night* passage, for it contains an allusive quibble on *sword* meaning "penis."<sup>36</sup>

After the lines on the hallucinatory dagger, Macbeth's soliloquy in II.i continues:

Now o're the one halfe World  
Nature seemes dead, and wicked Dreames abuse  
The Curtain'd sleepe: Witchcraft celebrates  
Pale *Heccats* Offrings: and wither'd Murther,  
Alarum'd by his Centinell, the Wolfe,  
Whose howle's his Watch, thus with his stealthy pace,  
With *Tarquins* rauishing sides,<sup>37</sup> towards his designe  
Moues like a Ghost.  
(49-56)

The death of Nature, a suspension of all natural vital and moral processes (for *Nature* here surely means more than merely the natural world; it includes what Banquo means by *Nature* in his lines at the beginning of the scene--human nature and its natural moral discriminations), is an essential preliminary to the unnatural assaults contemplated by the Weird Sisters, by Lady Macbeth, and now by Macbeth himself. The wicked dreams that "abuse / The Curtain'd sleepe" are due, inter alia, to the visitations of the nightmare, of incubi and succubi (*abuse* can have sexual meaning in Shakespeare: see Partridge, s.v.). Hence the transition in thought to the rites of witchcraft, which also hark back to the earlier Weird Sister scenes and their implications of demonic sexual possession. The word *wither'd* also recalls the Weird Sisters, as described by Banquo (I.iii.40); at the same time, this peculiarly suggestive epithet, coupled with the personification, conjures up a vision of the murderer as an elderly psychopath, a sort of Jack the Ripper. This impression is strengthened by the Tarquin allusion, which clinches the suggestions built up, not only in this soliloquy but also through the earlier structural coupling of sexuality with violence, that murder approximates to rape. Indeed, Shakespeare's presentation of Macbeth's plunge into violent criminality might have for its motto the words of Pericles: "Murther's as near to lust as flame to smoke" (*Per.*, I.i.138).<sup>38</sup> There is at any rate poetic justification for Malcolm's applying the epithet *Luxurious* (i.e., "lustful": IV.iii.58) to Macbeth.

Yet while Shakespeare sees analogies between lust and its most brutal form of gratification, on the one hand, and murder, on the other, his perceptions are characteristically subtle and fresh. Although Macbeth's act of regicide originates in an atmosphere of disordered sexuality, we are not to see him as simply moving from lust to murder in a chain of violent passions (there is a contrast here with Shakespeare's portrayal of Claudius, whose regicide is motivated by adulterous sexual appetite linked with unlawful hunger for the crown). Shakespeare carefully avoids the glib moralizing of his contemporaries, whose diatribes against the evils bred by lust are cited by Dickey. In the world of *Macbeth*, disordered sexuality is a function of a deeper moral disorder. There is no assertion in the play of a

simple connection between lust and crime, as in, for example, Marston's *The Insatiate Countess*, which hammers home the apothegm "Insatiate lust is sire still to murder."<sup>39</sup> Pericles's comment on the kinship of lust and murder belongs to the same uncomplex ethical framework: having observed the incestuous passion of Antiochus, he reflects that "One sin ... another doth provoke" (I.i.137), lust will lead to murder, and his life is in danger unless he flees from Antioch. What we have in Macbeth's criminal career is much less straightforward: a richly suggestive evocation of the complexity of evil, of the close interdependence between seemingly opposed natural impulses. We are shown a world of human action in which the barriers between creation and destruction are less sharply defined than we habitually suppose and the borderland between what is natural and what seems unnatural is shadowy. It is a world where violence is taken for granted, alongside the piety and the respect for hierarchical social forms that are reflected in the graciousness of Duncan's court. In such a milieu of mingled barbarism and civility moral sanctions may well appear fragily based. At the same time, the barely resistible quality of Macbeth's impulse to murder is very powerfully suggested by Shakespeare's metaphorical identification of it with warped sexual passion.<sup>40</sup>

