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‘The Supernatural’ in William Shakespeare’s  
*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest*  
and in Eliza Willard’s *Charmed: The Power of Three*:  
A Comparative Analysis

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Ingrid Holböck



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## 1. Introduction

*Charmed*, *Twilight*, *Buffy*, *the Vampire Slayer* and *Harry Potter*, esotericism, mysticism and spirituality: 'The Supernatural' is present in our lives as it has never been before. However, the interest in mystery, otherworldly beings, the supernatural and magical powers is not new. It has fascinated mankind from the beginning of its existence – as documented by prehistoric wall paintings – until today. Representing a subject of constant interest it runs through every single period of man's history. From early cultures of primitive people until this particular day, 'The Otherworldly' has kept its magnetism on us.

The following thesis aims at exploring motives that account for this attraction. It tries to examine potential reasons for man's fascination with 'The Supernatural' and his attitude towards this subject matter as reflected in the Elizabethan era as well as in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

The inspiration for the topic of this thesis derives from two particular literary seminars held by Ao. Univ. - Prof. Mag. Dr. Franz-Karl Wöhrer. The first course dealt with Irish literature. At the beginning of the first seminar, the students were introduced to aspects of Irish culture. The presented pieces of information that attracted my attention most dealt with Irish folklore and mythology, particularly the Irish fairy lore. My interest in the subject matter of various supernatural spirits accompanied by superstitious beliefs and reasons for the belief in the otherworldly was reinforced after a private visit to the National Leprechaun Museum in Dublin in the summer holidays in 2010. The permanent exhibition illustrated the history of Irish hobgoblins from their beginnings in mythology until these days.

The second literary course, which nurtured my interest in 'The Supernatural', focused on witchcraft plays in early modern England and Scotland. In this seminar the university students gained – among other information – insight into the history of witchcraft, the persecutions of witches as well as certain methods of torture. The two university courses inspired the topic of this thesis.

Literature is generally considered to mirror its respective society. Thus, by means of a close literary analysis of 'The Supernatural' as illustrated in William Shakespeare's plays *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest* as well as in Eliza Willard's contemporary book *Charmed: The Power of Three*, this thesis will examine man's perception of 'The Paranormal' in its given "Zeitgeist".

Consequently, the supernatural components dealt with in the chosen literature – fairies and witches, benevolent as well as harmful magic, occultism and superstitious beliefs about ‘The Otherworldly’ – will be approached according to their particular socio-historical and psychological context.

The main goal of this thesis is to explore manifestations of man’s interest in ‘The Supernatural’ in two different epochs. The following research questions are the starting point:

- How is ‘The Supernatural’ represented in the chosen literary pieces?
  - How was this subject matter perceived in the Elizabethan era, and how is it received today?
  - Are the Shakespearean attitudes towards fairies, witchcraft and sorcery, magical practices, and the occult different from those of today, and if so, how and why?
  - What was the impact of religion on the belief in ‘The Supernatural’?
- What effects do the vast amount of general knowledge – thus the loss of belief in mystery – and the decline of religion’s influence have on the belief in ‘The Otherworldly’?

The thesis is divided into three main parts. In the first section, Shakespeare’s presentation of otherworldly elements as demonstrated in his early comedy, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* will be analysed. The poet’s illustration of the magical fairy realm – the fairies’ outer appearance, their character traits, amusements and duties – will be discussed according to the prevalent fairy beliefs of that epoch. Thereby, the main causes of people’s faith in ‘The Supernatural’ at that time will be revealed.

The second part of this thesis centres on ‘The Supernatural’ as exemplified in Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest*, which is generally considered his last dramatic piece. Shakespeare’s portrayal of witchcraft, black and white magic as well as occult studies will be examined against the background of the Elizabethan mindset.

In the third part ‘The Supernatural’ in the popular culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *Charmed: The Power of Three*, published in 1999, will be analysed. The portrayal of the so-called ‘Charmed Ones’, three adult sisters who discover that they are witches endowed with supernatural powers, will be studied. By doing

so, the contemporary opinion about and image of witchcraft and magic will be critically assessed.

A personal reason for having decided on this particular topic results from my future profession as a grammar-school teacher. At one point of education pupils shall, at least once, be exposed to the famous playwright William Shakespeare and some of his works. From experience I know that teenagers are not enthusiastic about this topic because they regard it as old-fashioned and boring. I think that this dislike stems, to a certain degree, from the fact that the learners cannot relate this subject matter to their own lives. Consequently, it is a challenge for teachers to make Shakespeare and his works interesting.

By contrasting supernatural phenomena in selected Shakespearean plays to the paranormal issues addressed in contemporary 20<sup>th</sup> century literature the topic can become more attractive to students. They will notice that the poet's works are not old-fashioned since he used elements that are still of interest today. By means of comparing Shakespeare's plays to literary pieces of today pupils can be made familiar with 'The Paranormal' and can actively play a part in comparing the different works of literature. This will help to make the issue more exciting as it is not farfetched and not beyond their lives.

Although I am not a *Charmed* enthusiast, it is interesting to generally explore the reasons for the fascination of this series. I am sure that teachers must, to a certain extent, inform themselves about the current subjects of relevance and issues of interest concerning their pupils. This helps the teachers to understand the teenagers better. Additionally, by doing so, instructors evoke interest in their learners' lives, which proves that the pupils are accepted as individuals.



## **2. *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

The purpose of the following brief synopsis is to provide the reader with an outline of the play's plot of Shakespeare's theatrical piece.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is set in mythical Athens around Midsummer. Theseus, Duke of Athens, and Hippolyta, Queen of the Amazons, are arranging their wedding which will take place in four days. Suddenly, Egeus enters with his disobedient daughter Hermia and two young men. Desperately in love with Lysander, Hermia refuses to get married to Demetrius, who has been chosen by her father to become her husband. Theseus asked by Egeus to give his verdict, commands Hermia to marry Demetrius. If she does not obey the Athenian law according to which her father must approve of her husband, hence, if she does not obey to her father's will, she must die or live chaste. She needs to have reached a decision by new moon, the day of Theseus' and Hippolyta's wedding.

Hermia and Lysander arrange to secretly meet in a nearby wood the following night. From there the two lovers intend to flee the city in order to escape Athenian law. They entrust this information to Helena, who promises to help them. Yet as Helena is secretly in love with Demetrius, she hopes that by unveiling the elopement of Hermia and Lysander to her beloved she can win his favour.

Meanwhile, a group of ordinary tradesmen are preparing a play which they intend to perform as part of the wedding festivities of Theseus and Hippolyta. The amateur actors Bottom, Snout, Snug, Quince and Flute arrange for their rehearsal to assemble the following night in exactly the same wood in which Hermia and Lysander are to meet.

This particular wood is the home of Oberon, the King of the Fairies. Oberon and Titania, the Queen of the fairies, have recently quarrelled over the possession of a little Indian changeling boy. To overcome their disagreement and to achieve his will, Oberon orders Puck, his servant and jester, to drop a magic liquid on the eyes of the sleeping Titania which will cause her to fall in love with the first being she sees upon awakening.

In the meantime, the four star-crossed lovers arrive in the woods. Hermia and Lysander are lost and Demetrius and Helena argue until he finally forsakes her. Hence, Oberon, who has overheard the dispute, instructs Puck to pour some of

the magic potion on Demetrius' eyelids. Mistakenly, Puck confuses Demetrius for Lysander who then falls in love with Helena.

Coming across the amateur acting troupe, Puck turns Bottom's head into a donkey's head which scares away all the others so that he is left alone. Titania awakes and falls in love with the first person she sees, which is Bottom.

In the end, Puck sets things right again: he restores Bottom's human head, Hermia and Lysander are brought back together, and Demetrius and Helena are – with the help of the magic juice - happily united. Titania is disenchanted from her love towards Bottom and hands over the little Indian changeling boy to Oberon.

When Oberon discovers that Puck has made a big mistake, he intervenes by putting some drops of the magic juice on Demetrius' eyes and by casting a spell which will make him finally fall in love with Helena. Meanwhile Puck applies a remedial juice on Lysander's eyelids to restore his love for Hermia.

Finally, Theseus proposes a three-fold wedding ceremony at his palace.

### **2.1. 'The Supernatural' in *A Midsummer Night's Dream***

This chapter will closely examine the supernatural beings as illustrated in the play. The following analysis will look at the otherworldly "sprites", Oberon, Titania, Puck, as well as Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed as regards their character relations, their position within the supernatural world and their significance within the comedy. The main focus, however, lies on their specific character traits, paranormal powers and their duties. The discussion of these elements will be supported by various examples and quotations from the play.

The following investigation will start with the fairy sovereigns, Oberon and Titania and will be continued with the analysis of Puck, servant to the fairy King. Finally, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed, the cortege of the fairy Queen, will be considered.

#### **2.1.1. Oberon**

Oberon presides over the supernatural world depicted in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. As King of the otherworldly realm he reigns supreme and has sole authority over his personal assistants and the entire fairy folk. Apart from his

mischievous servant Puck, there is no explicit reference towards any particular valets of the sovereign. However, unspecified henchmen are mentioned and serve to emphasise Oberon's authority. This explicit indication is given in the stage direction at his first appearance, which states that Oberon enters the scene "[...] *at one door, with his Train*" (II. i, stage direction antecedent 60). Hence, the unnamed servants strengthen the ruler's power. They are of no importance concerning the development of the play.

Besides Oberon's position as fairy King, he is given the title "*king of shadows*" (III. ii, 347). He is in command of the dark hours, nightly fairy activities and nocturnal incidences. Oberon, as well as all the other sprites of the play, share the repeatedly mentioned connection to night-time. While the mortals on earth are asleep, the private fairy servants of Oberon, as well as the personal attendants of Titania, are busy fulfilling the tasks of their sovereigns. They complete their missions before daybreak (III. ii, 395) and disappear at the singing of the morning lark (IV. i, 91) to "[t]rip after [...] *night's shadow*" (IV. i, 93).

In the epilogue, Puck refers one final time to the fairies' appearance during the dark hours. He describes the otherworldly sprites as silhouettes (V. i, 412), comparable to visions appearing in nightly dreams. Similar to a reverie, in which everything is possible and in which rationality is of no importance, reality and fantasy become intermingled. This imaginary world, which humans encounter in their dreams, is symbolised by the fanciful fairy realm of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. While entering the world of dreams, as well as while immersing in the Shakespearean play, mortal beings encounter a fantastic land. However, when the mortals awake, they either do not remember their reverie or they can only recall fractions of their nightly visions. In the play, this oblivion is denoted by the awakening of Bottom and the four lovers. In the morning, while the fairies have already disappeared, the mortals wake up from their wonderful dreams. Although Bottom and the lovers are well aware of mysterious nocturnal incidences they are unaware of their experience with supernatural creatures and do not remember what has happened to them over night. Similarly the spectators are left in doubt about what is real when the final act ends. The audience can consider the play as a fantastic vision or as the product of a nocturnal dream. This leaves the actual belief in fairies and their supernatural

interferences in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* open-ended and free for the spectators' interpretation.

Regarding Oberon's supernatural abilities, it can be observed that he can make himself unseeable: "*I am invisible*" (II. i, 186). By doing so he is able to hide from humans in order to secretly spy on them and to listen to their conversations. Consequently, he overhears the conversation of the unfortunate lovers and decides to aid them with their miserable situation.

Secondly, he as well as his wife can circle around the globe in minutes. An indication for this otherworldly capability is Oberon's statement to Titania: "*We the globe can compass soon, [s]wifter than the wand'ring moon*" (IV. i, 94-95). Moreover, he is versatile in supernatural charms. His expertise in the flora and its magic allows him to enchant humans and fairies alike. He can thereby control the fate of spellbound beings. He makes use of this particular wisdom when instructing Puck to fetch him the purple flower "*Love-in-idleness*" (II. i, 178) which has the magical effect of making humans and otherworldly sprites fall in love with the first individual they see.

Furthermore, he knows how to remedy enchantments. A specific herb, for example, when squeezed into the eyes of an enchanted person, "*has the virtuous property, [t]o take away [...] all error with his might*" (III. ii, 366-367). Thanks to Oberon's wisdom in the magic of botany, Puck can correct his misapplication of the love draught. Additionally, the fairy King knows a corrective how to liberate Titania from her love of Bottom (III. ii, 59-60).

In terms of earthly beings it can be noticed that Oberon always applies his supernatural powers benevolently. Only when taking revenge on his wife for insisting on the Indian boy does he abuse his supernatural power for his own profit.

Despite Oberon being a supernatural character, he shows genuinely human feelings<sup>1</sup>. These emotions can be divided into negative sentiments – envy, egoism, anger, and revenge – and positive sentiments – empathy, remorse, and courtesy. The first mention of his unpleasant emotions can be observed in the fairy King's first appearance in which he is presented as an envious husband. He accuses Titania of being in love with the mortal Theseus: "*I know thy love to*

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<sup>1</sup> Black, Matthew. *CliffNotes on Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*. New York: Hungry Minds Incorporation, 2001. p.12.

*Theseus*" (II. i, 76) but she reproaches that "[t]hese are the forgeries of jealousy" (II. i, 81).

A further negative emotion of the fairy King, selfishness, is indicated by his ultimate claim for the little Indian boy, whom he wants as his personal henchman. Due to the fact that he does not get what he wants, a variety of other resentments develop. He experiences blind fury since Titania refuses to cede the changeling to him. Angered by the disobedient behaviour of his wife, he plots to rob her of the child by an enchantment. By means of the magical juice from the purple flower, he takes revenge on Titania. He plans to "*make her full of hateful fantasies*" (II. i, 256) and to make her fall in love with a "*vile thing*" (II. i, 34).

Besides these short-comings, Oberon also displays good character traits. When secretly listening to the star-crossed lovers' conversation and realising their distress, he feels entirely compassionate towards them and does not hesitate to help them. The unhappiness of the four humans causes Oberon's concern and, therefore, he assists them, via his servant, to reach harmony.

Furthermore, the fairy King shows penitence when he relieves Titania from the malevolent love spell. Oberon does "[h]er dotage now [...] begin to pity" (IV. i, 44) and wishes to "*undo [t]his hateful imperfection of her eyes*" (IV. i, 59-60). Even if Oberon does not repent the actual bewitching of Titania and, even though he revokes her enchantment only after having achieved his objective – "*I'll to my queen, and beg her Indian boy; [a]nd then I will her charmed eye release [...]*" (III. iii, 375-376), he commiserates with his wife for the preposterous situation she is in.

Oberon is portrayed as a kind-hearted, sympathetic and humane fairy when pitying the star-crossed lovers. Furthermore, by instructing Puck to restore Bottom's original face, his caring nature towards mortals is likewise revealed. This indicates that Oberon's supernatural forces are well-intentioned to earthly people. His use of magic is not well-intentioned when it comes to his wife. In this particular case he abuses his supernatural power for his personal benefit. It is interesting that the fairy King only actively intervenes when bewitching his wife, but that he sends Puck to bewitch and disenchant the humans. This is also indicated by the fact that he instructs his mischievous servant to intervene into earthly affairs. Oberon is well aware of Puck's irresponsibility, which is indicated

when he reproaches him “[s]till thou mistak’st” (III. i, 345). Nevertheless, he assigns his impish servant to accomplish the task instead of doing it himself. Thus, he gives priority to his personal concerns, whereas he considers human matters of lesser importance. However, Oberon can be regarded as an amiable sprite, since he is benevolent to earthly people. He never harms them, and he only manipulates Titania but does not cause her any grievous harm.

Oberon’s function within the play is that of mastermind of the action. He is the genius behind the enchantment of the four Athenian lovers and of Titania’s bewitching. His knowledge of magic allows him to see that the spells are put into practice, by his servant or by himself. By instructing Puck to bewitch the star-crossed lovers and by taking revenge on the fairy Queen, his ideas constitute the outer frame of the entire play. The inner frame is controlled by his mischievous servant Puck as will be illustrated later in this chapter.

Another crucial role constitutes that of a manipulator. With the aid of the magical juice Oberon aims to manipulate Demetrius’ feelings so that he falls in love with Helena. Furthermore, he bewitches Titania so that he should receive the little boy. Thus, his use of magic is restricted to the directing of feelings and actions of other beings. His supernatural practices serve to improve the situation of the four mortals by regulating their emotions via the love potion and to influence the fairy Queen’s decision. Thus, as has just been mentioned above, he shows benevolence towards earthly people in the first case, whereas in the second case his selfishness is revealed.

Generally, it can be said that Oberon is far from being a malicious sprite and, particularly concerning human affairs, he is entirely benevolent. However, when it comes to his rule of the fairy kingdom, and, more precisely to his wife, he is portrayed as an authoritative sprite who regards his wife as a person expected to obey male dominance. Concerning the development of the play Oberon is important since he controls the actions and magical occurrences.

### **2.1.2. Titania**

Titania is the wife of Oberon and, therefore, entitled Queen of the fairy world. Like her husband, she has personal otherworldly servants, who are called Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed. Titania’s responsibilities within the supernatural kingdom relate to the protection of flowers and the

embellishment of nature since she commands her attendants to shelter musk roses from caterpillars (II. ii, 3) and to adorn primroses with jewels made of dewdrops (II. i, 14-15).

Although Titania is, alongside Oberon, the lawful leader of the fanciful sprites, she is subjected to the authority of her husband. This is explicitly stated when she refuses to deliver the little boy to the fairy King. She states: "*Not for thy fairy kingdom*" (II. i, 144). Hence, her husband prevails over the supernatural world and Titania's sovereignty within this territory is restricted.

Titania has only limited paranormal abilities, most importantly the ability to fly. She never makes use of other paranormal faculties herself because Oberon has put a spell on her and thus is unable to invoke supernatural forces herself. She is a victim of otherworldly powers exercised by her husband and not an active practitioner of magic. This attributes a sense of disempowerment to her. Nevertheless, Titania can be characterised as an active woman with a strong will.

It is important to distinguish her status as a passive fairy queen and her temperament as an active woman. In the first case, passivity relates to female submission under male authority. Such a compliant conduct of women constituted an irrevocable principle in Shakespeare's time. In the second instance, activity is connected to an inherent character trait, thus irrespective of any directives. Although Titania is inferior and required to obey her husband – as it was tradition in the Elizabethan era – her nature revolts against this doctrine. Despite imperative conventions of that Zeitgeist that weaken her position as a woman in the fairy empire, she is an active woman in terms of her personality. In the following two examples will be given in order to demonstrate Titania's power.

She is portrayed as a "*rash wanton*" (II. i, 63) who disrespects the superiority of Oberon, her "*lord*" (II. i, 63). Her insistence on keeping the little boy reveals her rebellious nature. Firstly, she opposes the fairy King's demand of raising the child as his personal henchman. Then, she defies his persistent plea for the boy and raises her voice against him. Finally, she abandons her husband in the middle of their fervid discussion. Consequently, Titania is a forceful and daring woman who rebels against Oberon's preponderance.

Further proof of Titania's strong character can be seen when considering that Oberon, in the unresolved matter of the child, turns to magic as his last resort to overcome his wife's opposition. Since the fairy Queen does not submit herself to her husband's insistence on the Indian boy, Oberon enchants the fairy Queen in order to gain control over her. Causing Titania to become submissive to Oberon by means of fraudulent manipulation indicates Titania's unrelenting nature as well. She does not accept a restrictive female role but acts as a dynamic woman.

Further character traits include compassionate feelings towards human beings. Her motivation for keeping the changeling does not result from selfishness, as does Oberon's, but from empathy with the real mother of the child, who had died while giving birth to the newborn. The fairy Queen intends to foster the boy in honour of the dead mother (II. i, 136) and not for her personal benefit.

Another example of Titania's compassion with mortal people is her remorsefulness regarding the disadvantageous consequences of her quarrel with Oberon. Their heated debate over the little boy resulted in unfavourable changes of the weather conditions, causing continents to be flooded (II. i, 91-92), inauspicious effects on the course of the seasons which account for the crops to moulder (II. i, 94-94), and rising illnesses as "*rheumatic diseases [that] do abound*" (II. i, 105). Titania is sorrowful about these disastrous effects of their fight because they afflict human beings. She reproaches her husband:

*And this same progeny of evils comes  
From our debate, from our dissensions;  
We are their parents and original. (II. i, 115-117)*

These lines are an indication of the fairy Queen's benevolence concerning mortals. The fairy Queen is a kind-hearted sprite since she pities the people on earth who innocently have to suffer from the fairy sovereigns' contest of wills. She is concerned with the lives of human beings and does not want to inflict unnecessary hardships and sorrow upon them. Consequently, she can be regarded as an inoffensive paranormal creature that must not be feared by mortal beings.

An important function of Titania includes that of a ridiculed and disgraced sovereign. Because of her disobedience, she is disciplined and humiliated by

Oberon's enchantment, which makes her fall in love with a monstrous-looking human being. This constitutes the starting point in the mockery of the fairy Queen. Spellbound and in a love delirium, she introduces Bottom, whose beauty and intellect she praises by declaring "*[t]hou art as wise as thou art beautiful*" (III. i, 135), to the fairy world and orders her servants to fulfil the mortal's wishes and to make him feel comfortable (IV. i, 1-37). The contrast between the high-ranking, fragile fairy Queen and the low-ranking, ass-headed simpleton with his "*mortal grossness*" (III. i, 146) underlines this foolish comedy even more.

However, their dissimilarity is not only revealed by the difference in status and appearance, but also by their use of language. The fairy Queen speaks mostly in blank verse, and occasionally in rhymed verse: for instance, when Titania promises her beloved

*I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee;  
And they shall fetch thee jewels from the deep,  
And sing, while thou on pressed flowers dost sleep;  
And I will purge thy mortal grossness so  
That thou shalt like an airy spirit go. (III. i, 143-147)*

Bottom, on the other hand, speaks exclusively a blunt variety of prose, for instance, when he explains what he desires to eat:

*Truly, a peck of provender; I could munch your good dry oats.  
Methinks I have a great desire to a bottle of hay. Good hay, sweet  
hay, hath no fellow. (IV. i, 29-31)*

Analysing Titania's speech, the melodious sound of the iambic pentameter, it can be said that she "*uses a much more complex form of poetry, implying the exquisite beauty and magic of the fairy kingdom.*"<sup>2</sup>

While her accomplished language evinces the remarkable splendour of the fairy realm, Bottom's speech, mundane and inornate, illustrates his plain and coarse character. This opposition of verse and prose amplifies the difference between the high-ranking, beautiful fairy Queen and the low-ranking, ass-headed mortal Bottom<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Fry, Christopher. Epstein, Norrie et al.. *Study Guide for A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare. The Glencoe Literature Library*. New York: Glencoe/McGraw-Hill Companies, 2006. available at:  
[http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/midsummer\\_nights\\_dream.pdf](http://www.glencoe.com/sec/literature/litlibrary/pdf/midsummer_nights_dream.pdf).

Titania functions as an important means in terms of visualising the otherworldly realm. She contributes considerably to the vivid image of the minuscule and fanciful otherworldly sprites and adds to the charming atmosphere of the play. The fineness of the fairy Queen is emphasised by several allusions to the beauty of nature. Scenic images of her graceful diminutiveness are given by references to cowslips (II. i, 10) that serve as her personal guardians as well as flowers that function as her sleeping place (IV. i, 1). The intricacy of the sprites' design is additionally underlined by colourful descriptions relating to the duties of Titania's servants. They have to protect their Queen from what constitutes potential hazards, for example, prickly hedgehogs (II. ii, 10) or long-legged spiders (II. ii, 21). By means of these lovely depictions the fairy Queen provides an insight into the supernatural world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

### 2.1.3. Puck

Puck is the obedient but irresponsible servant of Oberon. He is also referred to by the names of Robin Goodfellow and Hobgoblin. The mischievous goblin is a familiar representative of the fairy world and his character has an established reputation. A fairy encountering him in a nearby Athenian wood easily recognises him as

*[...] that shrewd and knavish sprite  
Call'd Robin Goodfellow. [...]  
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm?  
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Puck [...].* (II. I, 33-40)

The fairy's immediate recognition of Puck, who plays tricks on mortals during night-time, points towards his renowned position among the otherworldly realm. He does not need to introduce himself to the sprite which he comes across because it is evident that it is him, the famous Puck.

Puck's supernatural abilities include the ability to fly, and that he can move quickly in space and time. Consequently, he can travel immediately wherever he wants to. This paranormal ability helps him to accomplish his master's commands instantaneously. He can "*put a girdle round about the earth [i]n forty*

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<sup>3</sup> Noyes, Ernest. *Shakespeare's Comedy of A Midsummer Night's Dream*. New York: Macmillan. 1908. In Noyes, Ernest. *The Metre of A Midsummer Night's Dream*. TheatreHistory.com, 2006. available at: <http://www.theatrehistory.com/british/midsummer006.html>.

*minutes*" (II. i, 175-176). He is "*swifter than the wind*" (III. ii, 94) and hastier than an "*arrow from the Tartar's bow*" (III. ii, 99-100).

Furthermore, the expeditious creature can make himself invisible and he is capable of shapeshifting. Consequently, he can secretly observe humans and he is able to intervene without being seen or identified. So mortals do not realize his interference. He occasionally assumes the shape of a horse; then again he appears as a dog. Now and then he takes the figure of a pig, changes his outer appearance into a bear without a head, or impersonates a fire (III. ii, 98-99). He also modifies his voice according to the physical form he transforms himself to. Thus, human beings never encounter Puck as the person he really is since, if it happens that he presents himself to earthly people, he always hides his real identity. Therefore, the sprite remains a mythical creature to mortals because they never recognise him as Puck.

Puck uses his supernatural skills to accomplish Oberon's commands, for example, when swiftly retrieving the magical flower. However, he predominantly makes use of his otherworldly capabilities in order to cause mischief (usually deliberately but sometimes unintentionally). Mockery constitutes his favourite leisure pursuit and it is his most fundamental character trait. Puck's delight in causing mischief denotes his jocular and humorous nature. His pranks frequently serve his own entertainment but they are also the result of his inattentiveness. This division is explicitly referred to when Oberon finds out that his servant has mistaken Lysander for Demetrius. The fairy King reproaches him for his irresponsibility with the following words: "*This is thy negligence. Still thou mistak'st, [o]r else committ'st thy knaveries willfully.*" (III. ii, 345-346).

Representative of the first category, accidentally caused mischief exemplifies Puck's misapplication of the magical potion. He is not accountable for the turmoil he has created since he did not cause the disarray on purpose but unintentionally. Although the sprite unwittingly confuses Lysander for Demetrius, he is not regretful for having caused even more confusion among the four Athenian lovers since "*those things do best please [him] [t]hat befall prepost'rously*" (III. ii, 120-121). Puck regards the grotesque situation as entertaining. His joy about the confusion is explicitly indicated by the following statement: "*[a]nd so far am I glad it so did sort, [a]s this their jangling I esteem a sport.*" (III. ii, 352-353).

The sprite's delight in absurd situations is also manifest in pranks performed deliberately for instance, when he misleads the amateur acting troupe "*through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier*" (III. i, 97). Puck's transformation of the innocent Bottom into an ass-head is another instance for his mischievous character. Additionally, Puck is filled with joy when the bewitched fairy Queen falls in love with the horribly looking mortal. He takes pleasure in the ridiculous situation and in Titania's farcical affection for the monstrous-looking human.

One could argue that Puck is careless about the fate and emotional distress of earthly people since he highly enjoys confusing mortals. Nevertheless, the otherworldly being can be characterised as a child-like sprite who simply wants to have fun without considering the consequences of his hoax. His mischievous nature drives him to instigate comical pranks. Thus, he is a carefree and sportive sprite with whom one cannot be angry. Furthermore, it must be taken into account that Puck's practical jokes do not cater for any malevolent intentions. His mischief is harmless and never results in any detrimental after-effects. He never hurts his victims but only wants to have a good laugh in fooling them. In the case of the intentional transformation of Bottom it is evident that the mortal does not undergo any suffering. Actually, Bottom benefits from his metamorphoses since he is granted access to the fairy realm where Titania's servants treat him as if he were a king. Finally, Puck re-establishes the victim's original face and leaves him in amazement about his fantastic 'dream'. Not only does he restore Bottom's appearance but he also unites the Athenian couples in the appropriate arrangement. Thus, Puck's pranks have no enduring consequences.<sup>4</sup>

Summing up, the sprite represents a non-hazardous supernatural creature who accounts for laughter among the audience since he is responsible for absurd, but inoffensive situations within the play.

