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## **Ride me as you would be rid: the horse in Brome and Heywood's 'The Witches of Lancashire'**

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## **"'Ride Me as You Would be Rid': The Horse in Brome and Heywood's *The Witches of Lancashire*" by Gabriel Egan**

Two hundred years before William Harrison Ainsworth invented Dick Turpin's miraculous horse-ride from London to York in his novel *Rockwood*, the King's men at the Globe playhouse dramatized a similar feat performed with supernatural assistance. Richard Brome and Thomas Heywood's *The Witches of Lancashire* (the stage title of a play that was printed in 1634 as *The Late Lancashire Witches*) was based on depositions from a real case of alleged witchcraft, and a recently-discovered eyewitness account shows that its spectacular transformations of humans to animals and back again were a part of its appeal. This was not the first play on the early-modern stage to feature horses, and yet theatre historians remain largely in the dark about just how the actors depicted horses, if indeed they attempted realistic depiction at all. In an inventory of the properties of the Lord Admiral's Men dated 10 March 1598, Philip Henslowe recorded "j great horse with his leages" (Foakes & Rickert 320). W. W. Greg speculated that this was the wooden horse of the Greeks to be used in a play about the siege of Troy, which would explain its being "great" and its legs seemingly being detachable. There is one other record in Henslowe of what might be a property horse: listed among clothing of the Lord Admiral's Men is "j hobihorse" (Foakes & Rickert 318). The same item refers to a hat for Robin Hood, so perhaps this hobby-horse was the kind of lightweight frame covered in material that was worn about the waist of a morris-dancer to represent a horse (OED *hobby-horse* n.); thus it could count as a costume. On the other hand, Henslowe's taxonomy is not especially rigid (the previous item in the list contains musical instruments) and a hobby-horse could also be a stick with a horse's head used as a child's toy. Neither kind of hobby-horse seems adequate to tell the popular Robin Hood story as anything other than comic burlesque.

The apparent avoidance of the direct depiction of horses in the drama is especially marked in Shakespeare's *Richard II*, a play that seems to set the audience up to expect a representation of trial-by-combat on horseback, only to deny them that pleasure. The trial arises from Richard's failure to reconcile Henry Bolingbroke, heir to the duke of Lancaster John of Gaunt, and Thomas Mowbray, Duke of Norfolk, in the play's opening scene. Richard decrees that "swords and lances [will] arbitrate" their accusations against one other (*Richard II* I.i.200). In early-modern combat, it was possible for swords and lances to be wielded by combatants on foot as well as on horseback ("Lance") but the audience expects it will be horseback in this case because in the second scene the Duchess of Gloucester hopes that "Mowbray's sins [sit] so heavy in his bosom | That they may break his foaming courser's back | And throw the rider headlong in the lists" (*Richard II* I.ii.50-52). An audience used to the normal form of trial by combat with lances will expect the depiction of horses, yet there is nothing in I.iii, the trial scene, that suggests the presence of real horses or simulacra.

Theatre productions of the play are thus set the problem of how to indicate that a trial-by-combat is imminent without much visual indication that it is to take place, as the Duchess of Gloucester promises, on horseback. Recent productions have dealt with the problem in various ways. For a production at Shakespeare's Globe in London (*Richard II* 2003) the director elected to suggest that the horses were nearby offstage and made the combatants begin to exit to commence the trial when the Lord

Marshall announced "Stay, the King hath thrown his warder down" (*Richard II* I.iii.118). For a Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) production in Stratford-upon-Avon (*Richard II* 2007-8) the director had Bolingbroke and Mowbray each ascend to a saddle that was suspended by a trapeze from the theatre flies in such a way that when released the actors swung towards one another on parallel paths, rather as they might approach one another in a tilt. At the moment the marshal cancelled the fight the actors had only to raise their lances to fly past one another harmlessly.

Shakespeare seems here to repeatedly raise and deflate expectations. Dialogue says that the trial will be on horseback, but the stage shows no animals, the combatants get close to commencing their trial, but Richard interrupts to frustrate them and indeed the onstage and theatre audiences. A modern production like the RSC's can use technical devices to mitigate such disappointments, but the performances in Shakespeare's time must have seemed oddly flat if, as in Tim Carroll's attempt to recreate the original practices, the horses were only to be imagined off stage. Why leave the horses out? The trial occurs because Richard could find no way to enforce forgiveness between Bolingbroke and Mowbray in the opening scene. Forgiveness is a key theme of the play, with that word recurring again in the mouth of the Duke of York when he counsels the new king Henry IV that to forgive his, York's, son would only incite the forgiven and his accomplices to further treachery (*Richard II* V.iii.81-84). In the event, York's son is forgiven. The word 'forgiveness' occurs for a third and final time in Richard's scene in prison, when surprisingly it is asked of a horse.

