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‘Heaven guide him to thy husband’s cudgel’: Falstaff as Male Witch in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

This essay argues that in Shakespeare’s The Merry Wives of Windsor, when the merry wives dress Falstaff as the old woman of Brentford, they reveal his true character by visually associating him with a witch and thus force the men of Windsor to punish him for his crimes. Falstaff’s behaviour matches the social disruption of the male witch; furthermore, his position as a new and unestablished member of a community, his gender, and the fact that the authorities of Windsor are inept make it difficult for the merry wives to successfully accuse him without appealing to popular witchcraft belief.

In Shakespeare’s *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford deliberately dress Falstaff in a specific, recognizable costume so that Ford will name him a witch and beat him. They clearly state their intent as Mistress Ford declares, ‘I would my husband would meet him in this shape. He cannot abide the old woman of Brentford. He swears she’s a witch, forbade her my house, and hath threatened to beat her’ (4.2.73–6)¹, to which Mistress Page vengefully replies, ‘Heaven guide him to thy husband’s cudgel, and the devil guide his cudgel afterwards!’ (77–8). Scholars have offered various perspectives on the scene in which Ford beats a disguised Falstaff, ranging from admiration for Falstaff’s supposed cleverness in using the costume to escape Ford² (despite the fact that he does not escape a beating), to disgust at Ford abusing someone he believes is an old woman,³ to praise of Mistress Page and Mistress Ford (who share a secret laugh at Falstaff’s expense).⁴ These interpretations have observed both the disturbing misogyny inherent in watching Ford beat a person who looks like an old woman in front of an audience and the canny calculation of the merry wives, who use their resources to manipulate the patriarchal community in which they live. Many have seen Falstaff’s disguise as part of the humiliation he undergoes,

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viewing the costume and the punishment it delivers as not representative of the man underneath and thus as in itself humiliating.⁵ I argue that Mistress Ford and Mistress Page, rather than foisting an unfair false identity upon the man who has been harassing them, calculatingly reveal his true identity, inviting a punishment that he deserves but one that the authorities of Windsor are too oblivious or inept to mete out properly. By dressing Falstaff as a witch and later as a devil, Mistress Page and Mistress Ford use the shorthand of local superstition to expose the threat of social, domestic, and economic disorder that Falstaff poses and punish him outside the legal system without the risk of either being targeted as unfaithful by controlling men or being dismissed as unreasonable by naïve men.

The costume in which the merry wives dress Falstaff reveals rather than conceals the man beneath, because, though Falstaff is not literally a witch, his behaviour in the town of Windsor matches the social disruption of the male witch almost perfectly. For example, E.J. Kent argues that male witches were not feminized men but rather that ‘ideas of early modern manhood shaped the accusations of witchcraft against men ... the beliefs that supported such accusations were fundamentally shaped by the masculinity of the witch’.⁶ Men accused of witchcraft were usually those who disrupted the smooth running of a community.⁷ Falstaff never performs actual witchcraft, but he certainly disrupts the equilibrium of Windsor and exhibits behaviour that demonstrates his threat to the community, just like the figure of the male witch. In the opening scene, Shallow confronts Falstaff, succinctly stating, ‘Knight, you have beaten my men, killed my deer, and broke open my lodge’ (1.1.95–6). Kent argues that ‘disorderly behaviour’⁸ could be considered evidence that a man was a witch, and Falstaff’s behaviour is disorderly from even before the moment he first appears onstage.

