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# 'Can you play that?': Moll's Urban Witchcraft in The Roaring Girl

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Article abstract

This essay explores the migration of witchcraft language from the rural environs in which we typically find it to the urban space of London in Dekker and Middleton's *The Roaring Girl*. The play's characters repeatedly turn to the language of witchcraft to describe Moll's disruptive presence in the play, a rhetorical strategy that I argue seeks to fix Moll in place in response to her unruly movement within the social, spatial, and acoustic horizons of the city, and to ostracize her from London by reimagining her as a figure that only makes sense in the rural environs beyond its walls.

Andrew Loeb

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## **‘Can you play that?’: Moll’s Urban Witchcraft in *The Roaring Girl***

*This essay explores the migration of witchcraft language from the rural environs in which we typically find it to the urban space of London in Dekker and Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl*. The play’s characters repeatedly turn to the language of witchcraft to describe Moll’s disruptive presence in the play, a rhetorical strategy that I argue seeks to fix Moll in place in response to her unruly movement within the social, spatial, and acoustic horizons of the city, and to ostracize her from London by reimagining her as a figure that only makes sense in the rural environs beyond its walls.*

Sir Alexander Wengrave, the grumpy senex figure in Dekker and Middleton’s *The Roaring Girl*, is not having a great day. Like any good father in a seventeenth-century city comedy, he just wants his son to settle down with a nice girl — as long as it’s not that woefully under-dowried Mary Fitzallard. But, having forbidden that match prior to the action of the play, he now finds himself faced with a worst-case scenario: Sebastian, the son in question, has in the interim apparently transferred his affections to an even more unsuitable partner: Moll Cutpurse, the cross-dressing, swaggering, sword-wielding ‘roaring girl’ of the play’s title. Sebastian of course is faking it, carrying out a clever ruse, as he tells it, to ‘force my father to consent / That here [with Fitzallard] I anchor, rather than be rent / Upon a rock so dangerous’ (1.112–14).<sup>1</sup> But Sir Alex doesn’t know that, and at the peak of his anxieties over what marriage to Moll will mean for his son’s and his own reputation, he asks a curious set of questions:

Who has bewitched thee, son? What devil or drug  
Hath wrought upon the weakness of thy blood  
And betrayed all her hopes to ruinous folly?  
Oh wake from drowsy and enchanted shame,

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Wherein thy soul sits with a golden dream  
Flattered and poisoned! (4.127–33).

Sir Alexander, in this moment, makes Moll into a witch. Sebastian's affections for Moll can only be explained, it seems, by way of enchantment.

At the same time, Sir Alexander's use of witchcraft as an explanatory framework for his son's transgressive desires has an oddly dislocating effect. The language of witchcraft feels strange and unfamiliar in a play so thoroughly concerned with the complex social world emerging in the rapidly expanding London of the early seventeenth century. While witches existed in early modern London — at least according to those who levelled accusations against them<sup>2</sup> — they do not often find representation on the stage. The witch of the early modern English theatre is a rustic figure in a rural locale: Shakespeare's weird sisters occupy a blasted heath; Marston's Erichtho, 'whose dismal brow / Contemns all roofs or civil coverture', resides in a remote 'desert';<sup>3</sup> Jonson's unruly antimasque witches convene variously from 'lakes', 'fens', 'rocks', 'dens', 'woods', and 'caves', to conjure their dame;<sup>4</sup> Middleton's Hecate and her coven live in the wilds beyond the walls of Ravenna; Dekker, Rowley and Ford's Mother Sawyer subsists on the margins of rural Edmonton; Heywood and Brome's coven lives in distant Lancashire.<sup>5</sup> If Moll is a witch, what is she doing in the city?