Puck's role within the play covers four<sup>5</sup> distinctive functions: he is a mischievous sprite, a love agent, a correspondent to Oberon, as well as a communicator to

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<sup>4</sup> Prez Hurtado, Nohem. *Robin Goodfellow, the True Protagonist of A Midsummer Night's Dream. A Devil or a Joker?* València: Universitat de València Press, 2006-2007. available at: <http://mural.uv.es/nopehur/paper1.htm>.

<sup>5</sup> Chanin, Desiree. *Character Analysis: Puck or Robin Goodfellow in A Midsummer Night's Dream, by William Shakespeare*. 13 April 2010. Massachusetts: Helium Incorporation, 2002-2012. available at:

the audience. In the following, these four roles are examined by means of selected illustrations.

The sprite's most important function is that of a mischief-maker who highly enjoys himself in that role. Puck is delighted when the fairy he encounters in the wood identifies him as the spirit

*That frightens the maidens of the villager,  
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,  
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn,  
And sometimes make the drink to bear no barm,  
Mislead night-wanderers, laughing at their harm. (II. i, 35-39)*

He takes pride in being renowned as that molester of the fairy realm and additionally boasts several of his tricks, with which he makes his master smile:

*I jest to Oberon, and make him smile  
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,  
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal;  
And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's bowl  
In very likeness of a roasted crab,  
And, when she drinks, against her lips I bob,  
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.  
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,  
Sometime for three-foot stool mistaketh me;  
Then slip I from her bum, down topples she,  
And 'tailor' cries, and falls into a cough;  
And then the whole quire hold their hips and laugh,  
And waxen in their mirth, and sneeze, and swear  
A merrier hour was never wasted there. (II. i, 44-57)*

Puck is given the leading part of the play since his practical jokes cater for the sudden twists in the play. Thus, he is responsible for the dramatic development of the play's action. Consequently, it is him who drives the plot.

Besides this role, he has another central function, namely that of a love bringer. He is compared to Cupid, the Roman God of love and passion. Oberon tells Puck that he has once witnessed Cupid with his arrow. The God took aim at a beautiful vestal but missed his target. The arrow hit a flower and from then on, the juice of this blossom has the magical ability to put humans under a love enchantment (II. i, 155-172). Since Puck receives the instruction of his master to put the four star-crossed lovers under spell, he can be regarded as a love agent. Cupid's as well as Puck's tasks are bringing love to a target subject.

Hence, the role of the characters is identical and, therefore, Puck is a love mediator.

In addition to Puck's two functions as a jester and harbinger of love, his third role comprises that of an observer and messenger to the fairy King. Invisibly monitoring the mortals, he reports to his master about recent events in the human world. In III. ii, Oberon asks Puck, whom he explicitly calls his messenger: "[...] *How now, mad spirit! What night-rule now about this haunted grove?*" (III. ii, 4-5). Puck tells his master how, in the act before, he has transformed Bottom into a beast with which the fairy Queen is now in love and how he has terrified the amateur actors during their rehearsal. Thus, Puck represents the role of an informer of his master.<sup>6</sup>

In the epilogue, Puck's fourth function becomes evident. That is to say his role as a communicator to the audience. He apologises for the turmoil and asks the spectators for forgiveness:

*If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumb'ered here  
While these visions did appear. (V. i, 412-415)*

Additionally, in his final speech, he proclaims that the addressees can regard the play being analogous to a vision appearing in front of their eyes while sleeping. He draws a parallel between the actual performance and the mortals bewitched within the play. After the couple's liberation from their miraculous 'reverie', as they consider the strange happenings, Puck states: "*When they next wake, all this derision [s]hall seem a dream and fruitless vision.*" (III. ii, 371-372). This statement is aligned to the bewitched mortals within the play, but also to the audience who is released from the magical presentation of theatrical production. Puck compares the fanciful occurrences to the product of fantastic illusions. Thereby he contributes to the spectators' being entranced by the dream-like dramatic piece. The audience is left in amazement about the supernatural phenomena of the fairy world just as the spellbound characters wonder about their vision.

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<sup>6</sup> Prez Hurtado, Nohem. available at: <http://mural.uv.es/nopehur/paper1.htm>.

#### 2.1.4. Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth and Mustardseed

The four fairies belong to the personal retinue of Titania. They are constantly at the side of their Queen to make her feel comfortable: by singing lullabies and protecting her from caterpillars, spiders, serpents, owls, hedgehogs, worms and snails (II. ii, 3-23), and animals that constitute a considerable threat to the diminutive sprites. Furthermore, they are responsible for liberating flowers from bugs (II. ii, 3) and for decorating blossoms with dew (II. i, 14-15). The fact that they “*hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear*” (II. i, 15) indicates once more the fairies’ activeness during night-time. While their sovereign is asleep they meticulously carry out Titania’s instructions, and thereby account for nature’s beauty.

Although the characters of Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed play a minor role in terms of the development of the action, they are of great significance with regard to the illustration of the fairy realm. The four sprites’ main function is to portray Shakespeare’s conception of their otherworldly kingdom since they give illustrative depictions of their general activities as well as their outer appearance. Besides their above mentioned daily occupations, Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed additionally account for colourful images related to their actual measurements. There are numerous indications given about the diminutiveness of the play’s otherworldly sprites. Frightened by the quarrel of their sovereigns over the little boy, they “[c]reep into acorn cups and hide them there” (II. i, 31). The skin of snails is “[w]ide enough” (II. i, 256) to function as their cover and they can make themselves coats out of bat’s leathern wings (II. i, 4-5). Butterfly wings (III. i, 158-159) function as their fans, their torches are made of humble-bee’s waxen thighs (III. i, 155) and they have to be careful not to be “*overflowen with a honey-bag*” (IV. i, 14-15) since the weight would kill the fragile and tiny sprites. These detailed and exquisite descriptions reveal the fairies’ extreme tininess and fragility.

A further indication of the fairy’s miniscule size can be found when closely looking at their particular designations. With their delicate names they relate to plants and animals of small dimensions. Peaseblossoms, the flowers of a pea plant, and mustard seeds, the germs of the mustard plant, are both small as are the dimensions of moths<sup>7</sup>. And cobwebs of spiders are graceful constructions

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<sup>7</sup> <http://oberon.pugetsound.edu/oberonwiki/index.php/Plants>.

that indicate the sprite's daintiness. By means of the four sprites' detailed portrayals, the audience receives a vivid insight into their fanciful empire.

## **2.2. 'The Supernatural' as Presented in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Its Historical Context**

As has already been mentioned, the Elizabethan era was a time full of superstitions and irrational beliefs. Certain of these beliefs, which derived from either folk-traditions or popular beliefs proliferating because of lack of universal knowledge, can be found in the play under examination and will be discussed in their historical context.

The aspects under consideration will include such issues as the night-time as the time of the activities of fairies, the day of Midsummer, night-time and the presence of the moon. It will be shown that these features were often associated with the otherworldly realm in the Elizabethan era, since they were believed to either enforce mysterious happenings or to be determined by higher and unknown forces. Thus, by choosing this particular setting Shakespeare highly emphasises the enchanting atmosphere of the play. Besides this magical scenery, the otherworldly protagonists are the most important agents of the supernatural in the play.

The subsequent part of this chapter will analyse how the dramatist's presentation of the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* relates to the traditional notion attributed to fairies by the Elizabethan audience. It will be shown that Shakespeare was well familiar with the established fairy mythology of his time and that he included certain aspects of fairy lore in the play. However, it will also be demonstrated that the poet broke with some traditional beliefs of the Elizabethan era relating to these otherworldly beings.

### **2.2.1. Night-time and Midsummer's Eve**

In the Elizabethan era, people regarded fairies to be nocturnal sprites. During the dark hours, these supernatural sprites – so it was believed – became highly active and performed their magic. Consequently, night-time was generally considered to be the period when fairies ascended from the "netherworld".

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare accurately follows this traditional belief and represents the fairies as beings of the night that have to accomplish

their duties “yet ere day” (III. ii, 395) was breaking since they flee dawn by dashing “after night’s shade” (IV. i, 93). All the bewitching takes place during the dark hours, which characterises the fairies as creatures of the night.

Yet, the play focuses on the fairy activities of one particular night of Midsummer: Midsummer’s Eve. Astrologically, this marks the longest day of the year since the “[s]un reaches its highest point in the sky.”<sup>8</sup> After the summer solstice, the sun declines; the impact of which on the northern hemisphere is that the days get shorter and the nights get longer. People of the Elizabethan era were “[u]naware of the complexities of the solar system, [consequently,] they were left to posit supernatural explanations for the incrementally decreasing length of the days following the solstice.”<sup>9</sup> Unable of rationally explaining this particular cosmological phenomenon, they assumed higher forces to be responsible for the event. This resulted in the rise of a variety of superstitions about that particular time of the year. Consequently, the title *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* alludes to the mysterious and magical ambience of Midsummer’s Eve. By choosing this date for the setting of his comedy, the poet puts emphasis on ‘The Supernatural’ since this specific night was closely associated with supernatural happenings and considered a day “combined with [...] several superstitious observances”<sup>10</sup>.

During the Elizabethan era, people believed that at Midsummer Night, herbs and blossoms gained magical powers and that fairies were particularly active and powerful.<sup>11</sup> Hence, huge fires were ignited to shelter man from these wicked sprites. Additionally, bonfires served the purpose of strengthening the weakening sun.<sup>12</sup> It was also supposed that during that particular night of the year, humans were inspired “to engage in strange behaviour”<sup>13</sup>. In the Shakespearean play a variety of such oddities can be found: the strange

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<sup>8</sup> Pallardy, Richard. *Midsummer: Sex, Sunshine, and Magic Mistletoe*. *Encyclopaedia Britannica Blog*. June 21, 2011. Encyclopaedia Britannica Incorporation, 2006-2011. available at: <http://www.britannica.com/blogs/2011/06/midsummer-sex-sunshine-magic-mistletoe/>.

<sup>9</sup> Pallardy, Richard. available at :<http://www.britannica.com/blogs/2011/06/midsummer-sex-sunshine-magic-mistletoe/>.

<sup>10</sup> Drake, Nathan. Vol.1. p. 328.

<sup>11</sup> Franklin, Anna. *Midsummer: Magical Celebrations of the Summer Solstice*. 1<sup>st</sup> edition, 2<sup>nd</sup> printing. United States of America: Llewellyn Publications, 2003. p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Franklin, Anna. pp. 13-16.

<sup>13</sup> CNN. Cable News Network. *Summer: Solstice Brings Longest Day, Strange Behaviour*. *CNN Tech. Technology, Computers, Internet and Personal Tech News from CNN.com*. Atlanta: Turner Broadcasting System Incorporation, June 20, 2000. available at: [http://articles.cnn.com/2000-06-20/tech/solstice.wrap\\_1\\_solstice-moons-longest-day?\\_s=PM:TECH](http://articles.cnn.com/2000-06-20/tech/solstice.wrap_1_solstice-moons-longest-day?_s=PM:TECH).

behaviour of the star-crossed lovers, Titania's absurd affection for a monstrous-looking human being, the amateur acting troupe that witnesses the peculiar transformation of their friend into an ass-head, and Bottom's bizarre 'dream'. Thus, the various manifestations of absurd behaviour of these characters reflect the magical influence and powerful effects which were typically ascribed to the influence of supernatural agents becoming active on Midsummer's Eve.

### 2.2.2. The Moon

During the Shakespearean era, the heavenly bodies were assumed to exercise an enormous influence upon humans' lives. As their constellations changed, their effects on humans' were also thought to vary. Eager to actively explore the unknown secrets and powers of the cosmos, Renaissance astrologers began to take an interest in cosmic powers and so they started to analyse the positions of the stars and planets. By creating analogies between their constellations and specific events, they aimed at understanding the hidden forces of the universe. Astrology was a popular, yet highly controversial science during Shakespeare's time. Particularly the Church criticised it as a heretical practice. In his bull *Inscrutabilis* from 1630, Pope Urban condemns astrology

*as the height of blasphemous human arrogance because the unfathomable depth of God's judgements does not tolerate the human intellect, locked as it is in the shadowy prison of the body, to rise above the stars.*<sup>14</sup>

Among all the heavenly bodies the moon constituted the most mysterious one. Since ancient times, it has been regarded "*a mysterious cosmic force*"<sup>15</sup> and it "*has been associated with illusion and baleful, negative influences*"<sup>16</sup>. According to the Renaissance physician Paracelsus, the moon had such an enormous power that it could even "*tear reason out of man's head by depriving him of humo[u]rs and cerebral virtues*"<sup>17</sup>. Yet, the Catholic Church denied this

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<sup>14</sup> Patrick, James. *Renaissance and Reformation*. New York: Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2007. p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> Bell, Jim. *Moon 3-D: The Lunar Surface Comes to Life*. New York: Sterling Publishing, 2009. p. 6.

<sup>16</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves, and Other Monsters*. New York: Visionary Living, 2005. p. 203.

<sup>17</sup> Paracelsus. Quoted in: Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves, and Other Monsters*. pp. 203-204.

hypothesis by arguing “that the real cause of madness was the devil acting on the moon”<sup>18</sup>. Since God, the creator of the universe, was benign, all the evil in the world was ascribed to his antagonist, the devil.

According to folklore, the moon is related to “female fertility, the monthly cycle, and the powers of nurturing”<sup>19</sup>, and symbolises “darkness, mystery, fear and evil”<sup>20</sup>. Considering these lunar associations it is not surprising that the moon gave rise to a variety of superstitions during the history of man. The waxing moon was thought to support growth, which is the reason why this period was regarded to be ideal for planting seeds or cutting hair. Contrary to this, the waning moon was believed to impede growth and, therefore, it was considered to be best to weed during that phase. During full moon, the heavenly body reached its maximum of power and was thought to cause madness. Particularly during this phase of the moon it was recommended to avoid sleeping under the lunar rays since the moonlight was assumed to provoke blindness.<sup>21</sup>

The moon, as a driving force that positively as well as negatively influences humans’ lives has kept its fascination until today as, for example, special offers of hair dressers indicate, who provide to cut the clients’ hair according to the phases of the moon. Even in our language the mysterious power of the moon has become manifest, as the words ‘lunatic’ or ‘moonstruck’ indicate.

In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Shakespeare makes use of several lunar references and, thereby, strengthens the atmosphere of magic, mystery, the uncanny, and the supernatural. However, the repeated allusions do not only enforce the notion of the supernatural but they can also be regarded as anticipations of mysterious happenings. Thus, the mere presence of the moon is a symbol for magic and mystery to take its course. The following two illustrations shall account for this particular function of the moon:

Before Hermia and Lysander elope to Athens, they arrange to meet “when Phoebe doth behold [h]er silver visage in the wat’ry glass” (I. i, 209-210). As the moon symbolises mystery and magic, the reference to Phoebe, a Greek moon goddess, alludes to the inexplicable and, therefore, foreshadows a

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<sup>18</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Vampires, Werewolves, and Other Monsters*. p. 204.

<sup>19</sup> Lewis, James. *Witchcraft Today: An Encyclopedia of Wiccan and Neopagan Traditions*. California: ABC-CLIO, 1999. p. 189.

<sup>20</sup> Bell, Jim. p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> “Moon”. Simpson, Jacqueline and Roud, Steve. *A Dictionary of English Folklore*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2000. p. 244. available at: <http://de.scribd.com/doc/56025250/A-Dictionary-of-English-Folklore>.

mysterious event. Exhausted from their walk, the two lovers lie down in the Athenian wood and, while they are sleeping exposed to the moonlight, magic takes its course and Puck bewitches them.

The second example relates to the amateur acting troupe that decides to meet in the Athenian wood at moonlight in order to practise their play:

*But, masters, here are your parts; and I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you, to con them by to-morrow night; and meet me in the palace wood, a mile without the town, by moonlight; there will we rehearse; [...].* (I. ii, 86-89)

Here too, the moon foreshadows a mysterious incident. After the actors have assembled, Puck interferes mischievously with their rehearsal. He makes use of his supernatural abilities in order to transform Bottom into an ass-head and then frightens the remaining actors away. As these two examples from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* indicate, the moon is presented as a driving force for mischievous acts of magic.

As “the ‘queen’ over the night”<sup>22</sup> the moon is also in command of nocturnal supernatural beings. Hence, its presence already indicates otherworldly creatures to be active on earth. In the play, Shakespeare makes use of this folkloristic belief by repeatedly associating the fairies with the mysterious heavenly body. Titania, for example, commands her servants to perform their “moonlight revels” (II. i, 141), and Puck identifies the sprites as beings that

*[...] do run,  
By the triple Hecate's team  
From the presence of the sun,  
Following darkness like a dream.* (V. i, .372-375)

Puck associates the supernatural sprites with the presence of the moon and, thereby, alludes to lunar superstitions of that time. He links the jolly attendance of the fairies to the company of Hecate, who, according to Greek mythology, was another sinister goddess of the moon. Usually portrayed as a three-headed deity representing the three phases of the moon Hecate symbolises darkness<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Bell, Jim. p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Kiefer, Frederick. *Shakespeare's Visual Theatre: Staging the Personified Characters*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. pp. 101-109.

and was believed to govern over magic and enchantments<sup>24</sup>. Consequently, the reference to Hecate implies mystery and bewitchment. The lines of the mischievous sprite also strengthen further the folkloristic assumption of Shakespeare's contemporaries of fairies to be nocturnal sprites that vanish at daybreak.

As has been demonstrated, the images relating to night-time, Midsummer's Eve and the moon serve the purpose of reinforcing the supernatural and magic ambience of the play. However, they also symbolise the two opposite levels of the theatrical world, namely the mysterious supernatural world of the fairies and the rational and structured world of mankind. On the one hand, there is the otherworldly sphere which is full of mystery and magic. On the other hand, there is the ordered and rational world of human beings.

### **2.2.3. The Shakespearean Fairies vs. the Fairies of Elizabethan Folklore**

The fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are presented as powerful beings with an enormous influence on the fate of humans. Shakespeare's presentation of the supernatural sprites as domineering over the life of humans corresponds with the common Elizabethan superstition according to which people were "*controlled and transformed through interactions with these supernatural beings*"<sup>25</sup>.

Shakespeare closely follows English folklore by referring to the fairy rings which the supernatural sprites of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* leave on the ground in the morning after their nocturnal dancing (II. i, 86). These rings were made of "*[a] natural mushroom fungus that grows in dark rings on grass and turf.*"<sup>26</sup> In Elizabethan England these circular formations were thought to be caused by the dancing feet of the fairies. A common superstition was that if one cast a wish at full moon in the middle of a fairy ring, it would come true.<sup>27</sup>

The little Indian boy, who is the reason for the fierce quarrel between Oberon and Titania, alludes to Elizabethan superstitions too, although Shakespeare's representation of the changeling highly differs from traditional folklore.

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<sup>24</sup> "Hecate". *Myth Encyclopedia. Myths and Legends of the World*. Illinois: Advameg Incorporation, 2012. available at: <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Go-Hi/Hecate.html>.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.taylor.edu/dotAsset/77410.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. New York: Visionary Living Incorporation, 2008. p. 121.

<sup>27</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca*. p. 121.

Previously, it was believed that newborn und not yet baptised babies were particularly susceptible to supernatural powers. Since they were not yet baptised they were considered “*heathen, and therefore [...] under the dominion of evil spirits.*”<sup>28</sup> In a moment when they are not looked upon, parents feared that their babies could be abducted into the otherworldly realm. According to legend it was believed that fairies would steal unbaptised human infants “*leaving in their place one of themselves, or a block of wood animated by their enchantments and made to resemble the stolen*”<sup>29</sup> one.

The reasons for baby abductions vary depending on legend. According to a common superstition in Elizabethan England, sprites abducted human infants in order to make them work as their slaves. Another myth holds that fairies replaced sick and unattractive children of their race with healthy and beautiful-looking human ones<sup>30</sup> so that the sprites could sustain and perfect the fairy race.

The most common protection against fairies stealing human babies was getting them baptised, since, without this sacred rite children were believed to be under the authority of malevolent sprites. Further ways of protecting unbaptised newborns from being kidnapped were putting an open bible close to the baby, to light a candle in the chamber, to keep a cross near the infant or to put a piece of the father's cloth on or next to the child. Moreover, particular plants were considered to hold off evil sprites.<sup>31</sup> Another method of securing infants from being kidnapped was to put iron scissors or nails under the babies' pillows or to fix these items on their cradles since iron was considered to keep fairies away.<sup>32</sup>

The superstition that people's healthy children were exchanged by sick, or disabled, or mentally handicapped ones results from the parents' inability of explaining illnesses or disabilities of their infants. It was a common belief that deformations of a baby, the sudden death of a newborn or bad behaviour of a child was due to their baby having been replaced by an unhealthy fairy infant.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hartland, Sidney. *The Science of Fairy Tales: An Inquiry into Fairy Mythology*. Elibron Classics. Boston: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005. p. 100.

<sup>29</sup> Hartland, Sidney. pp. 93-94.

<sup>30</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *Fairies: Mysteries, Legends, and Unexplained Phenomena*. New York: Visionary Living Incorporation, 2008. pp. 76-78.

<sup>31</sup> Hartland, Sidney. pp. 94-99.

<sup>32</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *Fairies*. p. 80.

<sup>33</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *Fairies*. pp.80-81.

This argumentation clearly is in line with what has been mentioned in the introductory chapter 'The Supernatural in the History of Man', namely that the belief in higher forces originates from people's lack of education as well as their fear of the unknown and that for these reasons various superstitious beliefs developed.

Shakespeare follows the Elizabethan belief when describing Oberon's motive for claiming the ownership of the changeling. He intends to make him his henchman and the "[k]night of his train, to trace the forests wild" (II. I, 25). This clearly corresponds to English folklore in which it was believed that children were brought into the fairy realm in order to work for the supernatural sprites.

The reason of Titania's insistence on keeping the little boy is an innovative idea. On the one hand, Puck reveals that the fairy Queen has abducted the newborn from a mortal Indian King (II. i, 22). The mischievous sprite does not give any explanation why she did so; however, he states that Titania has stolen the boy from his father. As the verb 'steal' has a negative connotation, Titania's reason for the newborn's abduction is presented in a negative light and implies that she egoistically robbed the baby. On the other hand, Titania explains that she did not take hostage of the child but brought him into the otherworld kingdom out of compassion for his mother who had died when giving birth to him. "[F]or her sake do I rear up her boy" (II. i, 136) she explains to Oberon. This justification indicates that the fairy Queen is a caring sprite, who does not act out of selfishness but out of true kindness with the deceased mother. It remains unclear which argumentation is true. However, what can be said is that Oberon's intention to make the child his servant corresponds to the traditional superstition of Shakespeare's time, which held, that fairies were malicious sprites that stole children in order to make them work as their slaves.

Shakespeare also follows legend when describing that Titania has a preference for beautiful human children. Thus, her affection for particularly pretty babies corresponds with the superstitious belief of that era. The little Indian boy is not the first human child to be introduced to the supernatural kingdom by her (II. I, 24). It is not revealed if she, as it was previously assumed, exchanged sick babies of the otherworldly realm with healthy human ones in order to ameliorate her race. The fairy Queen's main purpose of taking the little boy is to bring him up and to look after him. Titania "[c]rowns him with flowers" (II. i, 27) which

clearly indicates that the child is treated well. Thus, the fairy Queen displays solely positive attitudes towards the newborn. She is given an entirely sympathetic image, a fairy who must not be feared by humans.

Not only did Shakespeare characterise Titania as a kind-hearted sprite, but all the other supernatural beings of the play are also portrayed as benevolent beings who do not mean any harm to humans. The examples above show that Shakespeare was well aware of the traditional fairy mythology<sup>34</sup> and that he included certain superstitious beliefs of his contemporaries: the belief in the fairies' influence on human's fate, the sprites' use of magic, the fairy rings, remains of the sprites' nightly dancing, and the spirits' inclination to kidnap infants. Although Shakespeare adopted these assumptions he broke with the actual portrayal of the fairies' characters. Thus, the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* do not mirror the fairies as they were perceived in English legends. As Nathan Drake states, "*the Fairy Mythology [...] was, in fact, remodelled and improved by the poet.*"<sup>35</sup>

The following part will reveal how the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* diverge from those of traditional Elizabethan fairy lore. Attention will be drawn to two particular alterations of the Shakespearean sprites, their kind-heartedness and their tininess, and their connection with floral imagery.

The most significant innovation of the Shakespearean fairies concerns their portrayal as entirely good-natured beings. The supernatural sprites of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are depicted as completely benevolent. They want human beings to face pure contentment and satisfaction on earth. No harm of any kind shall distress them. The only reason for the sprites to intrude into the mortals' existence is to render their lives more fortunate and more content.

Yet, the fairies of Elizabethan folklore were not seen as benign creatures. Contrary to the compassionate and amiable sprites of the play, they were

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<sup>34</sup> Latham, Minor. *The Elizabethan Fairies*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1930. pp. 177-178.

<sup>35</sup> Drake, Nathan. *Shakespeare and His Times. Including the Biography of the Poet; Criticism on His Genius and Writings; A New Chronology of His Plays; A Disquisition on the Object of His Sonnets; And a History of the Manners, Customs, Amusement; Superstitions; Poetry, and Elegant Literature of His Age*. Volume 2. London: T. Cadell and W. Davies, 1817. p. 902. available at:

[http://books.google.at/books?id=iabSKsosU2cC&pg=PR4&lpg=PR4&dq=nathan+drake+dissertation+on+the+fairy+mythology&source=bl&ots=v837kfN6HF&sig=2uCpXGY5nKhitZDxwTG7rxiT8wE&hl=de&ei=iswcTdq7Asmt8QO7i5XHBQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.at/books?id=iabSKsosU2cC&pg=PR4&lpg=PR4&dq=nathan+drake+dissertation+on+the+fairy+mythology&source=bl&ots=v837kfN6HF&sig=2uCpXGY5nKhitZDxwTG7rxiT8wE&hl=de&ei=iswcTdq7Asmt8QO7i5XHBQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=1&ved=0CBoQ6AEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false).

generally considered to belong “to the category of wicked spirits<sup>36</sup>”. In Reginald Scot’s *The Discovery of Witchcraft*<sup>37</sup> they are even placed amongst diabolical creatures and in the *Daemonologie* of King James I, fairies are described as entities through which the devil distresses mankind<sup>38</sup>. Resulting from their infernal connection they were thought to inhabit “dark and mysterious portions of the earth”<sup>39</sup>, and people believed them to be “dangerous, capable of inflicting terrible harm, even death upon people and their livestock, and every precaution had to be taken to keep them at bay, or at least placated.”<sup>40</sup>

In order to protect themselves from the malevolent influences of the fairies people made use of a variety of methods. First of all, they cast spells and used objects to restrain the power of the supernatural sprites<sup>41</sup>. Among these items there were, for example, the cross and the holy water, as well as church bells, bells around the neck of animals, and iron horseshoes.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, people made use of particular plants and herbs, which they believed to weaken the influence of fairies. The strongest among these was the four-leaved clover. According to legend, it was employed to impede enchantments cast by wicked fairies<sup>43</sup>. Red verbena, daisies and red-berried trees were regarded to keep supernatural sprites at bay.

Furthermore, since it was believed that fairies nourished themselves on humans’ food, particularly on grain, cattle and dairy products, people provided them with nightly meals. By doing so, the sprites were hoped to leave the fields and herds untouched.<sup>44</sup> Additionally, people gave them pleasant names in order to appease the evil sprites. Moreover, they never talked about them

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<sup>36</sup> Latham, Minor. p. 33.

<sup>37</sup> Scot, Reginald. *The Discovery of Witchcraft. Booke VII, chapter XV*. London: Elliot Stock, 1584. p. 86. available at: <http://archive.org/stream/discoverieofwitc00scot#page/122/mode/2up>.