Kent also demonstrates that men accused of witchcraft had often caused disorder at the domestic level, just as Falstaff does in Windsor.⁹ Falstaff upsets the domestic sphere not only because of his attempts to seduce two married women but also by aggravating Ford’s jealousy. Kent uses the case of the accused witch Hugh Parsons to explain, ‘Hugh’s threatening speeches were powerful articulations of his ... inability for plain-dealing, and his potential to disrupt ... economic interdependencies’.¹⁰ Falstaff, similarly, disrupts the economics of the town of Windsor. As early as act 1 scene 1, Slender accuses Falstaff’s crony Pistol of pickpocketing, and, though Pistol steadfastly denies it (1.1.130–7), Slender give such an accurate account of what was stolen that it renders Pistol’s protestations feeble. Slender claims, ‘he [did steal my purse] ... of seven groats in mill-sixpences, and two Edward shovel-boards that cost me two shillings and twopence apiece of Ed Miller’ (131–4). The poor behaviour of Falstaff’s retinue reflects his

own actions as this charge follows Shallow's accusation of Falstaff's poaching and violence. Shortly after the dispute in front of the Page home, Falstaff decides to part ways with his crony Bardolph, declaring, 'I am glad I am so acquit of this tinderbox. His thefts were too open. His filching was like an unskilful singer: he kept not time' (1.3.20–2). While Falstaff defends Pistol against the accusation of stealing Slender's purse, he decides to part ways with Bardolph because the latter's stealing skills are underdeveloped and obvious. Shortly after, as he examines his dire financial situation, he openly declares, 'Well, sirs, I am almost out at heels ... There is no remedy: I must cony-catch, I must shift' (26, 28–9), after which he openly discusses his plan to woo Mistress Page and Mistress Ford in order to get access to their husbands' money (45–64). Falstaff manifests 'inability for plain-dealing' as he clearly intends to swindle, scam, and outright steal from the inhabitants of Windsor and repeatedly tries to disrupt the 'economic interdependencies' of the town, exhibiting qualities similar to the early modern conception of the male witch.

Perhaps most importantly, the male witch was a figure who had lost control of his emotions and lacked self-mastery. Kent explains, 'as in their bodily life, early modern men, of all ranks, were expected to exercise mastery of their emotions to ensure that they achieved proper manly equilibrium ... This impotence should not be theorized as feminization — it was a masculine state, a specifically masculine failure, understood in relation to masculine ideals and with reference to a masculine body'.¹¹ He concludes, 'We need to be sure that we are not forever feminizing abnormality and never masculinizing deviance'.¹² Falstaff certainly lacks emotional control and self-mastery. In act 1 scene 1 he has already committed violence and destruction offstage and admits to Slender, 'Slender, I broke your head' (1.1.105–6). Kent argues that 'the feminization thesis is unconvincing because it characterizes male witches as "weak-minded", "passive" and "powerless", traits which stand in direct contrast to the way accusers described them'.¹³ Falstaff is certainly not weak-minded, passive, or powerless. From the moment he arrives on-stage he is making puns and bawdy jokes and ridiculing others. Using the case of John Godfrey as an example, Kent argues: 'That John Godfrey was angry, aggressive, rough, provocative, unpredictable, greedy, and hyper-contentious suggested a particular configuration of the masculine body. He seems to me to be a masculine counterpart to the leaky, boundless body of the female witch'.¹⁴ Falstaff possesses all the qualities that Kent sees in Godfrey.

Though Falstaff maps onto the characteristics of the English male witch as described by Kent, the merry wives still need to disguise him as a recognizable local woman with a reputation as a witch because the support of community

men would have been necessary to bring him to justice through the legal system. While the Windsor men recognize that Falstaff's behaviour in their town has been inappropriate, they seem unable to handle nearly any conflict or misdemeanour in their community; Peter Erickson points out that in Windsor, 'The manner of dealing with conflict is avoidance'.¹⁵ In the play's opening scene, as Shallow attempts to get justice for Falstaff's vandalism, Evans tries to mediate the situation by suggesting a marriage between Slender and Anne Page (1.1.38–41). Erickson argues, 'The nature of the reconciliation Evans effects is subsequently shown to be permanent postponement of a resolution ... Evans indicates that the conflict will be avoided by tabling it'.¹⁶ The authorities of Windsor simply avoid or ignore any instance of community disruption, including Falstaff's greed, violence, and dissolution. Rosemary Kegl adds, '*The Merry Wives of Windsor* depicts th[e] elaborate legal machinery as ludicrously ineffective'.¹⁷ She explains that Justice Shallow is

not merely a justice but a quorum justice ... Slender defines Shallow as a member of the local gentry who has been favoured by the state with an appointment to the 'Coram' — or quorum. Justice Shallow, however, is completely ineffective. For example, he cannot find Falstaff in Ford's house when Ford asks for assistance, and he does nothing when the host cries for help after Evans and Doctor Caius steal his horses.¹⁸