In the prison scene, a former groom of Richard's stable describes how, at the recent coronation of Henry IV, the new king rode Richard's favourite horse, who seemed proud of his burden. Hearing this, Richard rails at the animal for not exacting revenge by throwing the rider, thus echoing the Duchess of Gloucester's prayer for Mowbray's horse to throw him off. On reflection, Richard regrets this railing as unfair: horses are bred to be proud of their riders, and so "Forgiveness, horse!" (V.v.90) he says. Musing further on his state--a habit that extended isolation in prison has developed in him--Richard imagines himself as such an animal, mistreated by its rider: "[I am] Spur-galled and tired by jauncing Bolingbroke" (V.v.94). To jaunce can mean to make a horse prance, or indeed to prance like one, so jaunty (that adjective has the same origin) Bolingbroke is here to be imagined riding Richard and making them jaunce together, to the rider's delight and his mount's humiliation. This idea of rider and horse switching places becomes a central conceit in Brome and Heywood's *The Witches of Lancashire*.

I have asserted that horses were not visually depicted on the early-modern stage, except in the unique form of the wooden horse statue in the story of the siege of Troy and perhaps the occasional comic hobby-horse. Others disagree. The new Oxford Collected Works of Thomas Middleton reconstructs the original text of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, attempting to show the play as it existed before Middleton's adaptation created the only version that we know, the one presented in the 1623 Folio of Shakespeare (Middleton 1170-201). For their encounter with the weird sisters (whom Middleton turned into witches), Gary Taylor's stage direction reads "*enter Macbeth and Banquo [on horseback]*" and in a footnote he wondered if it would make more sense for them to approach the stage via the playhouse yard or to enter on horseback through the doors in the tiring house (I.iii.35.1n). Assuming the

use of live animals, there are objections to either directions of entry. No surviving play indicates access to the stage from the yard (Gurr & Ichikawa 64) and the yard itself appears to have been something of a contained space: the contract for the building of the Fortune theatre, explicitly modelled on the Globe, called for the yard to be "fenced w<sup>th</sup> stronge yron pykes" (Foakes & Rickert 308). We know from accounts of the fire of 1613 that the doors giving admittance to the yard at the Globe were not large. In a letter to Ralph Winwood, John Chamberlain reported that the fleeing audience had "but two narrow doors to get out" (Chambers, *The Elizabethan Stage* 420) and hence these probably were unsuitable to admit actors on horseback. Although the stage doors were conceivably large enough for horses and stooping riders to pass through, it is hard to imagine two horses waiting patiently for their cues in the bustle of the tiring house, discharging their parts reliably, and returning to the tiring house at the end of the scene. A further objection was raised long ago: since Macbeth and Banquo are joined by Ross and Angus and all four must depart together in haste at the end of the scene, we would have to suppose that in all four horses appeared together on stage (Lawrence 22); the burdensome logistics would seem to outweigh the dramatic advantage.

What evidence is there that Macbeth and Banquo were seen riding horses? In his eyewitness account of the play in performance at the Globe in 1611, Simon Forman reported that "ther was to be obserued . . . Mackbeth and Bancko, 2 noble men of Scotland, Ridinge thorowe a wod" (Chambers, *William Shakespeare* 337). This is usually dismissed as Forman recalling the story as told in Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles*, where indeed the meeting with the three "nymphs" (as they were before Middleton uglified them) is depicted in a woodcut showing the Scotsmen on horseback. Editing the play for the Oxford Shakespeare, Nicholas Brooke pointed out that Forman used the word 'nymphs' that is not in the play but present in Holinshed, from whom Forman presumably took this word and presumably took the image of Macbeth and Banquo on horseback (Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 234-35). But Taylor had further evidence that horses could appear on the early-modern stage, noticing that they are needed for *The Witches of Lancashire* and for the play *A Larum for London* (Taylor & Lavagnino 388). We will come to *The Witches of Lancashire* in a moment. In explaining his approach to this evidence--derived from Alan C. Dessen and Leslie Thomson's dictionary of stage directions ("Horse")--Taylor mentioned that the horses involved might only be stage properties, not live beasts. But in fact he had been quite misled by Dessen and Thomson's error, for although there is an entrance for the apparently dead D'Alva "*carried vpon a horse couered with blacke*" in *A Larum for London* (1602, B1v) the context makes it plain that this is a misprint. The same direction calls for "*a Drum sounding a dead march*", which gives the clue that D'Alva is carried not on a horse but a hearse, which word (presumably spelt 'herse' and then misread) recurs several times in the ensuing scene, including a prefix for D'Alva to speak from "*in the hearse*" (*A Larum for London* 1602, B2r).

