EMERALD INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNEXIONS

WOMEN AND THE ABUSE OF POWER

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

EDITED BY

Helen Gavin

Women and the Abuse of Power

Emerald Interdisciplinary Connexions

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Emerald Interdisciplinary Connexions promotes innovative research and encourages exemplary interdisciplinary practice, thinking and living. Books in the series focus on developing dialogues between disciplines and among disciplines, professions, practices and vocations in which the interaction of chapters and authors is of paramount importance. They bring cognate topics and ideas into orbit with each other whilst simultaneously alerting readers to new questions, issues and problems. The series encourages interdisciplinary interaction and knowledge sharing and, to this end, promotes imaginative collaborative projects which foster inclusive pathways to global understandings.

Women and the Abuse of Power: Interdisciplinary Perspectives

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Preface

I have been thinking about evil women and their power for a long time. Most children, unless unlucky enough to have a truly unfortunate upbringing, encounter evil women for the first time in fairy tales. This is where women with power lurk, in the underlying malevolence of the usurped queen wreaking havoc in a kingdom or the wicked stepmother intent on destroying a child for no reason other than she is loved or beautiful, or both. Even as a child I never fell under the spell (sic) of fairy tales, the behaviour of the characters always seemed odd to the prosaic, practical little soul that I was. Five-year-olds can believe in magic; they can even believe in monsters. What did seem farfetched is the passive, docile characters onto whom this magical monstrousness was directed. Feminist despair of the damsel in distress motif is well-documented. For example, Leiberman (1972) points to representation of women and girls in fairy tales providing a limited sex role concept in terms of attaining power. The 'heroine' only sets out on an adventure because of the manipulations of those around her. Turkel (2002) goes further and says that the necessary happy ending of the fairy tales, particularly in those told to children from the nineteenth century onwards, reinforces traditional gender stereotypes, as the heroine is simply a passive recipient of the whim of other characters. It is, however, in one of the other tropes that we may find something more stirring of interest and worthy of inspection – the evil woman whose machinations almost lead to the downfall of Snow White, Cinderella, or Sleeping Beauty, or any other lacklustre ingénue (Porter, 2013). An evil woman is one who steps outside the required and expected behaviour of the elder female role. Motherly and protective she is not, but what is she instead? The stories gathered by Perrault or the Grimm brothers give us almost no motivation for the evil women they feature. It is in later retellings of the stories that we encounter underlying reasons why our ladies are evil. As I watched the newer versions of the stories unfold, depicted by Hollywood giants such as Charlize Theron, Meryl Streep, or Angelina Jolie, I began to understand why these women had been ignored in stories for children in a world where acceptable female behaviour was confined to the home. The evil woman here has, without doubt, power, and she enjoys it. The original folk tales from which they are drawn are not sanitized and are representative of a traditional gendered world but contain the full horror of pre-industrialized life where distrust of strangers was a form of community security and violent crimes were daily occurrences. Here then, the fantastical

represents real people, and the evil woman was a genuine character, the one who held the power, usually ill begotten, which she gleefully abused.

I have been fortunate to have encountered women who held power without abusing it. Aside from key relationships with men, such as my kind father and my wonderful husband (and, of course, the dreadful men I will not give space to here), I have been encouraged by women. The primary school teachers who showed women can be relied on to foster a love of learning, and the secondary school music teacher who found, inside a shy, awkward nerd, a confident musician. Then, later, female managers who picked us up after we encountered browbeating male bosses. To these women I will be eternally grateful. But this book is not about them. It is about the women whose lives intersect with power that they either exploit or of which they fall foul. It is about the conversations that we had about them.