The thematic and structural associations of sexuality, witchcraft, and criminal violence are used chiefly in the shaping of the action up to and shortly after the murder of Duncan. In the Porter scene that immediately follows the murder scene, sexuality is further linked with crime (and in this context its punishment): "Faith, here's an English Taylor come hither, for stealing out of a French Hose: Come in Taylor, here you may rost your Goose" (II.iii.16-18). There are a number of double-entendres here that establish the link: *Taylor* may be a euphemism for "penis"; *stealing* includes the ideas of "urinating" and, possibly, "whoring"; *rost your Goose* has among its meanings "treat your venereal infection."<sup>41</sup>

Some later passages continue the sexuality-witchcraft-crime associations. One of these appears in the first of the Hecate scenes, which are generally held to be spurious. Hecate chides the Weird Sisters for their trafficking with Macbeth without calling her in:

And which is worse, all you haue done  
Hath bene but for a wayward Sonne,  
Spightfull, and wrathfull, who (as others do)  
Loues for his owne ends, not for you.  
(III.v.10-13)

Dover Wilson's note on this passage states: "No relevance to Macb.; but seems to echo jealous speeches by Hecate in I.ii of Middleton's *Witch*" (New Camb. ed., p. 144). The indebtedness of the Hecate scenes in *Macbeth* to *The Witch* is a moot point; the debt may be Middleton's. The apparently meaningless reference to Macbeth as one who "Loues for his owne ends, not for you" perhaps suggests that Macbeth's relationship with the Weird Sisters is not the sort to be expected of a mortal and his succubus; more immediately, that Macbeth does not love the black arts and the Devil who commands them per se, as the *maleficiati* were believed to do, but only as means to his personal goals. If the scene is spurious, its author has at any rate perceived the sexual component in Shakespeare's presentation of both the Weird Sisters and Macbeth.<sup>42</sup>

Several of the ingredients in the Witches' cauldron have connotations of lustfulness, violence, and the unnatural termination of increase--an appropriate complement to Macbeth's wild desire to know "By the worst meanes, the worst" (III.iv.135), "Though the treasure / Of Natures Germaine,<sup>43</sup> tumble altogether, / Euen till destruction sicken" (IV.i.58-60). The cauldron scene begins with references to familiars (incubi, possibly). Included in the materials for the charm are

Liuer of blaspheming Jew,  
Gall of Goate, ...  
(IV.i.26-27, 29-31)

The Weird Sisters further strengthen the mixture: "Coole it with a Baboones blood"; "Powre in Soves blood, that hath eaten / Her nine Farrow" (II. 37, 64-65). The liver was regarded as the seat of sexual passion (this is surely too well known to need documentation); the Jew is perhaps mentioned not only because he was unchristened, like the Turk, Tartar, and birth-strangled babe, and so useful to witches, but also because of the Jews' reputation, in anti-Semitic tradition, for obscene rites with (and the murder of) Christian children. The goat, like the baboon, was believed to be a particularly lustful animal. Turks and Tartars were celebrated exponents of inordinate lustfulness and heartless cruelty. The drab exemplifies degraded sexuality; both she and the sow have killed their young (*Birth-strangled* being taken to mean "strangled at birth") in a gross denial of natural affection. These last are the most sordid of the various instances in the play of what we might call the "destroyed progeny" theme, which so frequently characterizes the world of the Weird Sisters, Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth, and is set against the fertility theme, which likewise occurs repeatedly, as in Banquo's often-quoted speech, "This guest of summer ..." (I.vi.3 ff.).

There is a sense in which "How many children had Lady Macbeth?" is a pertinent question. For an overriding impression, built up by the various associations throughout the play between witchcraft, sexuality, and violence, is that sexuality perverted by malice, human or superhuman, issues in an ultimate, life-denying barrenness. Macbeth has, and can have, no children: Rosse's comment on Duncan's supposed murderers, Malcolm and Donalbain, is a profoundly apt description of the self-consuming sterility that is the fate of the real ones: "Thriftlesse Ambition, that will rauē vp / Thine owne liues meanes" (II.iv.28-29). As if to stifle his own awareness of this truth, Macbeth plunges into an orgy of destruction of all who may take his stolen crown away from him. Not only Banquo but Fleance, too,