This essay explores the migration of the language of witchcraft from the rural environs in which we typically find it to the urban space of London in *The Roaring Girl*, expanding our understanding of the spatio-conceptual geography of the early modern English witch. Sir Alexander's repeated associations between Moll and witchcraft (which other characters echo and extend), I argue, seek to fix Moll in place in response to her unruly movement within the social, spatial, and acoustic horizons of the city, and ostracize her from London by reimagining her as a figure that only makes sense in the rural environs beyond its walls. Moll, very much a product of the particularly modern social world of a rapidly urbanizing London, cannot be easily marginalized through more familiar forms of gender, sexual, or moral discrimination, and so must be rendered a figure that belongs 'out there' beyond the city's walls. I conclude, however, by entertaining the idea that, in one sense, we might usefully understand Moll to be a witch in order to recognize how deftly she redefines and reconfigures Sir Alexander's slander against her reputation, re-situating herself as inextricably in and of the city.

Sir Alexander is far from the only character in the play to connect Moll with witchcraft and related forms of transgressive supernatural power. Sebastian first

uses that language in a private conference with Mary Fitzallard, where he says of his father,

He believes  
I dote upon this roaring girl, and grieves  
As it becomes a father for a son  
That could be so bewitched. (1.106–9)

Later, in response to a kind of intervention that Sir Alexander has organized to leverage the disapproval of Sebastian's peers to persuade him to give up his courtship of Moll, Sebastian instead doubles-down and proclaims,

I am deaf to you all.  
I'm so bewitched, so bound to my desires,  
Tears, prayers, threats, nothing can quench out those fires  
That burn within me. (2.176–9)

Sebastian, of course, does not actually think of Moll as a witch: in both instances, we can safely hear Sebastian's use of the term 'bewitched' as a sarcastic indictment of his father's pearl-clutching hyperbole, and indeed the latter comment may even be what suggests the framework to his father in the first place.

In a later episode, Sir Alexander interacts with Moll more directly, and the confrontation appears to confirm his suspicions. In scene 8, he encounters Moll disguised as a male music tutor — a hastily-concocted ruse to explain why she has been found in the company of Sebastian in his father's private chamber. Sir Alexander, however, has been spying on the group, is aware of the ruse, and knows Moll's real identity. In an effort not to give away his upper hand, he adopts a clever rhetorical maneuver. He asks her, 'There's a thing called "The Witch". Can you play that?' (8.204–5), and when Moll confirms that she can indeed play the song called 'The Witch'<sup>6</sup> quite well, Sir Alexander reveals his conceit in an aside: 'Ay, I believe thee. Thou hast so bewitched my son, / No care will mend the work that thou hast done' (207–8). Here, as earlier, his imagery produces Moll as an unruly disrupter of Sebastian's rational masculine autonomy — an enchantress capable of subduing men's wills.

Other evocations of Moll as supernatural figure are more oblique. Sir Alexander evokes her transgressive gender performance and behaviour and compares her to the mythic sirens whose seductive voices could overthrow the wills of men, calling her 'a mermaid / That has tolled my son to shipwreck' (2.222–3).<sup>7</sup> Following a shameful defeat at Moll's hand in a duel, Laxton attributes her uncanny skill to supernatural influence: 'Heart, I think I fight with a familiar, or the ghost

of a fencer' (5.125–6). Elsewhere, the qualities attributed to Moll echo popular perceptions of the witch's body. As Amanda Eubanks Winkler notes, the witch's body

is unbounded (possessing masculine and feminine qualities, moving in unexpected, unregulated ways) ... and emphasizes the lower bodily stratum (her overt sexuality). The onstage body of the witch subverted symmetry and harmony of form. The movements of her grotesque body were jerky and malformed, completely bereft of feminine grace.<sup>8</sup>

Like these more conventional stage witches, Moll's embodied gender performance is transgressive, unbounded, and indeterminate (at least to her less sympathetic observers). Other characters describe her as 'A creature ... nature hath brought forth / To mock the sex of woman', 'a thing one knows not how to name', 'woman more than man, / Man more than woman', 'two shadows to one shape', (2.129–34), 'both man and woman', (3.217), and 'a monster with two trinkets' (4.83), language that perhaps calls to mind Banquo's famous uncertainty about the bodies of the witches that appear in *Macbeth*: 'You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so'.<sup>9</sup>