Progressive Connexions, directed by Dr Rob Fisher, is a network of interdisciplinary projects in which scholars can pursue ideas without needing to submit to business models that may stifle creativity. This network is more nurturing of ideas and associations than might normally encountered in a modern academia that needs to fulfil demands beyond the scholarly. Meeting experts outside one's own discipline sometimes sparks a different direction in theory and research or collaborations across themes that might not otherwise happen. The chapters in this book were developed from papers presented and conversations held at *Evil Women*: *Women and Evil*, *the first global conference* held in Vienna, December 2018, hosted by Progressive Connexions. Recognizing an emergent theme of women, power, and its abuse, several conference presentations have been extended and consolidated in the light of the research undertaken, and the discussions then and later. Here, psychologists and criminologists talking with literary specialists, professional writers, and historians all learned something about each other's viewpoint. These considerations were not judgemental but placed women who were seen as evil due to some behaviour, whether that was criminal, magical, or supernatural, in the heart of our discussion. Here, we realized that many of 'our' evil women were in the grip of power, either their own or others, which was wielded with the intent to abuse it. This transcended any disciplinary focus each of us had, and a selection of papers were developed to appear here. An interdisciplinary focus incorporates political and social commentary with the historic and fictional accounts of female behaviour and its analysis with respect to power and its abuse. This book happened because we were all thinking about evil and women and sharing how we viewed this set of symbols. In addition, an observation of themes related to the abuse of power and women's relation to it grew from this. This resulting book provides a contextual view on how power and women who wield it or are affected by it are topics that transcend examination from one set of theories and evidence alone. Each section is followed by a commentary exploring how the set of chapters relates to a specific theme, how that theme is exported from different disciplines and viewpoints and to the overall theme of the book. Sections explore a set of concepts related to how women seize

and abuse power and how power in the hands of other people inflicts abuse on women. Key issues raised by the papers are discussed in the conclusion to each section with a pointer towards further exploration and research. The final concluding commentary will bring these issues together into a focussed examination of women and power and abuse. Through the eyes of interdisciplinary scholars, the fate of women who abuse or are abused by power is therefore explored in depth.

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Author Biographies

Kristin L. Bone is a *USA Today* bestselling author of dark fantasy and paranormal romance. Her works include the *Black Rose Guard* dark fantasy series and the *Flames of Kalleen* paranormal romance series. Kristin has a master's degree in modern literary cultures and is working towards her PhD in creative writing. She wrote her first short story at the age of 15 and grew up with an equally great love of both classical literature and speculative fiction. She has spent the last few years as a bit of a world traveller, living in California, London, and most recently, Belfast. When not immersed in words of her own creation or those she is studying, you'll find her travelling to mythical sites that have inspired storytellers for generations.

Laura Button is a community worker in Melbourne, Australia, and has just completed a Master of Human Rights Law at the University of Melbourne. Laura works alongside women who have been criminalized, have experienced violence, and with women who have enacted harm against others.

Miranda Corcoran is a Lecturer in twenty-first-century literature at University College Cork. Her research interests include Cold-War literature, genre fiction, popular fiction, sci-fi, horror and the gothic. She has published articles on paranoia, literature, and Cold-War popular culture and contributed a book chapter on transnational paranoia to the recently published book *Atlantic Crossings: Archaeology, Literature, and Spatial Culture*. She has also published articles on horror and science fiction in *The New Ray Bradbury Review* and *Supernatural Studies*. She is a host on the *New Books in Literary Studies* podcast and a regular contributor to the popular online magazine *Diabolique*.

Helen Gavin (Editor) teaches criminal psychology and advanced research methods at undergraduate and postgraduate level at the University of Huddersfield, UK, where she holds the post of Principal Lecturer and Subject Lead. She researches and writes on topics such as deviant sexual expression, female violence, homicide, and sexualized and gendered homicide. Previous books include *Understanding Research Methods and Statistics in Psychology* (2008, Sage), *Criminological and Forensic Psychology* (2014, 2019, 2022, Sage), and the Interdisciplinary Press 2010 text *Sex, Drugs and Rock & Roll*: *Psychological, Legal and Cultural Examinations of Sex and Sexuality* which was co-edited with Jaquelyn Bent. In order to find relief from such bleak themes, she indulges a fascination with fairy, folk, and supernatural tales. However, she has inevitably discovered this world has its dark side, and people often regret looking over her shoulder to see what she is reading.

Gina Gwenffrewi is a trans scholar from a Welsh-speaking community in Holywell, Wales. As a doctoral researcher in Trans Studies at the University of Edinburgh, she studies representations of trans women in the Americas through the prism of neoliberal society, with a focus on some of the literary and cinematic texts that are excluded from the mainstream. Gina is also passionate about trans theatre and blogs on trans-centred and trans-produced shows at the annual Edinburgh Festival.