<sup>38</sup> King James I. *Daemonologie, in Forme of a Dialogue. Thirde Booke*. Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Walde-graue printer to the Kings Majestie, 1597. pp. 53-57. available at: [http://books.google.at/books?id=dolLpc8UCvAC&pg=PR9&hl=de&source=gbs\\_selected\\_pages&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.at/books?id=dolLpc8UCvAC&pg=PR9&hl=de&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false).

<sup>39</sup> Latham, Minor. p. 193.

<sup>40</sup> Henderson, Lizanne and Cowan, Edward. *Scottish Fairy Belief: A History from the Fifteenth to the Nineteenth Century*. Great Britain: The Cromwell Press, 2001. p. 14

<sup>41</sup> Giebert, Stefanie. *Elfland Revisited: A Comparative Study of Late Twentieth Century Adaptions of Two Traditional Ballades*. Deutschland: Universität Trier, 2007. p. 18. available at : <http://ubt.opus.hbz-nrw.de/volltexte/2009/514/pdf/diss-giebert.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup> Briggs, Katharine. *An Encyclopedia of Fairies: Hobgoblins, Brownies, Bogies, and Other Supernatural Creatures*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1976. pp. 335-336.

<sup>43</sup> Briggs, Katharine. p. 180.

<sup>44</sup> Latham, Minor. pp. 113-118.

disrespectfully, since, as the fairies were assumed to be invisible, they could always listen to people's conversations.<sup>45</sup>

The second alteration of the poet's supernatural sprites from traditional folklore concerns their measurements. In the play, they are given miniscule measurements. Yet, according to the Elizabethan fairy mythology, they were usually almost as tall as mortals.<sup>46</sup>

The third modification relates to the identification of the Shakespearean sprites with flowers<sup>47</sup>. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the fairies are entirely related to blossoms: Titania sleeps on flowers; her attendants are given floral appellations; their duties are to embellish nature and, instead of dwelling in a scary place, they cavort in an Athenian wood. Every sinister aspect of the fairies has been removed by the poet. Instead, he represents them as beautiful, harmless and fragile sprites that are at risk to be crushed by falling honey bags. These examples of Elizabethan fairy lore and the superstitions related to these otherworldly creatures clearly illustrate that the sprites of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are not prototypical of that era. Shakespeare must have been aware of the folklore of his time, since he alludes to certain contemporary myths. However, he either reinterpreted them, or changed them. By doing so he

*has imparted an entire new cast of the beings whom he has evoked from its bosom, purposely omitting the darker shades of their character, and, whilst throwing round them a flood of light, playful, yet exquisitely soft and tender, endowing them with the mortal attributes of purity and benevolence.*<sup>48</sup>

This exceptional concept of the Shakespearean beings highly inspired contemporary poets so that innocuous, tiny, pretty and merry fairies became extremely fashionable in literature. By 1630, however, this new illustration, as well as "*the growth of science and technology [and] the rise of rationality and reason*"<sup>49</sup> had almost entirely replaced the fairies of Elizabethan folklore, and thereby led to the fall of the fairies as credible entities because

*[a]s long as they were regarded as wicked beings, they survived as powerful and credible entities; but when they [...] took upon*

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<sup>45</sup> Henderson, Lizanne and Cowan, Edward. p. 14.

<sup>46</sup> Latham, Minor. p. 66.

<sup>47</sup> Latham, Minor. pp. 185-187.

<sup>48</sup> Drake, Nathan. Volume 2. p. 337.

<sup>49</sup> Henderson, Lizanne and Cowan, Edward. p. 27.

*themselves the nature of good sprites, they lost their hold upon the fear of the folk. [...] When they became infinitesimal creatures who toyed with dew drops and hid in acorn cups, they vanished from reality.*<sup>50</sup>

Although the belief in fairies gradually diminished, Renaissance people were still confronted with a variety of inexplicable, mysterious and feared phenomena. Thus, soon a new dreaded agent was found who could be blamed for malevolent happenings: the witch and her destructive magic. This leads directly to the next part of this thesis, in which the figures of the witch and the Renaissance magician as well as their magical faculties will be analysed in view of their representation in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.

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<sup>50</sup> Latham, Minor. p. 193.

### **3. *The Tempest***

The subsequent short synopsis aims at providing the reader with an outline of the plot of Shakespeare's theatrical piece.

The magician Prospero and his daughter Miranda escaped to an abandoned island where they have meanwhile lived for 12 years. The reason for their flight was that Prospero, rightful Duke of Milan, occupied himself that much with magical studies that he neglected his stately responsibilities. His brother Antonio, avid for power, and Alonso, King of Naples, deprived Prospero forcefully of his sovereignty. As a consequence of this plot Prospero and Miranda had to flee to an insular area over which the magician now reigns. His servants are the airy spirit Ariel, and Caliban, the deformed son of the witch Sycorax. The former was confined in a split pine tree by the sorceress. Prospero rescued Ariel, who in return is now under his service.

The action starts with the seafaring of King Alonso, his brother Sebastian, his son Ferdinand, and Antonio, who sail back from a wedding feast in Tunis. When the ships pass the island which Prospero inhabits the magician orders Ariel to cause a dreadful tempest so that the royal ship runs ashore. The rest of the fleet sails back to Naples since they consider the royal ship to be lost.

Due to Ariel's magical interference, one part of the stranded crew is set asleep and the other grounded men are dispersed across the island. Ariel leads Ferdinand, prince of Naples, to Prospero and his daughter. Ferdinand and Miranda immediately fall in love and he promises to make her princess of Naples.

While the shipwrecked Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian are desperately searching for Ferdinand, Antonio plots Sebastian into killing Alonso so that he, Sebastian, can become king himself. Suddenly ghosts appear and Ariel, in disguise of a harpy, accuses the three men of having expelled Prospero from Milan. He tells them that, in order to take revenge for their sinful conduct, the sea has taken Ferdinand.

In the meantime, Caliban comes across the grounded seamen Trinculo and Stefan. He tells them that he is under the command of a domineering magician who has deprived him of the island. While Ariel overhears their conversation, he learns about their secret plan to kill Prospero and their intention to take over the

island. They intend to deprive Prospero of his books on magic because without them he is powerless.

Prospero gives his blessing to the betrothal of his daughter to Ferdinand. Three ghosts appear in the shape of Iris, Juno and Ceres and perform a masque for the young lovers.

When Caliban and the sailors arrive at the cave of the magician, they are scared off by three ghosts disguised as dogs.

Alonso, Antonio and Sebastian, led by Ariel, arrive at Prospero's cell where Prospero and his brother become reconciled. However, Prospero reclaims his dukedom. Later on he informs Alonso that his son is alive.

In the end, Prospero abjures his magic and releases Ariel and Caliban from his service.

### **3.1. 'The Supernatural' in *The Tempest***

'The Supernatural' as it is presented in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is more multifaceted than in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Unlike the latter play, in which paranormal powers are exclusively related to and exercised by fairies, *The Tempest* presents magical practices with more than just one character. These magical abilities are not only related to supernatural creatures, but also to ordinary human beings. Thus, magical forces are not, like in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, limited to an otherworldly realm, but can also be performed in the human world.

In the following chapter, the supernatural creatures – Ariel, an airy spirit, and a group of fairies – as well as the human beings with magical abilities – the witch Sycorax and the magician Prospero – will be analysed on the basis of their description in the play. The subsequent investigation will focus on their character relations and character traits as well as on their individual magical powers. Additionally, it will be tried to classify their magic in terms of black or white magic. The following investigation will be backed by assorted examples and quotations from the play.

#### **3.1.1. Ariel**

The spirit Ariel used to be under the command of the spiteful witch Sycorax, who had incarcerated him in a splintered pine tree for his refusing to carry out

her malicious orders. After the witch had died there was nobody to set him free. When Prospero is stranded on the shores of the abandoned island, he releases the paranormal creature from the pine tree. In return for his liberation Ariel has to serve the magician and assist him with his supernatural faculties. Prospero, however, assures him that, in the end, Ariel will be “as free [a]s mountain winds” (I. ii, 502-503) and delivered of any service.

Ariel is, as his name already implies, a sprite of the air. Prospero calls him “*my bird*” (IV. i, 184), and describes him to be “*dainty*” (V. i, 95) and made of nothing but the air (V. i, 21). This clearly classifies the otherworldly creature as an airy spirit with a graceful physical appearance.

Ariel shows a variety of ‘fairly-like’ features. He is a miniscule and delicate sprite. He describes himself with the following words:

*Where the bee sucks, there suck I:  
In a cowslip’s bell I lie;  
There I couch when owls do cry.  
On the bat’s back I do fly  
After summer merrily.  
Merrily, merrily shall I live now  
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough.* (V. i, 88-94)

Not only does Ariel show similarities with the other Shakespearean fairies in terms of his grace and measurements but he also shares the affinity for flowers with them. Bats too have an important function for Ariel. While the former exploits them as comfortable means of transportation, the latter use their wings as coats. And, akin to the fairy Queen Titania, whose servants protect her from owls, Ariel also avoids these birds by creeping into cowslips’ bells. A further parallel between the sprites of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and Ariel is their fondness of music. While the fairies take pleasure in dancing and performing their fairy ringlet, the airy spirit of *The Tempest* is, as his songs (I. ii, 377-389; I, ii, 399-405) and various stage directions (II. i, stage direction antecedent 294; III. ii, stage direction antecedent 124) indicate, fond of singing and playing the flute and drums.

As far as Ariel’s supernatural abilities are concerned, he is first of all capable of influencing the weather. On Prospero’s command he conjures up the tempest which causes the royal crew to run ashore. He can also generate thunder and lightning (III. iii, stage direction antecedent 53). Furthermore, he is able “*to fly*,

*[t]o swim, to dive into the fire, to ride [o]n the curl'd clouds"* (I. ii, 190-193), and he can make himself invisible as well as shape his shift, as, for example, into the form of a mermaid (I. ii, 301), a harpy (III. iii, stage direction antecedent 53), or the Roman goddess Ceres (IV. i, 166). Additionally, he is able to evoke music in order to either mysteriously lull (II. i, 180-196), or deliberately mislead (III. ii, 123-150) a particular target person or group. Moreover, he can summon spirits. In contrast to the fairies' magical faculties in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Ariel's supernatural abilities are not only confined to the dark hours but can also be applied during the day. This is indicated in the following conversation between Prospero and the airy spirit:

Prospero: [...] *there' more work.*  
*What is the time o' th' day?*  
 Ariel: *Past the mid season.*  
 Prospero: *At least two glasses. The time 'twixt six and now*  
*Must by us both be spent most preciousy.* (I. ii, 237-241)

Although Prospero's servant occasionally runs out of patience by reminding his master of his promise to set him free, Ariel respects him and calls him a "great" (I. ii, 189) and "noble" (I. ii, 299) man. He is an obedient servant who is "correspondent to [his master's] command, [a]nd do[es his] spriting gently" (I. ii, 296-297) without mistakes or complaints. However, Ariel has no other choice than to comply with his master's orders since Prospero threatens:

*If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,*  
*And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till*  
*Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters.* (I. ii, 294-296)

Like Oberon's servant, Ariel accomplishes his master's tasks instantaneously. When Prospero instructs him to bring the captain and the boatswain of the royal crew to his place, Ariel replies: "*I drink the air before me, and return [o]r ere your pulse twice beat.*" (V. i, 102-103).

Contrary to the mischievous Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, who selfishly abuses his supernatural powers by applying his magical faculties for his personal amusement as well, Ariel never applies magic for his own benefit but only to satisfy his master, who regards him a diligent and "industrious servant" (IV. i, 33).

The airy sprite is also more conscious to the consequences of applied magic as well as more sensitive towards human feelings than the Shakespearean prankster Puck. In the play, Ariel is described as a sprite “*too delicate [t]o act [...] abhorr’d commands*” (I. ii, 272-273). He feels compassionate with the stranded royal crew and, sympathising with them, he states to his master that if he himself were human, his “*affections [w]ould become tender*” (V. i, 18). The only reason why Ariel assists Prospero in causing the tempest is his aspiration for freedom. Thus, Ariel can be said to be an innocuous, kind-hearted and caring supernatural being that even persuades his master of becoming more benevolent with his antagonists.

### 3.1.2. Sycorax

Sycorax, the malevolent witch of *The Tempest*, is only a minor character and has no influence on the development of the play’s action. She is only indirectly referred to as she died already before Prospero’s arrival on the island. As a matter of fact, little is known about Sycorax. All the information on the witch is provided by Ariel, and – based on the sprite’s accounts – by Prospero.

According to the airy sprite, Sycorax was originally born in Algeria from where she was exiled to the abandoned island “*[f]or mischiefs manifold, and sorceries terrible*” (I. ii, 264). The only reason for why she was spared execution – a common practice against witches at that time – was the fact that she was pregnant with her son Caliban, who resulted from Sycorax’ intercourse with the devil: “*[...] got by the devil himself [u]pon thy wicked dam [...]*.” (I. ii, 321-322).

According to Prospero, the hunchbacked (I. ii, 258) Sycorax was a highly powerful witch who was capable of controlling the moon as well as the ebb and flow (V. i, 270) of the sea. Furthermore, she was in command of “*potent ministers*” (I. ii, 275) who assisted her in her harmful magical operations.

The range of Sycorax’ *maleficia* remains unknown. In the play it is merely indicated that she confined Ariel in a pine tree, where he was to be imprisoned for twelve years (I. ii, 274-280). This reference is the only example of how the witch applied her paranormal powers, and clearly illustrates that she used to be a practitioner of black, thus harmful magic. Furthermore, Sycorax is constantly associated with negative attributes. Prospero repeatedly calls her a “*foul*” (I. ii, 257) and “*damn’d witch*” (I. ii, 263) and portrays her as a spiteful (I. ii, 257),

authoritative (I. ii, 274) and vengeful (I. ii, 276) person. These features underline her image as an unpleasant and destructive character.

### 3.1.3. Fairies

In *The Tempest*, several other supernatural characters are briefly referred to, namely a group of fairies without further qualification. Prospero has given Ariel command over these sprites, and, although referred to as “[w]eak masters” (V. i, 41) and “*meaner fellows*” (IV. i, 35), they are of great importance to him since they assist him with their magical faculties in his endeavours.

Prospero describes these fairies as “*demi-puppets, that [b]y moonshine do the green sour ringlets make*” (V. i, 36-37) and “*whose pastime [i]s to make midnight mushrooms*” (V. i, 38-39) sprout. The portrayal of these sprites as miniscule and dancing creatures that produce fairy ringlets during their nightly amusements and that leave mushrooms behind them is similar to that of the fairies as illustrated in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

### 3.1.4. Prospero

Prospero is a magician and the former Duke of Milan. His studies of the dark sciences have enabled him to exercise a variety of magical forces. Although he used to be a powerful (I. ii, 54) and popular (I. ii, 141) sovereign, his preoccupation with magic led to his downfall as duke since he became “*raped in [his] secret studies*” (I. ii, 77) and “*dedicated [himself] to closeness*” (I. ii, 89-90) while progressively neglecting his stately responsibilities. Prospero’s excessive fascination with the occult is clearly illustrated when he compares his library to his dukedom (I. ii, 109-110) and when he esteems some volumes of his books more highly than his empire (I. ii, 167-168). It seems that Prospero devoted himself exclusively to magic and, thus, forgot about the world around him.

As far as Prospero’s character traits are concerned, he is first of all a vengeful person. On the abandoned island where he was exiled to, he concocts a plan how to take revenge on his brother for having ousted him and, thus, seeks retribution for being dispossessed of his dukedom. Prospero can also be described as a stubborn, irresponsible as well as unreasonable man. Although conscious of having “*neglect[ed] worldly ends*” (I. ii, 89), he did neither desist from continuing his secret studies of occultism and magic nor did he take the

consequences of forgetting about his duties into account. Prospero's irresponsibility is not only revealed by his disregarding of his legal obligation as a potentate of Milan, but also by abandoning his daughter Miranda, who has to grow up without a mother. Locked in his library he appears to have neglected the girl as well.

The fact that Prospero gives priority to his own interests and advantages points towards his selfishness. That he only thinks about his personal profit is shown when he frees Ariel from the pine tree. Prospero's motivation for doing so does not result from pity with the creature but from egotism. Although he initially liberates the creature, he then makes it a slave again since he puts the sprite under his command and makes him his assistant in magical enterprises.

Prospero's paranormal faculties are not innate to him, but have been acquired by thorough study. He has taught himself how to become invisible, how to apply charms and spells, for example, spells for freezing a target person (I. ii, stage direction antecedent 470), as well as how to summon, control and exploit spirits for his own benefit. Furthermore, he has the skill to make a pine tree gape, which he does in order to free the airy spirit Ariel (I. ii, 291-293). Moreover, he is able to anticipate future events (II. i, 292) and to interpret the stars (I. ii, 181-182). This indicates that he must also be well versed in astrology.

Although skilled in the theory of magic, without his "*brave utensils*" (III. ii, 94) – his occult books and his magic cloak (I. ii, 24) and wand (I. ii, 475) – "*[h]e's but a sot, [...] nor hath not [o]ne spirit to command.*" (III. ii, 90-92).

These particular tools, with which Prospero exercises his magic, are crucial to him since only they enable the magician to actively make use of his powers. Prospero therefore refers to his mantle as "*my Art*" (I. ii, 25) because he knows that this special piece of garment is, like the other means, a decisive equipment as it permits him to put his knowledge of magic into practice. The following two scenes from the play demonstrate that Prospero's magic is bound to these items:

In I. ii, in which Ferdinand, prince of Naples, arrives at Prospero's cell after having been separated from the rest of the stranded crew. Ferdinand has been led to the magician by the magic singing of Ariel, who remained invisible. There, Ferdinand and Miranda instantaneously fall in love and Ferdinand declares that, by getting married to the magician's daughter, he will make her princess of

Naples. Prospero, who has plotted the two to meet and to lose their heart to each other, is satisfied with the development of his secret plan. “[L]est too light winning [m]ake the prize light” (I. ii, 454-455) Prospero accuses Ferdinand of having come to the island in order to spy on him and threatens to drown him. Ferdinand refuses to follow Prospero to the sea and pulls his sword, but Prospero bewitches Ferdinand so that he cannot move. His hands and feet “have no vigour in them” (I. ii, 487). By doing so Prospero magically restrains Ferdinand from moving, fighting, and defending himself. After having “*charmed [Ferdinand] from moving*” (I. ii, stage direction antecedent 470) Prospero threatens: “[...] *I can here disarm thee with this stick [a]nd make thy weapon drop.*” (I. ii, 475-476). Finally, Miranda asks her father to spare Ferdinand, but he ignores her desperate pleas:

*Miranda: Beseech you, father.*

*Prospero: Hence! hang not on my garments.*

*Miranda: Sir, have pity; [...].* (I. ii, 477-479)

As this scene demonstrates, Prospero’s magic heavily relies on his utensils. That Prospero can put his opponent out of action effortlessly results from his knowledge of the appropriate spell. Thus, he depends on his secret books, which contain information on magical formulae. His magic wand, which, compared to Ferdinand’s swords represents a means of poor defence, is in fact a highly effective weapon. It enables Prospero to easily disarm his counterpart, who, paralysed, clutches to his sword. Prospero’s exclamation to his daughter reflects Miranda’s desperate attempt to remove her father’s magic cloak. She tries to deprive him of his mantle and thus of his supernatural powers.

The second example that illustrates Prospero’s power to depend on his supplies is given in the epilogue of the play. After having finally decided to renounce his magic, Prospero breaks the magic wand, burrows it into the ground and drowns his secret books deep down in the sea. He declares that, after having disposed of these items, his “*charms are all o’erthrown*” (Epilogue, 1) because he has no “*[s]pirits to enforce, Art to enchant*” (Epilogue, 14). This again demonstrates Prospero’s dependence on his instruments. As long as he owns his powerful utensils “*[his] charms crack not; [his] spirits obey*” (V. i, 2), but without them his magic disappears and he is unable of conjuring his otherworldly servants “*by whose aid*” (V. i, 40) Prospero’s intentions are magically put into practice.

Prospero's otherworldly assistants comprise Ariel and a group of fairies over which the magician has assigned him the control. Like Oberon in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Prospero rules these paranormal creatures, but not because he is their legal sovereign but because his "*so potent Art*" (V. i, 50) allows him to communicate with these creatures, to subjugate them under his service, and to benefit from their supernatural powers. Prospero's servants are at the magician's disposal at any time. They "[c]ome with a thought" (IV. i, 163) and support him with their paranormal powers. He only has to give them commands and, with their magical faculties, they put their master's tasks into realisation. Prospero states that it was only due to his servants' help that he

[...] *bedimm'd*  
*The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous winds,*  
*And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault*  
*Set roaring war: to the dread rattling thunder*  
*[Has he] given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak*  
*With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory*  
*[Has he made] shake, and by the spurs pluck'd up*  
*The pine and cedar: graves at [his] command*  
*Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth.* (V. i, 41-49)

Apart from these utensils, Prospero also relies on his obedient supernatural servants because they constitute his "*instrument[s] for controlling and developing the actions he sets forth.*"<sup>51</sup> Unlike Oberon, who could actually realise his magical enterprises without Puck, Prospero is unable to practise magic without the help of his supernatural servants. It is only due to their powerful support that Prospero sees his ideas realised. Consequently, these creatures are the main performers of magical events in *The Tempest*, whereas Prospero acts as the mastermind behind the mysterious events within the play. The magician's function as instigator of ideas reveals that he is an artist. Like a playwright, Prospero directs the plot of the play and thus creates a world of wonder. While Shakespeare creates marvels that amaze the audience, Prospero generates a world of illusions that baffles the protagonists of the play. Shakespeare is the initiator of the play *The Tempest*. Prospero is the creator of the tempest that causes the royal crew to shipwreck.

The relationship between Prospero, the creator of ideas, and Ariel, the spirit that primarily puts those ideas into effect, can be compared to the union of an artist

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<sup>51</sup> Knight, George. *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Final Plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1947. p. 210.

and his poetic medium. Ariel stands for the “*poetic medium*”<sup>52</sup> of his master. He is the channel through which Prospero’s art is realised, a catalyst for implementing the magician’s notions. He translates the artist’s ideas into reality, thus, enables him to create an artefact. Consequently, it can be said that Ariel is “*Prospero’s stage-manager; more, he is the enactor of Prospero’s conceptions: Prospero is the artist, Ariel the art.*”<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the magician depends on Ariel as the supernatural vehicle for bringing his plans to fruition.

The airy spirit, on the other hand, relies on his master just as well, since Prospero is the only person who can release the sprite from his life as a servant. This shows that Ariel applies his magical art with a concrete goal, namely his ultimate freedom. Here another analogy between Prospero and Shakespeare can be witnessed. As long as the artist is occupied with his project – taking revenge on Alonso in Prospero’s case and composing a theatrical piece in the event of Shakespeare – he depends on a poetic medium, which – on the other hand – depends on its master to be set free. After the playwright’s accomplishment of his goal there is no need for any catalyst. Art has been brought to life, and since Ariel is the “*personification of [...] art*”<sup>54</sup> he is eventually released from his service.

Prospero can be described as an arrogant and self-interested artist. He gives no credit to his servant for his achievements and boasts his supernatural abilities as if they were only the result of his own genius. This is clearly revealed in the scene in which Prospero wants to flaunt his special abilities by assigning Ariel to perform a masque for Miranda and Ferdinand. He tells his assistant: “[...] *I must [b]estow upon the eyes of this young couple [Miranda and Ferdinand] [s]ome vanity of mine Art.*” (IV. i, 39-41). Having left the two lovers enchanted with his magnificent show he brags that the actors of the spectacle were “*[s]pirits, which by mine Art I have from their confines call’d to enact [m]y present fancies.*” (IV. i, 120-122).

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<sup>52</sup> Bloom, Harold and Heims, Neil. *Bloom’s Shakespeare Through the Ages: The Tempest. Bloom’s Literary Criticism*. New York: Infobase Publishing, 2008. p. 151. available at: [http://books.google.at/books?id=wqIW7RBThMwC&pg=PA151&lpg=PA151&dq=poetic+medium+ariel+the+tempest&source=bl&ots=uutvYOT3J8&sig=EWLWCe24BVaSO6dPPPphEdCkOx4&hl=de&ei=jdeTfKBH8yOswbn\\_dTiAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CCAQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=poetic%20medium%20ariel%20the%20tempest&f=false](http://books.google.at/books?id=wqIW7RBThMwC&pg=PA151&lpg=PA151&dq=poetic+medium+ariel+the+tempest&source=bl&ots=uutvYOT3J8&sig=EWLWCe24BVaSO6dPPPphEdCkOx4&hl=de&ei=jdeTfKBH8yOswbn_dTiAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=result&resnum=2&ved=0CCAQ6AEwAQ#v=onepage&q=poetic%20medium%20ariel%20the%20tempest&f=false).

<sup>53</sup> Bloom, Harold and Heims, Neil. p. 152.

<sup>54</sup> Johnson, Stacy. “The Genesis of Ariel.” *The Shakespeare Quarterly. Volume 1, Number 1*. New York: The Shakespeare Association of America Incorporation, January 1950. p. 205.

This example represents Prospero as a boastful and self-centred magician who exploits his powers for his personal benefit. However, initially, the goal of his secret studies constituted, as he himself mentions, “*the bettering of my mind*” (I. ii, 90). This would imply that Prospero practices white, benevolent magic. Moreover, his motivation for occupying himself in esoteric studies would even characterise him as a Renaissance magus.

Nevertheless, Prospero’s magic does not appear to be entirely “white”, even less so as, at the end of the play, he states that he has turned to “*rough magic*” (V. i, 50). The question as to whether Prospero practices white or black magic, or if he can be regarded as a representative version of the Renaissance magus will be considered in the next part of this thesis, in which magical practices will be analysed and related to their historical context.

### **3.2. ‘The Supernatural’ as Presented in *The Tempest* and Its Historical Context**

During the Renaissance period, magic was an extremely controversial, albeit highly prominent issue. On the one hand, it was superstitiously associated with the dark magic of witches, who were believed to have made a bond with the devil in order to receive supernatural abilities. On the other hand, it was regarded as a useful means in order to gain knowledge about and control over the many hidden secrets of the world as well as an effective way of coming closer to God.

In the following part, I will examine Shakespeare’s portrayal of magic in *The Tempest* on the basis of the prevalent historical “Zeitgeist”. It will be demonstrated that Prospero’s magical practices are ambivalent in that they can neither be classified as white nor black magic. Additionally, I will show that Sycorax exemplifies the traditional stereotype of the witch as conceived in Renaissance England.

#### **3.2.1. Magic and Its Place in the Elizabethan World Picture**

In order to comprehend how Renaissance magic worked it is crucial to be aware of the underlying world view of that time and to understand how people perceived their place in creation. To be able to do so, two prominent philosophical concepts of that time – *The Great Chain of Being* and the

correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm – need to be outlined. The influence of these two theoretical concepts on the practice as well as on the reception of magic will be considered.

The notion of *The Great Chain of Being* originated from the philosophy of Plato's *Timaeus* and the works of Aristotle. Their view holds that everything in creation is arranged according to a strict hierarchical system which reaches “from the most real and perfect to the least real and most imperfect”<sup>55</sup>. This ontological structure was composed as follows<sup>56</sup>:

God  
Spirit Beings  
Creation  
Humans  
Beasts  
Plants  
Metals  
Stones

The rigid order of *The Great Chain of Being* is perfectly illustrated in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Ariel, morally sublime, adopts the highest position and illustrates the angelic and divine. Prospero symbolises the climax of the human race if we consider that he is an enlightened man whose magic solely aims at restoring harmony. The lower position of humans is represented by the drunken Trinculo and Stephano, who intend to kill Prospero. The illiterate and savage Caliban, who tried to rape Miranda, embodies the brutish being and, thus, assumes the lowest position within the chain represented in the play.<sup>57</sup>

Within this fixed order, which also consisted of a variety of subdivisions, the superior entities were believed to control the inferior ones. Consequently, man, who assumes a middle position within this great chain, has power over animals,

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<sup>55</sup> Taylor, Paul. *Respect for Nature: A Theory of Environmental Ethics. Studies in Moral, Political and Legal Philosophy*. United Kingdom: Princeton University Press, 1986. p. 139.