Moll, like other stage witches, is also spatially and physically unruly. As Kelly J. Stage notes, 'Moll and her mobility bring together London's disparate parts — streets full of rogues, shops full of citizens, fields full of gentle gallants. She also holds the play's disparate plotlines together'.<sup>10</sup> Observing her movements through a street market, Goshawk remarks 'Tis the maddest, fantastical'st girl! I never knew so much flesh and so much nimbleness put together' (3.211–12), and Laxton agrees, noting, 'She slips from one company to another like a fat eel between a Dutchman's fingers' (213–14). Sir Alexander calls her 'A devil rampant!' (11.162), and the play's Prologue, Sebastian, Jack Dapper, Trapdoor, and Sir Alexander all variously refer to her as 'Mad Moll',<sup>11</sup> one of many epithets that Moll suggests may be prompted by her 'mad going' (10.360). That extravagant mobility also appears to be contagious, perhaps subtly authorizing some of Sir Alexander's fear. As he explains his plot to Mary Fitzallard, Sebastian adopts a number of unruly spatial metaphors for the intrigue. He assures her, 'Though wildly in a labyrinth I go, / My end is to meet thee' (1.98–9) and describes the subterfuge involved both as sailing 'with a side wind' (99–100) and as the 'crooked way' on which he must go (110).

Stage argues that Moll's extraordinary spatial versatility and urban competence are fundamental to her challenge to and subversion of normative social

practices: '[Moll's] unclassifiable persona makes her uniquely capable of moving between social structures and social spaces instead of being limited by them ... Her tactics work against the power of urban space, including the patriarchal rules and gender expectations that go with it'.<sup>12</sup> Moll notably occupies a somewhat unfixed position as a character in the play itself — Moll Cutpurse is based on the real Mary Frith that audiences would likely have known by reputation if not by encounter, and the epilogue specifically collapses theatrical and real worlds at the play's end, announcing that 'The Roaring Girl, some few days hence, / Shall on this stage give larger recompense' (Epilogue 35–6). And indeed, the *Consistory of London Correction Book* records a court appearance by Mary Frith on charges of appearing at the Fortune theatre about the time the play was likely performed, cross-dressed, playing a song, and making (purportedly) lascivious comments.<sup>13</sup> The play thus shares a blurred line between real and fictional worlds with semi-journalistic witchcraft plays like *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Late Lancashire Witches*, both of which concern actual women accused of performing witchcraft and, in the latter case, witches that were still awaiting judgment as the play was performed.<sup>14</sup> Moll's violation of the spatial norms of early modern London and of the theatrical fiction of *The Roaring Girl* itself facilitates an extraordinary freedom and versatility, but also obliquely connects her, in the early modern imagination, to the unruly figure of the witch.

These examples of the language, ideologies, and theatrical techniques pertaining to, and associated with, witchcraft in the play can help us to see where Sir Alexander is coming from in his recourse to those resources as he struggles to understand his son's inexplicable desire for Moll. But I want to stress that the language he deploys also has an explicitly ideological valence. Sir Alex does not simply *describe* Moll as a witch; he makes her into one. And the fact that the witch is not an especially familiar figure in the urban landscape of early modern London is, I think, a crucial part of his rhetorical strategy. Conventional witchcraft drama frequently figures social dynamics as spatial dynamics. Ben Jonson, in the *Masque of Queens* (1609), draws on a range of learned authorities to emphasize the grotesque and unruly movements of his antimasquers, describing the 'strange Gestures' (30) and 'preposterous change, and gesticulation' (328) of the witches 'who at their meetings *do all things contrary to the custom of men*. Dancing back to back, and hip to hip, their hands joined, and making their circles backward, to the left hand, with strange phantastick motions of their heads, and bodies' (329–32, emphasis mine). The appearance of the titular queens then banishes the witches from the stage: 'not only the hags themselves but the hell into which they ran quite vanished, and the whole face of the scene altered, scarce suffering the

memory of such a thing' (335–7). Jonson's allegorical assertion of conventional order and virtue, embodied in the queens and signifying royal (also patriarchal, urban) power, manifests through spatial reorganization. The unruly space of the witches is not just emptied but erased. The masque obliterates all physical signs and, evidently, even the memory of the witches' wild rustic sabbat to reinscribe the space as a site that performs royal magnificence.