Dessen and Thomson list one further play requiring a horse (real or simulated) on stage. In III.ii of *Thomas of Woodstock* is the stage direction "*Enter a spruce courtier a horsebacke*" and the ensuing dialogue indicates that the animal is walked about the stage (*The First Part of the Reign of King Richard the Second* 173a. This play survives only in manuscript form (British Library Egerton 1994) and its textual situation is complex, especially in its relation to Shakespeare's *Richard II* that, as we

have seen, so pointedly avoids showing horses. Michael Egan's claim that *Thomas of Woodstock* is in fact Part One of Shakespeare's play (Egan) has widely been ignored and a tentative attribution to Samuel Rowley around 1606-10 remains the best interpretation of the evidence (Jackson). W. J. Lawrence thought this play the one indisputable example of a live horse appearing on the early-modern stage, making it "a remarkable exception to the general rule" that they did not (Lawrence 25). For my purpose, it is significant that as he walks the horse Woodstock talks gently and sympathetically to it, remarking "yo<sup>u</sup> haue sweat hard about this hast" and noticing the animal's underfed and overworked condition. By contrast, the rider is "spruce", meaning well-kempt, and yet the horse has "as much witt" as its rider. If this play is a response to Shakespeare's *Richard II*, rather than a source for it as Michael Egan believed, the scene touchingly realizes the sympathies latent in Shakespeare's prison scene between Richard and the groom. Woodstock's affectionate "youle followe any man that will lead yo<sup>u</sup>" echoes Richard's realization that to blame the animal for its inbred servility is to mistake its nature. The horse at least does not mistake appearance for substance. Woodstock is given the task of walking the animal to cool it down after its day's riding because the "spruce courtier" mistook Woodstock's plainness of clothing (he does not dress like a duke), assumed he was a groom of the household, and left the animal with him while he entered the house to find the duke.

The other play that Taylor, following Dessen and Thomson, thought involves the representation of a horse on the stage is Brome and Heywood's *The Witches of Lancashire*. There, a new bride Parnell berates and beats her husband Lawrence for failing in his wedding night duty because of impotence, brought about (it is discovered) by the witchcraft of his former sweetheart Moll. The townspeople mock Parnell's unnatural dominance of her husband by putting on a skimmington. This tradition of public humiliation was first recorded under that name, 'skimmington', in the second edition of Charles Butler's book *The Feminine Monarchy*, being absent from the first (Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie* E3r; Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie, or the Historie of Bees*, I1v). Butler overturned the orthodoxy that had prevailed since Aristotle according to which the head of a bee colony was male, and in a passage concerning the male drones' vassalage to the female honey bees Butler imagined, and forestalled, the possibility of upstart women using this newly-discovered feminine superiority in bees to argue for human female superiority. Only if a wife imitated the honey bees' industry and economy, and her husband the drones' laziness, would she be entitled to abuse "poor *Skimmington*" and even then it ought to be gently done to limit his humiliation. The second recorded use of this word is Brome and Heywood's play itself, and its evidence accords with later accounts showing that the skimmington was a procession in which dummies representing the married couple were led about the town on a horse or donkey to be noisily mocked by their neighbours.

Because the stage direction in the first printing of the play is heavily abbreviated (Brome & Heywood *The Late Lancashire Witches*, H4v), it is quoted here from a modern edition (Brome & Heywood *The Witches of Lancashire*):

*Enter [a] drum[mer] beating before a skimmington and his wife on a horse [followed by] diverse country rustics. As they pass, PARNELL pulls [the] skimmington off the horse and LAWRENCE [likewise the] skimmington's wife, [and] they beat them. [The]*

*drum[mer] beats [an] alarm [and the] horse comes away. The hoydens at first oppose the gentlemen, who draw [their swords, at which] the clowns veil bonnet. [They all] make a ring [while] PARNELL and [the] skim[mington] fight. (The Witches of Lancashire IV.iii.173)*