must die; Malcolm must be trapped: "Diuellish *Macbeth*, / ... hath sought to win me / Into his power" (IV.iii.117-19); and when Macduff escapes him, Macbeth resolves that "From this moment, / The very firstlings of my heart shall be / The firstlings of my hand"; whereupon he orders the destruction of "His Wife, his Babes, and all vnfortunate Soules / That trace him in his Line" (IV.i.146-48, 152-53).<sup>44</sup> This apparently pointless slaughter has a savage logic about it, from Macbeth's point of view: it cuts off a possible source of future retribution. It is strictly relevant to Macbeth's preoccupation with the menace posed by others' off-spring that the murderer of Macduff's son should address the boy as "you *Egge?* / Yong *fry* of Treachery?" (IV.ii.84-85; italics mine). Yet for all of Macbeth's efforts to make assurance double sure and destruction sicken, his comment upon the Weird Sisters' prophecy proves to be exactly correct: "Vpon my Head they plac'd a fruitlesse Crowne, / And put a barren Scepter in my Gripe" (III.i.61-62). By a consummate paradox it is Macduff, the "*Bloody Childe*" of IV.i, who finally ends Macbeth's vain hopes of succession along with his usurped rule, for "*Macduff* was from his Mothers womb / Vntimely ript" (V.viii.15-16). The man who gained "the Ornament of Life" (I.vii.42) through an act of life-destroying, quasi-sexual violence, loses it at the hands of an antagonist whose entrance into the world was effected through another act of sexually related violence, but in this instance a life-rendering one.

Violence is an integral aspect of nobility in the society with which the play begins and ends. Properly channeled and directed, by cohesive social forces involving service and selfless courage, it preserves order, upholds just rule, and is a power for good. When released by the individual with the headlong force of overmastering sexual passion and at the urging of evil forces from within and without, violence brings destruction, social disintegration, and personal damnation. Sonnet 129, to which I have already alluded, is surely remarkably apt as an evocation of Macbeth's homicidal career, which, like lust,

Is perjur'd, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,  
Savage, extreme, rude, cruel, not to trust;  
Enjoy'd no sooner but despised straight;  
Past reason hunted, and no sooner had,  
Past reason hated, as a swallowed bait,  
On purpose laid to make the taker mad--  
Mad in pursuit, and in possession so;  
Had, having, and in quest to have, extreme;  
A bliss in proof, and prov'd, a very woe;  
Before, a joy propos'd; behind, a dream.  
(3-12)

The one jarring phrase here is "A bliss in proof"--Macbeth has no joy in his crimes, and it is part of his tragedy that he realizes this before, while, and after he commits them. That aside, it is fair to say that *Macbeth* gains a major part of its power through its continued suggestion that "Murther's as near to lust as flame to smoke."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>John B. Harcourt, "'I Pray You, Remember the Porter,'" *SQ* [*Shakespeare Quarterly*], 12 (Autumn 1961), 397. Cf. also Eric Partridge: "*Macbeth* is the 'purest' of the Tragedies, and, except for the Porter Scene, pure by any criterion" (*Shakespeare's Bawdy*, rev. and enl. ed. [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969], p. 46). I realize that these comments refer principally to a felt absence of bawdry, but their implication is that allusions to sexual matters in general are few.

<sup>2</sup>Jan Kott, *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*, trans. Boleslaw Taborski, 2nd ed., rev. (London: Methuen, 1967), pp. 71, 72; Ian Robinson, "The Witches and Macbeth," *The Critical Review*, 11 (1968), 104; D. F. Rauber, "Macbeth, Macbeth, Macbeth," *Criticism*, 11 (Winter 1969-70), 61. Since this article was accepted for publication I have seen Roger L. Cox's *Between Earth and Heaven: Shakespeare, Dostoevsky, and the Meaning of Christian Tragedy* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969). In his chapter on *Macbeth*, Cox draws attention to various hitherto unnoticed sexual meanings in the play. A number of these coincide with my own readings, and I am reassured to find an independent confirmation of them. Cox does not, however, link sexuality in *Macbeth* with witchcraft and violence, as I seek to do; he is, rather, concerned to make biblical connections.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Alfred Spalding, *Elizabethan Demonology* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1880), p. 86 ff.; Walter Clyde Curry, *Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns*, 2nd ed. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1959), p. 60.