Dekker, Rowley, and Ford's *Witch of Edmonton* mobilizes a similar, albeit somewhat more subtle, spatial logic. The play identifies Mother Sawyer, the witch in question, as at once originating from and a part of the village, and a threat that must be pushed out in order to secure Edmonton as a cohesive community. In both the title and the play's dialogue, she is 'The old witch *of* Edmonton' (2.1.86, emphasis mine)<sup>15</sup> and one of the play's morris dancers remarks that 'witches themselves are so common nowadays ... They say we have three or four *in* Edmonton besides Mother Sawyer' (3.1.12–14, emphasis mine). But Old Banks, who encounters her on the edge of his land, cries '*Out, out* upon thee, witch!' (2.1.17, emphasis mine again) at first sight of her, and the morris dancers, headed by Old Banks's son Cuddy, propose including a mock witch figure *in* their dance so that she can be ritualistically danced *out* of the community circle.<sup>16</sup> I highlight the prepositions in these examples (just a few of many) to demonstrate how the play's representational and rhetorical strategies for ostracizing the witch rely on movement between distinct spaces: like Jonson's antimasquers, the witch in and of Edmonton is the unruly other discovered within, the unruly other that must be pushed out.

The problem Moll presents to someone like Sir Alexander is that while she's clearly transgressive, she's transgressive in ways that the material conditions of the city facilitate — hers is a subject position only available in, and indeed made possible by, early modern London, owing to its status as a modern cosmopolitan cultural centre. While they may be immoral or inappropriate according to normative social practices, Moll's individual behaviours and transgressions (both actual and merely suspected) are fundamental — if frowned-upon — aspects of urban life. If she's an unchaste whore, as several characters including Sir Alexander suspect her (wrongly) of being, she is not exactly out of place in London. As Sir Alexander himself notes of Moll's name, 'Forseek all London from one end t'other / More whores of that name, than any of ten other' (4.1.161–2).<sup>17</sup> If she is a thief (11.1) — though again, she's not — she is certainly in good company among rogues like Tearcat, Trapdoor, and the play's other cutpurses. If she is a cross-dresser — and, okay, we can give her that one — London's burgeoning fashion market and the trends that drive it facilitate her sartorial transgressions. Indeed,

the *Hic Mulier* pamphlet identifies the mixing of differently-gendered clothing pieces as an explicitly urban phenomenon:

Call but to account the Taylors that are contained within the Circumference of the Walles of the City, and let but their Hells and their hard reckonings be iustly summed together, and it will bee found they haue raised more new foundations of this new disguise, and metamorphosed more modest old garments, to this new manner of short base and French doublet (onely for the vse of Freemen's wiues and their children) in one moneth, then hath beene worne in Court, Suburbs, or Countrey, since the vnfortunate beginning of the first diuelish inuention.<sup>18</sup>

In other words, even Moll's most visibly transgressive behaviour, her cross-dressing, marks her as a part of a uniquely urban space and culture, not an outsider from it. Sir Alexander can call her whore, thief, and hermaphrodite, but he cannot other her from the city. The language of witchcraft, however, offers him a ready-at-hand strategy by which he can contain those transgressions under a single rubric. The witch is ambiguously-gendered, sexually transgressive, immoral, unruly, uncontained. And, most importantly, the witch belongs 'out there'. If Moll is a witch, she no longer coheres as a sign of the city, and Sir Alexander can recover that city as a space for himself, one that continues to privilege normative gender, class, and geographic boundaries.