As can be seen from this direction, the word 'skimmington' applies specifically to the dummy representing the husband although it could easily be transferred to the ritual as a whole, as indeed the OED records happening. Since in this case the married couple on the horse are clearly dummies, there is no reason to suppose that a real horse was used to transport them: a dummy horse would much better evoke the derision of the ceremony. However, at first glance Taylor seems to be right in suggesting that a horse has to be represented on the stage. On reflection, however, the situation is somewhat more convoluted. What needs to be represented is a kind of inset show, a public performance of humiliation enacted within the wider drama of Brome and Heywood's play. That is, the audience at the Globe need not take the dummy horse for a real horse in the world of the play but rather the dummy horse on the stage might just as well represent a dummy horse used in the ritual. This makes *The Witches of Lancashire* unsuitable as evidence for what the audience at the Globe saw nearly thirty years earlier when Macbeth and Banquo were to be imagined riding through a wood in Scotland. However the Shakespeare play was staged, any horses the audience imagined the Scotsmen riding were real ones.

The skimmington mocks the newlyweds Lawrence and Parnell for their inversion of social norms of family behaviour: instead of being subordinate the wife is domineering and violent. By attacking the skimmington and beating the dummy representing her husband, Parnell cannot help reinforcing the ritual's powerful derision, since in this attack she performs upon a representation of her husband the violence that the ritual mocks. Indeed, if this editor has expanded the stage direction correctly her attack somewhat brings the community together in collective enjoyment of her aggression's pointlessness: "[*They all*] make a ring [*while*] PARNELL and [*the*] skim[mington] fight". The skimmington forms a concise visual correlate of the ultimately harmless chaos that the witches create in this small Lancashire town. Essentially, they have inverted all norms of social hierarchy, so that the town's children dominate their parents, wives dominate husbands, and servants their masters and mistresses. Although there can be no certainty in the matter, it seems likely that the parts of the play that dramatize these inversions of hierarchy are primarily Brome's contribution to the collaboration, since the following year, 1635, the King's men at the Globe performed his sole-authored play *The Antipodes* that is entirely taken up with this theme. In *The Antipodes* the inversion occurs not by witchcraft but by travel: life on the other side of the world is imagined to be an inversion of all norms that prevail in London, so that thieves chase constables of the watch, aristocrats dress in rags and their servants wear finery, and so on in extended comic topsy-turvydom. The seeds of this inversion are clearly present in *The Witches of Lancashire*, and in particular in its depiction of the relationship between horses and human beings.

The action of *The Witches of Lancashire* takes place in the households of two squires, Master Generous and Master Seely. Generous's groom Robert knows two of the play's witches personally: one is his sweetheart Moll and the other his master's wife Mistress Generous. Robert is given the task of fetching wine from Lancaster for

his master, and Moll offers to instead ride with him all the way to London and back in a night to fetch the superior wine offered at the Mitre in Fleet Street. (The play's several references to the quality of wine at the Mitre are surely amongst the earliest examples of what we now call 'product placement' in a publicly performed narrative, and presumably Brome and Heywood were rewarded for them.) After the ride to London, Robert complains to the audience:

[*Robert*]

I was nettled last night: three hundred miles a night upon a raw-boned devil (as, in my heart, it was a devil), and then a wench that shared more o' my back than the said devil did o' my bum.

This is rank riding, my masters.

(*The Witches of Lancashire* III.ii.74-78)

The innuendo (sex as riding) is clear, as is the pain of over-exertion at both. Robert has more such pain to come. Fearful of his wife's movements, Master Generous instructs Robert to deny Mistress Generous their grey gelding when next she comes to his stables. Doing so, Robert is made to stand in for the animal he tends:

*Mrs Generous* Oh, is it so? And must he be made acquainted with my actions by you, and must I then be controlled by him, and now by you? You are a saucy groom!

*Robert* You may say your pleasure. (*He turns from her*)

*Mrs Generous* No, sir, I'll do my pleasure. (*She bridles him*)

*Robert* Aw!

*Mrs Generous*

'Horse, horse, see thou be,  
And where I point thee carry me.'

*Exeunt, [he] neighing*

(*The Witches of Lancashire* III.ii.96-104)

This is not the first of the play's transformation by witches of somebody or something into a mount, but it is the first to be shown on stage. In an earlier scene, the witch Gillian Dickinson kidnaps a small boy and then bridles her familiar, a demon-child, who exits and is described by the boy, peering offstage, as having been turned into "a white horse, ready saddled and bridled" (II.v.52).

