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“th’ ingredience of our cauldron”:
Dead Animal Matter in Early Modern Witchcraft Narratives

Animal familiars that do the bidding of witches are a staple in early modern witchcraft narratives, yet often overlooked are the dead animals that litter these plays and treatises. Dead animals appear both as the result of accused witches cursing another’s own pets or livestock (interestingly sometimes at the hands of a witch’s animal familiar) as well as in the ingredients that are part of the recipes witches enact on the page and stage. Is there tension between the animal familiars often present in these texts and that dead animal matter?

Renaissance receipt books often detail the “strength” that women needed to possess in breaking down nonhuman animals and other ingredients to be used, a glimpse of the labor of early modern domestic life. However, witchcraft texts most often only list ingredients, not practices, so we must imagine a prior time where the witches would gather and break down ingredients. Yet there remains dead animal matter in abundance, and it points to a different kind of strength that often gets overlooked in discussions of witches.

Drawing on numerous sixteenth and seventeenth-century witchcraft treatises as well as Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Middleton’s *The Witch*, and Dekker, Rowley, and Ford’s *The Witch of Edmonton*, this essay will thus chart three types of dead animals in early modern witchcraft texts: dead animal matter used as ingredients in various cauldrons, dead animals that spark witchcraft accusations, and animals killed by animal familiars. I argue for the agency and vibrancy of nonhuman animals and their disembodied parts in these texts, making a case for how dead animal matter is imbued with its most power when used as an ingredient. This abundance of [dead] creaturely presence underscores the role of witches in wreaking death and destruction upon the nonhuman world.

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“The uttermost that magic can perform’:
Grimoires and the Matter of Conjuring on the Early Modern Stage”

What can early modern grimoires tell us about the representation of ritual and demonic magic on the early modern stage? Marlowe’s *The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus* was the popular catalyst for a series of ensuing plays (such as Barnabe Barnes’ *The Devil’s Charter*) that present, with varying degrees of authenticity, necromantic summoning magic, aping the magic circles and Kabbalistic incantations found in contemporary grimoires and magic books. And yet the significance of such scenes has largely been ignored or downplayed. Andrew Sofer, one of the few scholars to take stage conjuring seriously, has emphasised the efficacy of performative speech in Faustus’s famous conjuration. But in early modern grimoires, conjuring is not just about words: it demands meticulous attention to the work of repetitive and consequential material practices. Raising demons requires the presence of a magic book that must be hand created with consecrated quill pen and ink, by a ritually cleansed body, wearing consecrated robes, with a circle drawn at a certain time of day and with certain astrological formations in alignment, in a hermetically sealed space, and accompanied by various paraphernalia, fumigations, and embodied actions. In other words, the *matter* of conjuring matters. This paper seeks to extend Sofer’s work to suggest that although stage magic presents a necessarily truncated version of actual magical ritual, the physicality of drawing the circle, of gesture, of clothing, and of properties emphasises how crucial embodiment is to the efficacy and, even, theatricality of magic.

Kaitlyn Culliton
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Women’s Wits and Chimney Witchcraft

Using John Lyly’s *The Maid’s Metamorphosis* (1600) and Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (1603) as a starting point, this paper looks at the perceived physical and spiritual threats of malfeasance surrounding early modern chimneys and hearths. Theoretically under the management and purview of women, hearths and chimneys were the centre of commercial and domestic life in the home, and therefore the most vulnerable to disruption. As England underwent several economic, social, and cultural changes, building practices, particularly the construction and renovation of middle-class homes, was impacted. Chimneys became a prevalent feature in English skylines, helpfully reducing indoor smoke, which was frequently associated with witchcraft, but problematically altering the physical structure and associated values of the early modern household. Anxieties about this restructuring of household and the roles of women in particular, can be evidenced in archaeological discoveries of spiritual middens, accumulations of household items to deter witches and evil spirits—ranging from witch bottles to dead cats—hidden in walls surrounding the hearths and thresholds. This paper uses references to chimneys in early modern drama to examine of the relationship between the physical spaces of the home and the stories told about such spaces.

Caitlin Mahaffy
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“Take My Milk for Gall”: Lady Macbeth as Mother-Witch in *Macbeth*.”

Early modern understandings of motherhood seem crucial to definitions of witchcraft. If a woman engages in a kind of perverse motherhood—that is to say that her actions make a mockery of the traditional roles of mother and wife—or, alternatively, rejects motherhood entirely, she is likely to be labeled a witch in early modern literature. The witches in *Macbeth*, who Banquo claims “should be women...” and yet are not because they have beards, seem postmenopausal, positioned firmly outside of motherhood. This essay will briefly discuss the *Macbeth* witches as perverse in their rejection of motherhood, a rejection demonstrated both through their actions and their physical bodies. Then, the essay will turn to a more in-depth analysis of the character of Lady Macbeth, the true perverse mother in the play. Lady Macbeth renders herself witch-like by wishing for a postmenopausal body earlier than her time, expressing a want for the “thick blood” of a nonreproductive body and “gall” in exchange for proper breast milk. Witches were thought to suckle their familiars in an imitation of the mother/child bond, marking the figure of the witch clearly as a kind of perverse mother. Lady Macbeth’s apparent desire for a menopausal body and her longing to possess the gall required to give “suck” improperly suggest that what she most wants when she calls on the spirits to “unsex her” is a witch’s body. Through her clear rejection of motherhood and all of the societal expectations associated with it, she renders herself unnatural and, therefore, a kind of fourth witch.