Cynthia Jones is a Visiting Assistant Professor at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah. Her main research interests lie in the representation of the monstrous in literature and media, especially within nineteenth century France and Quebec. She is also interested in Folklore, Fairy tales, and Legends and the role they play in creating personal, cultural, and national identities. Other research interests include the representation of evil women in nineteenth century French Literature, French Decadent Literature, and the Occult.

Morag Claire Kennedy is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology who leads the MA Criminology course at Nottingham Trent University. She researches and writes on topics such as intimate partner abuse/homicide, digital coercive control, and feminism. She likes to relax and unwind to new shows on Netflix and is a huge foodie.

Almudena Nido works at Isabel I University (Spain), teaching in the Department of Modern Languages and Social Sciences. After completing her PhD thesis at University of Oviedo, she has published articles about the Anglo-Saxon epic poem *Beowulf* and the interactions of power and resistance. Her current research interest lies in investigating the depictions and interpretations of the female monster in *Beowulf*.

Theresa Porter is a Forensic Psychologist working for the State of Connecticut, USA. She specializes in violence by women. She has published and lectured on Foetal Abduction, Infanticide, Child Neglect and Abuse, Child Homicide by Stepmothers, Elder Abuse, Hyper-Femininity, and Sexual Abuse by Women. She has collaborated with Helen Gavin on several publications; for example, their article on infanticide was selected for inclusion in the fourth edition of *Current Perspectives in Forensic Psychology*, and they co-authored the book *Female Aggression* (2015, Sage). They are currently writing articles on Serial Infanticide, whilst Theresa continues her day job of providing psychological treatment to individuals with severe and persisting mental illness.

Introduction

Helen Gavin

> What I fear most is power with impunity. I fear abuse of power, and the power to abuse.
>
> –Isabel Allende (2007)[1]

Power and control are the tools of abusive interactions; such power that may lead to abuse can be expressed in many different ways. Political or economic, interpersonal, and emotional means of control can all become oppressive and abusive as the balance in power becomes uneven, to the detriment of the abused. Belliotti (2016) suggests that the concept of power itself is not negative, it is what is done to attain and retain power that is almost inescapably harmful, as those who have this commodity benefit and others do not. The abused is both stripped of power, and so often is, or is represented as being, female, and therefore, in the eyes of the world, stripped of agency. Those without agency are vulnerable, living at the whim of others, potentially subject to abuse. Women and femininity are traditionally related to the role of passive, compliant recipients of thought and actions from the world of men, without voices of their own (Beard, 2017). Consequently, women are typically perceived as having a victimhood that is almost an intransigent part of their reality, as if they have no power beyond that attributed to them by sexual characterization, motherhood, or worldly adoration or disgust. Such views are apposite in today's environment, when the far right is making a mockery of hard-won reproductive rights and ownership of women's bodies (Center for Reproductive Rights, 2020), and the outcry about sexual harassment in all industries (Peters & Besley, 2019) serves once more to cast women as the victims, albeit victims who are fighting back (Weldon, 2019). In addition, the position of those who identify as female, or who reject the long-held distinction of masculinity and femininity are increasingly sidelined or even outcast from society's purview. This 'fight' is fuelled by feminist goals of equity and empowerment, autonomy and activism, and is a stance that people who identify as female may take in order to tackle unconscious male privilege and hegemonic masculinity. However, whilst women have been growing in stature in global platforms, there is a tendency to ascribe to them the antithesis of male power, as if women will inherently use power in ways that are beneficial to those around them or who rely on them. There are some who do seem to typify this, such as Jacinda

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Ardern, Katrín Jakobsdottír, and Zahia Benkara, but there are many who do not. There are few explorations of whether female power is as robust and potent as male power, and as open to abusive use. This book attempts a balanced and interdisciplinary view in order to explore another representation of women, that in relation to how they abuse power or how they react to that abuse. Each section is followed by a commentary exploring how the set of chapters relates to a specific theme, how that theme is exported from different disciplines and viewpoints and to the overall theme of the book. Sections explore a set of concepts related to how women seize and abuse power, and how power in the hands of other people inflicts abuse on women. Key issues raised by the papers are discussed in the conclusion to each section with a pointer towards further exploration and research. The final concluding commentary will bring these issues together into a focused examination of women and power and abuse.