The central scene of the play (IV.i) is a witches' feast held in a barn and supplied with food magically stolen from the marriage of Lawrence and Parnell. The witches compare their mounts:

*Meg* What beast was by thee hither rid?

*Mawd* A badger nab.

*Meg* And I bestrid

A porcupine that never prick'd.

*Moll* The dull sides of a bear I kick'd.

I know how you rid, Lady Nan.

*Mrs Generous*

Ha, ha, ha! Upon the knave my man.  
(*The Witches of Lancashire* IV.i.77-83)

Underneath the raw comedy of these transformations is a subtle sympathy for the animals thus subjected, and Robert's pain at being so used is keenly described. Yet his pain is also deserved, since as a groom he prepares other animals to be thus treated. Unthinking cruelty to animals initiated the earlier kidnap of the boy: he first enters beating a pair of greyhounds for their reluctance to chase a hare, only to have the greyhounds turn into the witch Gillian Dickinson and her familiar, the demon-child; their kidnap of the boy is their revenge for this mistreatment.

Such cycles of animal abuse recur in the play, and the transformations of biological form are the means by which an audience is made to sympathize with the animals' case. We can trace the initiating impulse for these cycles in the first appearance of the witches, in II.i, where they are planning a countryside activity that until just a few years ago was a routine, familiar, and healthy outdoor pursuit witnessed across the British landscape as young and old, aristocrat and commoner, town-dweller and country-dweller came together for a socially-cohesive and traditional purpose, until a government ban brought the long-standing practice to an end. I refer, of course, to the tradition of hunt sabotaging:

*Meg* Then list ye well: the hunters are  
This day by vow to kill a hare,  
Or else the sport they will foreswear  
And hang their dogs up.  
*Mawd* Stay, but where  
Must the long-threaten'd hare be found?  
*Gillian* They'll search in yonder meadow ground.  
*Meg* There will I be, and like a wily wat [hare],  
Until they put me up, I'll squat.  
*Gillian* I and my Puckling will a brace  
Of greyhounds be, fit for the race,  
And linger where we may be ta'en  
Up for the course in the by-lane.  
Then will we lead their dogs a-course,  
And every man and every horse,  
Until they break their necks, and say--  
*All* 'The devil on Dun is rid this way!  
Ha, ha, ha, ha!  
(*The Witches of Lancashire* II.i.48-64)

Before leaping to the presentist conclusion that the witches are prototype animal rights activists, we should recall that to get to their feast one rode "a badger", another "a porcupine", another "a bear" (kicking his sides), and the last rode her groom Robert (IV.i.77-83). Yet as we have seen, riding in this context carries a sexual charge and having brought Gillian Dickinson to the witches' feast, Robert laments that either sex or horse-riding pursued over-vigorously is exhausting and unpleasant: "how damnably did I ride last night [with Moll], and how devilishly have I been rid now" (IV.i.15-17). Richard Levin pointed out that in the drama of this period there is a recurrent theme of high-class women being sexually attracted to the

grooms of their stables, thinking them more virile and specifically stronger-backed than men of their own class (Levin "The Lady and Her Horsekeeper and Shakespeare"; Levin "More Ladies and Their Horsekeepers in Shakespeare"). *The Witches of Lancashire* is squarely within that well-documented tradition, although it takes the sniggering somewhat further by treating the matter literally and having Robert complain that it is too much work: "They say there be light women, but for your own part, though you be merry, yet I may be sorry for your heaviness" (IV.i.5-7).

Robert gets his revenge at the witches' feast. The kidnapped boy makes a break to escape, is pursued as far as the stage door, and in chasing him the witch Meg Johnson spies approaching horsemen and the feast has to be hurriedly broken up. As the witches mount their familiars, Mistress Generous prepares to leave:

*Mrs Generous [To Robert]*

Come, sirrah, stoop your head like a tame jade.

Whilst I put on your bridle.

*Robert* I pray, Mistress, ride me as you would be rid.

*Mrs Generous* That's at full speed.

*Robert [aside]* Nay, then, I'll try conclusions.

*[He snatches the bridle and puts it on her]*

'Mare, mare, see thou be,

And where I point thee carry me.'