Not only does Justice Shallow allow discord in the community to continue and spread; he also becomes a part of that discord, exacerbating rather than resolving it. When he first appears on stage, he himself is engaged in petty squabbles while Evans attempts to mediate. When Shallow angrily exclaims, 'The Council shall hear it; it is a riot' (1.1.30), Evans replies 'it is not meet the Council hear a riot. There is no fear of Got in a riot' (31–2). Rather than calming down at Evans's words, Shallow escalates his threat: 'if I were young again, the sword should end it' (35–6). Kegl summarizes, 'By depicting Shallow's and Evans's failed attempts to keep the peace, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* perpetuates a generalized fear of local disorder'.¹⁹ The authorities of Windsor are clearly inept at dealing with even minor local discord even before Falstaff arrives to poach, pickpocket, squabble, and woo married women; the merry wives cannot trust Windsor's officials to both recognize and effectively deal with the threat that Falstaff poses.

In addition to the local authorities' ineptitude, the heads of the Ford and Page households are irrationally rage-filled or passive, respectively, leaving Mistress Ford and Page little hope that either of their husbands will appropriately deal with

Falstaff's advances or social disruption. Ford leaps to the worst conclusions about his wife, rendering her unable to report Falstaff's predatory behaviour and receive help. Pamela Allen Brown notes, 'The Windsor wives' decision to keep Falstaff's overtures hidden from their husbands would have been unusual in both common practice and the narratives of the jesting literature'.²⁰ However, Ford's reaction to the possibility of Falstaff wooing his wife illustrates exactly why the wives must keep their plans a secret — if Ford knew the truth, Mistress Ford would almost certainly face false accusations. As soon as Ford learns that Falstaff is attempting to woo his wife, he decides, 'I will seek out Falstaff' (2.1.126), preferring to confront the man himself rather than simply speak to Mistress Ford. While Ford is a jealous and angry husband who immediately jumps to unfair conclusions about his wife, Page is the opposite. Mistress Page says of her husband, 'he's as far from jealousy as I am from giving him cause; and that, I hope, is an unmeasurable distance' (93–4). Page's response when he hears about Falstaff wooing his wife, however, is to dismiss the rumour, not because he trusts that his wife will be faithful but because he does not believe that Falstaff would ever pursue her. When Nim tells him '[Falstaff] loves your wife. There's the short and the long' (120–1), Page responds, 'I will not believe such a Cathayan, though the priest o' th' town commended him for a true man' (129–30). Had the merry wives told their husbands the full truth immediately, Ford would not have believed his wife's innocence, while Page would not have believed Falstaff's guilt. The merry wives then decide to punish Falstaff both because the men of Windsor will not and because a direct accusation against Falstaff stands to implicate them as well.

Dressing Falstaff as a suspected female witch is the only way the merry wives can get the men of Windsor to mete out justice through the understood and accepted social codes of their community. Historian Robin Briggs explains that, 'Witchcraft was peculiarly malleable, available to fit any kind of discord, because the link between ill-will and physical effects did not need to be demonstrated'.²¹ In order to make the men of Windsor deal with the threat of Falstaff, the merry wives must turn him into a shape that can fit any kind of discord and a person whom Ford can accuse without any need to actually prove guilt. Ford's male companions make no effort to stop him from violently beating Falstaff as the old woman of Brentford. By contrast, when he accuses his own wife, the Windsor men try to reason with him. When Ford begins to search the buck basket, Page, Evans, and Shallow each reprimand him in turn. Page exclaims, 'Why, this passes, Master Ford. You are not to go loose any longer; you must be pinioned' (4.2.108–9), Evans agrees, 'Why, this is lunatics! This is mad as a mad dog!' (110), and Shallow finishes, 'Indeed, Master Ford, this is not well, indeed' (111). The

men's remonstrances on behalf of Mistress Ford coupled with their silence in response to Ford beating a suspected witch emphasize Briggs's point that 'the link between ill-will and physical effects did not need to be demonstrated'.²²