This introductory chapter will set out the overarching arguments about women, power, and abuse of power, incorporating viewpoints from social and biological sciences, history, literature and cultural studies, from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Interdisciplinarity

An interdisciplinary focus means incorporating political and social commentary, with historic and fictional accounts, and psychological explanations. For example, examining the forms of sexism in political factions (Austin & Jackson, 2019) alongside reportage of female behaviour with respect to power and its abuse, such as Shakespearean portrayal of women (Rackin, 2016) and verified examinations of female perpetrated atrocities (Gavin & Porter, 2015) means we are not limited to one viewpoint. In addition, an observation of themes related to the abuse of power and women's relation to it provides a contextual view on how power, and women who wield it or are affected by it, are topics that transcend examination from one set of theories and evidence alone.

Theories of Power

One of the most influential theoretical frameworks about power is that written by French and Raven (1959). They suggested five bases of power (Raven adding a sixth in 1965). In this framework, power can be legitimate (a person has the right to expect others to be compliant) reward-based (a person or group can be compensated for their compliance), expert (due to a person's high skill or knowledge), referent (the result of perceived worth), coercive (that a person has the means to punish for noncompliance) and the final power base is informational (a person's ability to control information that others need).

A leader, irrespective of how that position has been attained, has legitimate power; this means that s/he is able to issue commands with the expectation that they are obeyed. Even a dictator expects orders to be complied with, given that other power bases may act in line with it, such as the power to punish. Dictators

should be aware that this is highly unstable, and leaders often have to reinforce their legitimacy. Rather than coercion, reward would be a better form of power base, as people are more likely to want to comply with orders if they will receive something they want as a result.

People can also attain power in unexpected ways; many experts find themselves consulted and respected, and as reputation and confidence rises, become leaders. This seems to be threatening to some; famously Michael Gove, then Lord Chancellor, in the days leading up to the vote on leaving the European Union, said that the people of the United Kingdom had had enough of experts.[2] This was viewed as a statement made from vested interest rather than anything backed by evidence (Dommett & Pearce, 2019), but does demonstrate how those with that kind of power can be viewed negatively. Often, experts hold informational power, since they have access to understanding that others may not and needing to explain this provides enhancement of leadership status. This can even lead to celebrity status, again often unsought. Celebrity status is referent-based power, not because of the expertise or information one holds but the fame that is derived from having it. Other forms of referent-based power come from being respected for worth or value that is perceived, not necessarily earned.

Most recent studies of social influence, and hence power, have been reiterations of the French and Raven model, that power is the potential to control something that another person or group wants. It is highly influential in research since it can be applied in many different ways. Parents hold power in families as children need supervision, protection, and safety. Teachers, medical staff, work supervisors, politicians elected or otherwise, etc., all hold power as we move through life. Turner (2005) agreed that power is a central aspect of human life but suggested that models such as the French and Raven one do not tell us how power is enacted, simply that it is identified in terms of dependence. He suggested that in addition to looking at forms of power we look at how those with power use persuasion, authority, and coercion to gain and retain it. This leads directly to considerations of how power can be abused.

Abuse of Power

Abuse is generally agreed to be mistreatment that causes harm, either directly to the abused, or to something or someone close to them. Power-based abuse can be interpersonal, political, professional, or social in nature. When we consider the abuse of power, we will always turn to the most recent political scandal, wherein an elected official has used their office to promote self-interest over and beyond the acceptable practice of their power. But power is abused in many situations. When a parent neglects or beats their child, they are abusing the power they hold over them due to their dependence. Similarly, in domestic abuse, the abuser is the powerholder, and the abused partner is helpless to prevent it. Hattery and Smith (2016) describes 'family' as a complex set of social structures including some of the members being dependent on the breadwinner, usually male. Such an unequal position is often difficult to maintain, such as when one member gains some

independence from the abuser, and the response to such threats can escalate into an upward spiral of psychological and economic abuse, violence and even fatality (Gavin, 2015, 2019).

Other situations in which power can be abused is where we encounter bullies, either in the school yard or in the office. According to Grenny and Maxfield (2011), up to 95% of people in work in the United States have experienced bullying, and they go on to say this engenders an atmosphere of fear and silence, which can contribute to threats to workplace safety. Organization environments that do nothing about psychological mistreatment, or even encourage it, do not lead to effective working practices. Such toxic environments are termed emotionally vampiric (Bernstein, 2012) consuming the energy of employees (or family members or communities) by manipulative and controlling behaviour.