*A great noise within at their parting. Exeunt.*

*The Witches of Lancashire* IV.i.142-7)

The Golden Rule that Robert asks her to observe, "ride me as you would be rid", is applied violently by his reversal of mount and rider. As with so many comic resolutions in drama, the villain is hoist on her own petard and justice thereby done. Obvious parallels are Barabas falling into his pot in Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* and Petruccio being *The Tamer Tamed* in Middleton's sequel to Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. And yet *The Witches of Lancashire* does not quite show official justice being done upon the witches.

Although Gillian Dickinson is individually punished for riding on Robert and Robert is punished for his subjugation of horses in his job as groom, the coven itself is, at the end of the play, handed over to the authorities but not yet punished. Their eventual end in hanging, after a proper trial, is anticipated by the townspeople:

*Moll* Well, rogue, I may live to ride in a coach before I come to the gallows yet.

*Robert [To Mistress Generous]* And mistress, the horse that stays for you rides better with a halter than your jingling bridle.

*(The Witches of Lancashire* V.v.241-5)

Robert is referring to the technology of execution, the gibbet and halter, as a kind of mechanical horse and bridle that will bring the condemned on a final journey. This was a familiar conceit and had been used at the close of the dramatic life of Sir Thomas More by Shakespeare and others for the same company, the Chamberlain's/King's men's. Led to his scaffold, More reflects "I am now on a far voyage, and this strange wooden horse must bear me thither" (*Sir Thomas More*

xvii.62-3). At the ends of these plays, then, the horse is reduced to a mere instrument of human agency, albeit with a hint of the divine. But in the midst of *The Witches of Lancashire*, the witches' transformations of humans into beasts and back again, initiated to disrupt a hunt out of mere malice, become the means by which the miserable plight of animals, especially horses, is exposed to audience sympathy.

These transformations form the central part of an eyewitness account of the play in its first performances. On 16 August 1634 Nathaniel Tomkyns wrote a business letter to his acquaintance Sir Robert Phelips, and to lighten the tone at the end Tomkyns turned to some "merriment" that he thought might interest Phelips. In London, he wrote, "hath been lately a new comedy at the Globe called *The Witches of Lancashire*, acted by reason of the great concourse of people three days together". The success of the play Tomkyns attributed to its spectacular staging effects, being

the transforming of men and women into the shapes of several creatures and especially of horses by putting an enchanted bridle into their mouths, their posting to and from places far distant in an incredible short time, the cutting off a witch (= gentlewoman's) hand in the form of a cat by a soldier turned miller, known to her husband by a ring thereon (the only tragical part of the story), the representing of wrong and putative fathers in the shape of mean persons to gentlemen by way of derision, the tying of a knot at a marriage (after the French manner) to cease masculine ability, and the conveying away of the good cheer and bringing in a mock feast of bones and stones instead thereof and the filling of pies with living birds and young cats etcetera. (Brome & Heywood, *The Witches of Lancashire* 163)

This spectacle must form part of the explanation for the play's extraordinary popularity, shown by its being played on three successive days whereas the theatre's repertory system would normally present a new play each day. The most celebrated continuous run of this kind was the enormously popular and controversial *A Game at Chess* by Middleton, shown for nine consecutive days before being suppressed (Middleton 1776).

Unlike most drama of the period, and much like Middleton's hit, *The Witches of Lancashire* was about contemporary, indeed ongoing, events: the apprehension, conviction, and summoning to London for sentencing of four women from Pendle Forest in Lancashire found guilty of witchcraft at the Lancaster assizes. While the Lancashire women languished in jail in London in the summer of 1634 the seasoned dramatists Heywood and Brome planned a play based on the case. Somehow they obtained transcripts of the witnesses' and defendants' depositions which were intended only for privy council use, and they drew upon these for journalistic details. When their play was nearly ready, the King's men successfully petitioned the lord chamberlain to prevent other companies performing witch plays, so preserving their 'scoop', and on 11, 12, or 13 August (we cannot be sure which), *The Witches of Lancashire* opened at the Globe (Berry 1984). For all its sympathy for animals, the play is markedly unsympathetic to the real (alleged) witches who at the time of the play's highly successful first run--it was revived two years later (Sotheby's 115)--were under threat of execution although the case against them was known to be flawed. The historical record of the accused women fades into obscurity. Although their accuser confessed to inventing his story, no pardon is recorded and the women were

still in jail when they disappear from our view in 1637. Tomkyns's end is better recorded: on 5 July 1643 he was hanged for counter-parliamentary treason. That is, he died (appropriately enough, in the light of this play) for being a Cavalier.

<sup>1</sup>All quotations of Shakespeare are from Shakespeare 2005.

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