

# The Staging of Witchcraft in Jacobean Theatre

## A Study of the Blackfriars Theatre, London

Shokhan Ahmed, School of English – Email [sa488@le.ac.uk](mailto:sa488@le.ac.uk); Supervisors – Dr Mary Ann Lund and Professor Martin Dzelzainis

My doctoral research investigates witchcraft during the reign of King James VI and I when witchcraft belief was very wide spread in Scotland and England, and there was a growing tendency for dramatists to use witchcraft materials in their plays. The writings of Reginald Scot and King James I, alongside modern scholarly work by Thomas Keith, Allen Macfarlane, Diane Purkiss and others, will be considered to analyse beliefs about supernatural power and especially witchcraft and witches' activities.

The research is sponsored by the Kurdistan Regional Government Human Capacity Development Programme.

The project will also evaluate how the technology of the Blackfriars playhouse facilitated the appearance of spirits, witches, magicians, deities and dragons.

How did supernatural entities fly and dance on stage in early modern England? Does it make any difference to the audience when supernatural characters use one form of entrance rather than another?

The last chapter deals with “cunning women” and will also consider why elderly women in early modern England were more prone to accusations of witchcraft than the young, and why an enormous number of harmless women were tortured, including midwives and healers.



The topic of the nature and status of stage directions in these plays will also be investigated. This means that this thesis will analyse the status of stage directions in printed text, and whether the stage directions in these plays were originally written by the author himself or were revised or supplied by editors, scribes or members of the theatre companies.

This study is principally concerned with the staging of drama at the Blackfriars theatre, especially from the time that the King's Men leased it in 1609. The thesis examines Jacobean plays which were staged at the Blackfriars as well as some Elizabethan (e.g., *Dr Faustus*) and post-Jacobean plays (e.g., *The Late Lancashire Witches*) which were also performed there.