Kara McCabe
Tufts University

“My spirits know their moments”: Hecate’s Scholarship in Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch*

Until 1778, Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch* existed only in manuscript form. As a result, it is impossible to know when exactly Middleton composed play. *The Witch*’s influence within the canon of Middleton’s plays is often discounted because of this. *The Witch*, however, offers a unique understanding of early modern English womanhood that is absent from other plays of the period. Unlike William Shakespeare’s witches, Middleton’s Hecate engages in sex magic, incest, and flight. She boils babies, calls up sprites, and dispenses herbs of dubious provenance. Hecate has both extensive knowledge and complete agency, traits which portrayals of women onstage during the period often lack. Hecate’s agency is at odds with a woman’s function in early modern society. She openly defies the conventions of marriage, chastity, and godly womanhood. My paper argues that the male imagination is at fault for the transformation of women’s knowledge into *maleficium*. As the only generative power that patriarchal structures possess, the male imagination attempts to unmake women’s epistemologies by reforming legitimate learning into something evil. By reframing the texts of womanhood – grimoires, midwifery manuals, recipe books, and conduct guides – as unique, gendered epistemologies, I show that the heart of *The Witch* is Hecate’s scholarship and not her sins. *The Witch* is more than boiled babies and succubae. It presents a serious engagement with what women know, what they do with that

knowledge, and how communities of women function synchronously in order to protect themselves and each other.

Melissa Pullara
Mount Royal University

A Witch by Words: Exploring the nature of testimony in *The Late Lancashire Witches*

In *Daemonologie* (1599), the future James I of England specifically notes that 'Barnes or wiues, or neuer fo diffamed perfons . . . such witneffes may be fufficient in matters of high treason againft God' (66). The fact that in the context of witchcraft accusations, the limits of acceptable lawful testimony were extended beyond what was typically allowed becomes especially significant for the Pendle trials of 1612, where nine-year old Jennet Device provided a key testimony that resulted in the death of eight people, including her mother (Potts, Image 26). In 1633-34, eleven-year-old Edmund Robinson also testified to observing sorcery in Lancaster county; given the Device precedent, Robinson's testimony became key for convicting the accused, but Robinson later admitted his observations were falsified. Nonetheless, Robinson's recorded account was paramount for identifying, and so creating, the witches of Lancaster, who, without testimony, would never have been translated to and solidified in the historical records. Both the 1612 and 1633-34 trials act as primary source materials for Heywood's and Brome's *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634). But I argue in this paper that the play calls into question the reliability of where testimony comes from, as the first scene sees open criticism of Mr. Seely, who, "In all obedience kneels unto his son; / He with an austere brow commands his father (1.1.92-93). This deference to his child in what should otherwise be adult matters is thought, ironically, to be a result of witchcraft. This, I argue, is part of where play's comedy on a serious topic comes from, as the playwrights use their source material to highlight the somewhat ludicrous cycle of testimony that both labels, and so I argue creates, the witch and, contrarily, supposedly recounts tales of witchcraft. There is an inherent unreliability, then, in the key materials at the centre of these accusations that Heywood and Brome use their play to interrogate.

Katey Roden
Gonzaga University

"'Hated like a sickness': Disease and Disability in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621)

Much has been made of Rowley, Dekker, and Ford's sympathetic portrayal of Elizabeth Sawyer, the witch in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621), a character who deftly showcases how stigma accompanying age, class, and gender facilitate transformation into a witch. However, critical attention has not been paid to Sawyer's non-normative body, described in both the play and its

source text as “crooked and deformed.” This paper amends this critical gap by reading *The Witch of Edmonton* through the frameworks of Feminist Disability Studies to interrogate broader cultural anxiety over the meaning of non-normative bodies and the contemporary belief that bodily health could function as a vector for interpreting the health of individual souls and the body politic. By attending to the embodied position of the witch on the early modern stage, particularly how Sawyer’s physical differences are described via a lexicon of contagion and disease, I advance Sara Ahmed’s claim that bodies marked as other are “stickier” and more likely to attract negative emotions. Examining the “stickiness” of this disabled, impoverished, elderly woman I contend, provides an apt avenue to explore the contagion of fear that drives the social violence in the play and binds, or perhaps sticks, the main and subplot of *The Witch of Edmonton* together.

Mel Viperman-Cohen
University of West Florida

“I have supp’d full with horrors”:
Famishment as Queer Threat in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*

Macbeth is a play concerned with the early modern body. Scenes of feasting and banquets are simultaneously celebrations of political gain and perverse depictions of the dangers of falseness. The human form is full of growth and potential, and it is also vulnerable to myriad ills – physical and spiritual. In his final scenes before he is defeated in battle, Macbeth threatens famine on his enemies and even on his subjects.

Early modern famishment – both of the self and to others – revealed frightening possibility of women creating and controlling spaces outside of patriarchal and state authority. Literature on famishment reveals deliberate attempts to control, and the frustrating inability to define, how women were allowed to manipulate certain bodies, including their own.

Building from Christine Varnado’s queer reading of early modern witches through the lens of materiality and collusive relationships, this project argues that the danger of the weird sisters in William Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* is their threat of physical, emotional, and spiritual famishment to Macbeth and Scotland more broadly. The materiality of the witches reveals the early modern desires for markers of the implicit danger of famishment in legibly feminine bodies and the anxiety at their lack. The matter of witchcraft in *Macbeth* is in fact the matter of famishment.