The psychology of abuse of power centres on the personality of those who carry this out, but sometimes ignores the psychological makeup of those who strive for power in the first place. It is easy to see power abuse played out in full view of the world's media; we have seen a myriad of examples in the rise of people to positions of high power and then their own grandiosity and/or incompetence means that to keep power, they need to abuse it. Narcissistic personality is not conducive to managing high power effectively, as lack of empathy and even self-awareness leads to elevated levels of sense of entitlement and likelihood of exploitative behaviour (Watson et al., 1984). Indeed, this may even be encouraged, as the inevitable outcome of attaining desirable ends, in a sort of unconscious group cost–benefit analysis (Vermeule, 2019). The problem with overlooking 'acceptable' pieces of behaviour of this nature is that the powerholder has their behaviour reinforced and does not have the internal controls to prevent escalating it. Psychodynamic theory (see Cervone & Pervin, 2015) suggests that internal unconscious urges (the id) require behaviour that is essentially selfish, but that we learn to control these via our rational mind (ego), which balances this with the superego's concerns with moral norms. Imbalance in these can lead to socially unacceptable behaviour, such as an id that overpowers the ego resulting in selfish actions. Couple this to a sense of entitlement and inability to empathize with another's point of view, and we have someone who will abuse any power they are given, even that of the most powerful offices and professions on Earth.

Women, Power, and Abuse

The recipient of abuse is often female, especially in family settings, or workplaces where women's input does not appear to be valued, and hence power resides outside of their influence. If women are not in a position to challenge the abuse, or to exercise any agency they may have, it will continue and, with no checks against the abuser, may even escalate. However, it is too easy to persuade ourselves of continued female victimhood, as traditionally women have been denied power. However, they also acquire it in different ways and in various arenas, from the personal to the global (Lepowsky, 2019), the domestic (Tan et al., 2019), and the political (Hughes & Paxton, 2019). Historically, reportage of the involvement of

women in power has been minimized, notwithstanding the notable contribution of warrior queens (e.g., Boudiga, Rani Lakshmibai, Elizabeth I). When women do step into positions of power, their behaviour is spotlighted much more than that of their male counterparts. They carry out the same roles, and the same abuses of that role can be observed in female holders of office. Such female abusers are statistically rare, major examples being female Nazi concentration camp officers or female genocide perpetrators (Smeulers, 2015). Perhaps this scarcity is why they are viewed with what amounts to revulsion and dehumanization, whilst remaining fetishistically sexually desirable (Banwell & Fiddler, 2018).

In addition to the public world, the private, domestic, and interpersonal relationships people form are imbued with a power that, whilst it appears hidden, also represents the wider world's hegemonies. Private issues become public when the worst excesses of imbalance of power spill into violent, even fatal, outcomes. Women kill for the same reasons as many and for other motivations; how they are treated then is driven by a male agenda. There is an assumption all abuses, violent, psychologically harming, or territorial, are always instigated by men, and mainstream media and science often dismiss that perpetrated by women unless it is too shocking to ignore. Even then it is compared to male behaviour as if this was simply a pale imitation of male hostility, and only committed in the domain of domestic violence or substance abuse (Gavin & Porter, 2015). This trivializes women's behaviour, if it is not seen as something women do as their own free agents. Sexual or domestic violence is not the only aggression that women receive or mete out but look at the world's press and thinking that was the case would be forgiven. Historically, there are examples of the gender disparity in the way we view our heroes and villains. William Wallace, better known to the world as *Braveheart* (Icon Productions, 1995), has obtained iconic status as a symbol for independence against the might of an invading English army. Contemporary chroniclers depict him as an outlaw, committing brutal atrocities, but the Scots and the rest of the world, other than the English, see him as a hero. Contrast this with the story of Boudiga. A victim of the occupying Roman army's inhuman treatment, stripped of her land and possessions, her son executed, her daughters raped and brutalized, Boudiga rampaged through what is now East Anglia. Her armies claimed to have destroyed the Ninth Legion, whose disappearance is still not understood. She was defeated by the governor Paulinus in what historians describe as a major tactical mistake. She then took poison in order to avoid what would certainly have been torture and public execution. Unlike Wallace, Boudiga is little known outside England, except as a sycophantic description of the one woman who, ironically, almost destroyed Great Britain in the 1980s. Despite featuring as a symbol for early feminist movements, later depictions have her reduced to a marauding, vicious harpy rising up against friendly democratic patrons (Vandrei, 2018).