If this strategy is Sir Alexander's game, it aligns with a further set of representational strategies associated with witchcraft plays that produce sophisticated, aristocratic urbanity in contradistinction to the spectacle of the unruly rustic witch. Frances Dolan, for example, argues that comic representations of rural witches viewed by a sophisticated London theatre audience 'facilitated the skepticism by which elite culture distinguished itself from popular belief in witches ... The urban audience can laugh, in part, because the social conflicts addressed through belief in and accusations against witches were not really their problems'.<sup>19</sup> And, in Diane Purkiss's influential argument, even in those plays that treat witchcraft more seriously, 'witchcraft is staged as a theatrical spectacle of otherness which exists to subtend the maintenance of hierarchy and order',<sup>20</sup> transforming their witches into figures of simultaneous fascination and revulsion subject to the controlling gaze of a comparatively elite audience in order to disarm their supposed threat and subject them to patriarchal power. Indeed, one of the chief anxieties Sir Alexander expresses about his son's attraction to Moll is that she is a spectacle, 'Whom all the world stick their worst eyes upon' (11.2), and that his son's



reputation will be affected by the moralizing gaze she draws. By framing Moll as a witch, however, Sir Alexander mobilizes the spectacle of her difference against her.

Recall that in the scene where Sir Alexander confronts Moll when she's disguised as Sebastian's music tutor, he asks her if she can *play* 'The Witch', a double-entendre that is both musical (a point to which I return below) and metatheatrical. If Moll plays the role of the stage witch, she becomes a figure theatrically produced as the other against which normative hierarchies can be shored up and reified. By marking her with the language of witchcraft, Sir Alexander subjects Moll to an apparatus of specular control in which she is identified as unruly but also made into a figure of spectacle that performs for us — a sophisticated theatregoing audience invested in a sense of its own superior adherence to order, discipline, and virtue.<sup>21</sup> He pushes Moll out of the city and renders her antithetical to it: the unruly rustic outsider whose difference throws the city and its community into relief as normative, secure, righteous. His rhetoric leverages the distinction between urban and rural space, implying that he belongs to one and Moll to the other.

Moll, however, is not so easily contained, and I want to conclude by examining one way in which Moll deftly reappropriates and reconfigures Sir Alexander's witchcraft framework in order to assert herself as integral to London's urban space. As I noted above, Moll's assurance that she can play 'The Witch' resonates with both the musical and theatrical meanings of 'play' (the probable popular ballad by that name and, perhaps, the stage character). I want to suggest that in this moment she recognizes Sir Alexander's rhetorical/representational strategy and begins to use it against him both to appropriate and deconstruct the urbane sophistication he thinks he himself represents. Moll never does play the song called 'The Witch' for us, but she does play three other songs that charm and enchant her audiences (both onstage and off) musically, if not explicitly magically. Hearing these — and particularly the final canting song, on which I focus here — in conjunction with the play's language of witchcraft, I argue, places Moll among a small but significant pantheon of musical witches on the English stage. But unlike the other members of this ad hoc coven — the weird sisters of *Macbeth*, the antimasquers of *Queens*, Hecate and her sisters in *The Witch*, the women of Lancashire — Moll's music figures her not as a harmless rustic spectacle but rather as an integral part of the urban soundscape.<sup>22</sup>

Moll's songs are a kind of magic, especially when heard in relation to the play's wider deployment of the language of bewitchment, and the canting song makes this especially clear. As Dekker's own sensationalized account of the London

underworld, *Lanthorne and Candle-Light* (1608), points out, canting has its etymological and conceptual roots in song:

This word *canting* séemes to bee deriued from the latine *verbe* (*canto*) which signifies in English, to sing, or to make a sound with words, thats to say to speake. And very aptly may *canting* take his deriuatiō *a cantando*, from singing, because amongst these beggerly consorts that can play vpon no better instruments, the language of *canting* is a k[in]de of musicke, and he that in such assemblies can *c[a]nt* best, is counted the best Musitian.<sup>23</sup>

Music and magic share a similar etymological connection, which we find embedded in words like ‘incantation’ and ‘enchant’ (from *cantare*, to sing) and ‘charm’ (from *carmen*, song).<sup>24</sup> Moll’s canting song is not actually magical, but it is deeply connected to magic at the same time that it is intimately rooted in the material and social conditions of the city.