Historians suggest that accused witches were often longstanding members of a community who had established patterns of deviant and disruptive behaviour for years before they were finally brought to trial. For example, James Sharpe claims, 'in most cases taking a suspected witch to court was not something to be embarked upon lightly. Where supporting evidence is available, it is clear that the act of witchcraft recorded in a formal court document as providing the basis for prosecution was often only the tip of a much larger and more varied iceberg of deviant behaviour'.²³ Falstaff, as a visitor to Windsor, would be an unlikely candidate for a witchcraft accusation as he lacks the history within the community to establish this recognizable pattern of behaviour. Mother Pratt, on the other hand, has a 'longstanding connection with [the] community'.²⁴ Falstaff's costume works as a visual shorthand that the men of Windsor instantly interpret in the way the merry wives intend them to. While the men of Windsor may argue that Ford does not have enough evidence to manhandle the buck basket, they know he does not need any evidence at all to manhandle a suspected witch. The merry wives cleverly use known male prejudice against a local woman and the malleability of witchcraft accusation to manipulate local authorities to punish a disorderly man.

Beyond Falstaff's beating as a witch in disguise, each of the humiliations that he undergoes at the hands of the merry wives reinforces his association with the figure of the witch since each is reminiscent of either popular ideas about witchcraft or common witchcraft punishments. For example, the entire episode of the buck basket is reminiscent of a trial by ordeal. Kirsten Uszkalo comments, '[the merry wives] string [Falstaff] along through a series of humiliating misadventures associated with cunning, witchcraft, and fairy magic'.²⁵ Among these, she lists: 'they swim him in the Thames'.²⁶ 'Swimming', according to Heikki Pihlajamaki, was 'a procedure in which the suspect's wrists were tied to her ... ankles. She was then thrown into water with ropes attached. If the suspect sank, she was presumed innocent and was hauled up, for water as God's pure element would not accept the Devil's allies. Her failure to sink was considered an indication of guilt'.²⁷ Though Falstaff's ducking comes as a practical humiliation devised by the merry wives, he explains the fact that he does not sink at length, stating, 'you may know by my size that I have a kind of alacrity in sinking ... I had been drowned, but that the shore was shelvy and shallow' (3.5.10–12). This failure to sink, although rendered comical, and although perfectly reasonable, functions as

a reminder of Falstaff's close association with witchcraft and propensity to disrupt the smooth functioning of domestic life in Windsor.

Though Falstaff's wetting in the Thames has some similarities to swimings, water ordeals were not a common part of the English legal system in the late 1500s, a fact that emphasizes the merry wives' reliance on local custom outside a dysfunctional legal system. Pihlajamaki's work tracing the history of the water ordeal in England is helpful for an understanding of how Falstaff's comical ducking functions in the larger context of the Windsor town government. Pihlajamaki explains, 'In England, the ordeals disappeared after the abolition of 1215 and as the jury system developed. No "scientific" theory of evidence replayed ordeals at this point, nor were lawyers with academic training to master such a theory.'²⁸ Water ordeals did resurface in some parts of England, however, during the early modern period. Pihlajamaki writes, 'Cases of water ordeals appeared in England by the 1590s, and by the 1610s they were used quite frequently, but mostly unofficially. The English system never came to depend on swimming the suspects in any important sense.'²⁹ He qualifies further, 'Ordeals, especially swimming a witch, were thought of in most countries as a phenomenon of popular culture with which learned jurists or theologians wanted to have nothing to do.'³⁰ The merry wives, then, use an ordeal people would associate with witchcraft but that would have little weight in a genuine court of law.³¹