<sup>4</sup>"Macbeth' and the Furies," *ShS* [*Shakespeare Survey*], 19 (1966), 57. Cf. also Willard Farnham, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1950), pp. 82 ff.

<sup>5</sup>*Shakespeare and the Outer Mystery* (Lexington: Univ. of Kentucky Press, 1968), pp. 76, 78. (These passages are from a revised version of the author's "Night's Black Agents in *Macbeth*," *RenP* [*Renaissance Papers*], 1956, p. 24.) Cf. also Ch. X, "Supernature and Demonism in Elizabethan Thought," in Wilbur Sanders' *The Dramatist and the Received Idea: Studies in the Plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1968).

<sup>6</sup>*Macbeth* quotations are from the First Folio, as printed in *The First Folio of Shakespeare: The Norton Facsimile*, prepared by Charlton Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968). Long *s* has been modernized. Act, scene, and line numbers are those of the Globe edition. Reference is sometimes made also to the New Cambridge edition of John Dover Wilson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1947), and the New Arden edition of Kenneth Muir, 9th rev. ed. (London: Methuen, 1962). Other Shakespeare citations are to Peter Alexander's edition of the *Complete Works* (London: Collins, 1951).

<sup>7</sup>Quoted from the note on I.iii.9 in the New Variorum *Macbeth*, ed. H. H. Furness (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1873), p. 32. None of the commentators remarks on the significance of chestnuts in this context, though the New Variorum edition quotes Dyce's friend's speculation that *rump-fed* may mean "nut-fed," citing Kilian's Dictionary for *Rompe* meaning "empty nut" (*ibid.*). I have nothing in the way of explanation to offer, but there may well be some special point in the reference to chestnuts.

<sup>8</sup>The F reading is *Ragge*. This makes sense ("worthless person"), but "you Witch, you Hagge" occurs a few lines earlier. Dover Wilson in the New Cambridge edition and H. J. Oliver in the New Arden edition retain the F reading.

<sup>9</sup>As, for instance, in "The poor Transylvanian is dead that lay with the little baggage" (*Per.*, IV.ii.21-22); "The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't / With a more riotous appetite" (*Lr.*, IV.vi.122-23). *Ronyon* is an obscure word. The only *OED* citations of it are the two Shakespearean instances and the form *Runnyon*, from a 1655 imitation of Chaucer, where it means "penis." In Chaucer *ronyon/ronyan* may have ribald connotations: see the note on *Seint Ronyan*, *CT*, VI, 310, and the references there given, in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 728.

<sup>10</sup>*The City of God against the Pagans*, XV.xxiii, Loeb Classical Library, IV (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966), 548.

<sup>11</sup>*St. Thomas Aquinas: Summa Theologiae ...*, IX, ed. Kenelm Foster O.P. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1968), Prima Pars, 1 a., Quastio 51, art. 3, p. 42.

<sup>12</sup>Johannis Nideri, ... *de Visionibus ac revelationibus opus rarissimum ...* recensente Hermanno von der Hardt (Helmstädt, 1692), pp. 616-17.

<sup>13</sup>*Malleus Maleficarum ...*, I (Lyons, 1615), Pars Prima, Quastio vi, 70. Contractions are expanded in this quotation and in all subsequent ones from older writers, with other slight modernizing. Accounts of incubi and succubi, their sexual relations with witches and other humans, their motives in the practice, and their methods of obtaining and using human semen appear in the following representative writers on witchcraft, besides those already mentioned: St. Bonaventura, *Sententiarum*, Liber II, d.viii, Pars Prima, a. 3, q. 1 (quoted by Montague Summers in *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology* [London: Kegan Paul, 1926], n. 34, p. 105); Ulrich Molitor, *Tractatus de Lamiis et Pythonicis* [1489] (Paris, 1561); Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584); Jean Bodin, *De la Demonomanie des Sorciers*, rev. ed. (Anvers, 1593); King James VI, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh, 1597); Henri Boguet, *Discovrs des Sorciers* (Lyons, 1602); Peter Binsfeld, *Tractatus de Confessionibus Maleficorum et Sagarum*, 2nd rev. and aug. ed. (Trèves, 1605); Francesco Maria Guazzo, *Compendium Maleficarum* [1608, 1626], ed. Montague Summers, trans. E. A. Ashwin (London: John Rodker, 1929); Thomas Cooper, *The Mystery of the Witch-Craft* (London, 1617); Martin Del-Rio, *Disquisitionum Magicarum Libri Sex* (Cologne, 1633); Lodovico Maria Sinistrari, *De Daemonalitate et Incubis et Succubis* [c. 1670], ed. and trans. Isidore Lisieux (Paris, 1875: English trans., 1879). See also Russell Hope Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology* (London: Spring Books, 1959), s.v. *Incubus*, *Succubus*.