<sup>56</sup> Burton, Dan and Grandy, David. *Magic, Mystery, and Science: The Occult in Western Civilization*. Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2004. p. 48.

<sup>57</sup> Campbell, Oscar (editor). *A Shakespeare Encyclopaedia*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1966. p. 179.

the vegetation and inorganic elements, whereas he is dominated by otherworldly beings, i.e. angels, demons, and God.

In addition to the concept of a universal order, there existed the belief in a universal interdependence. This thought was inspired by the Renaissance rediscovery of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, mistakenly ascribed to the mythic figure of Hermes Trismegistus. Translated into Latin by the Italian Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), the head of the Florentine Academy, the *Corpus Hermeticum* consists of fifteen tractates and *The Perfect Sermon of Asclepius*. It gives a philosophical as well as a spiritual account on the nature of the cosmos, the divine, the mind, and creation and includes treatises about alchemy, astrology and magic.<sup>58</sup>

According to Hermes Trismegistus, who was believed to be a contemporary of Moses<sup>59</sup>, man is originally divine, but has lost his divinity with the expulsion from paradise. However, “*through a process of purification, learning and initiation*”<sup>60</sup> he can get reunited with God. Since God’s sublimeness is omnipresent, it is crucial to first understand and appreciate the mysteries of nature, which can be achieved through various methods, among which magic takes a prominent role, and to seek then unification with the Lord.<sup>61</sup>

Christians regarded Hermes Trismegistus as a prophet who had anticipated the advent of Jesus Christ. The Church therefore endorsed the document and believed it to be a useful means of contributing to and explaining the origin of Christianity.<sup>62</sup> The approval of the *Corpus Hermeticum* added to the social acceptance of magic and revived its practice. However, as will be shown in the course of this chapter, the reception of magic remained controversial. While it was generally appreciated by intellectuals of that period as a scientific and

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<sup>58</sup> Greer, John. *An Introduction to the Corpus Hermeticum*. Internet Sacred Text Archive (ISTA). United States of America: Evinity Publishing Incorporation, 2011. available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/herm/h-intro.htm>.

<sup>59</sup> Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas. *The Western Esoteric Traditions. An Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 37. available at: <http://books.google.at/books?id=IPwoK5XYrAC&pg=PA37&dq=hermes+trismegistus+believed+to+be+a+contemporary+of+moses&hl=de&sa=X&ei=yRz1UICAGIXFtAbXsYCABQ&ved=0CFsQ6AEwBw#v=onepage&q=hermes%20trismegistus%20believed%20to%20be%20a%20contemporary%20of%20moses&f=false>.

<sup>60</sup> Warnock, Christopher. *Renaissance Astrology. Hermes Trismegistus: Hermetic Philosophy, Astrology & Magic*. Iowa: Warnock, Christopher, 2000-2010. available at: <http://www.renaissanceastrology.com/hermestrismegistus.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Forrest, Isidora and Forrest, Adam. *What is Hermeticism? The shorter Answer. Hermetic Fellowship Website*. Portland: Hermetic Fellowship, 1995-2004. available at: <http://www.hermeticfellowship.org/HFHermeticism.html>.

<sup>62</sup> [http://www.alchemylab.com/hyper\\_history.htm](http://www.alchemylab.com/hyper_history.htm).

spiritual discipline, the Church just tolerated it in a very limited way and only if it was conducive to Christianity.<sup>63</sup>

The second Renaissance concept, the belief in the universal interdependence of all things created, is shown in the Hermetic principle of “as above, so below”<sup>64</sup>, which derived from the *Corpus Hermeticum*. This theory argues for a link

*between the microcosm (or “small world”) of the human body with the macrocosm (or “large world”) of the universe [...] through a system of occult (or “hidden”) correspondences and relations [...]. The world, therefore, took on an emblematic quality, replete with hidden meanings, associations, and occult symbolism.*<sup>65</sup>

The following description, which focuses on how Renaissance intellectuals pictured the composition of the macrocosm as represented in the microcosm, shall illustrate this concept. While it was generally known that the universe was put together of the substances earth, water, air, and fire, the human body was believed to be analogously composed of four elements which showed similar characteristics to the four constituents of the universe. As a result, the element earth, cold and dry in its qualities, represented melancholy, while water, with the features cold and moist, symbolised phlegm. Air, which is typically hot and moist, signified the sanguine humour, and fire, hot and dry in its attributes, corresponded to choler.<sup>66</sup> According to the proportion of the four humours to each other, four different human temperaments were distinguished: the melancholic (introverted and thoughtful), the phlegmatic (relaxed and quiet), the sanguine (pleasure-seeking and sociable), and the choleric (ambitious and leader-like). Ideally, these four temperaments were well balanced. An imbalance or disorder among the humours was believed to result in various illnesses.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Greer, John. available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/herm/h-intro.htm>.

<sup>64</sup> Martin, Walter and Rische, Jill. *The Kingdom of the Occult*. Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Incorporation, 2008. p. 292.

<sup>65</sup> McClellan, James and Dorn, Harold. *Science and Technology in World History: An Introduction*. Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 2006. p. 206. available at: [http://books.google.at/books?id=bpNIToBV5wYC&pg=PA206&lpg=PA206&dq=natural+magic+renaissance+occult+magus&source=bl&ots=pdqUaluy9b&sig=4BiWV\\_oYfMQhGWCm8paX7wnAO6g&hl=de&sa=X&ei=Y6liUMDBLONJswaQxoCQCw&ved=0CGQQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=natural%20magic%20renaissance%20occult%20magus&f=false](http://books.google.at/books?id=bpNIToBV5wYC&pg=PA206&lpg=PA206&dq=natural+magic+renaissance+occult+magus&source=bl&ots=pdqUaluy9b&sig=4BiWV_oYfMQhGWCm8paX7wnAO6g&hl=de&sa=X&ei=Y6liUMDBLONJswaQxoCQCw&ved=0CGQQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=natural%20magic%20renaissance%20occult%20magus&f=false).

<sup>66</sup> Schwab, Christian. *Shakespeare's Historical Background and the World Picture of the Elizabethan Age*. Germany: GRIN Publishing, 2007. p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> Campbell, Oscar. p. 663.

The two Renaissance concepts, *The Great Chain of Being* and the correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm, sparked off an enormous interest in the occult sciences, among which a variety of occult practices, primarily astrology, alchemy, and magic, adopted an important role.

As far as magic was concerned, the main focus lay on *magia naturalis*, which, in fact, was no natural magic, as the translation into English might suggest, but rather a “ ‘*mastery*’ ”<sup>68</sup> of the natural world, since it focused on the study and evaluation of ancient texts as well as on the observation and understanding of the natural world. This is the reason why this discipline, which can be regarded as “a pre-modern form of natural science”<sup>69</sup>, contributed to the legitimization of certain magical practices. The Catholic Church, however, rejected *magia naturalis* as it feared its authority to be undermined.<sup>70</sup> If hidden secrets could be rationally explained, there was no more room for God’s miracles.

Spiritual magic constituted another category of Renaissance magic which was highly controversial. This branch was characterised by ceremonies and rituals, which enabled the magus to raise spirits. *Goety* dealt with the summoning of demons and the souls of the dead, whereas *theurgy* focused on the invocation of angels with the goal of elevating the soul and getting unified with the divine. With regard to *theurgy* the magician was at constant risk to be outwitted by a devilish sprite since it was believed that a malevolent sprite could disguise himself as a good one in order to steal the magus’ soul and to cause his damnation<sup>71</sup>. The Catholic Church disapproved of both magical practices; on *goety*, because it implied a pact with the devil and on *theurgy*, because it claimed to be a means through which man could reach salvation. This, according to the religious doctrine, was however only possible through Christ himself, who was represented by the Church.<sup>72</sup> The only spiritual magic compatible with Christianity comprised “*the Eucharist, exorcism, [and] the cult of*

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<sup>68</sup> Principe, Lawrence. *The Scientific Revolution: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011. p. 28.

<sup>69</sup> Shumaker, Wayne. *The Occult Sciences in the Renaissance: A Study in Intellectual Patterns*. California: University of California Press, 1972. p. 108.

<sup>70</sup> Henry, John. *The Fragmentation of Renaissance Occultism and the Decline of Magic*. Great Britain: Science History Publications, 2008. pp. 11-12. available at: [http://www.academia.edu/234158/the\\_fragmentation\\_of\\_Renaissance\\_occultism](http://www.academia.edu/234158/the_fragmentation_of_Renaissance_occultism).

<sup>71</sup> Nauert, Charles. *Humanism and the Culture of Renaissance Europe. New Approaches to European History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. pp. 71-72.

<sup>72</sup> Bremmer, Jan and Veenstra, Jan. *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period. Groningen Studies in Cultural Change*. Leuven: Peeters Publishing, 2002. pp. 190-191.

*Saints*<sup>73</sup> and was only permitted to be rehearsed by representatives of the Catholic Church.

As these descriptions of Renaissance magical practices and their goals reveal, “at its highest levels Renaissance magic and associated knowledge systems were serious spiritual and intellectual enterprises that embodied learned understanding of the natural world.”<sup>74</sup>

The ultimate Renaissance magus, the practitioner of *magia*, was consequently an erudite and purified person. His comprehension of the world and of God bestowed “superpowers”<sup>75</sup> upon him which enabled him to transcend his fixed position within the *Great Chain of Being* and to rise above the forces which were believed to influence mankind in order to manipulate them for beneficial purposes. His knowledge about the correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm allowed him to have power over the natural and the supernatural, to “marry heaven and earth together”<sup>76</sup> and to act as an intermediate between God and mankind.

Having provided a framework for magic within the Shakespearean era, the following chapter will examine if Prospero lives up to the ideal of the Renaissance magus. Additionally, Prospero’s magical practices will be examined in more detail.

### **3.2.1.1. Prospero, an Archetypical Renaissance Magus?**

Prospero is a learned man who has fully immersed himself in the study of occultism, as he explains to his daughter, for “the bettering of [his] mind” (I. ii, 90). Contrary to Christopher Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus, who, like Prospero, pushes beyond human limitations, however signs a pact with the devil in order to receive magical abilities, Prospero’s superhuman powers are based on his vast amount of knowledge. His private studies of the hidden secrets in the world have granted him the skills to rise above and control the forces of nature as well as to draw on spirits. Consequently, he has the power to transcend his position

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<sup>73</sup> Evans, Jules. *Renaissance Magic and Superheroes. Philosophy For Life and Other Dangerous Situations*. Wednesday, 6 January, 2010. United Kingdom: The Website of Jules Evans, 2010. available at: <http://philosophyforlife.org/renaissance-magic-and-superheroes/>.

<sup>74</sup> McClellan, James and Dorn, Harold. p. 206.

<sup>75</sup> Evans, Jules. available at: <http://philosophyforlife.org/renaissance-magic-and-superheroes/>.

<sup>76</sup> Evans, Jules. available at: <http://philosophyforlife.org/renaissance-magic-and-superheroes/>.

within *The Great Chain of Being* and, thus, can act as an intermediary between the heavenly, the spirited world and the earthly.

Prospero's magic can be interpreted as conforming to "*providence and morality*"<sup>77</sup> as regards his liberating Ariel from the long-lasting imprisonment in the pine tree, his leading Ferdinand into safety, his restraining Sebastian from killing Alonso, and his desire to seek reconciliation with his brother. Additionally, in making Alonso feel remorseful Prospero enables him to get cleansed of his sinful behaviour, to purify his soul, and, thus, to become a better person. Hence, as these examples show, Prospero exemplifies the Renaissance ideal of a wise as well as of a morally good magus, who uses his magic in an honourable way since it aims at restoring harmony and making both, the world and man, more sublime.

However, Prospero's motives for exercising magic are, as the following analysis will reveal, not consistently altruistic. In fact, his superhuman abilities contribute primarily more to his personal benefit than to the greater good of mankind. Firstly, he frees Ariel by magic, but only to make him his private servant and to take advantage of the sprite's otherworldly faculties. Secondly, he orders the airy spirit to direct Ferdinand to his cell, but not because he intends to care for the forsaken shipwrecked, but because he wants to make him acquainted and magically fall in love with his daughter for self-serving political reasons. Contrary to Oberon, who, out of pity, interferes in the love-life of the young couples in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Prospero intrudes into the private sphere of Miranda and Ferdinand and manipulates them in order to arrange their marriage, thereby taking advantage of it. He does not primarily have their happiness in mind but rather a selfish "*private political act*"<sup>78</sup> by which he aims at "*preserving his authority*"<sup>79</sup> as well as at restraining his hated brother from any political demands. The union between Miranda and Ferdinand, prince of Naples,

*has the effect of excluding Antonio from any future claim on the ducal throne, [...and] it also effectively disposes of the realm as a political entity: if Miranda is the heir to the dukedom, Milan through the*

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<sup>77</sup> Wetmore, Kevin. *Catholic Theatre and Drama: Critical Essays*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2010. p. 60.

<sup>78</sup> Greenblatt, Stephen. *Representing the English Renaissance*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988. p. 228.

<sup>79</sup> Greenblatt, Stephen. p. 228.

*marriage becomes part of the kingdom of Naples, not the other way around. Prospero [in the end of the play] recoups his throne from his brother only to deliver it over, upon his death, to the King of Naples once again. The usurping Antonio stands condemned, but the effects of the usurpation [...] are, through Miranda's wedding, confirmed and legitimized. [...] [H]e has [...] arranged matters so that his death will remove Antonio's last link with the ducal power. His grave is the ultimate triumph over his brother.<sup>80</sup>*

Thirdly, Prospero's declared intention behind the tempest, the reconciliation with his brother Alonso, is only a subterfuge because, in fact, the only reason for the sea storm is Prospero's aspiration to reclaim his dukedom and to maintain his power and control. This is revealed by his harsh response to Alonso's plea to "pardon [him his] wrongs" (V. i, 119):

*For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother  
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive  
Thy rankest fault, – all of them; and require  
My dukedom of thee, which perforce, I know,  
Thou must restore. (V. I, 130-134)*

While Alonso clears himself of his wrongdoings, Prospero, who admittedly condones Alonso's mistakes, commits the capital sin of hatred. He remains filled with rancour towards his brother and even excludes him as an active part from his family. This shows that Prospero is unwilling to forgive Alonso and that he, hurt by Alonso's original behaviour to such an extent, must have in fact already rejected the idea of a possible reunion long before. Consequently, when Prospero conjures the tempest and then leads Alonso to his place, he does not have any reconciliation with his brother in mind, but taking revenge on him and regaining his dukedom. Prospero anticipates that Alonso, whom he has previously separated from his son Ferdinand during the shipwreck, would – in despair of the presumed death of his child – unresistingly relinquish the Milanese dukedom to him.

By pretending that the storm at sea and the subsequent shipwreck aim at leading the royal crew to his island, where he longs to get reunited with his brother, Prospero simulates to be a morally good man and intends "to idealize

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<sup>80</sup> Greenblatt. Stephen. p. 228.

*himself [... and] to conceive of himself as a standard of perfection [...] as magician with impeccable [...] goals.”<sup>81</sup>*

Presenting himself as a virtuous person with noble intentions additionally serves the purpose of vindicating the tempest to Ariel. Well aware that the airy spirit “*refus[es] [...] grand hests*” (I. ii, 274) and rejects to fulfill tasks which are morally not justifiable for the delicate creature (I. ii, 272-273), Prospero has to make sure that Ariel is on his side and truly supports him with his otherworldly powers. By hiding his true intentions and by making Ariel believe that his supernatural faculties contribute to an honourable goal, Prospero can be certain that the airy sprite assists him in his reputable enterprises.

Fourthly, Prospero misuses the potential of his art by taking advantage of it as a powerful means for intimidation and subjugation. This is clearly revealed when he threatens Caliban for reacting unwillingly to his command:

*Hag-seed, hence!  
Fetch us in fuel; and be quick, thou 'rt best,  
To answer other business. Shrug'st thou, malice?  
If thou neglect'st, or dost unwillingly  
What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps,  
Fill all thy bones with aches, make thee roar,  
That beats shall tremble at thy din. (I. ii, 368-373)*

Effectively daunted, Caliban obsequiously replies:

*No, pray thee.  
[Aside.] I must obey; his Art is of such pow'r  
It would control my dam's god, Setebos,  
And make a vassal of him. (I. ii, 374-376)*

A further example of Prospero's explicit threats with his magic is given in the scene in which Ariel asks his master when he intends to set him free. Angered about his servant's audacity, he warns him menacingly:

*If thou more murmur'st, I will rend an oak,  
And peg thee in his knotty entrails, till  
Thou hast howl'd away twelve winters. (I. ii, 294-296)*

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<sup>81</sup> Allen, David and White, Robert. *Subjects on the World's Stage: Essays on British Literature of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*. United States of America: University of Delaware Press, 1995. p. 243.

With these words he successfully subdues Ariel, who submissively apologises to Prospero:

*Pardon, master:  
I will be correspondent to command,  
And do my spriting gently. (I. ii, 297-298)*

Summarizing, it can be said that, on closer examination, these examples undoubtedly refute the assumption that Prospero is an exemplary Renaissance magus. Despite the fact that he is a learned man who has, due to his comprehensive studies of the occult, a great understanding of a variety of hidden secrets in the world, he does not operate in accordance with Hermetic philosophy. Prospero is a vindictive and unscrupulous man with a dubious morality, who is driven by his greed for power and control. He endeavours to distance himself from being a vengeful and ruthless person “*by idealizing himself in a defensive maneuver*”<sup>82</sup>:

*Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th’ quick,  
Yet with my nobler reason ’gainst my fury  
Do I take part: the rarer action is  
In virtue than in vengeance: they being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend. (V. i, 25-29)*

Nevertheless, he remains far from being a virtuous magician. Instead of “*an inspiring magus*”<sup>83</sup> he rather reminds one of an “[...] *ill-tempered magistrate*”<sup>84</sup> who exploits his magic powers for self-interested purposes.

As has been shown by means of selected passages from the play, Prospero does not live up to the standards of a Renaissance magus. His actual magical practices will be examined in greater detail in the following pages. It will be examined if Prospero may serve as an example of a practitioner of white magic or if he uses his power in a destructive way.

Prospero’s magic is controversial as it is both white and black<sup>85</sup>. Critics often idealize him as an “*all-powerful purveyor of white magic*”<sup>86</sup> whose supernatural

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<sup>82</sup> Allen, David and White, Robert. p. 243.

<sup>83</sup> Hattaway, Michael. *A New Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture. Volume 1*. United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2010. p. 242.

<sup>84</sup> Hattaway, Michael. p. 242.

<sup>85</sup> Foakes, Reginald. *Shakespeare: From the Dark Comedies to the Last Plays: From Satire to Celebration*. Great Britain: Routledge, 1971. p. 166. available at:  
<http://books.google.at/books?id=B6avFPTRNk0C&pg=PA166&lpg=PA166&dq=prospero+black>

powers are in accordance with the “*Hermetic art*”<sup>87</sup>. The reason for this exalted picture results from the long-lasting claim that Prospero’s magic brings about “*reconciliation, repentance, and restored harmony*”<sup>88</sup> and thereby “*promote[s] moral virtue and prevent[s] violence*.”<sup>89</sup> However, scholars have more recently departed from this established point of view and rather tend to interpret the figure of Prospero in a less glorified way.<sup>90</sup> According to Allan and White

*critics have only recently begun to note that the wicked brothers fail to repent. For an astonishingly long time interpreters simply could not see that the text refuses to support Prospero’s claim that he succeeded in his grand design. In one scholarly publication after another it was assumed that repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation are achieved at the end of the play. Indeed, so certain were critics of Prospero’s success that they conceived of The Tempest as an allegorical drama on the Christian pattern of sin, repentance, and reconciliation.*<sup>91</sup>

Corresponding to what has just been revealed about Prospero’s magic this traditional viewpoint of Prospero as a sublime practitioner of white magic, who behaves within the principles of the Christian doctrine, cannot be persuasively supported. In fact, as will be shown below, Prospero’s magical practices are closer to black magic than to white magic.

The maliciousness of his art is revealed by the fact that he conjures up a mad storm which scares the royal crew to death. The following examples shall underline his viciousness by revealing the extent and extremity of the horror he causes the voyagers to experience.

Prospero refers to the tempest as a “*direful*” (I. ii, 26) happening and Miranda’s account on it, as well as her desperate pleas to her father to put an end to this appalling event suggests the dreadfulness of the situation on board:

*If by your Art, my dearest father, you have  
Put the wild waters in this roar, alley them.  
The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,*

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+or+white+magic&source=bl&ots=miKvQmy78G&sig=0cKsIF0GhPlagBXTTuR4YBC7yjM&hl=d  
e&sa=X&ei=SzdfUO6hF4zAswbOkoHoAQ&ved=0CGQQ6AEwCQ#v=onepage&q=prospero%2  
0black%20or%20white%20magic&f=false.

<sup>86</sup> Hager, Alan. *The Age of Milton: An Encyclopedia of Major 17<sup>th</sup> Century British and American Authors*. Westport: Greenwood Publishing Press, 2004. p. 307.

<sup>87</sup> Bloom, Harold and Heims, Neil. p. 245.

<sup>88</sup> Greenblatt, Stephen. p. 226.

<sup>89</sup> Wetmore, Kevin. p. 61.

<sup>90</sup> Hattaway, Michael. p. 242.

<sup>91</sup> Allen, David and White, Robert. p. 244.

*But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek,  
 Dashes the fire out. O, I have suffered  
 With those that I saw suffer! a brave vessel  
 [...] Dash'd all to pieces. O, the cry did knock  
 Against my very heart! Poor souls, they perish'd!  
 Had I been any god of power, I would  
 Have sunk the sea within the earth, or ere  
 It should the good ship so have swallow'd, and  
 The fraughting souls within her. (I. ii, 1-13)*

According to this description the tempest is a terrifying calamity for the people on the ship, who are, in the face of immediate drowning, crying heartbreakingly. Facing death, they turn to prayers (I. ii, 52-53), beseech God to have mercy upon them and, at the abyss of despair, they make their farewells to their beloved ones:

*A confused noise within: Mercy on us! -  
 We split, we split! - Farewell, my wife and children! -  
 Farewell, brother! - We split, we split, we split! (I. ii, 59-61)*

Ariel's report on how well he has accomplished his master's command of raising the awful tempest emphasizes the agonizing terror even more:

*I boarded the king's ship; now on the beak,  
 Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,  
 I flam'd amazement: sometimes I'd divide,  
 And burn in many places; on the topmast,  
 The yards and boresprit, would I flame distinctly,  
 Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors  
 O' th' dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary  
 And sight-outrunning were not: the fire and cracks  
 Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune  
 Seem to besiege, and make his bold waves tremble,  
 Yea, his dread trident shake. (I. ii, 196-206)*

According to Ariel's vivid representation, the tempest has been that horrifying that it would have even unsettled Neptune, the mighty God of the sea. As the adjective 'sulphurous' in the quotation above indicates, the royal crew has experienced the tempest as the spawn of hell, since, according to mythology, the smell of sulfur is "*associated with the Devil's fiery home*."<sup>92</sup> A further indication of the storm resembling an infernal incident is the exclamation of

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<sup>92</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. New York: Checkmark Books, 1999. p. 90.

Ferdinand. While jumping into the rousing sea he cries: “[...] *Hell is empty,[a]nd all the devils are here.*” (I.ii, 213-214).

As these examples illustrate, Prospero causes a tremendous mortal fright among the voyagers. Consequently, he uses his magic in a destructive way and, hence, strongly resembles a practitioner of black magic. This is even more so, since the accomplishment of conjuring up storms used to be generally associated with witchcraft<sup>93</sup>. For example, in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, the first of the three malevolent witches declares that she intends to take revenge on a woman for having refused to hand her the chestnuts she has been munching and for insulting her by raising a tempest that aims at distressing her husband who is currently at sea:

|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <i>First Witch:</i>  | <i>Her husband's to Aleppo gone, master o' the Tiger:<br/>But in a sieve I'll thither sail,<br/>And, like a rat without a tail,<br/>I'll do, I'll do, I'll do.</i>                                                                 |
| <i>Second Witch:</i> | <i>I'll give thee wind.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <i>First Witch:</i>  | <i>Thou'rt kind.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <i>Third Witch:</i>  | <i>And I another.</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <i>First Witch:</i>  | <i>I myself have all the other,<br/>And the very ports they blow,<br/>All the quarters that they know<br/>I' the shipman's card.<br/>[...]<br/>Though his bark cannot be lost,<br/>Yet it shall be tempest-tost.</i> <sup>94</sup> |

However, not only by invoking a tempest does Prospero’s art remind of the destructive magical practices usually ascribed to witches at that time, but also by his necromantic exercises. Necromancy, “[t]he art of divination through contact with the spirits of the dead”<sup>95</sup> used to be typically associated with black magic and constituted one of the crimes alleged witches were frequently accused of having committed<sup>96</sup>. Prospero’s necromantic magic allows that “[...]”

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<sup>93</sup> Nostbakken, Faith. *Understanding The Tempest: A Student Case Book to Issues, Sources, and Historical Documents. Literature in Context Series.* United States of America: Greenwood Press, 2004. p. 53. available at:

[http://books.google.at/books?id=4wupDARaQEAC&pg=PA53&lpg=PA53&dq=prospero+white+magic&source=bl&ots=8h7JGAp8fX&sig=s2Of6t\\_eWZySRqRZ25rdxdncEUo&hl=de#v=onepage&q=prospero%20white%20magic&f=false](http://books.google.at/books?id=4wupDARaQEAC&pg=PA53&lpg=PA53&dq=prospero+white+magic&source=bl&ots=8h7JGAp8fX&sig=s2Of6t_eWZySRqRZ25rdxdncEUo&hl=de#v=onepage&q=prospero%20white%20magic&f=false).

<sup>94</sup> [http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/macbeth\\_1\\_3.html](http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/macbeth_1_3.html). Act i, scene iii, lines 8-27.

<sup>95</sup> Greer, John. *The New Encyclopedia of the Occult.* United States of America: Llewellyn Publications, 2003. p. 324.

<sup>96</sup> Lewis, James. p. 199.

*graves at [his] command [h]ave wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em forth."* (V. i, 48-49).

That Prospero's art bears a striking resemblance to black magic is additionally underscored by the fact that he himself states that he has turned to "*rough magic*" (V. i, 50). Moreover, since he shares a variety of similarities with the malevolent witch Sycorax, the assumption of him being a practitioner of black magic is emphasized even more. First of all, he, like Sycorax, has been expelled to the abandoned island for his occupation with magic. Secondly, he lives there, like the spiteful witch, with his offspring and resumes his magical practices. Thirdly, comparable to the wicked sorceress, he makes Ariel his servant.

However, Prospero finally becomes conscious of the hazardous potential of his magic. He realizes that he has violently manipulated his supernatural faculties, has departed from his original motive of his secret studies – which have initially constituted "*the bettering of [his] mind*" (I. ii, 90) –, and has caused certain malicious deeds by turning to black magic. Conscious of his guilt he renounces his magic and, in the epilogue, asks the audience to forgive him his sins and to grant him absolution:

*[...] Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, Art to enchant;  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer, which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.  
As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.* (Epilogue, 13-20)

This moral transformation of Prospero to the better is, however, the result of Ariel, since it is him who initiated his master to exercise leniency with the royal crew. After the airy sprite's report to his master on how he has proceeded with Alonso and his entourage on the island

*Confin'd together  
In the same fashion as you gave in charge  
[...]; all prisoners, sir,  
In the line-grove which weather-feds your cell;  
They cannot budge till your release. The King,  
His brother, and yours, abide all three distracted,  
And the remainder mourning over them,  
Brimful of sorrow and dismay; but chiefly  
Him you term'd, sir, "The good old lord, Gonzalo";*

*His tears run down his beard, like winter's drops  
From eaves of reeds. (V. i, 8-16)*

he avows that, although he is no earthly being and therefore unfamiliar with human emotions, he himself has pity on these men (V. i, 19). He asserts that, if Prospero saw them in their present state of mind, his "*affections would become tender*" (V. i, 17) too. Thus, Ariel appeals to his master's conscience and, by doing so, operates as Prospero's moral authority. In this manner the spirit causes Prospero to become contemplative about the sorrow he has caused through his magic with the result that he forsakes his destructive otherworldly practices and commands Ariel to release the spell-bound men:

*Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling,  
Of their affections, and shall not myself,  
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply  
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?"  
[...]  
Go release them, Ariel:  
My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,  
And they shall be themselves. (V. i, 21-32)*

However, even if Prospero ultimately declares to have realized that he misused his special abilities by turning to foul magical practices, it remains highly questionable if, in the end, he has really got morally refined. His commands have all been dutifully accomplished by his obedient servant Ariel. The shipwrecked men, who are in a desperate state of mind, are on his island, and there is no obvious obstacle to hinder Prospero from winning back his dukedom. His plan, to take revenge on Alonso and make him remorseful, has worked out well. Consequently, Prospero can easily dispose himself of his helpful utensils since there is no more need for him to exercise magic. His plans have taken a turn for the better; he will regain his power and return to Milan. Moreover, he is aware that, if he wants to return home and be fully socially integrated there, he has to forsake his dubious magical practices.