Similarly, consider the genesis of the vampire legend. Dracula is clearly a product of the sexual repression of the nineteenth century, describing seduction and sexuality in Gothic terms. He is not truly a depiction of death and gore, but his antecedents are. He has a real man and a real woman hidden in the murky legends of his creation. The man is Vlad Tepes, son of Vlad Dracul, also known as

Vlad the Impaler. Despite the 1970s rise in Death Tourism (Banyain, 2010), Vlad was not in reality a blood sucker, but he did kill in some rather stomach-turning ways. Notwithstanding the impaling and various other delightful forms of death, to modern Romanians he is the saviour of their land against marauding Turkish armies. Contrast this with the rather bad press that Dracula's female ancestor has received. In the sixteenth-century Hungary, young peasant girls were grateful to be offered well paid work in the Castle Czejte, but once they entered the grounds, they were never seen again. A Royal army sent to investigate finds one dead girl and one dying, several wounded, and others locked up, and witnesses testify against the Countess Elizabeth Bathory (Branson-Trent, 2010). Describing atrocities over a twenty-five year period, it sounds like the peasants were simply testifying, at the behest of the King's soldiers, against a woman who was probably medically and legally insane, but who was also an heir to the throne who may have needed to 'disappear'. Her depravities did not include the draining of blood from the young girls, drinking and bathing it, as has been widely described. However, Elizabeth, like Vlad, is inextricably linked to the vampire legend, but the description of their grisly practices is very different, a liberating hero on one hand, a noble lady with an unusual approach to servant discipline on the other.

More recent atrocities have cast a clearer light on the way women behave when power goes to their heads. Blame for this is often laid at the door of a hidden, occult world, in which femaleness, however it is derived, is a danger and, at the same time, to be in charge of a desirable power that attracts those who wish to diminish it. Witches, changelings, monsters, these are all supernatural beings who are represented as female and holding some power that is consequently stripped from them. The witch may inspire literary representations of women taking power for their own need, but supernatural symbology shows how women are themselves subverted by the idea of demonic or sinister forces (Ferber, 2009). A modern word for a woman of power is sadly, bitch, but could so easily translate to witch, as many who stand in the public sphere have found (Lim, 2009). Hillary Clinton, for example, during the 2016 US presidential election campaign, was variously depicted as a bitch, a witch and a 'nasty woman', despite her long career in both public service and political office, and support for a palpably unfaithful husband. These are pervasive tropes in Western childhood that may spread into adult, but repressed, anxieties. A world of fear and fascination is encapsulated by the modern and historical view of witches. In the twenty-first century, the term witch is either applied to anyone engaging in, mostly, innocuous mystical rituals, a name that is reduced to amusement or employed as entertainment, or a derogatory epithet for all the jealousies and fear to be heaped on a woman stepping into what is perceived as a man's world. Whilst witchcraft and the supernatural should not be taken too seriously, there is a serious study to be made of the representation of powerful women and evil women abusing power in literature about witches.

In her PhD thesis, Trammell (2020) wrote about what she called witch-media, a phenomenon in which the image of the witch represents a woman in power, both in terms of a source of anxiety and desire. She explained that it is a shorthand for representations of sex and sexuality bound up with horror and

empowerment. The witch, aside from a strange early modern persecution, is a prominent cultural figure of wisdom, fear, and power, which deserves investigation by historians, feminists, and psychologists. Modern thoughts of witches often reflect such cultural representations as Shakespeare's three hags on the blasted heath, the three Yagas stomping around Russian forests in chicken-legged houses, and Pratchett's three Wyrd sisters abroad in Lancre. To understand our deep-seated apprehension with the idea of the sorceress and her power, and the propensity for abuse of power, these depictions of witches will be considered in the light of psychological consciousness of evil, abuse, and protection.