I have already mentioned some of the tactics the merry wives use to try to coerce or trick the men of Windsor into dealing with the threat of Falstaff since these women have little recourse within the legal system and since Falstaff's guilt is so difficult to prove. This manipulation of normative but unofficial local censure replaces the legal justice they are unable to access and fits particularly well with the practice of swimming — a form of local trial used to demonstrate guilt, but also one not associated with the courts. For instance, one possible explanation Pihlajamaki presents for the use of ordeals in witch trials is that 'Witchcraft crimes were *crimina excepta*, particularly difficult to prove ... it was probably more difficult to acquire sufficient evidence in witchcraft cases than it was in other types. Ordeals were, alas, needed to complement the otherwise insufficient *indicia ad torturam*'.³² While the merry wives probably only give Falstaff a soaking in the Thames in order to punish and humiliate him, Falstaff's clear mention of hell and explanation that he did not sink invoke an ordeal used to identify witches, an ordeal outside the bounds of the legal system and one particularly used in cases in which guilt was difficult to prove to the authorities. The merry wives find themselves in a similarly difficult situation as they both attempt to deal

with Falstaff outside the bounds of the law and demonstrate proof of his destructive behaviour to the men of Windsor.³³

Falstaff's association with witchcraft continues into his third and final humiliation as the merry wives manipulate local tradition to unofficially punish him before the entire Windsor community. At the end of the play, Falstaff wears another disguise that the merry wives invent for him, but this time they dress him as Herne the hunter rather than as a local witch. Scholars generally agree that Shakespeare invented this figure, whom the play represents as a character out of local folklore.³⁴ Though Herne the hunter is not himself a witch, the way that Mistress Page describes him curiously resembles a popular malefic witch. She explains, 'he blasts the trees, and takes the cattle, / And makes the milch-kine yield blood' (4.4.29–30). Actions like destruction of property, killing or laming cattle, and spoiling produce often appear in witchcraft pamphlets accusing purported witches of maleficia. Kent claims, 'Of the thirty-five men accused of witchcraft in the Essex assize, twenty-three were indeed accused of maleficium — of murdering and bewitching men, women, and children, bewitching and killing livestock, harming property and domestic product'.³⁵ The merry wives' association of Falstaff with Herne the hunter, like their act of disguising him as the wise woman of Brentford, does not render him a literal witch but instead gives shape to the threat of disorder he poses to the community through stories and characters that the community understands as harmful. Rather than functioning as slander, these associations accurately reflect that Falstaff has already 'beaten ... men, killed ... deer, and broke open [a] lodge' (1.1.95–6). Once again, Falstaff's disguise functions not to obscure his identity but to reveal his true nature and punish his disorderly behaviour.

Falstaff's disguise as Herne the Hunter also, notably, includes horns or antlers, gesturing to a connection with the devil. Anne Parten comments, 'the image of the horned Falstaff is designed to evoke no single set of connotations: he is, simultaneously, any or all of the following — devil, hunted deer, fertility spirit, scapegoat, satyr, Actaeon'.³⁶ While each of these associations are meaningful, I want to focus on imagery associating Falstaff with the devil in his final humiliation. Reginald Scot's popular skeptical work *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, first printed in 1584, only thirteen years before the play's probable first performance date,³⁷ refers to devils with horns as an obvious example of oft-repeated folklore. Scot writes, 'in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with an ouglie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a tail in his breech'.³⁸ The imagery of the devil with horns was so well established as to be a cliché by the

time Shakespeare imposed a pair on Falstaff. Once again, this association visibly reveals Falstaff's true nature rather than slandering him.