According to these examples, Prospero acts as a practitioner of harmful magic. He mainly exploits his magical abilities to "*torment his 'slaves' and 'enemies' [... and] to disturb the natural order, and make [...] destruction.*"<sup>97</sup> Moreover, he occasionally employs magical practices traditionally ascribed to malevolent witches.

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<sup>97</sup> Foakes, Reginald. p. 165.

Yet, although Prospero's magic bears a certain resemblance to that performed by evil sorceresses, he cannot be classified as a true practitioner of black magic. Even if he is responsible for a variety of misdeeds, he never fully exploits the malicious side of his power. At no time does Prospero have in mind to gravely hurt a person but actually always acts with caution. Moreover, he is constantly concerned about the royal crew's safety. When Ariel informs his master that

*Not a soul  
But felt a fever of the mad, and play'd  
Some tricks of desperation. [...] (I. ii, 208-210)*

Prospero is content with the sprite's performance of raising the tempest but immediately asks him: "*But are they, Ariel, safe?*" (I. ii, 218), and "*But was not this nigh shore?*" (I. ii, 216). The fact that he needs to be reassured that the shipwrecked men are in security as well as that they can easily escape to the seashore and thus, never really are at the risk of drowning, indicates that Prospero's magic is exercised with careful consideration. As he guarantees Miranda, he has arranged the storm at sea with prudence:

*I have with such provision in mine Art  
So safely ordered [the tempest], that there is no soul -  
No, not so much perdition as an hair  
Betid to any creature in the vessel  
Which thou heard'st cry, which thou saw'st sink. (I. ii, 28-32)*

This assertion of Prospero is substantiated by the remark of the stranded men, who are amazed that, in spite of suffering shipwreck, their clothes still look like new:

*[It] is indeed almost beyond credit, -  
[...]  
That our garments, being, as they were, drenched in  
the sea, hold, notwithstanding, their freshness and  
glosses, being rather new-dyed than stained with salt water. (II. i, 56-63)*

These examples clearly disassociate Prospero from being a veritable practitioner of black magic. Even if his 'Art' appears to be destructive at first sight, he never applies it in a truly detrimental way.

In conclusion, it can be said that Prospero's magic is ambivalent and difficult to categorise. According to the arguments produced in this chapter he is neither a true practitioner of white, nor one of black magic. If one agrees with the long-established notion that Prospero restores harmony and promotes moral virtues, then he can rather be seen as a practitioner of white magic, who occasionally lapses into black magic. If one agrees with the argument put forward in this chapter that Prospero never had the reconciliation with his brother in mind but only exploited his special abilities for selfish purposes, then he rather represents a practitioner of black magic who incorporates some elements of white magic. This suggests that

*The Tempest does not offer a sharp clash between black magic and white magic, but [it] offers rather a sense of magic as an art at best neutral, and perhaps dubious in its common use, but available to good or bad ends, depending on the user.*<sup>98</sup>

Consequently, Prospero's supernatural abilities emphasise the ambiguity with which the commitment to occult studies and the practice of magic were perceived at Shakespeare's time. It was not unusual that even prominent Renaissance magi were accused of witchcraft. Probably the most famous example is Dr John Dee, the private astrologer of Queen Elizabeth I of England. He

*was accused of attempting to murder [Queen] Mary by black magic [...and] of murdering children by sorcery [...] and for being 'a companion of hell-hounds and a caller and conjurer of wicked and damned spirits'.*<sup>99</sup>

However, "[w]hile men's interest in magic were [sic!] usually permitted as a form of scholarship"<sup>100</sup>, women's commitment in this field was mostly regarded with suspicion and related to the practice of black magic or witchcraft.

Since magic is inevitably associated with witchcraft, the next chapter will give a concise outline of the notion of black magic during the Renaissance period.

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<sup>98</sup> Foakes, Reginald. p. 166.

<sup>99</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. p. 84.

<sup>100</sup> Charlton, Debra. *Holistic Shakespeare: An Experiential Learning Approach*. United Kingdom: Intellect Ltd., 2012. p. 129. available at: <http://books.google.at/books?id=o0tpYHkf4rwC&pg=PA129&dq=sycorax+renaissance+witchcraft&hl=de&sa=X&ei=uFuzUP3cClzSsgbgv4H4DA&ved=0CEAQ6AEwBjgU#v=onepage&q=sycorax%20renaissance%20witchcraft&f=false>.

### 3.2.2. Witchcraft in the Renaissance Era

The main focus of the subsequent chapter lies on selected official documents which contributed to, and aimed at, the legitimization of the witch craze of that time. Furthermore, the stereotype of the malevolent Renaissance witch will be identified, and I will show that the witch persecutions resulted in *gendercide*. Potential reasons for why primarily women were targeted will be discussed. Additionally, distinctive practices associated with witchcraft will be explored. Moreover, certain methods applied in trials of accused witches will be analysed. Finally, I will show that Shakespeare presented Sycorax in accordance with the popular Renaissance notion of a witch.

#### 3.2.2.1. Selected Historical Documents on Witchcraft

Already the Holy Bible (Old Testament) treats this phenomenon and advances the view that witchcraft must not be tolerated. Exodus 22:18 states: “*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live*”<sup>101</sup>, and Deuteronomy 18:10-12 warns man not to engage in mysterious rituals, as this would mean an offence against God:

*There shall not be found among you any one who maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or who useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all who do these things are an abomination unto the LORD, and because of these abominations the LORD thy God doth drive them out from before thee.*<sup>102</sup>

As these two quotations reveal, witchcraft, and, more precisely, its rejection as a demonic practice, is strongly connected with Christian and Jewish religion.

In 1486, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, both members of the Dominican order and inquisitors of the Catholic Church, wrote the *Malleus Maleficarum*<sup>103</sup>, also known as *The Hammer of Witches*. Published for the first time in 1487 in Germany, this renowned and highly influential medieval treatise served the purpose to refute any doubts about the real existence of witches and to

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<sup>101</sup> *The Holy Bible. 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version. Exodus 22 :18. Bible Gateway.* New York: The Zondervan Corporation, 1994. available at: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Exodus%2022:18%20&version=KJ21>.

<sup>102</sup> *The Holy Bible. 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version. Deuteronomy 18:10-12. Bible Gateway.* New York: The Zondervan Corporation, 1994. available at: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Deuteronomy%2018:10-12&version=KJ21>.

<sup>103</sup> Kramer, Heinrich and Sprenger, Jacob. *Malleus Maleficarum*. Speyer: 1487. (translated by Montague, Summers. 1928). available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/mm/>.

legitimize the persecution of practitioners of black magic. Additionally, it informed witch-hunters about the procedures of identifying, interrogating, convicting and torturing witches.<sup>104</sup>

The *Malleus Maleficarum* enjoyed immense popularity as it falsely appeared to be approved by two great authorities, namely by Pope Innocent VIII and by the faculty of theology of the University of Cologne. It precedes the papal bull from 1484, *Summis desiderantes*, in which Innocent VIII instigates harsh measures against witchcraft. In this papal document, Kramer and Sprenger are mentioned as skilled inquisitors and are personally assigned by the pope to fight witchcraft in Germany.<sup>105</sup> By means of prefixing the papal bull to the *Malleus Maleficarum*, the authors evoke the impression that their manifest was endorsed by Innocent VIII, which, in fact, was not the case. The theologians of Cologne had never approved of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, on the contrary, they regarded the book as unethical. As a result of this, they refused to issue the letter of approbation so that Heinrich Kramer himself forged the authorization.<sup>106</sup>

Nevertheless, the *Malleus Maleficarum* became the “*de-facto handbook for witch-hunters and Inquisitors throughout Late Medieval [and Renaissance] Europe*”<sup>107</sup> because it highly fostered the fear of witchcraft. Thirteen editions were published from 1487 until 1520 and sixteen more between 1574 and 1669.<sup>108</sup> As these numbers indicate, it contributed to a dramatic increase in the persecution of alleged witches and sparked off the European witch-craze, which reached its peak during the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, in the religiously independent England, the influence of the *Malleus Maleficarum* was initially poor. Until modern times there was no English translation of it to be found.<sup>109</sup> The witch persecutions on the continent were primarily dominated by religious motives. Engaging in witchcraft was associated with the devil and, therefore, regarded as a heretical act. On the British islands, however, witches were

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<sup>104</sup> Lovelace, Wicasta. *The Malleus Maleficarum of Heinrich Kramer & James Sprenger. Ancillary Text: Introduction to Online Edition. May 1, 2012*. United States of America: Windhaven Network, 1999-2012. available at: <http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/introduction/>.

<sup>105</sup> Jones, Terry. *Catholic-forum.com. Saints: Pope Innocent VIII: Summis Desiderantes, 5 December 1484*. Catholic-forum.com, 2012. available at: <http://www.catholicforum.com/saints/pope0213a.htm>.

<sup>106</sup> Lovelace, Wicasta. available at: <http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/introduction/>.

<sup>107</sup> Lovelace, Wicasta. available at: <http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/introduction/>.

<sup>108</sup> Lovelace, Wicasta. available at: <http://www.malleusmaleficarum.org/introduction/>.

<sup>109</sup> Keith, Thomas. *Religion and the Decline of Magic. Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971. p. 440.

initially not attacked because of betraying the holy divinity but because their *maleficium*, their malevolent magical power<sup>110</sup>, was feared.<sup>111</sup>

The parliamentary Act of 1542 by Henry VIII declared witchcraft in England, for the first time, an indictable offence to be punished by death. In 1563, Elizabeth I passed a second Act, which also treated witchcraft as felony, but which demanded the death penalty only if harm had been caused. Less malevolent offences could be punished by imprisonment. Both Acts condemned witchcraft because of its destructiveness, but neither of them referred to it as an engagement with the devil.<sup>112</sup>

The continental notion of witchcraft was finally brought to England by King James VI of Scotland. At that time, the Scottish empire was still under the control of the Catholic Church. Hence, it is not surprising that King James was influenced by the religious doctrine on witchcraft which prevailed in continental Europe. In order to refute the doubts about the real existence of witches and the critique on the irrationality of the witch-persecutions, which Reginald Scot had pronounced in *The Discovery of Witchcraft*<sup>113</sup> in 1584, King James VI wrote the *Demenology*<sup>114</sup>. In this text, which was published in 1597, he accused witches of being attendants of Satan: "*Witches ar servants onelie, and slaues to the Devil.*"<sup>115</sup> By entering a bond with the fiend supernatural devilish faculties are bestowed upon them. James's *Demenology* instigated an enormous witch-craze in Scotland, which led to brutal executions of alleged witches.

In 1604, one year after James's ascendance to the English throne as King James I, he passed a final witchcraft Act, which made it judicially easier to convict and execute witches. In this new parliamentary Act, which was in force until 1736, witchcraft became, for the first time in England, related to a contract with the devil. Yet, the notion of witchcraft as a satanic engagement remained

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<sup>110</sup> Quaife, Geoffrey. *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage. The Witch in Early Modern Europe*. London: Croom Helm, 1987. p. 44.

<sup>111</sup> Quaife, Geoffrey. pp. 135-136.

<sup>112</sup> Keith, Thomas. p. 442.

<sup>113</sup> Scot, Reginald. *The Discovery of Witchcraft*. London: Elliot Stock, 1584. available at: <http://archive.org/stream/discoverieofwitc00scot#page/n5/mode/2up>.

<sup>114</sup> King James I. *Daemonologie*. Edinburgh: Printed by Robert Walde-graue printer to the Kings Majestie, 1597. available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/kjd/>.

<sup>115</sup> King James I. *Daemonologie: Book I, Chapter III*. p. 9. available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/kjd/kjd04.htm>.

less dominant than on the continent<sup>116</sup>. The main reason for its condemnation was still based on the belief that it was “*an anti-social crime, rather than [...] a heresy.*”<sup>117</sup> As documents of English trials show, people were primarily accused for allegedly having performed *maleficia*, rather than having agreed to a pact with the devil.<sup>118</sup>

### 3.2.2.2. The Traditional Witch

The typical Renaissance witch was generally imagined to be a woman who was

*poor, uneducated, something of a social outcast, “queer” and perhaps partly demented, and usually old. The presumption that she was a sorceress was enormously strengthened if she was physically repulsive, afflicted by some such evident abnormality as a drooping or crooked eye, and given to unintelligible but ominous muttering.*<sup>119</sup>

This description reveals that “*Prospero’s construction of the foul and uneducated witch Sycorax (old, ugly, [...], sexually contaminated) [...mirrors] the stereotype of the witch familiar from many Renaissance treatises.*”<sup>120</sup>

Especially in England and Scotland, witches were also considered to be surrounded by domestic spirits, called *familiars*, or *imps*<sup>121</sup>, which could take the form of nearly any animal. Besides dogs, toads, owls and mice, black cats were the most common ones. Witches – so it was believed – received these diabolic representatives either from the devil himself or they inherited them from other witches with the intention to protect as well as to aid them in carrying out their *malificia*.<sup>122</sup> In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare incorporates this popular belief as Sycorax’ malevolent magic is also supported by the assistance of familiars. In I. ii, 275 Prospero states that the witch’s mischievous power is accomplished “[b]y help of her more potent ministers”.

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<sup>116</sup> Pavlac, Brian. *Witch Hunts in the Western World: Persecution and Punishment from the Inquisition Through the Salem Trials*. United States of America: Greenwood Group, 2009. p. 126.

<sup>117</sup> Keith, Thomas. p. 443.

<sup>118</sup> Scarre, Geoffrey. *Witchcraft and Magic in 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Century Europe*. London: Macmillan Education Limited, 1987. p. 23.

<sup>119</sup> Shumaker, Wayne. p. 68.

<sup>120</sup> Barry, Jonathan. Hester, Marianne et alii (ed.). *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief. Past and Present Publications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. p. 184.

<sup>121</sup> Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca*. pp. 122-123.

<sup>122</sup> Guiley, Rosemary Ellen. *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca*. pp. 122-123.

A further evidence of being a witch constituted the so-called *Witch's Teat*, often also referred to as *Witch's Mark*<sup>123</sup>. Primarily in England it was believed that familiars nourished themselves on “*milk, blood, or some magical substance*”<sup>124</sup> from a witch's wart or any other kind of bodily imperfection. Women who displayed a teat were usually put under surveillance or isolation to find out if a hungry familiar would appear. As soon as a bug, like a cockroach, a fly, a moth, or a rat approached her, she was accused of being a witch.<sup>125</sup>

In continental Europe, disfigurements of the skin were also regarded as palpable evidence of witchcraft. However, instead of being associated with familiars, physical blemish was considered to have been caused by the devil himself, who, in order to claim the witch his property, had left a visible mark on her body, namely the *Devil's Mark*<sup>126</sup>. These two different interpretations of unusual bodily spots illustrate what has been explained before: the notion of the devil played a less important role in England than it did on the continent.

### 3.2.2.3. Witchcraft: The Issue of Gendercide

The traditional witch was a woman. It is impossible to uncover the exact number of female witch convictions as the available documents on witch trials do not mirror the true amount of accusations. Yet, it is generally agreed that in England around 90 percent of alleged practitioners of witchcraft were women.<sup>127</sup> As a result of this, the witch-craze is, from a feminist point of view, occasionally also referred to as *gendercide*<sup>128</sup>.

One argument that has been put forward in order to understand why primarily women were accused of being witches relates to “*clerical celibacy*”<sup>129</sup>. Trethowan claims that the clergymen's oppressed sexuality is prone to culminate in a destructive power against women and that the impossibility of satisfying their sexual craving made women dreaded and hated objects to them. He concludes that this “*fear-laden rejection of woman rose to a raging*

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<sup>123</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 119.

<sup>124</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 119.

<sup>125</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 119.

<sup>126</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 119.

<sup>127</sup> Burns, William. *Witch Hunts in Europe and America: An Encyclopedia*. United States of America: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1959. p. 108.

<sup>128</sup> Rowley, William. Dekker, Thomas and Ford, John. *The Witch of Edmonton. Revels Student Editions*. Corbin, Peter and Sedge Douglas (editors). Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986. p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Scarre, Geoffrey. p. 51.

*campaign of revenge and annihilation of her*".<sup>130</sup> Suggesting that the witch persecutions were conducted due to clergymen's unfulfilled desires appears logical at first sight because the witch-craze was, as has already been shown, highly promoted by the Catholic Church. Nevertheless, this hypothesis is rather unlikely, since it is not true that only celibate men prosecuted female practitioners of witchcraft. Regularly, also women and even children deliberately instigated accusations in order to dispose of a disliked person.<sup>131</sup>

Another view why mostly women were associated with witchcraft is based on their being frequently considered to be mentally as well as morally inferior to men<sup>132</sup>. This notion is already developed in the Holy Bible in which husbands are advised: "[...] dwell with your wives with understanding, giving honor unto the wife as unto the weaker vessel[...]."<sup>133</sup>

Based on this idea, Scarre hypothesizes that primarily women were accused of being practitioners of malicious magic because

*they were considered to be less rational than men, and less able to restrain their passions. Consequently, they were thought to be more easily persuaded into witchcraft by the Devil, once they had been crossed and were seeking revenge. They were believed, in addition, to have more taste than men for the vile and orgiastic activities of the sabbath*<sup>134</sup>.

According to popular belief the *witches' sabbath* constituted "an orgiastic and ritualized gathering of witches under the leadership of the Devil."<sup>135</sup> In compliance with this prevailing view it was held during night-time in a secluded place, as, for example, "in the midst of forests or on the heights of mountains."<sup>136</sup> During this rite, – so it was believed – witches worshiped the Devil, proudly reported on the mischief they had caused since the last assembly, introduced new members to their community<sup>137</sup>, danced naked and

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<sup>130</sup> Trethowan, W.H. in Scarre, Geoffrey. p. 51.

<sup>131</sup> Scarre, Geoffrey. p. 51.

<sup>132</sup> Scarre, Geoffrey. p. 51.

<sup>133</sup> *The Holy Bible. 21<sup>st</sup> Century King James Version. 1 Peter 3:7.* Bible Gateway. New York: The Zondervan Corporation, 1994. available at: <http://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20Peter%203:7&version=KJ21>.

<sup>134</sup> Scarre, Geoffrey. pp. 51-52.

<sup>135</sup> Von Greyerz, Kasper. *Religion and Culture in Early Modern Europe. 1500-1800.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. p. 145.

<sup>136</sup> Spence, Lewis. *An Encyclopedia of Occultism. Metaphysics.* Cosimo Classics. New York: Cosimo Incorporation, 2006. p. 432.

<sup>137</sup> Spence, Lewis. pp. 432-

sacrificed children to their lord<sup>138</sup>. Additionally, “heavy emphasis [...] was placed on the erotic aspects of the sabbath – ritual intercourse with the Devil and the prevalence of promiscuous heterosexual and homosexual activity among the witches [...]”.<sup>139</sup>

A further argument why especially women were accused of witchcraft is produced by Pavlac, who argues that the

*feminine aspect of nursing the imp [on a witch's teat] may have been a factor in the English's targeting women much more frequently than men, who were not seen as providers of nourishment from the body.*<sup>140</sup>

#### 3.2.2.4. Distinctive Practices of Witchcraft

A variety of characteristic activities ascribed to witchcraft are enumerated in the *Malleus Maleficarum*. According to this document, witches were believed to have the supernatural powers to

*raise hailstorms and hurtful tempests and lightnings; cause sterility in men and animals; offer to devils, or otherwise kill, the children whom they do not devour. But these are only the children who have not been re-born by baptism at the font, for they cannot devour those who have been baptized, nor any without God's permission. They can also, before the eyes of their parents, and when no one is in sight, throw into the water children walking by the water side; they make horses go mad under their riders; they can transport themselves from place to place through the air, either in body or in imagination; they can affect Judges and Magistrates so that they cannot hurt them; they can cause themselves and others to keep silence under torture; they can bring about a great trembling in the hands and horror in the minds of those who would arrest them; they can show to others occult things and certain future events, by the information of devils [...]; they can see absent things as if they were present; they can turn the minds of men to inordinate love or hatred; they can at times strike whom they will with lightning, and even kill some men and animals; they can make of no effect the generative desire, and even the power of copulation, cause abortion, kill infants in the mother's womb by a mere exterior touch; they can at times bewitch men and animals with a mere look, without touching them, and cause death; they dedicate their own children to devils.*<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Levack, Brian. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. 3<sup>rd</sup> publication. Great Britain: Pearson Education Ltd., 2006. p. 41.

<sup>139</sup> Levack, Brian. p. 41.

<sup>140</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 119.

<sup>141</sup> Kramer, Heinrich and Sprenger, Jacob. *Malleus Maleficarum*. II. ii. *Of the Way whereby a Formal Pact with Evil is made*. available at: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/pag/mm/>.

Based on Reginald Scot's enumeration of typical malevolent magical enterprises in *The Discovery of Witchcraft*, this list can be further extended:

*Witches can pull down the moone and the stares [...] send needles into the livers of their enimies [...] transferre corne in the blade from one place to another [...] cure diseases supernaturallie, flie in the aire, and danse with devils [...] transubstantiate themselves and others, and take the forms and shapes of asses, wolves, ferrets, cowes, apes, horses, dogs, [...] keep divels and spirits in the likenesse of todes and cats [...] raise spirits (as others affirme) drie up springs, turne the course of running waters, inhibit the sunne, and staie both day and night, changing the one into the other [...] go in and out at awger holes, [...] saile in an egge shell, a cockle or muscle shell [...] bring soules out of the graves [...] teare snakes in peeces with words, and with looks kill lambes [...] bring to passe, that chearne as long as you list, your butter will not come.*<sup>142</sup>

In summary, witches were attributed the abilities of changing the weather conditions, levitation, which is the faculty to fly, clairvoyance, prophecy and divination, as well as necromancy and shapeshifting. Moreover, they were believed to be able to torment victims, to inflict diseases and other misfortune on a hated person, and even to cause the death of a human being or animal. Some of the *maleficia* ascribed to witches bear a strong resemblance to the feared magical practices assigned to fairies. In the same way as supernatural sprites previously used to be blamed for misfortune and hardship, “[a]ccusations of witchcraft tended to be made [...] to explain personal disaster or bad luck.”<sup>143</sup>

### 3.2.2.5. Trial by Ordeal

Once having been accused of being a practitioner of black magic, suspects faced arrest, imprisonment, interrogation and torture<sup>144</sup>. Before witches could be sentenced to death – which was the usual procedure – they had to confess to witchcraft. Torture, which served the purpose to make the accused plead guilty and reveal the names of any accomplices<sup>145</sup>, played a crucial part in European witch trials since it was believed that witches wouldn't make a true confession until they were in pain<sup>146</sup>. Yet, due to the common assumption that the Devil

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<sup>142</sup> Scot, Reginald. *The Discovery of Witchcraft*. Quoted in: Scarre, Geoffrey. pp. 86-87.

<sup>143</sup> Monaghan, Tom. *Renaissance, Reformation and the Age of Discovery, 1450-1700*. Heinemann *Scottish History*. United Kingdom: Heinemann, 2002. p. 30.

<sup>144</sup> Gerber, Larry. *Torture*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2011. p. 19.

<sup>145</sup> Levack, Brian. *The Witchcraft Sourcebook*. New York: Routledge, 2004. p. 198.

<sup>146</sup> Gerber, Larry. *Torture*. p. 19.

was protecting [witches] from pain<sup>147</sup>, Kramer and Sprenger recommended the use of ordeals, complicated tests of pain<sup>148</sup>, instead of torture<sup>149</sup>. Thereby, suspects were not tortured in order to make a confession, but they had to undergo a torture-like test procedure which should reveal whether the accused was a witch or not. Surviving the ordeal was viewed as God's judgment of innocence<sup>150</sup>.

One such test constituted the red-hot iron test<sup>151</sup>, during which the alleged witch had to carry a bar of red-hot iron in his or her hands without letting it drop. Another test formed the boiling water ordeal<sup>152</sup>, in which the accused had to put his or her arms into a pot of boiling hot water in order to retrieve a plunged object. Some days after these ordeals, the hands and arms of the alleged witch were inspected. *"[I]f the hands [and arms] were healing properly, the accused was declared innocent. If the accused's wounds became infected, however, confirmation of guilt and punishment followed."*<sup>153</sup> The belief underlying these test procedures was that if a person was telling the truth, God would protect him or her from harm, and the wound would thus heal quickly<sup>154</sup>.

A further method of testing an accused person was the *swimming test*, also referred to as *swimming the witch* or *ordeal by water*<sup>155</sup>, in which the suspect, whose hands and feet were tied together, was thrown into a pond. While sinking and drowning signified that the person – even though dead – was innocent, floating on the water verified that the suspect was a witch. The guilty suspect

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<sup>147</sup> Gerber, Larry. *Torture*. p. 19.

<sup>148</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 30.

<sup>149</sup> Reynolds, Cecil and Kamphaus, Randy. *Handbook of Psychological and Educational Assessment of Children: Intelligence, Aptitude, and Achievement*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: Guilford Press. 2003. p. 4. available at: <http://books.google.at/books?id=z6bxtDF1suUC&pg=PA4&dq=methods+of+torturing+witches&hl=de&sa=X&ei=Yn28UKiOBJHlswbY9oC4CQ&ved=0CD0Q6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=methods%20of%20torturing%20witches&f=false>.

<sup>150</sup> Gardner, Thomas and Anderson, Terry. *Criminal Law*. 11<sup>th</sup> Edition. United States of America: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012. p. 108. available at: <http://books.google.at/books?id=AcJte9is2QQC&pg=PA108&dq=hot+iron+ordeal+witch+trial&hl=de&sa=X&ei=aznHUPr2A8b4sgaH3IGwBA&ved=0CDcQ6AEwAg#v=onepage&q=hot%20iron%20ordeal%20witch%20trial&f=false>.

<sup>151</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 30.

<sup>152</sup> Segrave, Kerry. *Lie Detectors: A Social History*. North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2004. p. 5.

<sup>153</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 30.

<sup>154</sup> Reynolds, Cecil and Kamphaus, p. 4.

<sup>155</sup> Szasz, Thomas. *The Manufacture of Madness: A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970. p. 34. available at: <http://books.google.at/books?id=hpOcRRum3XEC&pg=PA34&dq=swimming+test+ordeal+by+water&hl=de&sa=X&ei=SdnFUJCElbgTAaMxYHgCQ&ved=0CEAQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=swimming%20test%20ordeal%20by%20water&f=false>.

then was pulled out of the water by means of a rope and put to death.<sup>156</sup> The *swimming test* was based on the concept that, “*since witches rejected the water of baptism, so the element of water would reject them in turn, and they would float in an unnatural manner.*”<sup>157</sup> Although the *swimming test* was officially authorized in certain European countries, it never became a legal procedure in English and Scottish witch trials.<sup>158</sup>

Another method of testing on whether a suspect was a witch or not represented the practice of *pricking the witch*<sup>159</sup>. During this procedure, unusual bodily blemish of the accused person was pierced with a needle. If the defendant did not show any sign of pain and did not lose any blood, the spot was identified as mark left by the Devil and the suspect was put to death.<sup>160</sup> Throughout Europe, but particularly in England and Scotland, *pricking* was a widespread technique to identify a witch in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>161</sup>

In view of these testing procedures it is not surprising that, during the great witch-hunt, “*thousands of individuals [...] confessed to crimes they did not commit*”<sup>162</sup> so as to escape these ordeals.