The Blasted Heath

Macbeth starts with three weird sisters appearing in thunder and lightning on a blasted heath and greeting each other with tales of misdeeds gleefully reported.[3,4] They agree to meet again after the *hurly burly is done* (Act 1, Scene 1), that is, the battle now being fought where Macbeth will emerge as victor. These sisters are foretellers of destiny, but with a much more sinister intent than most other oracles. Thus, Shakespeare masterfully prepares his audience for a drama in which a man is manipulated by female supernatural and human forces into abusing his position to achieve the highest power in his land. The second time we see the witches they hail Macbeth and Banquo in order to deliver their prophecies. These predictions are clear but perplex the men so much they suspect their reason distorted by some hallucinogen (*Were such things here as we do speak about? Or have we eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner?* Act 1, Scene 3). The witches lead and provoke Macbeth to his demise, thrusting both him and his Lady into the worst examples of human behaviour and the deepest pits of despair. The Macbeths rampage through Scotland to commit regicide, murder, and proxy murder with increasing recklessness as the play proceeds. They are goaded into these acts by pure ambition, on which the hags play by making predictions that meet their own intent, to gain power over men in order to wreak havoc and harm. They steer the lady to madness and suicide, and the lord to an inevitably violent end. Shakespeare accomplishes this via subtle stagecraft and some rather modern thinking. Macbeth's downfall is described as being by a man not born of woman, which he assumes means he cannot be killed by a man. But the witches mean that MacDuff was *from his mother's womb untimely ripped* (Act 5, Scene 8), possibly the first mention of caesarean section on the English stage. We also see Macbeth's ambition stirred by his wife, a depiction of the 'power behind the throne' remarkably familiar to twenty-first century audiences, but which we can also see is driven forward by the supernatural forces, not just the natural. The witches are in the play, but not of the play, as they speak differently (rhyming couplets rather than iambic pentameter), are given no names, and appear on stage in one of the most dramatic opening scenes in theatre: *Act 1, Scene 1 A desert place. Thunder and lightning. Enter three witches.*

Shakespeare uses understanding of power to excellent effect in this play, the sisters being the guiding force that moves the plot onwards in three major

motions: the prophecy, the action, and the aftermath. Their power over the humans is clear and yet it is their otherness that confuses and embellishes the earthly behaviours. Macbeth admits to himself that he was already thinking about how to improve his position and profit by his battle victory (Act 1, Scene 3), but the prophesying whispers in his ear propel him on to act on his ambition. The witches, undoubtedly female (Macbeth even refers to them as sisters, Act 3, Scene 4) but not beholden to men, would have seemed not only unconventional but mysterious, dangerous, and shadowy to an audience when first staged, and today's companies take pains to ensure the enigmatic qualities remain. These are women who hold sway over men and their world without being of the world, and they are intent on malice and mayhem. In a seventeenth-century England, with witchcraft hysteria evident from the King downwards (Normand & Roberts, 2000), these characters would have appeared to represent a real threat. Evil witches, women who hold the fate of men in their hands, represent the ways in which men worried about women abusing power. Macbeth's witches are so malevolent and truly symbolic of how England perceived the occult in Shakespeare's time. They are seen as crones, old women who have acquired knowledge beyond the understanding of men. Traditionally the crone is a wise woman, who can use her knowledge for good, as when she helps in childbirth and treating ill health, or she can be bad, meddling with people and whistling up storms (Willis, 1993). Shakespeare truly wanted Macbeth's witches to appear as evil, vicious old women, the way King James described them in *Daemonologie* (1597). James believed he and his bride were targeted by witches causing a storm to prevent them reaching their wedding; his actions were part of the trigger to the witch hunts that saw many people, predominantly older women, tortured, condemned, and executed. For sixteenth-century and seventeenth-century Britain, threatened by plague and religious conflict, witches, for which read independent women, were a convenient scapegoat (Sollée, 2017). But Shakespeare was clearly writing for entertainment not just politics and also showed how they delighted in abusing the power they held over the actions of humanity. The supernatural qualities of Shakespeare's witches mean they are peripheral, rather than centre stage, but their influence is evident right through the play and in everything the characters do, and the outcomes are exactly what these hags wanted. Crones who are depicted as evil, meddling in the human world are very much the way Macbeth's witches are seen by modern audiences, as much as they were for audiences contemporary to the original. England and Scotland were not untouched by the fearful witch hysteria in Western Europe, but representation of magical entities was different in other areas.

Deep in a Russian Forest

Slavic folklore contains stories about Baba Yaga, the old lady who lives in a hut that walks through the depths of the forest on chicken legs. She has iron teeth, steals people to eat them, and her fence is topped with human skulls. Baba flies through the night sky in a mortar with a pestle for an oar, magicking up tempests