That song is part of a larger exchange in scene 10 in which Moll engages in a thieves’ cant dialogue with Tearcat and Trapdoor while Jack Dapper and several of his aristocratic companions watch and listen. As they speak, Moll periodically translates key terms for her audience, forging a degree of familiarity between high- and low-class characters only possible in an urban space that necessitates close proximity between disparate social groups.<sup>25</sup> The exchange culminates in the call-and-response canting, sung with Tearcat, and one listener suggests that the song is sonically unruly, at least in this initial iteration.<sup>26</sup> Jack Dapper’s comment, ‘the grating of ten new cart-wheels and the gruntling of five hundred hogs coming from Romford market cannot make a worse noise than this canting language does in my ears’ (10.236–9), seems to continue Sir Alexander’s project of othering Moll from the city: this critique identifies cant and Moll as its singer/speaker with the grating noises of carts and animals infiltrating the city from the rural Romford market, just as the rustic witch’s unruly music invades the space of the London theatre as a spectacle of strangeness. But a later exchange between Moll and Lord Noland suggests that Moll’s canting song may have a very different kind of quasi-magical purpose. When Lord Noland asks how she came to know thieves’ cant and the ‘nasty villains’ who speak it (10.323), Moll poses a rhetorical question in response:

MOLL Suppose, my lord, you were in Venice.

LORD NOLAND Well.

MOLL If some Italian pander there would tell  
All the close tricks of courtesans, would not you  
Hearken to such a fellow?

LORD NOLAND Yes.

MOLL And here,  
Being come from Venice, to a friend most dear  
That were to travel thither, you would proclaim  
Your knowledge in those villanies to save  
Your friend from their quick danger. (10.346–53)

The song, in other words, acts as a kind of protective charm. Moll's in-cantation, based in knowledge acquired through her uniquely urban social and spatial mobility, offers Lord Noland and the other gentlemen unfamiliar with the London underworld a degree of protection that will facilitate their own free movement within and through the city. She expands their auditory and spatial horizons and brings them into what Bruce R. Smith would call her acoustic community, 'maintained not only by what its members *say* in common but what they *hear* in common',<sup>27</sup> enabling them to safely and securely navigate London's less familiar, less savoury spaces.

Moll Cutpurse is not a witch. But for the aristocratic characters in *The Roaring Girl* and the urbane London theatregoers attending performances of it at The Fortune, Moll is socially, spatially, and acoustically unruly. The language of witchcraft, both overt and oblique, that pervades the play registers this unruliness and functions as a strategy to mark, contain, fix, and other that unruliness. By making Moll into a witch, Sir Alexander and others seek to make her untenable as a feature of urban London. But Moll Cutpurse is London itself, mastering its social, spatial, and acoustic horizons and asserting herself as intrinsic to it. Moll, no stranger to clever subversion, reappropriates and reconfigures Sir Alexander's language on the fly and plays the witch, inviting him (and indeed us) to ask, 'must you have / A black ill name because ill things you know?' (10.353–4). In response to efforts to push her out, Moll's enchanting canting invites others to feel safe at home in what was always her city to begin with.