### 3.2.2.6. Sycorax, a Typical Renaissance Witch?

Considering what has just been explained about Renaissance witchcraft, it becomes clear that Shakespeare’s portrayal of Sycorax largely corresponds to the prevalent notion of what constituted a witch at that time. Her physical appearance, as well as her character traits – which have been revealed in Sycorax’s character analysis – and the fact that, with the help of her powerful familiars, she used to apply her magical faculties for malevolent purposes conform to the traditional picture of a Renaissance witch. Presenting this character as a woman underscores that the witch prosecution primarily targeted

<sup>156</sup> Einstadter, Werner and Henry, Stuart. *Criminological Theory: And Analysis of Its Underlying Assumptions*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. United Kingdom: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2006. p. 39.

<sup>157</sup> Klaniczay, Gábor and Pócs, Éva (ed.). *Witchcraft Mythologies and Persecutions. Demons, Spirits, Witches*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Volume. Hungary: Central European University Press, 2008. p. 139.

<sup>158</sup> Gijswijt-Hofstra, Marijke, Levack, Brian et alii. *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. Volume 5*. London: The Athlone Press, 1999. pp. 24-25. available at:

<http://books.google.at/books?id=tWqoKVtZld4C&pg=PA24&dq=witches+torture+swimming+the+witch&hl=de&sa=X&ei=DHm8UOGIB9HOSgbct4DACQ&ved=0CC4Q6AEwAA#v=onepage&q=witches%20torture%20swimming%20the%20witch&f=false>.

<sup>159</sup> Levack, Brian. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. p. 52.

<sup>160</sup> Levack, Brian. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. p. 52.

<sup>161</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. p. 272.

<sup>162</sup> Levack, Brian. *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe*. p.82.

females and constituted a gendercide. Consequently, Sycorax is an excellent example of “male authors and authorities writing the predominantly female witch figure.”<sup>163</sup> She symbolises the victim of “male aggression”<sup>164</sup> and dominance. By portraying the malevolent witch as an Algerian woman, Shakespeare additionally alludes to “[t]he black African element [which became] an extremely negative quantity during the seventeenth century, associated with devilry.”<sup>165</sup> Furthermore, Shakespeare relates to the popular belief in the *witches’ sabbath*, where Sycorax copulated with the Devil with whom she begot a child. The only reason why she was not brought to trial by ordeal and, thus, escaped death penalty, was her being pregnant, since, under these circumstances, “women [...] were usually exempted.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Barry, Jonathan. Hester, Marianne et alii. p. 185.

<sup>164</sup> Teague, Frances. *Acting Funny: Comic Theory and Practice in Shakespeare’s Plays*. United States of America: Associated University Press, 1994. p. 57. available at: [http://books.google.at/books?id=BzRfR51i60C&pg=PA57&lpg=PA57&dq=why+is+sycorax+from+algeria&source=bl&ots=BIIC63NGkD&sig=Lpp9\\_SHVIY1vc8IZErC9uSj2UcU&hl=de&sa=X&ei=FWW\\_UMP5NseQswaM2YCYCw&ved=0CE8Q6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=why%20is%20sycorax%20from%20algeria&f=false](http://books.google.at/books?id=BzRfR51i60C&pg=PA57&lpg=PA57&dq=why+is+sycorax+from+algeria&source=bl&ots=BIIC63NGkD&sig=Lpp9_SHVIY1vc8IZErC9uSj2UcU&hl=de&sa=X&ei=FWW_UMP5NseQswaM2YCYCw&ved=0CE8Q6AEwBA#v=onepage&q=why%20is%20sycorax%20from%20algeria&f=false).

<sup>165</sup> Kahf, Mohja. *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999. p. 92. available at: [http://books.google.at/books?id=AZS6RJkujasc&pg=PT106&dq=sycorax+algeria+black&hl=de&sa=X&ei=tGG\\_UJaLMonesgbqplCYBQ&ved=0CEYQ6AEwCA](http://books.google.at/books?id=AZS6RJkujasc&pg=PT106&dq=sycorax+algeria+black&hl=de&sa=X&ei=tGG_UJaLMonesgbqplCYBQ&ved=0CEYQ6AEwCA).

<sup>166</sup> Pavlac, Brian. p. 39.

#### 4. *Charmed*

*Charmed* is a highly successful American TV series – the TV series as well as certain of its actors and actresses have won several awards<sup>167</sup> – which was originally invented by the television writer Constance M. Burge. The series stars four sisters in their mid-twenties who discover that they are witches. The so-called *Charmed Ones* include Prue, Piper and Phoebe. Equipped with different supernatural powers, the sisters are destined to fight diverse demons and monsters and to protect innocent beings from evil creatures. Despite these constant battles, the *Charmed Ones* constantly try to combine their responsibilities as good witches with their ordinary lives. Although the supernatural constitutes the main plot of each episode, sisterhood, friendship, love, fashion, motherhood, and working life form important parts, too.

From 1998 until 2006, a total of eight *Charmed* seasons were produced by Aaron Spelling and his production company *Spelling Television*.<sup>168</sup> Since the final season *Charmed* has repeatedly been broadcast on TV. At present (i.e. in 2013), a rerun of the 3<sup>rd</sup> season can be seen not only on the Austrian TV channel *Puls 4* but also on the German TV channel *kabeleins*.<sup>169</sup> In Great Britain, replays of season 3 and 4 are currently on air on *Pick TV* as well as on pay-TV channel *E4*.<sup>170</sup> In the United States of America, *TNT* and *WE tv* are currently repeating seasons 3 and 5.<sup>171</sup>

Besides the TV series there exist 41 books<sup>172</sup> dealing with episodes of *Charmed*, which were written by various authors. Although some books are identical with the TV series, they do not always entirely stick to the show's canon. The main focus of this thesis lies on the very first book of *Charmed*, *The Power of Three*, by Eliza Willards. It corresponds to the first episode of season

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<sup>167</sup> IMDb. *Internet Movie Database. Awards for Charmed*. Washington: IMDb.com, Inc., 1990-2013. available at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0158552/awards>.

<sup>168</sup> *tvweb. Charmed*. Nevada: Pipeline Media Labs, 2013. available at: <http://www.tvweb.com/shows/charmed>.

<sup>169</sup> Margreiter, Andreas. *tvheute.at. Das TV-Magazin*. Wien: WUNDERWERK, Digitale Medienproduktion GmbH, 2012. available at: <http://www.tvheute.at/cont/tv/detail.aspx?broadcastid=216020691072&date=08.01.2013%2006:00:00>.

<sup>170</sup> *tvguide. Charmed*. United Kingdom: TVGuide.co.uk Ltd TV Listings, 2013. available at: <http://www.tvguide.co.uk/titlesearch.asp?title=Charmed>.

<sup>171</sup> *tvguide. Charmed*. California: Lionsgate Entertainment Inc, 2013. available at: <http://www.tvguide.com/search/index.aspx?keyword=charmed>.

<sup>172</sup> *Goodreads. Shelves. S Charmed. Popular S Charmed Books*. California: Goodreads Inc., 2013. available at: <http://www.goodreads.com/shelf/show/s-charmed>.

1 entitled *Something Wicca This Way Comes*<sup>173</sup>. However, in order to provide the reader with an overall notion of *Charmed*, references to other *Charmed* TV-episodes and books will be made where necessary.

It is worth mentioning that, additional to the eight *Charmed* TV seasons and the 41 *Charmed* books, there exists a variety of merchandise articles, for example: a final 9<sup>th</sup> season of *Charmed* in the form of a comic book series comprising 24 issues published by *Zenescope Entertainment*;<sup>174</sup> an official *Charmed Magazine* – consisting of 24 issues with supplementary information on the storyline of the television series, gossip about and interviews with the cast and crew, posters, numerous pictures, and quizzes – published by *Titan Magazines* between October 2005 and August 2008<sup>175</sup>, an action video game based on the 4<sup>th</sup> season<sup>176</sup> and two board games, *The Book of Shadows* and *The Source*<sup>177</sup>, in which players adopt the roles of the series' protagonists. Currently, *Charmed* fans are collecting supporters on Facebook in order to present a petition to *CBS Home Entertainment* and *Warner Bros. Entertainment* for bringing back *Charmed* in the form of a movie as well as a video game based on the comic book series.<sup>178</sup> This proves that *Charmed* is still highly topical in the field of popular culture.

#### **4.1. *Charmed: The Power of Three***<sup>179</sup>

Little Prue, Piper and Phoebe Halliwell were raised by their grandmother, Penny, in an old Victorian mansion in San Francisco after their mother, Patty, had died during their early childhood – she had been killed by a demon, a fact which, at that point of time, the three sisters are unaware of. Now, in their mid-twenties, the three of them live together in the Californian manor which they inherited from their grandmother.

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<sup>173</sup> Burge, Constance (TV writer) and Kretchmer, John (director). *Charmed: Something Wicca This Way Comes. Season 1, Episode 1*. United States of America: Spelling Television, 1998.

<sup>174</sup> Brusha, Joe and Tedesco, Ralph. *Zenescope. Comics. Charmed*. Pennsylvania: Zenescope Entertainment, 2013. available at: <https://www.zenescope.com/comics/21-charmed>.

<sup>175</sup> *The Charmed Wiki. Charmed Magazine*. California: Wikia Entertainment, 2013. available at: [http://charmed.wikia.com/wiki/Charmed\\_Magazine](http://charmed.wikia.com/wiki/Charmed_Magazine).

<sup>176</sup> *MobyGames. Charmed. Description*. California: MobyGames, 1999-2013. available at: <http://www.mobygames.com/game/exen/charmed>.

<sup>177</sup> *IMDb. Internet Movie Database. FAQ for Charmed. Charmed Merchandise*. Washington: IMDb.com, Inc., 1990-2013. available at: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0158552/faq>.

<sup>178</sup> Facebook. *Bring Charmed Back. Gemeinschaftsseite über Charmed*. Facebook, January 6, 2013. available at: <https://www.facebook.com/SaveCharmedPetition>.

<sup>179</sup> Willard, Eliza. *Charmed: The Power of Three*. New York: SSE, Simon Spotlight Entertainment, 1999.

One day, in the basement, Prue rediscovers their old wooden spirit board, which they were given by their mother. The sisters used to play with it when they were younger, yet, they have never understood the message inscribed on it: *“To my three beautiful girls. May this give you the light to find the Shadow. The power of three will set you free. Love, Mum.”* (p. 11).

Phoebe and Piper subsequently agree on consulting the tool just for the fun of it, when suddenly, without having touched it, the pointer moves to the letters A-T-T-I-C. Phoebe instantly decides to go upstairs where she finds a weighty, old tome covered in dust. On the front cover it displays the originally Celtic but now Wiccan symbol of the *triquetra*<sup>180</sup> – three arcs interlocked inside a circle. It is entitled *Book of Shadows* and contains, amongst others, magical spells, descriptions of otherworldly creatures, images of women combating supernatural beings, and information on the trial of Melinda Warren, one of the ancestors of the Halliwell sisters who had lived during the time of the Salem Witch Trials. She had been accused of witchcraft and, thereupon, been condemned to be burnt at the stake. According to the *Book of Shadows* her last words were:

*You may kill me, but you cannot kill my kind. With each generation, the Warren witches will grow stronger and stronger – until, at last, three sisters will arrive. Together, these three sisters will be the most powerful witches the world has ever known. They will be the Charmed Ones.* (p. 52)

When Phoebe recites the incantation from the first page, the ghost of Melinda Warren suddenly appears and reveals that with the magic charm just performed, Phoebe has activated her own as well as her sisters' supernatural powers, which they inherited from the maternal side of their family. Melinda continues that the Halliwell sisters are the so-called *Charmed Ones*. They are “white” witches with individual supernatural faculties, whose destiny it is to save innocent beings from various demons and monsters. The combination of their special abilities makes them the most powerful witches.

Additionally, Melinda warns Phoebe that malicious warlocks – malicious otherworldly beings in human shape who seek to take possession of witches'

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<sup>180</sup> Emick, Jennifer. *The Everything Celtic Wisdom Book: Find Inspiration Through Ancient Traditions, Rituals and Spirituality. Everything Series*. Massachusetts: F+W Media Inc., 2009. p. 109.

supernatural powers by killing them – are on their way to steal the *Charmed Ones*' power. This is also the reason why the sisters were raised as ordinary children. With their powers remaining inactive, the warlocks were unable to locate them.

Before Melinda vanishes, she conjures up the picture of a man stabbing a woman with a gem-adorned, double edged knife. Phoebe recognizes the crime scene as she had previously seen a local report on the news informing about the murder of three women. Each victim had the same symbol tattooed on their collarbone: the *triquetra*. Immediately, Phoebe becomes aware of the fact that these women were witches and that she and her sisters are in great danger.

When Phoebe reports to her sisters what she has discovered in the attic, they first of all do not believe her. However, during the next days, the sisters' supernatural powers reveal themselves and substantiate Phoebe's claim: the three of them are witches with magical faculties.

Prue experiences her individual supernatural power – telekinesis – for the first time at work where she imagines strangling her boss, Roger, who has taken credit for her labour. Her secret intention becomes reality and Roger's tie mysteriously winds itself around his neck. Only by unfastening it Prue can save her boss from suffocating. Later on, when ordering a coffee, she does not have to reach for the cream jug but only has to think of it and it magically moves to her place. Another strange incident that occurs to Prue takes place at a pharmacy. She has a headache from Phoebe's countless efforts to persuade her of their mission as the *Charmed Ones* and desperately searches for aspirin. Suddenly a bottle of the remedy falls down from the shelf. Convinced that her sister can move objects when being upset, Phoebe decides to agitate Prue more and more. As Phoebe has assumed, further bottles fall to the floor.

Piper makes her first acquaintance with her magical force – molecular immobilization or freezing time – while preparing her sample meal at *Quake's*, the restaurant she has applied for. When the chef is on the brink of tasting her dish, Piper, who has not yet seasoned it, panic-stricken yells stop. Instantly everything around her is brought to a stand-still.

Phoebe first encounters her supernatural faculty – premonition or seeing events from the past, present and future – while taking a ride through the hills. Suddenly she becomes dizzy; everything around her turns intensively bright and

she sees an imaginary picture of two inline-skating boys being hit by a car. Later that day her vision comes true, but thanks to her anticipation she knows how to save the teenagers.

After these mysterious incidences, Prue and Piper are finally convinced that Phoebe is right and that they are indeed the *Charmed Ones*.

As Phoebe makes an allusion about the sisters' magical abilities to Jeremy, Piper's boyfriend, he becomes alert and persuades his girlfriend to entrust him with more information on their faculties. Jeremy, however, is a warlock. Pleased to have found the *Charmed Ones* he invites Piper to a romantic place where he plans to kill her. When pulling out his knife, she recognizes it as the one with which the women in the news report were killed. Desperately she jells at him to stop and immediately he freezes.

Back at home, Piper reveals to her sisters that Jeremy is a warlock who tries to appropriate their powers. Hence, the three of them consult the *Book of Shadows* in which they find some instructions on how to kill a warlock. First, they arrange themselves around a table, light nine candles, and anoint them with special oils and spices. Then Piper takes a doll and pierces some thorns of the roses which Jeremy has recently given to her into the toy. Finally, they chant a spell and Piper burns the doll.

While Jeremy gradually awakens from being frozen, he feels thorns growing out of his body. As he is still alive – the power of the *Charmed Ones* is not yet fully developed – he decides to haunt the sisters back home, but as soon as he arrives, Prue uses her telekinetic power and tosses him around the room. Finally the sisters chant the mantra engraved on the spirit board "*The power of three will set us free*" (p. 11). Before he explodes, Jeremy announces that even if the Charmed Ones have succeeded in killing him there are many more warlocks who are after their supernatural power.

#### **4.2. 'The Supernatural' in *Charmed: The Power of Three***

The following chapter will examine the three witch sisters according to their portrayal in *Charmed: The Power of Three*. In order to render a complete picture of the Halliwell siblings, supportive references to other *Charmed* TV-series and books will occasionally be made as well. The protagonists of *Charmed*, Prue, Phoebe and Piper, will be analyzed according to their character

relations, their personality traits, and their outer appearance. With regard to their ordinary life, the main focus will be put on both their role as working women and on their private life. As far as their magical existence is concerned, it will be scrutinized what their powers are, how they apply them, and what for. By means of this analysis it will be revealed that despite being witches with supernatural powers the *Charmed Ones* are illustrated as ordinary women who the audience can identify with. Furthermore, it will be shown that by “*provid[ing] positive representations of [w]itches as “good people”*”<sup>181</sup> the series provides an alternative interpretation of Wicca and, thus, contributes to deconstructing common prejudices related to this subject matter. Whether this new interpretation is in accordance with contemporary witchcraft or merely a dramatic invention of the series’ creators will be considered in 4.3.

#### 4.2.1. Prue

Prudence Halliwell, or just Prue, is a woman of 27. She is the firstborn of Patty Halliwell, a witch, and Victor Bennet, an ordinary human being. After Patty’s early death Victor abandoned Prue and her sisters since he could no longer stand the fights with his mother-in-law about how to raise the three children. Although eventually living with their grandmother, 8-year-old Prue regularly had to look after her younger sisters. “*She practically had to sacrifice [...] her own childhood to raise [...]*” (p. 22) them. Even though Piper and Phoebe are now grown up, Prue still acts as if she was their mother, which is indicated, for example, in the following comment: “*Prue was only two years older than Piper, but sometimes she treated Piper more like a child than a sister.*” (p. 6).

Prue’s protectiveness concerning her sisters not only manifests itself in everyday life but also in witchcraft business. When, in *The Power of Three*, Jeremy arrives at the *Charmed Ones*’ home to plague the sisters, Prue shelters Piper and Phoebe from the malevolent warlock:

*Prue, Piper and Phoebe backed away as Jeremy stepped inside and closed the door. He pulled the jeweled knife from his pocket and raised it over his head. Prue stepped in front of Phoebe and Piper, trying to protect her sisters. (pp. 169-170)*

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<sup>181</sup> Berger, Helen and Ezzy, Douglas. *Teenage Witches: Magical Youth and the Search for the Self*. United States of America: Rutgers University Press, 2007. p. 39.

Prue is a strong-willed and determined woman who does not submit to male authority. This is indicated by the fact that she simply quits a job because her boss has taken credit for her project (p. 126).

Additionally, Prue can be described as a highly reasonable person who initially *“didn’t believe in witchcraft or incantations”* (p. 47), as these subject matters are logically not comprehensible for her. Her rationality is revealed by her constant quest for logical explanations of the mysterious happenings which the three sisters experience (p. 48; p. 117; p. 118). First of all, she disbelieves that the pointer of the spirit board has really moved on its own and suspects Phoebe to have moved it herself:

*“What did you guys do now?” Prue asked as she entered the living room [...]. “The pointer on the spirit board [...]. It, it moved on its own.” [...] Prue shot her a stinging “yeah, right” look. [...] “You always used to move the pointer,” Prue added. “No,” Phoebe said. “I didn’t this time.” Prue put her hand on her hip. “I don’t have time for this.” She began to turn away. “Prue – wait!” Phoebe cried. To Phoebe’s surprise, Prue stopped. She didn’t lose the sceptical expression on her face, but she didn’t leave the room. “Just watch it – it will move.” [...] “This isn’t funny, Phoebe,” Prue said. “It isn’t even entertaining.” “Ah, ah, ah!” Phoebe cried out [...] “It did it again! It moved!” [...] Prue walked over to the spirit board. She glanced at it and frowned. “It’s still on the letter T, Phoebe.” “I swear it moved!” Phoebe yelled. “Sure it did.” Prue turned and left the room. (pp. 27-30)*

She regards Phoebe’s conviction about having evoked their supernatural powers as a *stupid fantasy* (p. 61) and suspects her of inventing the witchcraft issue in order to provoke her:

*“[...] The Charmed Ones? [...] Phoebe, I told you this morning. That witch stuff is insane.” [...] Why should she have to listen to Phoebe’s rantings and ravings about witchcraft? “Phoebe, this is ridiculous,” Prue said. “We’re not witches, okay? And I don’t want to talk about it anymore. [...] I know you make up these crazy stories just to push my buttons. I’m not going to let you do that to me. [...]” (pp. 104-107)*

When Prue’s own magical faculties start to reveal themselves, she accuses Phoebe of playing a joke on her:

*“All right, Phoebe,” she said. [...] “Let’s just get some things straight: I do not have special powers.” [...] “Now pass me the cream.” Prue pointed to the pitcher, and her jaw fell open, as she watched the pitcher slowly, deliberately, move along the wooden top of the bar – by itself. It stopped beside her coffee cup. [...] Prue stared at the coffee, stunned. Maybe Phoebe was right all along, she thought.*

*Maybe we really do have special powers. Prue shook her head. No. It had to be a trick. (pp. 107-109)*

However, as she can no longer rationally vindicate the strange occurrences happening around her, she realizes that Phoebe is right and that the sisters are indeed witches. Finally, she surmounts her common sense and acknowledges that there exist higher powers in the world which cannot be logically explained:

*She struggled with her common sense. [...] But Prue knew she'd have to learn to let another voice inside her speak, too. The voice that told her there were powers at work in the world far beyond logic and sense – powers that were beyond comprehension. (p. 164)*

As far as her special abilities are concerned Prue has inherited the power of telekinesis, thus, she can move objects with her mind. Thereby – as in the scene in which she imagines to strangle her boss – her power is channelled through her hands:

*I could wring his neck! She wrapped her hands around an imaginary neck and pretended to strangle it [...]. "Help!" Roger cried out from his office. [...] Prue [...] peered into Roger's office, and gasped. He lay on the floor in front of his desk, tugging at his necktie, gasping for breath. His face was swollen and red, bulging over the tie, which had jammed around his neck like a noose. [...] Prue stared at him in shock as he struggled to yank his necktie off. The tie seemed to be strangling him – all by itself! (pp. 84-86)*

However, her power can also be channelled through her eyes. This is the case when she fights Jeremy in the manor:

*She stared at him with fury and with power. She stared at him with a force she never knew she possessed. She narrowed her eyes, aiming all her power at Jeremy. Jeremy's body hurled through the air and slammed against the door with a bang. [...] She concentrated on Jeremy once more, her power flowing through her eyes. Jeremy sailed through the air. He crashed into a wall, smashing the pictures hanging there. (pp. 169-170)*

Besides the faculty of telekinesis, she is familiar with the three basic skills inherent to all witches and warlocks in *Charmed*: casting spells, preparing magical potions, and scrying, which is by definition “[t]he ancient art of

*clairvoyance achieved by concentrating on an object – usually one with a shiny surface – until visions appear.*<sup>182</sup>

In *Charmed*, scrying is applied in order to retrieve a person or an item. Thereby, a crystal pendulum is held above a map and moved slowly. The more the pendulum swings, the closer one is to the lost target object. Ultimately, after a certain amount of time, the pendulum will draw down on one precise spot on the map, thus, indicating the exact location of the person or thing.<sup>183</sup>

Concerning her professional career Prue is portrayed as an independent and successful woman, who is not afraid of taking on new challenges. During her college time, she used to work at the *Museum of Natural History*. Afterwards she was in charge of identifying and authenticating auction pieces at *Buckland Auction House*. Yet, Rex Buckland, the owner of the auction house, who is actually a warlock who suspects her of being a *Charmed One*, has only employed Prue to clearly prove her and her sisters' secret identity as most potent witches and to usurp their powers. However, the three sisters finally discover that Rex is a warlock and with their supernatural powers they manage to defeat him.<sup>184</sup> Afterwards Prue decides to pursue her childhood dream of becoming a professional photographer and is quickly hired by *San Francisco 415 Magazine*, where she becomes a top photo journalist.

Prue's love life is star-crossed. She has been happily engaged to Roger until Phoebe reveals to her that he has attempted to seduce her. Although Roger outlines the situation the other way round, Prue – divided over whom to trust – breaks the engagement. However, she blames Phoebe for this outcome and since that day has never forgiven her younger sister (pp. 12-13).

Being a witch makes Prue's private life even more complicated. As evil warlocks are behind the *Charmed Ones'* power the sisters have to keep their true existence a secret. Prue is frustrated that she cannot entrust her big love and long-term boyfriend, Andy Trudeau, with her real identity and that she has to lie to him about her activities as a witch. Nevertheless, Andy, who is a police inspector at the San Francisco Police Department, discovers the reality about

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<sup>182</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca*. p. 319.

<sup>183</sup> Scrying is used by the *Charmed Ones* for the first time in: Mayhew, Vivian and Valerie (TV writers) and Conway, James (director). *Charmed. That Old Black Magic. Season 2, Episode 6*. United States of America: Spelling Television, 1999.

<sup>184</sup> Kern, Brad and Anderson, Sheryl (TV writers) and Damski, Mel (director). *Charmed. Wicca Envy. Season 1, Episode 10*. United States of America: Spelling Television, 1999.

the Halliwell sisters and from then on aims at protecting the three sisters. At the end of season 1 Andy dies while defending the *Charmed Ones* against a demon<sup>185</sup>. Prue blames herself for Andy's death and since then has never had any serious relationship.

#### 4.2.2. Phoebe

Phoebe Halliwell, aged 22, is the youngest of the three Halliwell sisters. In *The Power of Three* she has just returned from New York where she has tried in vain to find her father in order to confront him with his abandonment. This portrays her as an emotionally sensitive person who has not yet come to terms with her past.

Her relation to Prue is highly tense. The two of them "*had never gotten along*" (p. 13), but the situation deteriorates even more when Prue breaks the engagement with Roger, blaming Phoebe for it. However, their shared destiny as the *Charmed Ones* finally improves their sisterhood.

Phoebe leads a desperate life without any stability or prospect. This is indicated by her remark on having experienced a "*lost, floundering feeling [...] for the last couple of years*" (p. 40), as well as by Prue's comment on her youngest sister's life: "*That girl is so in the dark, a little light might help.*" [...] "*[...] she has no vision,*" Prue complained. "*No sense of the future.*" (p. 12) According to Prue, Phoebe "*has always been a flake*" (p. 46) who has "*never considered the consequences of her actions*" (p. 16). Nevertheless, her sisters are always on her side, especially Prue, who has constantly been "*bailing Phoebe out of some kind of mess*" (p. 16).

What makes Phoebe's life even more complicated is the fact that she is a chaotic and disorganised person, who is frequently lost in thought, as the following example illustrates: "*A car horn beeped outside. 'Oops. I forgot about the cab,' Phoebe said. 'Why am I not surprised?'*" Prue replied." (p. 18).

Phoebe can also be described as a spontaneous and enthusiastic person. This is revealed in the scene in which she readily agrees to consult the just rediscovered spirit board:

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<sup>185</sup> Burge, Constance and Kern, Brad (TV writers) and Les, Sheldon (producer). *Charmed. Déjà Vu All Over Again. Season 1, Episode 22*. United States of America: Spelling Television, 1999.

*"Look!" she [Piper] cried. "Our old spirit board!" "Where did you find this? [...]" "Prue found it in the basement. Let's try it out," Piper suggested. "Just for fun". "Why not?" Phoebe placed the game on the coffee table. Then she jumped up and grabbed some candles off the sideboard. (pp. 26-27)*

Contrary to the reasonable Prue, Phoebe is a "gullible" (p. 20) person. She relies more on her instinct than on common sense<sup>186</sup>. Additionally, she quickly gets excited. This is revealed by the fact that she straightaway believes that "a spirit had sent her a message" (p. 35) by moving the pointer of the spirit board towards the letters A-T-T-I-C: "[S]he wasn't going to ignore the message from the spirit board. It has to mean something, she thought. I have to find out what's up there." (pp. 33-34).