<sup>14</sup>Sinistrari observes that the Devil has sexual relations not only with witches but also with ordinary men and women: "Prout autem apud diversos Auctores legitur, et pluribus experimentis comprobatur, duplici modo Damon hominibus carnaliter copulatur: uno modo quo Maleficis et Sagis jungitur, alio modo quo aliis hominibus minime maleficis miscetur." (Lisieux, 1879 ed., p. 21). See also Section 25, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>*The Poetical Works of Edmund Spenser*, ed. J. C. Smith and E. de Selincourt (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1912), p. 189. Italics mine.

<sup>16</sup>*De Visionibus ac revelationibus*, pp. 542, 564.

<sup>17</sup>Pp. 567-68. Discussions of ligature also appear in *Malleus*, Molitor, Lambert Daneau (*A Dialogue of Witches ...* [London, 1575]), Scot, James VI, Boguet, Binsfeld, Guazzo, Cooper, and Del-Rio. Guazzo and Del-Rio both list as witches' means of achieving ligature the enforced separation of spouses and the drying up of the husband's semen. The First Witch plans to practice both these evils.

<sup>18</sup>*Discovrs des Sorciers*, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup>Nicolai Remigii, ... *Daemonolatreiae libri tres ...* (Lyons, 1595), Liber 1, Cap. vii, p. 77.

<sup>20</sup>*An Examen of Witches ...*, by Henry Boguet, trans. E. A. Ashwin, ed. Montague Summers ([London: John Rodker,] 1929), note, pp. 311-12.

<sup>21</sup>See further Partridge, *Shakespeare's Bawdy*, p. 95. In *Our Naked Frailties: Sensational Art and Meaning in Macbeth* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1971), which I read after having completed this article, Paul A. Jorgensen points out (without illustration) the bawdy sense of *doe* (p. 120).

<sup>22</sup>Lii.171-76: *The Works of Thomas Middleton*, ed. A. H. Bullen, V (London: Bullen, 1885), 375.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. e.g., *The Honest Whore*, Part 1, IV.i.184-86 (*The Dramatic Works of Thomas Dekker*, ed. Fredson Bowers, II [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1955], 77); *The Honest Man's Fortune*, II.i (*The Works of Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher*, ed. A. Glover and A. R. Waller, X [Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1912], 221); *Wiv.*, IV.ii.169-72.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. also *Ant.*, II.i.22, IV.xii.47, and further Daniel Stempel, "The Transmigration of the Crocodile," *SQ*, 7 (Winter 1956), 67-68. In an interesting article, David Kaula notes various Shakespearean instances of the association of love with witchcraft ("Othello Possessed: Notes on Shakespeare's Use of Magic and Witchcraft," *ShakS* [*Shakespeare Studies*], 2 [1966], 115).

<sup>25</sup>Cf. *Lr.*, III.iv.118-22:

Switchold footed thrice the 'old;  
He met the *nightmare* and her ninefold;

In Middleton's *The Witch* there are references to incubus and succubus activities by Hecate and the witch Stadlin, and Hecate's son Firestone seeks permission "to ramble abroad tonight with the *Nightmare*, for I have a great mind to overlay a fat parson's daughter" (Lii.90-92: ed. cit., V, 371). Italics mine. See also Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*, s.v. *Nightmare*.