## Notes

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- 1 Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, ed. Coppélia Kahn, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford, 2007), 721–78, <http://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199580538.book.1>. All subsequent parenthetical citations refer to this edition, which follows the source text's use of scene numbers only.
- 2 James Sharpe identifies only a handful of witchcraft cases concerning residents of early modern London including a 1480 accusation against John Stokes for curing fevers by magic, a 1574 allegation that a witch had fed blood to her familiars, a 1599 case involving a bewitched child, a 1602 case involving the possession of a shopkeeper's daughter, and the 1701 case of Sarah Moordike, who was tried in Guildford, acquitted, and chased by a mob across the Thames and into London. See James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England, 1550–1750* (London, 1996), 25, 72, 161, 191, 227–9. Laura Gowing, in her analysis of the language of insult and slander in late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth century court records, notes that the term witch, 'always a very rare accusation in London', was the only term among those she tracks that decreased in the court records between 1574 and 1640. See Laura Gowing, *Domestic Dangers: Women, Words, and Sex in Early Modern London* (Oxford, 1998), 64–5, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198207634.001.0001>. See also Owen Davies, 'Urbanization and the Decline of Witchcraft: An Examination of London', *Journal of Social History* 30.3 (1997), 597–617, <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsh/30.3.597>.
- 3 John Marston, *The Wonder of Women, or the Tragedy of Sophonisba*, in *Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays*, ed. Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge (Manchester, 1986), 33–84, 4.1.97–9.
- 4 Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Queens* in *Ben Jonson: The Complete Masques*, ed. Stephen Orgel (New Haven, 1969), 122–41, lines 45–9. Subsequent references cite line numbers in this edition parenthetically.
- 5 The exception to this pattern is Thomas Heywood's *The Wise Woman of Hogsdon* (London, 1638; STC: 13370) which, though situated in the suburbs outside the city proper, concerns itself with a far more urban environment than the other examples in this list. The wise woman in question, however, is something of a charlatan, more like Jonson's Subtle than Middleton's Hecate.
- 6 As several modern editors of the play have pointed out in their respective editorial notes, this line probably references a now-lost contemporary ballad. See Middleton and Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, ed. Kahn, 760; David Bevington, ed., *The Roaring Girl*, in *Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology* (New York, 2002), 1424; Jennifer

- Panek, ed., *The Roaring Girl: A Norton Critical Edition* (New York, 2011), 72; and Kelly J. Stage, ed., *The Roaring Girl* (Ontario, 2019), 110.
- 7 Linda Austern suggests a connection between the seductive powers of prostitutes, witches, and sirens in “Art to enchant”: Musical Magic and its Practitioners in English Renaissance Drama’, *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 115.2 (1990), 203–5, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jrma/115.2.191>.
  - 8 Amanda Eubanks Winkler, *O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note: Music for Witches, the Melancholic, and the Mad on the Seventeenth-Century English Stage* (Bloomington, IN, 2007), 20, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt2005sqk>.
  - 9 William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. Sandra Clark and Pamela Mason (New York, 2015), 1.3.45–7.
  - 10 Kelly J. Stage, *Producing Early Modern London: Comedies of Urban Space, 1598–1616* (Lincoln, NE, 2018), 141, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1ws7vsr>.
  - 11 See Middleton and Dekker, *The Roaring Girl*, Prologue 30, 1.102, 2.206, 4.203, 5.152, 7.13, 10.36, 11.208.
  - 12 Stage, *Producing Early Modern London*, 141.
  - 13 A transcription of the entire entry appears in P.A. Mulholland, ‘The Date of the Roaring Girl’, *The Review of English Studies* 28.109 (1977), 30–1, <https://doi.org/10.1093/res/xxviii.109.18>.
  - 14 A thorough account of the relationship between trial and play can be found in Herbert Berry, ‘The Globe Bewitched and *El Hombre Fiel*’, *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 1 (1984), 211–30.
  - 15 Thomas Dekker, William Rowley, and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Shelby Richardson (Ontario, 2022). Subsequent parenthetical references are to this edition.
  - 16 On the fascinating social dynamics of the morris dance scene, see David Nicol, ‘Interrogating the Devil: Social and Demonic Pressure in *The Witch of Edmonton*’, *Comparative Drama* 38.4 (2005), 439, <https://doi.org/10.1353/cdr.2004.0047>; Roberta Barker, “An honest dog yet”: Performing *The Witch of Edmonton*, *Early Theatre* 12.2 (2009), 170, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.12.2.821>; Andrew Loeb, “My poor fiddle is bewitched”: Music, Magic and The Theatre in *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Late Lancashire Witches*, in *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage*, eds. Helen Ostovich and Lisa Hopkins (Ashgate, 2014), 220–1, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315593197>.
  - 17 Gowing convincingly shows that slanders involving the term whore often carried an in-group/out-group valence that frequently took on a spatial dimension: ‘Defamations regularly began “Goe you whore” or “away you whore”, and defamers referred particularly to the localities notorious for prostitution and bawdy houses,

Clerkenwell and Turnmill Street ... In insults like these women assumed a particular responsibility for local honesty, claiming the right to define and enforce the moral character of their neighbourhood'. Laura Gowing, 'Language, Power, and the Law', *Women, Crime, and the Courts in Early Modern England*, eds. Jennifer Kermode and Garthine Walker (Chapel Hill, 1994), 29, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203993675-7>. Sir Alexander's mobilization of the language of witchcraft appears to seek to go beyond simply relegating her to the less savoury neighbourhoods of London and rather focuses on alienating her from the city altogether.