Shortly afterwards, when she discovers the *Book of Shadows*, Phoebe is completely enthralled by its mystical contents. Contrary to Prue, she does not regard it as "some stupid book" (p. 47) and spends the whole night reading in it. Due to her naïve curiosity, she unknowingly activates the power of the *Charmed Ones* by performing the so-called *Dominus Trius* spell:

*" 'Hear now the words of the witches  
The secrets we hid in the night  
The oldest of Gods are invoked here  
The great work of magic is sought  
In this night and in this hour  
I call upon the Ancient Power  
Bring your powers to we sisters three!  
We want the power  
Give us the power! ' " (pp. 41-42)*

As far as Phoebe's individual powers are concerned she is able to receive premonitions. She makes her first experience with this faculty when riding her bike up a mountain:

*Phoebe pumped her legs as she struggled to ride up a steep San Francisco hill. [...] Then she felt a sudden dizziness that almost knocked her off her bike. I'm probably just working my body too hard, Phoebe told herself. [...] A bright light flashed into Phoebe's eyes. She felt a jolt of electricity run through her body, and she gasped, overcome with fear. What is it? she wondered. She closed her eyes, and a scene unfolded in her mind:  
Two teenage boys on in-line skates. No helmets.  
Going fast. Very fast.  
Jumping over curbs, weaving in and out.  
A car rounds a corner. A black car.*

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<sup>186</sup> Ruditis, Paul. p. 89.

*A horn honks. Tires screech. The car swerves.  
 Too late. Too late.  
 The car hits the boys.  
 Blood in the street.  
 Dripping from their cracked heads ...  
 The image disappeared. Phoebe blinked and shook her head to clear it. She stood in the street, half-balanced on her bike, a little shaken.  
 What was that? she wondered. What just happened?  
 She stared at the landscape, the houses around her. It was different from what she had seen in her mind. She didn't see any teenage boys or a black car. But the scene felt so real, she thought. I saw those two boys get hurt! Was that a vision? she wondered, catching her breath.  
 If it was, she thought, I've got to do something. I've got to save those boys! (pp. 139-140)*

Due to her special faculty she is able to locate the teenagers and save them. Being a witch contributes to Phoebe's personality as she gradually starts to act in a more mature and responsible way. These new character traits contribute to her being respected and taken seriously by her sisters. This is revealed in the scene in which Phoebe warns Piper and Prue to be wary of warlocks:

*"Look, the point is, we don't know where the evil is going to come from," Phoebe said. "So we all have to be very careful, okay?" Piper and Prue exchanged glances. They weren't used to taking orders from their baby sister. But they nodded, and Piper said, "Okay." (p. 130)*

Contrary to her sisters, Phoebe embraces her destiny as witch, as she considers this dramatic change of their lives as a welcome possibility to get new perspectives in her hopeless life:

*Prue frowned. She still felt troubled. "But how will we ever feel safe?" she asked. "How will we know who to trust?" "We can't suspect every guy we meet," Piper said. "[...] Maybe, after a while, we'll know how to spot a warlock a mile away." Prue shook her head. "Even so, everything's going to be different from now on." "At least our lives won't be boring," Phoebe said. "But they'll never be the same," Prue protested. "This is a bad thing?" Phoebe joked. (p. 180)*

As far as her outer appearance is concerned she is described as a handsome young woman:

*[...] Phoebe looked good. Her new chin-length hair cut suited her, and her figure was in great shape, as usual. She wore jeans and a tank top [...]. (p. 17)*

At the beginning of the series she is unemployed and without money, circumstances which contribute to Phoebe's dissatisfaction with her own life.

When she tries to find some work, she has to realize that, without a completed college degree, it is difficult to get the jobs she is interested in. Thus, she decides to go back to university, and in season 3, she finally graduates from college with a B. A. in psychology.<sup>187</sup> Since season 4, she has successfully been working as an advice columnist for *The Daily Mirror*, a major San Francisco newspaper, and tries to combine her working career and her responsibilities as a good witch as well as possible:

*Considering the number of demons that interfered with Phoebe's work schedule, she did miss her deadlines with surprising frequency. But she always managed to get her work in close to on time. Or at least before the paper went to press.*<sup>188</sup>

Phoebe's love life is ill-fated. Initially, she is married to Cole Turner, a half demon, who has been instructed by *The Triade*, the most powerful fellowship of upper-level demons, to kill the *Charmed Ones*<sup>189</sup>. However, Cole falls in love with Phoebe and renounces his evil side. By doing good deeds he proves to Phoebe that he has become a better person. Yet, eventually, his demonic roots prevail over his human ones. As Phoebe considers her destiny as a good witch and Cole's life as a half demon as incompatible, she decides to get divorced from him<sup>190</sup>. Afterwards, she marries the human Dex Lawson, but when Phoebe confesses to Dex that she is a witch, he leaves her and achieves that their marriage gets annulled<sup>191</sup>. Finally, in season 8, Phoebe meets Coop. He is in fact a Cupid, an angelic creature and love mediator, who was sent by *The Elders* – a council of highly powerful guardian angels who protect good witches – to help Phoebe find her true love. Gradually, Phoebe realises that Coop himself is her true love. They get married and have three daughters, who are cupid-witch hybrids.

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<sup>187</sup> Anderson, Sheryl (TV writer) and Williams, Anson (director). *Charmed. The Demon Who Came in From The Cold. Season 3, Episode 19*. United States of America: Spelling Television, 2001.

<sup>188</sup> Ruditis, Paul. p. 21.

<sup>189</sup> Estrin, Zack and Levison, Chris (TV writers) and Behring, John (director). *Charmed. Magic Hour. Season 3, Episode 2*. United States of America: Spelling Television, 2000.

<sup>190</sup> Cerone, Daniel (TV writer) and Conway, James (director). *Charmed. A Witch's Tail, Part 1. Season 5, Episode 1*. United States of America: Spelling Television, 2002.

<sup>191</sup> Wright, Rob (TV writer) and Kretchmer, John (director). *Charmed. Rewitched. Season 8, Episode 5*. United States of America: Spelling Television, 2005.

#### 4.2.3. Piper

Piper Halliwell, aged 25, is the middle sister of the *Charmed Ones*. She often acts as an intermediate between Prue and Phoebe, whereby she generally sides with her younger sister (p. 23). This is indicated, for example, in the scene in which she tries to appease Prue, who disapproves of the fact that Phoebe moves back into the Victorian mansion as she still blames her for the break-up with her ex-fiancé Roger:

*"Look, maybe you've forgotten why I'm still mad at her?" "No, of course not," Piper said, trying to calm Prue down. "But Phoebe has nowhere else to go. She lost her job. She's in debt ..."* (p.15)

When Phoebe is disappointed that Prue still has not forgiven her and does not want her to move in, Piper tries to comfort and cheer her little sister up:

*Piper touched her arm. "Don't worry about her," she said. "Prue just needs a little time to get used to things, okay? [...] Hey, I've got an idea," Piper said. "And I think it will cheer you up. Come on." Piper grabbed Phoebe's hand and dragged her down the creaky stairs.* (pp. 25-26)

Thus, Piper can be described as a caring, optimistic and harmony seeking young woman. Additionally, she is a humorous, occasionally ironic person. When Phoebe reveals to Piper that the three of them are witches and have inherited special powers from their ancestors, who were witches as well, she replies sarcastically: *"And we have a cousin who's a drunk, an aunt who's manic, and a father who's invisible."* (p. 68). And, at the end of *The Power of Three*, after finally having realized that Phoebe is right, she wryly comments on Prue's telekinetic power: *"Why don't you get a job with a moving company," Piper called out. "You could move whole houses full of furniture without lifting a finger!"* (p. 131).

Although Piper, like Prue, does not believe in witchcraft (p. 68), she somehow doubts that Phoebe's accounts on their being the *Charmed Ones* are merely lies or a joke:

*"Look at me, Piper," she [Phoebe] said. "Do I really look like I'm kidding around?" Piper gazed back at her sister. Phoebe didn't seem to be joking. That was the problem.* (p. 70)

However, as Piper has an important application for a job as a chef that day she abandons her ambivalent feelings. This portrays Piper as a focused and ambitious career woman. Yet, when during her audition meal Piper's inherited power manifests itself for the first time, she becomes aware that Phoebe has been telling the truth about their being witches:

*"I am ready to taste your meal," he [the head chef] told her. No! Not yet! Piper thought, clutching the measuring cup of port wine. She hadn't had time to add it to the pasta sauce, and without it, the sauce wouldn't taste right. What was she going to do? [...] "Chef Moore, I –" Piper began. Before she had a chance to finish, the chef picked up a fork and hovered over the pasta. [...] "I didn't have time to –" Piper tried again. "Ah-ah!" The chef cut her off with a wave of his hand. With his other hand, he dipped the pasta into the sauce and raised the fork to his lips, preparing to taste the unfinished dish. Piper was frantic. "But, but –" I can't let him eat it, she thought. [...] "No! Wait!" she cried, waving her hands. "Don't eat it. Stop! Stop!" Chef Moore stopped. He stood as still as a statue, the fork hovering near his open mouth. "Thank you so much," Piper said. "I just need two seconds ..." She stared at the chef, who still stood frozen in place, the fork at his lips. No one told me he had a sense of humor, Piper thought, laughing nervously. "Chef Moore?" Piper asked. She tapped his shoulder. He didn't move an inch. What was he doing? She waved a hand in front of his face. "Chef Moore?" He didn't respond. His eyes didn't even blink. Piper glanced at the stove – at the pot of boiling water that had frozen mid-bubble. "What is going on?" Piper murmured, her heart thudding heavily against her chest. She glanced at the clock hanging on the wall. The second hand isn't moving either, she realized. She rested her ear against the refrigerator. It's not humming! Everything has stopped dead, Piper thought. Everything except me! She stared at the motionless Chef Moore in horror. Did I do that to him? She asked herself. Is Phoebe right? Am I ... am I really a witch? (pp. 89-90)*

After that mysterious incident Piper apologizes to Phoebe for not having had enough confidence in her: *"You were right all along, Phobes"* (p. 128).

As far as her working life is concerned, she can be described as a successful and ambitious woman. Initially, she is working as a head chef at the restaurant *Quake's*, but later she opens her own night club called *P3*. It becomes a hotspot in the San Francisco night scene. Yet, after some years Piper decides to sell it in order to realize her lifelong dream, which is opening her own restaurant.

In the series, Piper is in love with the Whitelighter<sup>192</sup> Leo Wyatt. Although he returns her feelings, their relationship becomes highly complicated, due to the

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<sup>192</sup> The otherworldly Whitelighters are comparable to guardian angels. Some of their various paranormal faculties comprise locating people in distress, moving objects, shape-shifting and creating magical potions. They protect good witches and assist them in their destiny as well as their use of supernatural powers. Additionally, they function as intermediaries between witches and the so-called 'Elders'. This assembly of extremely potent Whitelighters can warn sorceresses of immediate demonic threats. They can also be consulted for the identification of

fact that Whitelighters are generally forbidden to have relationships with witches. Thus, when *the Elders* find out that the two of them are romantically engaged, they send Leo back to heaven. Piper briefly starts an affair with her neighbour, Dan, but breaks up with him as soon as Leo, who temporarily quits his duties as the *Charmed Ones'* guardian angel, returns into her life. Piper and Leo try to clandestinely get married, but *the Elders* find out about their secret and teleport Leo back once again. However, when Piper threatens to resign from her duties as witch and not to save any innocent beings as long Leo is not brought back to her, *the Elders* grant their love an exemption. Piper and Leo can finally get married. Together, they have three children, Wyatt, Chris and Melinda, who are half witches and half Whitelighters.

Besides fulfilling her responsibilities as a witch and a working woman Piper tries her best to be a loving and caring mother. However, she has to realize that her duties often interfere with her private life:

*Between her job at P3 and the constant demon interferences, she felt like she was always missing out on the important moments in Wyatt's life. She had already missed the first time he rolled over on his own, and she dreaded the day someone else told her that he was walking.*<sup>193</sup>

#### **4.3. 'The Supernatural' as Presented by Eliza Willard in *Charmed* and Its Historical Context**

The following chapter aims at illustrating witchcraft in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. First of all, I will refer to Gerald Gardner, who is considered the founding father of modern pagan witchcraft, or Wicca. Afterwards, I will outline the basic conceptions and principal ethics of Wiccans. It will be revealed that contemporary witchcraft has distanced itself from its previously negative image. Wicca is not a devil-worshipping, *maleficia*-causing practice but a benevolent pagan nature religion whose practitioners live in mutual respect, veneration, and live in harmony with the environment and mankind. Against this theoretical

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unknown malevolent spirits and for information on how to defeat them. The powers of 'The Elders' include, among other, clairvoyance, immortality, conferring immunity against any supernatural forces, and removing the power of evil otherworldly creatures. <http://charmed.wikia.com/wiki/Whitelighter>.

<sup>193</sup> Ruditis, Paul. pp. 92-93.

background I will consider in 4.3.3. if the *Charmed Ones* can be regarded as varieties of present-day witches.

#### 4.3.1. Gerald Gardner: The Founder of Wicca

The retired British civil servant Gerald Brosseau Gardner (1884-1964) is generally regarded as “*the father of contemporary [w]itchcraft*”<sup>194</sup>. Gardner always had a “*keen and active interest in the supernatural*”<sup>195</sup>. In the Far East, where he had worked as a young man, he “*studied the magical beliefs and practices of the indigenous peoples of Borneo and Malaysia*”<sup>196</sup>. He was a folklorist, spiritualist and druid; he was an active member of a variety of secret organizations, for example, Freemasonry and Rosicrucianism; and he was a supporter of the highly controversial, yet tremendously influential theory on witchcraft developed by the British anthropologist Margaret Murray (1863-1963).<sup>197</sup> According to Murray, the witches who were persecuted in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries belonged to a nature-based religion that existed long before Christianity. They were, so Murray argues, practitioners of an ancient fertility cult which was centered on the veneration of a horned god, whom Christian Inquisitors mistakenly assumed to be the devil.<sup>198</sup> Murray’s thesis has been rejected due to her extremely “*selective and uncritical*”<sup>199</sup> use of sources. Her critics claim that her conclusions are mainly based on the confessions of witches. These statements must be considered highly questionable as they were frequently obtained by torture. Murray, however, used them to make “*sweeping generalizations about the “witch-cult”*”<sup>200</sup>. Nevertheless, Murray’s thesis vastly contributed to modern pagan witchcraft as it created “*a myth of [Wiccan] origin*”<sup>201</sup>.

Gardner claims that, in 1939, he supposedly encountered a coven of witches in England’s New Forest and that Old Dorothy, the high priestess of that coven,

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<sup>194</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches, Witchcraft and Wicca*. p. 35.

<sup>195</sup> De Blecourt, Willem and Hutton, Ronald et alii. *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe. Volume 6. The Twentieth Century*. Great Britain: The Athlone Press, 1999. p. 43.

<sup>196</sup> Howard, Michael. *Modern Wicca: A History From Gerald Gardner to the Present*. United States of America: Llewelyn Worldwide, 2009. p. 1.

<sup>197</sup> De Blecourt, Willem and Hutton, Ronald et alii. p. 43.

<sup>198</sup> Davy, Barbara. *Introduction to Pagan Studies*. United Kingdom: AltaMira Press, 2007. p. 110.

<sup>199</sup> Burns, William. *Witch Hunts in Europe and America: An Encyclopedia*. p. 204.

<sup>200</sup> Burns, William. p. 204.

<sup>201</sup> Davy, Barbara. p. 110.

initiated him to their occult practices. Convinced to have discovered members of the pre-Christian religion described in Murray's hypothesis, he decided to revive this ancient faith.<sup>202</sup> He then founded a coven himself and devised a book of shadows as "*the ritual manual of [his] version of witchcraft*"<sup>203</sup>. This handbook, in which he draws on a variety of occult elements from different sources he got familiar with during his life, "*became the root, [...] or inspiration for most of the Wiccan traditions we have today*"<sup>204</sup>.

Later, Gardner initiated a number of women as Wiccan priestesses, who created their own covens throughout the United Kingdom.<sup>205</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s the "*new old*" religion<sup>206</sup> was successfully transferred to other English-speaking countries and, finally, it

*was also to establish itself in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, and Italy, and even in Far Eastern countries such as Japan and India, in Central and South America (principally Mexico and Brazil), and South Africa. It is now claimed that Wicca is one of the fastest growing religions in the world.*<sup>207</sup>

Given the fact that Wicca is a "*decentralized movement*"<sup>208</sup> without neither a central church nor a collective bible or any rules<sup>209</sup>, a variety of different communities have developed from the original Gardnerian Wicca throughout the decades. However, as shall be outlined in the subsequent chapter, there exist certain basic beliefs and morals that are shared by the majority of Wiccan practitioners.

#### **4.3.2. Theoretical Conceptions and Principal Ethics of Wicca**

The chief concept of Wiccan philosophy is the belief in a spiritual, self-balancing energy, which manifests itself in dichotomous entities, such as light and dark, hard and soft, life and death.<sup>210</sup> Based on this principle, Wiccans "*symbolize*

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<sup>202</sup> Howard, Michael. pp. 1-2.

<sup>203</sup> Howard, Michael. *Modern Wicca*. p. 2.

<sup>204</sup> Sabin, Thea. *Wicca for Beginners: Fundamentals of Philosophy & Practice*. United States of America: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2006. p. 10.

<sup>205</sup> Howard, Michael. p. 3.

<sup>206</sup> Sabin, Thea. p. 12.

<sup>207</sup> Howard, Michael. p. 3.

<sup>208</sup> Morris, Brian. *Religion and Anthropology: A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. p. 285.

<sup>209</sup> Sabin, Thea. p. 13.

<sup>210</sup> Roderick, Timothy. *Wicca: A Year and a Day: 366 Days of Spiritual Practice in the Craft of the Wise*. United States of America: Llewellyn Worldwide, 2005. p. 20.

*their understanding of [...] divine energy in male and female terms – as both god and goddess.*<sup>211</sup> Since Wicca not only emphasizes the glory of a male deity but equally also worships the divine feminine, many women were attracted to this notion during the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s. Against this background a separate spiritual movement was to develop, the so-called Dianic Wiccan group which consists exclusively of women who solely venerate a Goddess.<sup>212</sup> Wiccans are convinced that the spiritual energy is omnipresent and that, according to the previously discussed principle ‘as above, so below’, the earth is a direct manifestation of the divine. Consequently, members of Wicca honour it and

*focus on attuning [to] and working with earth energies. This means understanding the cycle of the seasons, participating in these cycles through ritual and contact with the earth, and living within the flow of the earth’s natural power rather than working against it.*<sup>213</sup>

Due to the growing ecological awareness and the rising concern about environmental issues in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, a distinct Wiccan movement, called green Wicca, has developed. Its practitioners mainly focus on preserving and healing the earth.<sup>214</sup>

The concept of a sacred earth is accompanied by the belief that man is a representation of the divine as well. According to Wiccans, man is infused with spiritual energy too and it manifests itself in man’s psychic abilities. Examples of these special faculties are empathy, divination, the art of prophecy achieved through reading astrological chart or tarot cards, acting as a medium, and receiving information from the spirited world.<sup>215</sup> These faculties, which can be imagined as intuition or sixth sense, allow the experienced practitioner to understand and adjust to the secrets in the world.<sup>216</sup> They are innate to all people and can be activated and improved by means of a variety of spiritual practices, for example, meditation and ritual.<sup>217</sup>

Furthermore, Wiccans believe in the potency of magic. Contrary to psychic abilities, which aim at the theoretical comprehension of the hidden forces in the

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<sup>211</sup> Roderick, Timothy. p. 20.

<sup>212</sup> Sabin, Thea. p. 11.

<sup>213</sup> Sabin, Thea. p. 27.

<sup>214</sup> Howard, Michael. p. 4.

<sup>215</sup> Sabin, Thea. p. 29.

<sup>216</sup> Sabin, Thea. pp. 28-29.

<sup>217</sup> Sabin, Thea. p. 29.

world, magic, as exercised by Wiccans, focuses on practically “*bending or working with them*”<sup>218</sup>. Via meditation, trance, and dancing<sup>219</sup>, as well as by the use of “*charms and enchanted herbal mixtures, [...] stones and other natural, energy-filled objects*”<sup>220</sup>. Wiccan magic strives for a “*harmonious movement of energies to create needed change*”<sup>221</sup> in order to ameliorate mankind and the world. Highly influential for the magic practiced by Wiccans, as well as for their general moral conduct, is the so-called *Wiccan Rede*, which states:

*Eight words the Wiccan Rede fulfill;  
An' it harm none, do what ye will.*<sup>222</sup>

Basically, these lines give Wiccans the freedom to choose their own way of living as long as they do not harm anybody or anything. In terms of their magical practices, the *Wiccan Rede* requires them to apply their magic in a responsible and benevolent way. Additionally, since Wiccans have a “*deep and abiding respect for the sanctity and free will of all living creatures*”<sup>223</sup> they also make use of their power in a non-manipulative way. This implies “*that spells should not be cast against wrongdoers: a Witch could make no effort to stop a rapist or a crime magically, because that would be manipulation of the criminal's free will.*”<sup>224</sup> Yet, in serious but controversial cases, Wiccans often address their magic charms on a general situation rather than on an individual subject and, thereby, avoid any moral conflict.

*For example, instead of binding a troublesome person in order to solve a problem, the Witch casts a spell directed at [the] solution of the problem by unspecified means “for the good of all”. Or, instead of casting a love spell on a specific individual, the Witch casts a spell to attract “the right and perfect love”.*<sup>225</sup>

Additionally, many Wiccans believe in the *Threefold Law of Return*, a moral principle that derives from the Eastern notion of karma. According to this theoretical concept, each action will be returned three times. Thus, if a witch

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<sup>218</sup> Sabin, Thea. p. 30.

<sup>219</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. pp. 216-217.

<sup>220</sup> Cunningham, Scott. p. 19.

<sup>221</sup> Cunningham, Scott. *Living Wicca. A Further Guide for the Solitary Practitioner*. Unites States of America: Llewellyn Worldwide: 1993. p. 6.

<sup>222</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. p.359.

<sup>223</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. p.359.

<sup>224</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. p.359.

<sup>225</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. p.359.

applies her power for good deeds, she will be rewarded three times with good. Consequently, the *Threefold Law of Return* “is a significant incentive not to use magic to curse others or even manipulate them, for the evil will return in triple strengths as well.”<sup>226</sup>

Modern pagan witchcraft is not restricted to be exercised solely in covens – although certain communities claim that “only a witch can make a witch”<sup>227</sup>, thus, that one must be initiated and an active member of a coven – but it can also be practised independently by a single person.

Having outlined the key concepts and main ethics of Wicca it becomes clear that modern-pagan witchcraft is highly different from Renaissance witchcraft. Contrary to the previously widespread notion that witches are in league with the devil and that they draw on otherworldly demonic powers in order to cause hardship and destruction contemporary witchcraft can be described as a benevolent spiritual movement that enables its members to live in respect and harmony with their environment. In doing so, practitioners do neither apply any supernatural forces nor do they conjure any kind of otherworldly entities but they work in accordance with entirely natural, though occasionally unexplored energies.

#### **4.3.3. The *Charmed Ones* – Contemporary Pagan Witches?**

As I have shown in the preceding chapter, present-day witchcraft is a highly spiritual movement whose practitioners live in tune with their environment. It comprises a variety of belief systems which influence not only how Wiccans perceive their position within the world, but also how they interact with other people and nature. However, the *Charmed Ones* have not deliberately decided to be witches: they were born witches – a fact which is incompatible with traditional Wiccan teaching as there exist claiming that there are “no true *hereditary witches*”<sup>228</sup>. Present-day witchcraft is a religious lifestyle that is not, as indicated in *Charmed*, passed on from generation to generation, but that is chosen by the individual as a result of vocation.

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<sup>226</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches and Witchcraft*. p.331.

<sup>227</sup> Wigington, Patti. *Religion & Spirituality. Paganism/Wicca. Covens vs. Solitary Practice*. New York: About.com. 2013. available at: <http://paganwiccan.about.com/od/wiccaandpaganismbasics/a/CovenVsSolitary.htm>.

<sup>228</sup> Macmorgan, Kaatryn. *Wicca 333: Advanced Topics in Wiccan Belief*. United States of America: iUniverse, Inc., 2003. p. 229.

In the series, the *Charmed Ones* are not witches by personal conviction in that they do not show a special interest in the Wiccan philosophical conceptions. For them, Wicca does not constitute their spiritual path. The three siblings are witches because it is their fate. As Melinda Warren entrusts Phoebe: *“This is your destiny and the destiny of your sisters! [...] You are the Charmed Ones. You must protect the innocent from the forces of evil.”* (p. 58). The apparition of Phoebe’s ancestor reveals furthermore: *“The three sisters are filled with the power of good, with more power than any other witch. Your magic will be weak at first, but will develop quickly.”* (p. 56).

And indeed, the magical faculties of the *Charmed Ones* are to advance incredibly fast. While, at the beginning of the first episode, Phoebe desperately states: *“I don’t know what to do! I don’t know how to use my power! I don’t know anything!”* (p. 58) at the end of the first episode she and her sisters already know how to apply their special faculties and, thus, they can successfully vanquish the warlock Jeremy. Hence, *Charmed* makes believe that Wiccan magic can be practiced almost instantaneously by any layman. However, this conflicts with Wiccan knowledge:

*One cannot learn the things that unmask wisdom at the speed to which we have become accustomed in contemporary living. There are no short-cuts. There are no drive-throughs or just-add-water formulas when it comes to learning about the spiritual matters of magic and the mystical ways of the Old Ones. Slowly, slowly, at the pace of life itself, can one truly absorb the knowledge, customs, and wise practices of our ancient pagan ancestors – those things which form the basis of the Wiccan path.*<sup>229</sup>

Thus, *Charmed* bypasses the philosophy of neopaganism and merely focuses on the sisters’ magically fighting various malicious beings.

In *The Power of Three*, the *Charmed Ones* are confronted with a warlock who seeks to steal their special powers. Phoebe, who, at that point of time, is unaware of what a warlock really is, consults a bookstore and learns about the perpetual battle between witches and warlocks which results from their intrinsic differences:

*[W]arlocks were originally witches, making their inferiority complexes understandable. They are the bad seed of the Wicca world. As “witches gone bad”, warlocks are determined to make their mark by*

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<sup>229</sup> Roderick, Timothy. p. x.

*torturing innocents. Another quest is to kill witches and steal their powers. Warlocks have also been known to form agreements with demons to further their goals. All of this is done to strengthen their own power and to perform evil deeds. [...] Warlocks usually appear in human form. However, they can easily take a monstrous demeanor. Unfortunately, it is difficult to recognize warlocks until they have revealed their evil power. (pp. 94-95)*

In *As Puck Would Have It*, the sisters have to contend against a wicked, animal-killing creature referred to as *Bestiari Demon*, which is, according to the sisters' *Book of Shadows*, described as

*a demon in human form that drains life-energy from animals. [...] He collects it [...] And then he uses it to make himself stronger. The more power he absorbs, the more powerful he gets. And he starts to adapt the animals' attributes as well.*<sup>230</sup>

These fantastic and spectacular accounts of wicked creatures are pure fantasy and incompatible with modern pagan witchcraft, since Wiccans do not believe in the existence of otherworldly beings such as demons, malevolent sprites or devils as “*personalities*” but as *embodiments of negative [...] energy*”<sup>231</sup>. “*Wicca is not based in the supernatural*”<sup>232</sup>, but deals with natural forces in the real world. Consequently, the *Charmed Ones*' fights against diverse spiteful paranormal creatures are a fanciful invention of the series' creators and have nothing in common with true Wiccan conceptions.

Additionally, the *Wiccan Rede* requires practitioners of modern-pagan witchcraft not to hurt others. In *Charmed*, however, the sisters are not reluctant to harm their otherworldly victims. In *The Power of Three*, the *Charmed Ones*' magical practices, which aim at preventing the warlock Jeremy from stealing their special powers, causes him to suffer enormous pain:

*Suddenly, an excruciating pain tore through his body. “Noooo!” he growled. He doubled over, clutching his stomach. He stumbled a few steps further, into a chain-link fence. He gripped it, writhing in pain, trying to fight the agony. But the magic was too strong for him. Thorns sprouted from his grisly face, pierced through his body, slashing his shirt. He howled in torment. The Charmed Ones, he realized. They're*

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<sup>230</sup> Ruditis, Paul pp. 153-154.