Since the beginning of the play, the language that Falstaff himself uses, and that others use about him, often associates him with witchcraft, hell, or the devil. For example, in act 1, scene 1, Pistol taunts Slender with 'How now, Mephistopheles?' (109), making an obvious reference to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, one of the most famous examples of a man making a deal with the devil. Later, as Falstaff and Pistol scheme to rob Ford, they talk about Ford's money and Falstaff's plan using a spiritual play on words. Falstaff says of Mistress Ford, 'Now the report goes, she has all the rule of her husband's purse; he hath a legion of angels' (1.3.45–6). Pistol responds, 'As many devils entertain, and "To her, boy!" say I' (47). While Falstaff simply uses 'angels' as the colloquial term for coin, Pistol puns on the spiritual application of the word to call Falstaff a devil for his swindling. Mistress Page and Mistress Ford also associate Falstaff with the devil and hell. When Mistress Ford reads Falstaff's bold letter, she declares, 'If I would but go to hell for an eternal moment or so, I could be knighted' (2.1.42–3). Falstaff himself more than once talks flippantly about hell. He says to Pistol, 'I am damned in hell for swearing to gentlemen my friends you were good soldiers and tall fellows' (2.2.8–9). After being thrown in the Thames from the buck basket, Falstaff makes another glib reference to hell: 'If the bottom were as deep as hell, I should down' (3.5.11–12). Falstaff frequently uses language associated with the devil and hell to describe himself and his circumstances, so his final disguise is consistent with his behaviour and even his own self-representation throughout the play. Page makes an explicit connection between Falstaff and the devil as he talks to Shallow about the evening plans to humiliate the man in the forest: 'No man means evil but the devil, and we shall know him by his horns' (5.2.10–11). Once again, the merry wives use a disguise to reveal Falstaff's true identity and to highlight the disorder that he has tried to create in the town of Windsor.

In addition to Falstaff's final humiliation working to associate the man with the devil, the mixing of witchcraft and fairy magic in this scene reinforces Falstaff's positioning as a male disruptor of the community. This pairing of witchcraft and fairy elements features in several contemporary witch trials, most notably in the trial of one of the few male English witches of the early modern period: John Walsh. Marion Gibson writes, 'John Walsh is the only male 'witch' in this time period to have an account devoted to his trial ... Walsh's ritual ... is ... connected with the devil and with beliefs about fairies' (25). The trial document claims,

[Walsh] being demaunded how he knoweth when anye man is bewitched: He sayth that he knew it partlye by the Feries, and saith that ther be. iii. Kindes of Feries, white, green, & black. Which when he is disposed to use, hee speaketh with them upon hyls, where as there is great heapes of earth, as namely in Dorsetshire.³⁹

In this trial document, John Walsh reports fairies that are black, white, and green, exactly the words Mistress Quickly uses as she chants, 'Fairies black, grey, green, and white' (5.5.34). The combination of fairy and witchcraft elements at the end of the play strengthen an association between Falstaff and witch-like behaviour by connecting him with a non-fictional male witch contemporary who similarly disrupted a community and was brought to justice.

Though scholars have interpreted Falstaff's beating while in disguise as a witch as anything from part of his cunning escape to a horrifying visual of abusive misogyny, few have recognized the witch-like behaviour that Falstaff demonstrates long before the witch costume calls attention to it — or the unique way that the merry wives seek justice against him outside of the legal system by using an established lexicon of local beliefs and superstitions. Falstaff's disguises are not disguises at all, but rather a mechanism by which the merry wives expose his trickery and bring him to justice. Like Actaeon, he becomes Windsor's 'deer' (5.5.112); the hunter becomes the hunted.

Notes

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- 1 William Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in *The Norton Shakespeare: Early Plays and Poems*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Susanne Gosssett, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Gordon McMullan, vol. 1 (New York, 2016), 1463–1532. Hereafter parenthetical citations reference act, scene, and line numbers in this edition of the play.
 - 2 Richard Grinnell, 'The Witch, The Transvestite, and the Actor: Destabilizing Gender and the Renaissance Stage', *Studies in the Humanities* 23.2 (1996), 163–84, 169.
 - 3 Nancy Cotton, 'Castrating (W)itches: Impotence and Magic in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38.3 (1987), 320–26, 321, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2870506>.
 - 4 Kirsten C. Uszkalo, 'Cunning, Cozening, and Queens in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *Shakespeare* 6.1 (2010), 20–33, 28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17450911003643084>.