- 18 *Hic Mulier* (London, 1620; STC: 13374), C1r–v.
- 19 Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England, 1500–1700* (Ithaca, 1994), 223, <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501707285>.
- 20 Diane Purkiss, *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London, 1996), 200.
- 21 The most salient example of this is Jonson's *Masque of Queens*, which Purkiss discusses at length in *The Witch in History*, 202–6. See also Martin Butler, *The Stuart Court Masque and Political Culture* (Cambridge, 2008).
- 22 Eubanks Winkler, in her important study of the musical conventions for representing witches on the stage, notes that 'composers and playwrights consistently marked witches as disorderly by rendering them incapable of producing harmony, portraying them as rustic bumpkins bereft of graceful movement or music, or conflating sexual, political, and spiritual transgression' and argues that this was part of a larger strategy of sonically reinforcing their distance and difference from a sophisticated London audience — a strategy very like Sir Alexander's. See Winkler, *O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note*, 24–5, 28.
- 23 Thomas Dekker, *Lanthorne and Candle-light* (London, 1608; STC: 6485), B4v.
- 24 See Eubanks Winkler, *O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note*, 23, and Northrop Frye, 'Charms and Riddles', in *Spiritus Mundi: Essays on Literature, Myth, and Society* (Bloomington, IN, 1983), 123. Gary Tomlinson argues more generally that 'there can be no clear and precise boundary ... between music conceived of as a magical and as a non-magical force' since 'all musical effect in the early-modern era was at the very least susceptible to magical interpretation' in *Music and Renaissance Magic: Toward a Historiography of Others* (Chicago, 1993), xiii–xiv. I have explored the relationship between music and magic in two previous studies of musical witches, "My poor fiddle is bewitched": Music, Magic, and the Theatre in *The Witch of Edmonton* and *The Late Lancashire Witches*, in *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern English Stage*, ed. Helen Ostovich and Lisa Hopkins (Farnham, 2014), 215–32, and 'Music, Community, and Middleton's Anti-Masque in *The Witch*', *Early Theatre* 23.2 (2020), 31–58, <https://doi.org/10.12745/et.23.2.3987>.

- 25 On the complexities of canting as a form of ‘cross-talk’ (like cross-dressing) that demonstrates Moll’s mobility across class lines and between social groups, see Jodi Mikalachki, ‘Gender, Cant, and Cross-Talking in *The Roaring Girl*’, *Renaissance Drama* 25 (1994), 119–43, <https://doi.org/10.1086/rd.25.41917308>.
- 26 While no definite musical settings for the songs Moll performs in the play have been pinpointed, Ross Duffin has argued that playing companies in the period likely set original lyrics for their plays to existing ballad and song tunes. Duffin proposes, albeit speculatively, that the canting song may have been sung to the tune of ‘The Black Almain’, based on its metre and line structure. See Ross Duffin, *Some Other Note: The Lost Songs of English Renaissance Comedy* (Oxford, 2018), xxiv, 333–6. If he’s right about this, the song is sung to a tune that may have been familiar to a London audience as the tune also used for two ballads on the dangers of rumour and slander, ‘Against Rebellious and False Rumors’ ([EBBA 37055](#)) and ‘Fames Concerning a Warning to All London Dames’ ([EBBA 32413](#)), the implications of which are sort of delightful in the context of this particular play. Regardless of the specific setting, even if as Jack Dapper implies the words that Moll sings are jarring and unruly, the music she sings those words to was likely a familiar tune, blurring the line between what is familiar and what is unfamiliar in the witchiest possible way.
- 27 Bruce R. Smith, *The Acoustic World of Early Modern London: Attending to the O-Factor* (Chicago, 1999), 46.