<sup>26</sup>Marion Bodwell Smith comments on Lady Macbeth's reversal of sexual roles in *Dualities in Shakespeare* (Toronto: Toronto Univ. Press, 1962), pp. 172 ff. In *The Dramatist and the Received Idea*, Wilbur Sanders analyzes the "Come you Spirits" speech (I.v.41 ff.) in terms of its sexual undertones: Lady Macbeth offers herself to erotic invasion by her demonic lovers; she sees the deed of darkness as an act of sexual fulfillment (p. 268). Dover Wilson had earlier remarked that Lady Macbeth is "invoking the Powers of Hell to take possession of her body, to suck her breasts as demons sucked those of witches" (Introd., New Camb. ed., pp. lvi-lvii).

<sup>27</sup>"His Fiend-Like Queen," *ShS*, 19 (1966), 76.

<sup>28</sup>Daneau, discussing the various means by which "Sorcerers can cast their poysons" (Ch. III), remarks, "I haue seene them, who with onely laying their handes vpon a nurses breastes, haue drawne forth all the milke, and dryed them vp" (*A Dialogue of Witches*, sig. E.iiiij.<sup>v</sup>).

<sup>29</sup>It seems clearly wrong to say, as K. M. Briggs says, that "The alleged sexual perversions of the witches did not lodge in Shakespeare's mind" (*Pale Hecate's Team* [London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962], p. 82).

<sup>30</sup>Hammer's emendation, *quarrel*, is practically certain.

<sup>31</sup>Kaula (*ShakS*, 2 [1966], 118), remarking that Shakespeare "provides several indications that Iago's hatred for Othello is in fact an inverted love and his campaign against him a kind of sadistic sexual assault," cites as one of these, "I'll pour this pestilence into his ear" (II.iii.345). In a note on the latter passage Kaula states: "That Iago's pouring of poison in Othello's ear represents a kind of impregnation is borne out by the symbolic identification of poison with semen, an identification recognized not only by the modern psychoanalyst ... but also by Shakespeare's contemporary, Dr. Jorden." Kaula quotes in this connection from Jorden's *Discourse of the Mother*. In Iago's metaphor we have a blend of the actual poisoning through the ear, perpetrated on King Hamlet by Claudius, and the fertilization images cited in this paper.

<sup>32</sup>*Vaulting* can likewise be a sexual metaphor: cf. e.g., "vaulting variable ramps" (*Cym.*, I.vi.133).

<sup>33</sup>Rowe's emendation, *do*, is necessary here for the antithesis; the assertion as it stands is meaningless.

<sup>34</sup>The Shakespearean association of depraved sexuality with beasts is too common to need much illustration, but cf., e.g., "that incestuous, that adulterate beast" (*Ham.*, I.v.42); "O you beast! / ... Wilt thou be made a man out of my vice?" (*MM*, III.i.137,139); "the beast with two backs" (*Oth.*, I.i.118).

<sup>35</sup>Cf. again the Porter on drink and lechery: "it *makes* him, and it *marres* him" (II.iii.36: italics mine).

<sup>36</sup>Cf. Partridge, p. 196, s.v. *sword*. Lady Macbeth's *Knife* (I.v.53) is likewise phallic, as Wilbur Sanders points out: "... she will do the deed of darkness, in her sexually inverted state, with her 'keene Knife', under the 'Blanket of the darke'; and there is to be no interfering moralistic heaven to bring about *coitus interruptus*--she will have her fulfilment" (p. 268).

<sup>37</sup>Pope's emendation, *strides*, is as certain as these things can be: *sides* is nonsense.

<sup>38</sup>In Appendix D of his New Arden edition, Muir notes various parallels between *Mac.* and *Luc.* and comments: "These parallels may possibly be explained by Shakespeare's belief that 'murder's akin to lust as fire to smoke [*sic*]" (p. 195). On the prevalence of this idea in Renaissance literature see Franklin M. Dickey, *Not Wisely but Too Well: Shakespeare's Love Tragedies* (1957; rpt. San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1966), pp. 40 ff.