- 5 Anne Parten, 'Falstaff's Horns: Masculine Inadequacy and Feminine Mirth in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', *Studies in Philology* 82.2 (1985) 184–99, 190, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4174203>.
- 6 E.J. Kent, 'Masculinity and Male Witches in Old and New England, 1593–1680', *History Workshop Journal* 60 (2005), 69–92, 73, <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/dbi034>.
- 7 Ibid, 74.
- 8 Ibid, 80.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid, 84.
- 12 Ibid, 87.
- 13 Ibid, 70.
- 14 Ibid, 85.
- 15 Peter Erickson, 'The Order of the Garter, The Cult of Elizabeth, and Class-Gender Tension in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, (London, 1985), 94–113, 98, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315018584>.
- 16 Ibid, 97.
- 17 Rosemary Kegl, "'The Adoption of Abominable Terms": The Insults that Shape Windsor's Middle Class', *ELH* 61.2 (1994), 253–78, 260–1, <https://doi.org/10.1353/elh.1994.0016>.
- 18 Ibid, 262.
- 19 Ibid, 268–9.
- 20 Pamela Allen Brown, *Better a Shrew than a Sheep: Women, Drama, and the Culture of Jest in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, 2003), 52, <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501722363>.
- 21 Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours* (New York, 1996), 265.
- 22 Ibid, 265.
- 23 James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, 1996), 106.
- 24 Jessica Dell, "'A witch, a quean, an old cozening quean!": Image Magic and Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', in *Magical Transformations on the Early Modern Stage*, ed. Lisa Hopkins and Helen Ostovich, (New York, 2014), 185–201, 191, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315593197>.
- 25 Uszkalo, 'Cunning, Cozening, and Queens', 20.
- 26 Ibid, 20.
- 27 Heikki Pihlajamäki, "'Swimming the Witch, Pricking for the Devil's Mark": Ordeals in the Early Modern Witchcraft Trials', *Journal of Legal History* 21.2 (2007) 35–58, 36, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01440362108539608>.

- 28 Ibid, 40.
- 29 Ibid, 42.
- 30 Ibid, 44.
- 31 By 1621 Rowley, Dekker, and Ford were able to openly mock the practice of ducking in their play *The Witch of Edmonton*, even though the play is based on a serious contemporary local trial. See Thomas Dekker, John Ford, and William Rowley, *The Witch of Edmonton*, ed. Lucy Munro (London, 2017), 182.
- 32 Pihlajamäki, 'Swimming the Witch', 48.
- 33 In *The Witch of Edmonton*, Rowley, Dekker, and Ford refer to the concept of the disruptive male community figure who is difficult to prosecute when Sawyer lists misdeeds that hurt a community but are not punished as witchcraft. She states, 'Men-witches can, without the fangs of law / Drawing once one drop of blood, put counterfeit pieces / Away for true gold' (4.1.161–3).
- 34 Diane Purkiss, *At the Bottom of the Garden: A Dark History of Fairies, Hobgoblins, Nymphs, and Other Troublesome Things* (New York, 2000), 141.
- 35 Kent, *Masculinity and Male Witches*, 71.
- 36 Parten, 'Falstaff's Horns', 184.
- 37 Walter Cohen, 'Introduction: *The Merry Wives of Windsor*', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, 2nd edn (New York, 2008), 1255–64, 1262.
- 38 Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, ed. Brinsley Nicholson (London, 1886), 122.
- 39 'The Examination of John Walsh', in *Early Modern Witches: Witchcraft Cases in Contemporary Writing*, ed. Marion Gibson (New York, 2000), 29, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203992302>.