<sup>231</sup> Dragonsong, Erin. *Wicca Spirituality: A New Wicca for a New World. Demons & Devils*. Canada: Wicca- Spirituality.com, 2006-2012. available at: <http://www.wicca-spirituality.com/wicca-beliefs-jesus.html>.

<sup>232</sup> Drew, A. J. *A Wiccan Formulary and Herbal*. United States of America: Career Press, 2005. p 40.

doing this to me! He didn't think they could be so strong so soon. (p. 165)

In *As Puck Would Have It*, the *Charmed Ones* stop the *Bestiari Demon* from killing innocent animals by casting a spell, which effects that, under an agonized cry, “[h]is body burst[s] into flames”.<sup>233</sup>

These two sensational examples clearly demonstrate that the Halliwell sisters, even though they are familiar with the *Wiccan Rede*, since Phoebe once recites it from the *Book of Shadows* (p. 114), do not act according to this chief moral Wiccan concept. Even when they apply their special faculties for good purposes – in these cases, saving themselves from a warlock and protecting jeopardized animals from a beast – their magic is far from being harmless to the respective target.

As far as the *Charmed Ones*’ shared basic abilities as witches are concerned – spell casting, potion making, scrying – it can be observed that these faculties are indeed applied by modern-pagan witches. Prue’s special power, telekinesis, and Phoebe’s distinctive ability of premonition, are employed by real Wiccans as well.<sup>234</sup> Piper’s individual capability, molecular immobilization, is an entirely fictional skill and is not part of any of the Wiccan magical performances.

The fact that the *Book of Shadows* serves the *Charmed Ones* as “their guide” (p. 58) in terms of finding proper spells and accurate potions is in line with contemporary witchcraft since Wiccans use this

*book of beliefs, rituals, [w]itchcraft laws and ethics, herbal and healing lore, incantations, chants, dances, spells, divination methods, rituals, and miscellaneous topics [...] as a guide [...] in practicing their Craft and religion.*<sup>235</sup>

However, for the *Charmed Ones* the *Book of Shadows* has only one function, namely finding a useful magical instruction in order to fight a malevolent entity. From a spiritual point of view it is of no importance to them.

Summarising it can be said that Prue, Phoebe and Piper cannot be regarded as characteristic Wiccans of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, since their portrayal has only a few affinities with the real practitioners of modern-paganism. The spiritual aspect of

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<sup>233</sup> Ruditis, Paul. p. 205.

<sup>234</sup> Fry, Carrol. *Cinema of the Occult: New Age, Satanism, Wicca and Spiritualism in Film*. United States of America: Associated University Press, 2008. p. 31.

<sup>235</sup> Guiley, Rosemary. *The Encyclopedia of Witches & Witchcraft*. p. 32.

contemporary witchcraft is entirely left out in the series and a variety of alleged Wiccan-related elements, such as the *Charmed One*'s antagonists or certain of their magical practices, are only inventions of the series' creators to achieve spectacular effects.

Despite the fact that television and literary productions such as "*Charmed portray[...] fantasy versions of the Craft*"<sup>236</sup> the impact on the addressees must not be underestimated. In the following chapter I will discuss some possible reasons for the resurgent interest in witchcraft.

#### **4.3.4. Witchcraft and Its Fascination for Wiccans and the Audience of *Charmed***

The preceding chapter aims at providing some potential explanations for the contemporary revival of pagan witchcraft. Since the portrayal of Wicca in *Charmed* highly diverges from authentic Wiccan practice, it can be assumed that the interest of the series' audience and true Wiccans in this subject matter has different origins. As a result, I will first of all explore some possible arguments for the Wiccans' fascination with witchcraft. Hereafter, I will explore some potential reasons for the *Charmed* audience's fascination with this issue.

One plausible motive for the general interest in witchcraft is related to the rising "*dissatisfaction with the traditional teachings and structures of the Church*"<sup>237</sup>. Already in 1914, the French sociologist Émile Durkheim stated that

*the old ideals and divinities which incarnate them are dying because they no longer respond sufficiently to the new aspirations of our day; and the new ideals which are necessary to orient our life are not yet born.*<sup>238</sup>

Hence, since the Church is gradually losing its significance in and influence on people's lives, man seeks surrogate guidance in order to fill this "*spiritual vacuum*"<sup>239</sup>. Wicca constitutes – among other religions – such an alternative path. The appeal of this movement primarily stems from its being a non-

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<sup>236</sup> Howard, Michael. p. 4.

<sup>237</sup> Lynch, Gordon. *The New Spirituality: An Introduction to Progressive Belief in the Twenty-First Century*. London: I. B. Tauris, 2007. p. 104.

<sup>238</sup> Durkheim, Émile. in Lynch, Gordon. p. 104.

<sup>239</sup> Ankerberg, John. *Reasons for the Modern Occult Revival. Part 1*. United States of America: Ankerberg Theological Research Institute, 2013. available at: [http://www.ankerberg.com/Articles/\\_PDFArchives/new-age/NA3W0103.pdf](http://www.ankerberg.com/Articles/_PDFArchives/new-age/NA3W0103.pdf).

patriarchal, undogmatic, flexible and liberal spiritual movement, which focuses, among other subject matters, on current issues such as environmental awareness.

A further reason for the contemporary rise of Wicca in general and the occult in particular constitutes, according to the American theologian Dr John Ankerberg, “the failure of rationalism, secular humanism and materialism as comprehensive worldviews.”<sup>240</sup> These philosophical movements, which dismissed ‘The Supernatural’ by putting emphasis on logic and ratio exclusively, have not succeeded in providing man with a satisfactory ideology. Ankerberg argues that

*millions of people have found such philosophies cannot meet their deeper personal needs, provide an outlet for spiritual expression, or offer a legitimate basis for genuine meaning in life. [...] According to the Bible, man is created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26,27), and has an innate need for fellowship with God. This explains why the history of mankind is the history of almost endless religious involvement—a search after divine reality. [...] Men and women often turn to counterfeit religious expression in an attempt to satisfy these yearnings. Thus, thinking the world of the psychic realm is something divine, many have turned to the paranormal, mystical, and occult in search of what they would not or could not find elsewhere.*<sup>241</sup>

Another explanation for the present revival of spirituality and the occult in its various manifestations is “romanticism”<sup>242</sup>, the glorifications of ancient times. Christopher Partridge, professor at Lancaster University and founding co-director of the Centre for the Study of Religion and Popular Culture, states that this development is directly related to the fact that

*[t]here is a strong sense of continuity with the past. This powerful, sentimental attachment to the distant past is directly continuous with a romanticized understanding of ancient cultures and spiritualities. For example, our ancestors, it is often believed, used to live in a harmonious, symbiotic relationship with the planet. They were in touch with nature, themselves and each other.*<sup>243</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ankerberg, John.

<sup>241</sup> Ankerberg, John.

<sup>242</sup> Miller, Timothy (editor). *America's Alternative Religion*. United States of America: State University of New York Press, 1995. p. 339.

<sup>243</sup> Partridge, Christopher in Petersen, Line. *Renegotiating Religious Imaginations through Transformations of "Banal Religion" in Supernatural*. *Transformative Works and Cultures*, no. 4. Copenhagen: TWG. 2010. available at: <http://journal.transformativeworks.org/index.php/twc/article/view/142/145>.

Since these ancient qualities have dramatically disappeared, people “nostalgically [seek] a return to a simple pre-modern life”<sup>244</sup> in which these valued skills were still present. Consequently, religions such as Wicca, which “claim that their beliefs and practices spring from ancient sources”<sup>245</sup> and, moreover, which worship the earth and advise its members to live in respect for and harmony with the earth, successfully flourish.

An important precondition for the rediscovered interest in witchcraft must not be neglected: witches are no longer persecuted in the civilized world, except in a few countries, for example, in (South) Africa or New Guinea<sup>246</sup>. In Great Britain, the Witchcraft Act of 1739 was repealed in 1951 and, in the same year, the *Fraudulent Mediums Act* was passed, “which gave freedom for individuals to practice witchcraft so long as no harm was done to person or property.”<sup>247</sup>

One probable reason for the interest in witchcraft by the audience of *Charmed* is related to the series’ dramatised depiction of magic. *Charmed* features three powerful individuals “who can [...] change the world through both the power of their actions and the power of their language.”<sup>248</sup> This appealing portrayal “contrasts with the relatively powerless position of teenagers in everyday life”<sup>249</sup> and creates “the tendency for [...the audience] to want to solve their problems with magic and spells, like their prime time role models [...]”.<sup>250</sup> Primarily for “those who may feel marginalized”<sup>251</sup> magic constitutes an attractive tool. As simplistically indicated by the series, one must just consult the *Book of Shadows* in order to find an appropriate charm or magic potion with which all problems can quickly be sorted out. This one-dimensional approach to witchcraft is promoted even further by Ngaire Genge’s publication of *The*

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<sup>244</sup> Miller, Timothy. p. 339.

<sup>245</sup> Miller, Timothy. p. 339.

<sup>246</sup> Schons, Mary. *Witch Trials in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. National Geographic. United States of America: National Geographic Education, January 21<sup>st</sup>, 2011. available at: [http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/news/witch-trials-21st-century/?ar\\_a=1](http://education.nationalgeographic.com/education/news/witch-trials-21st-century/?ar_a=1).

<sup>247</sup> “Witchcraft Acts”. Pearson, Joanne. *A Popular Dictionary of Paganism*. London: Routledge Curzan, 2002. p. 158.

<sup>248</sup> Latta, Susan. *Reclaiming Women’s Language for Power and Agency: The Charmed Ones as Magical Rhetors*. in Beeler, Karin and Stan. p. 20.

<sup>249</sup> Livingstone, Sonia. *Children and the Internet*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009. p. 116.

<sup>250</sup> Johnston and Peg. p. 121.

<sup>251</sup> Edwards, Emily. *Metaphysical Media: The Occult Experience in Popular Media*. United States of America: Southern Illinois University Press, 2005. p. 75.

*Unofficial "Charmed" Companion: The Book of Shadows*<sup>252</sup>, which is designed as a practical spell book for the fan community of *Charmed*.

A further reason for the fascination of the series' addressees with Wicca pertains to the illustration of the *Charmed* witches. Prue, Piper and Phoebe are "the embodiment of Girl Power, sexy, beautiful young women who can and do [...] 'kick ass'."<sup>253</sup> On a fan club forum site 'MaryannCastle' comments that she likes the series because it "reaffirm[s] that we can be strong and still be women"<sup>254</sup> and 'Mimialliwell' writes that what she enjoys most about *Charmed* is "the fact that it is girl power to the max"<sup>255</sup>. Similarly, 'Honig-girl' states that the series "is great because it's played by strong women"<sup>256</sup>.

As these comments indicate, *Charmed* presents witchcraft with a strong postfeminist notion<sup>257</sup>. In her article, *Girl Power for Second-Wave Feminists*, Susan Wolfe explains that

*[w]ere we to deconstruct Charmed as a [...] feminist series, we might [...] read the powers of evil as standing in for the various hegemonies that seek to govern and restrict the choices we make as women, and the Charmed Ones as feminists par excellence, contesting the various social forces that oppress, repress and restrict women.*<sup>258</sup>

Thus, according to this reasoning, the target audience – *young women in their late teens*<sup>259</sup> – is drawn to witchcraft due to the fact that the series makes believe that Wicca is only about female power.

Further motives for the interest in witchcraft and other occult practices among teenagers constitute, according to Lynn Schofield Clark, professor of media studies at the University of Colorado's Boulder's Journalism School "fun [... as

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<sup>252</sup> Genge, Ngaire. *The Unofficial "Charmed" Companion: The Book of Shadows*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2000.

<sup>253</sup> Wolfe, Susan. *Girl Power for Second-Wave Feminists*. in Beeler, Karin and Stan. p. 90.

<sup>254</sup> Fanpop. *The Girls of Charmed. What do you like so much about Charmed?* United States of America: Spin Entertainment, 2011. available at: <http://www.fanpop.com/clubs/the-girls-of-charmed/answers/show/34061/what-like-much-about-charmed>.

<sup>255</sup> Fanpop.

<sup>256</sup> TV.com. *Charmed Forums. Why do you like Charmed?* United States of America: CBS Interactive Inc., 2006. available at: <http://www.tv.com/shows/charmed/forums/why-do-you-like-charmed-219-196273/?page=0>.

<sup>257</sup> Ruddell, Caroline. in Beeler, Karin and Stan. p. 29.

<sup>258</sup> Wolfe, Susan. in Beeler, Karin and Stan. p. 99.

<sup>259</sup> Beeler, Karin. *Seers, Witches and Psychics on Screen. An Analysis of Women Visionary Characters in Recent Television and Film*. North Carolina: McFarland & Company. Inc., 2008. p. 52.

*opposed to] a serious quest for religious meaning*"<sup>260</sup>. Kari Fraser, a clinical psychologist, adds temporal "*escape*"<sup>261</sup> from reality as a further reason for the fascination with 'The Supernatural'.

As these explanations reveal, the reasons for the *Charmed* audience's fascination with witchcraft are entirely different from those of authentic Wiccans. Although the series portrays a fictional version of witchcraft and magic its influence on the audience is tremendous. It is a fact that *Charmed* and similar media production about witchcraft have greatly contributed to "[t]he increasing involvement of teenagers in Wicca"<sup>262</sup>.

*One of the fastest-growing demographic groups of [w]itchcraft practitioners [... are] young people aged thirteen to nineteen: a group particularly affected by popular media and for whom a vast amount of this media is specifically produced.*<sup>263</sup>

Due to the highly limited, rather superficial, and mostly one-dimensional approach to witchcraft by "so-called *teen witches*"<sup>264</sup>, genuine witches see a great need "*to distance 'real' Wicca [...] from the commercialized phenomenon*"<sup>265</sup> which they regard as a "*fluffy bunny teen religion with minimal content*"<sup>266</sup>.

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<sup>260</sup> ReligionNewsBlog.com. Teen Interest in Supernatural can promote Family Dialogue. Netherlands: RNB, June 25, 2003. available at: <http://www.religionnewsblog.com/3567/teen-interest-in-supernatural-can-promote-family-dialogue>.

<sup>261</sup> ReligionNewsBlog.com.

<sup>262</sup> Johnston, Hannah and Aloï, Peg (editors). *The New Generation Witches: Teenage Witchcraft in Contemporary Culture*. Ashgate Controversial New Religions Series. England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2007. p. 122.

<sup>263</sup> Johnston and Aloï. p. 113.

<sup>264</sup> Howard, Michael. p. 4.

<sup>265</sup> Johnston and Aloï. p. 147.

<sup>266</sup> Johnston and Aloï. p. 147.

## 5. Conclusion

The starting point of the present thesis was that the interest in 'The Supernatural' has always played a crucial part in the history of man, the motives for man's continuous fascination with and his perception of this particular subject matter, however, have considerably changed in the course of time. This thesis has focused on 'The Supernatural' in the context of the Renaissance era respectively the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries by means of examining manifestations of 'The Supernatural' – fairies, witches, magicians, black and white magic, occultism as well as certain mystery-related natural events – in three selected pieces of literature: William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, and Eliza Willard's *Charmed: The Power of Three*. The aim of this analysis was to investigate how 'The Supernatural' is illustrated in the selected literature, and to discuss these representations in their socio-historical and psychological background, and in this way to reveal possible reasons for man's persevering interest in 'The Supernatural'.

The examination of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has shown that Shakespeare's portrayal of 'The Supernatural' largely reflects the Renaissance conception of that issue. The settings which the poet chose for the plays' magical happenings to take their course – night-time, Midsummer's Eve and the different phases of the moon – were, at that time, indeed associated with mysterious occurrences. Moreover, his portrayal of fairies as nocturnal sprites, that apply enchantments and magical potions, abduct children of humans, dance at night, and intervene into mortals' lives, accurately illustrates his contemporaries' beliefs. It has been shown, however, that the poet's depiction of fairies as diminutive and kind-hearted creatures with primarily floral imagery is not in accordance with the prevailing notions of his time since, at the Renaissance era, people assumed fairies to be malevolent beings who dwelled in infernal places.

The study of the Renaissance attitudes towards the supernatural components described in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has demonstrated that the time of Shakespeare was characterized by a great variety of superstitions, which primarily derived from folk traditions and myths. The firm belief in fairies as truly existing beings that maliciously interfere in humans' lives helped to account for the origin of man's misfortune and to give it a tangible face. With a clear picture

of the liable culprit people felt more comfortable since they did not live in ignorance of a dreaded agent but were able to develop methods of purportedly appeasing the source of evil in order to prevent it from bringing hardship upon them.

People's strong conviction of allegedly mystifying – since, at that time, not yet scientifically explicable – natural phenomena to be caused by paranormal forces aimed at supplying reason-based and questioning people with answers to the enigmas they saw themselves confronted with.

As far as the analysis of *The Tempest* is concerned it has been argued that this Shakespearean representation of 'The Supernatural' perfectly reflects Elizabethan conceptions of reality. The poet's depiction of the witch Sycorax as a female character that not only was deformed, but also had sexual intercourse with the devil and caused *maleficia* with the help of her familiars, illustrates the common stereotypical notion of witches of that time. Likewise, his portrayal of Prospero as a man absorbed in occultism clearly indicates the fascination with this pseudo-scientific discipline in the 16<sup>th</sup> and early 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Additionally, the fact that Prospero's magical practices as well as his ambitions as a magician are presented in an ambivalent way – neither does he entirely stand for a Renaissance magus, nor can he be considered a practitioner of black magic – mirrors the ambiguity with which magic was perceived at that period of time.

The examination of the Renaissance view on the supernatural constituents depicted in *The Tempest* has revealed the following: the rediscovery of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the subsequent new attitude to occultism resulted, on the one hand, in its being acknowledged a scholastic and spiritual study. In this context, magic, more precisely white magic, was perceived as a potent tool for conferring the pure Renaissance magus awareness of and power over the hidden secrets and as a means of providing him with the prospect of union with God, the creator of the world and its underlying marvels. Owing to the enormous impact of the anti-witch propaganda put forward in the *Malleus Maleficarum* and the powerful influence of the church, magic was, on the other hand, radically condemned. In this context, magic, i.e. black magic, was considered a malevolent and heretical practice. Similar to the earlier Renaissance belief in fairies – due to the popularity of Shakespeare's

embellished representation of these sprites as well as the progress in science and technology they vanished as credible entities – the belief in witchcraft and the persecution of alleged practitioners of black magic primarily aimed at finding a new scapegoat for man's misfortune. However, as this thesis has demonstrated, the prevalent negative attitudes towards Renaissance magic were frequently misused in order to eliminate social outcasts or hated neighbours. Given the irrational methods of identifying a witch, it was almost impossible for a person wrongly accused of witchcraft to prove her innocence.

With regard to Eliza Willard's *Charmed: The Power of Three* the analysis has shown that the literary presentation of 'The Supernatural' is highly sensational and fantastic rather than in line with current esoteric beliefs. Although the novel incorporates certain Wicca related ideas – *The Book of Shadows*, *The Wiccan Rede*, the symbol of the *triquetra*, spellcasting, potion making, scrying, telekinesis, and premonition – its portrayal of witchcraft as a phenomenon that is inherited and of paranormal faculties that can be performed instantaneously, as well as the depiction of witches as heroic warriors who magically combat vicious creatures, diverges from the motives of authentic Wicca. Consequently, the series does not give a truthful account of current witchcraft beliefs.

The consideration of the prevalent "Zeitgeist" concerning the supernatural elements incorporated in *Charmed* has revealed that the perception of present-day witchcraft is entirely different from the one of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. Contrary to the irrational Renaissance belief in witches to be devil-worshipping malefactors, contemporary Wicca, which was founded by Gerald Gardner and, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century has been officially recognized as a religion, constitutes a benevolent spiritual movement. Modern witches strive for a harmonious, respectful relationship with nature and believe in the existence and potential of magic. In this context, magic is perceived as a means for redirecting natural energies so as to gently effect a necessary change that contributes to the amelioration of the world. In doing so, magical practices must meet *The Wiccan Rede*, the most important moral principle of witchcraft, which obliges its members not to cause any harm. As this thesis has demonstrated the present fascination with authentic Wicca – it is one of the fastest growing religions worldwide – derives from the fact that man is, and has always been occupied with the quest for the divine. However, today, the dissatisfaction with traditional

religions is growing and their teachings are increasingly considered to be outdated. As a result, the church has lost its previously strong hold upon man, leaving him in a spiritual void. Contemporary witchcraft provides an alternative to fill this vacuum and opened up a path to experience the divine. Non-authoritative, undogmatic, and non-patriarchal in its conception Wicca seems to correspond more with the demands of modern man. Because of its focus on respecting and preserving nature, which is, due to the growing ecological awareness of the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries a prominent issue, it appears topical too. Moreover, by claiming to originate from ancient sources, Wicca meets man's sentimental desire for a return to a romanticized past.

*Charmed*, by contrast, ignores largely the philosophy of Wicca and reduces witchcraft to a sensational display of magic. As a result of such a one-dimensional portrayal, the audience – primarily female teenagers – experiences witchcraft not as a spiritual way of living but as a mere preoccupation with magical practices. In this context, magic is perceived as an attractive tool for effectively solving problems. Inspired by the *Charmed Ones* who, by simply reciting a spell successfully, can make a supernatural antagonist vanish, the audience seeks to overcome their difficulties with magic too. Particularly for those who feel marginalized, magic can constitute a convenient tool. This attitude towards magic is further encouraged by Ngaire Genge's publication of *The Unofficial "Charmed" Companion: The Book of Shadows*, a so-called practicable spell book for the *Charmed* community. Additionally, there are strong feminist issues underlying the magic in *Charmed* in that magic functions as a means of granting women power that enables them to overcome gender-specific injustices. Moreover, since the series compares witchcraft to an adventurous activity, the audience may also regard magic as an entertaining pastime. Although *Charmed* may simply be considered a good read which allows for a temporal escape into a fictitious world of fantasy, its impact on the audience has been considerable. Media presentations of *Charmed* have highly contributed to the enormous rise of teenage witchcraft, which, as authentic Wiccans emphasize, is, however, just a commercialized and superficial phenomenon.

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### **English Abstract**

‘The Supernatural’ has always had a unique fascination on humankind. However, the attitudes towards this particular subject matter as well as the motives for this timeless attraction have altered through the history of man. This thesis focuses on ‘The Supernatural’ in the Zeitgeist of the Renaissance era as well as the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. On the basis of three selected pieces of literature – William Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Tempest* and Eliza Willard’s *Charmed: The Power of Three* – the otherworldly manifestations of fairies, witches, a magician, black and white magic, as well as certain mystery-related natural events will be examined. The aim of this analysis is to investigate how ‘The Supernatural’ is illustrated in the chosen literary works, to discuss these representations in their socio-historical and psychological context, and thereby to reveal possible reasons for man’s interest in ‘The Otherworldly’.

### **German Abstract**

„Das Übernatürliche“ hat schon immer eine besondere Faszination auf den Menschen ausgeübt, jedoch wurde es in der Menschheitsgeschichte unterschiedlich wahrgenommen und interpretiert. Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit dem Übernatürlichen zur Zeit der Renaissance sowie des späten 20. und frühen 21. Jahrhunderts. Anhand von drei ausgewählten literarischen Werken – William Shakespeares *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* und *The Tempest* und Eliza Willards *Charmed: The Power of Three* – werden die übernatürlichen Darstellungen von Feen, Hexen, einem Magier, schwarzer und weißer Magie, sowie einiger mit Mysterien assoziierter Naturereignisse untersucht. Ziel dieser Analyse ist es herauszufinden, wie „das Übernatürliche“ in der jeweiligen Literatur inszeniert wird, diese Präsentation mit dem soziohistorischen und psychologischen Zeitgeist zu vergleichen, und dadurch mögliche Beweggründe für das Interesse der Menschen am Übernatürlichen aufzudecken.



## Deutsche Zusammenfassung

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit hat sich, ausgehend von drei literarischen Werken – William Shakespeares *A Midsummer Night's Dream* und *The Tempest*, sowie Eliza Willards *Charmed: The Power of Three* – mit dem ‚Übernatürlichen‘ in der Renaissance und dem späten 20. beziehungsweise frühen 21. Jahrhundert auseinandergesetzt. Dabei hat sich Folgendes herausgestellt:

Shakespeares Darstellung der Feen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* entspricht größtenteils der Vorstellung seiner Zeitgenossen hinsichtlich dieser überirdischen Wesen. Auch die in dem Stück mit Magie und Mysterien in Verbindung gebrachten Naturereignisse wurden zu Shakespeares Zeit mit dem ‚Übernatürlichen‘ assoziiert. Die Vorstellung, dass Feen wirklich existieren, und dass damals unerklärbare Naturphänomene von höheren Mächten hervorgerufen werden, resultierte hauptsächlich aus Aberglauben, welcher seinerseits durch Volksmärchen und Mythen verstärkt wurde.

Shakespeares *The Tempest* verdeutlicht sachgemäß die Haltung gegenüber Hexen und Magiern zur Zeit der Renaissance. Während Sycorax gänzlich den damals verbreiteten Stereotypen einer bösen Hexe entspricht, verkörpert Prospero zwar nicht den idealen Magus, verdeutlicht aber durch seine ambivalenten magischen Praktiken und Absichten, dass Magie in jener Epoche ein umstrittenes Thema darstellte. ‚Schwarze‘ Magie wurde – primär durch den Einfluss des *Malleus Maleficarum*, zu Deutsch *Hexenhammer* – als böswillige und ketzerische Tat verurteilt. Vermeintlichen Hexen wurden übermenschliche, vom Teufel bewirkte Fähigkeiten zugeschrieben, mit denen sie angeblich Unheil über ihre Mitmenschen brachten. Somit stellten sie einen willkommenen Sündenbock für unerklärbares Übel dar. ‚Weiße‘ Magie und andere okkulte Praktiken wurden hingegen – inspiriert durch das *Corpus Hermeticum* – als nützliche Tätigkeiten angesehen. Durch Okkultismus glaubte man, die Mysterien der Welt verstehen sowie sich Gott, dem Schöpfer, annähern zu können.

Eliza Willards zeitgenössischer Roman *Charmed: The Power of Three* ist eine größtenteils spektakuläre und fantastische Darstellung von Wicca, in der die dem Hexenglauben zugrundeliegenden Prinzipien und Moralvorstellungen gänzlich übergangen werden. Hauptaugenmerk liegt primär auf der sensationellen Darbietung von magischen Praktiken durch die drei

Protagonistinnen Prue, Piper und Phoebe. Ob als Flucht in eine Fantasiewelt, als Anregung um persönliche Probleme entsprechend der fiktiven Vorbilder mit Magie zu meistern, oder als unterhaltsamer Zeitvertreib, *Charmed* hat zu einem deutlichen Anstieg jugendlicher, in erster Linie weiblicher Hexen geführt. ‚Authentische‘ Wicca-Anhänger distanzieren sich allerdings ausdrücklich von diesem auf einer kommerziellen, eindimensionalen und oberflächlichen Hexendarstellung basierenden Jugendkult.

## **Curriculum Vitae**

### **Personal Details**

Name: Ingrid Holböck  
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### **Education**

1988 - 1992: Henry Dunant Volksschule, Vienna  
1992 - 1999: RG und GRG Franklinstraße 21, Vienna  
Sept. - Dec. 1998: Edwards R. Murrow High School, New York (student exchange organized by The Ronald S. Lauder Foundation)  
1999 - 2001: RG und GRG De La Salle Schule, Schulbrüder Strebersdorf, Vienna  
2001 - 2013: English and American Studies, University of Vienna  
2001 - 2013: French Studies, University of Vienna  
2010 - 2011: German as a Second Language, vocational training, Kirchliche Pädagogische Hochschule, Vienna  
  
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### **Work Experience in the Academic Field**

2004 - 2005: Teacher Assistant in Wales: St. Teilo's High School, Cardiff and Llantwit Major School, Vale of Glamorgan (organized by the bmukk, Bundesministerium für Unterricht, Kunst und Kultur)  
2001 - 2013: Private tutoring in English, French, German as a Second/Foreign Language