<sup>39</sup>IV.ii.78: *John Marston: The Works*, ed. A. H. Bullen (1887; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 1970), III, 209.

<sup>40</sup>My colleague R. P. Laidlaw has suggested that there may be further ramifications of the succubus-incubus-violence association in Duncan's murder and related events. He writes: "Developing from your interpretation of 'dreyne him drie as Hay' (I.iii.18) it seems possible to see significance in Lady Macbeth offering drink to the attendants, turning them into 'spungie Officers' (I.vii.71), since there is a strong emphasis on the draining of Duncan's blood--'who would haue thought the olde man to haue had so much blood in him' (V.i.44-45)--and upon drought imagery after the discovery of the murder--'the Wine of Life is drawne, and the meere Lees / Is left this Vault, to brag of' (II.iii.100-101) and 'The Spring, the Head, the Fountaine of your Blood / Is stopt' (103-4). The link between drinking wine and shedding blood is made explicit in the first of these two latter quotations. If the attendants can be seen as sham succubi (and at the least they share Duncan's bed) as well as sham murderers, Macbeth's act of killing them takes on a double significance, since he is not only severing himself from his guilt but also from the powers which led him on. Your own interpretation of the bloody daggers in phallic terms and a further link with the Witch's speech ('Sleepe shall neyther Night nor Day / Hang vpon his Pent-house Lid': I.iii.19-20), 'Sleep no more: / *Macbeth* does murthure Sleepe' (II.ii.35-36), may suggest that Macbeth himself takes on the dual role."

<sup>41</sup>See further Harcourt, *SQ*, 12 (Autumn 1961), 398-99 and the references there given. *Steal* and *stale* were homophonic in Shakespeare's English (see Helge Kökeritz, *Shakespeare's Pronunciation* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1953], pp. 148, 175, 198); *stale* (v.) meant "urinate" but possibly also "whore": Shakespeare certainly uses the noun *stale* to mean "harlot, trollop" (see Partridge, s.v.). On *tailor* meaning "penis" see also Hilda M. Hulme, *Explorations in Shakespeare's Language* (London: Longmans, 1962), pp. 99 ff.

<sup>42</sup>Cf. Merchant: "... Hecate broods over this play, whatever the status of the 'interpolated scenes'" (*ShS*, 19 [1966], 81).

<sup>43</sup>The Globe editors' emendation, *germens*, and the deletion of the comma are obviously correct (the Q. and the F. texts of *Lr.*, III.ii.8 have *Germaines* and *germaines* respectively).

<sup>44</sup>Miss Mahood comments: "*Firstlings* can mean 'firstborn young' as well as 'the first results of anything, or first-fruits.' Macbeth has no children but acts of violence against the children of others" (*Shakespeare's Wordplay*, p. 135). Paul A. Jorgensen also remarks on the sterility of the relationship between Macbeth and his wife (*Our Naked Frailties*, pp. 153-54).

#### Source Citation (MLA 7<sup>th</sup> Edition)

Biggins, Dennis. "Sexuality, Witchcraft, and Violence in *Macbeth*." *Shakespeare Studies* 8 (1976): 255-277. Rpt. in *Shakespearean Criticism*. Ed. Lynn M. Zott. Vol. 69. Detroit: Gale, 2003. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 15 Oct. 2013.

#### Document URL

<http://go.galegroup.com.jsrvproxy1.sunycc.edu/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CH1420046129&v=2.1&u=sunycc&it=r&p=LitRC&sw=w&asid=1879131def33f6b951ba9f28cf626c08>

**Gale Document Number:** GALE|H1420046129

Keywords: witchcraft, witch-beliefs, religion, female sexuality, female chastity iv. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS First and foremost, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Dr. Laura Tosi, for her kind guidance and invaluable suggestions at all stages of this dissertation.Â Thus, the representations of Hecate and her cohorts in *The Witch*, of Mother Sawyer in *The Witch of Edmonton*, and of the weird sisters in *Macbeth* are analyzed as well as the constructions of female characters in those plays. Consequently, this dissertation considers the role of gender in witch hunts and how witchcraft was represented in the Elizabethan and Jacobean drama in terms of gender.