

## THE INFLUENCE OF REGINALD SCOT'S "THE DISCOVERIE OF WITCHCRAFT" ON THOMAS MIDDLETON'S "THE WITCH"

Literature has its specific world, and in that world texts do not exist separately but they collaborate with one another creating inter-textual dimensions between each other. The present article studies the influence of Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* on Thomas Middleton's tragicomedy *The Witch*. In the paper we will try to find out in what inter-textual dimensions these texts appear, and at what specific levels the influence of Scot's book can be observed on the above mentioned play.

Scot was a critical and sceptical person toward the issues concerning witchcraft and magic. And the author expressed his sceptical viewpoint explicitly and elaborately in his book. According to professor Almond, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* was an 'unashamedly and unapologetically sceptical' work /Almond, 2011:2/. Scot used a wide range of both contemporary and ancient materials, and stories from the writers of the inquisition about the so-called supposed witches. He was also familiar with a number of witchcraft pamphlets and trial records which had their manifestations in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* /Almond, 2011: 4-5, 16-21/.

When we analyze the textual parallels between the play and Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, gradually it becomes more and more obvious that Middleton's play stands very close to *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Middleton obviously alludes to Scot's book in terms of both explicit verbal allusions and implicit references.

The first parallel that can be observed between the two mentioned texts is the following:

*Hecate: Titty and Tiffin,  
Suckin and Pidgen,  
Liard and Robin,  
White spirits, black spirits;  
Grey spirits, red spirits,*

*Devil-toad, devil-ram;  
Devil-cat, and devil-dam  
Why Hoppo and Stadlin, Hellwain and Puckle!  
/The Witch, I.ii.1-10/*

In this extract the witch appears with her initial invocation of different colorful and ridiculous spirits. A list within the same names of spirits can be found in Scot's book:

*Now, how Brian Darcies he-spirits and she-spirits, Titty and Tiffin, Suckin and Pidgin, Liard and Robin, &c. his white-spirits and black-spirits, gray-spirits and red-spirits, Devil-toad and Devil-lambe, Devils-cat and Devils-dam, agree herewithal, or can stand consonant with the Word of God, or true Philospohy, let Heaven and Earth judge.*

[/http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?action=byid&warn=N&id=D10000120436380421&div=1&sequence=0&SOURCE=config.cfg&file=default](http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/fulltext?action=byid&warn=N&id=D10000120436380421&div=1&sequence=0&SOURCE=config.cfg&file=default) /consulted 13.09.2012/.

Observing the above presented extracts it becomes obvious that Middleton's extract derives directly from Scot's text. So, from the very beginning of the play Middleton's dependence on Scot's book can be clearly seen. And gradually Scot's scepticism will also be visible in Middleton's play via representation of a comical figure of the witch.

Within the same passage we find an instance where Hecate gives an 'unbaptised brat' to Stadlin and orders the latter to boil the dead body of the baby very well in order to make ointment for her flight where she is going to appear with 'hundred leagues' of witches:

*Hecate: There, take this unbaptised brat;  
Boil it well; preserve the fat.  
You know 'tis precious to transfer  
Our 'nointed flesh onto the air... ,*

*When hundred leagues in air we feast and sing,  
Dance, kiss and coll, use everything.  
What young man can we wish to pleasure us*

*But we enjoy him in an incubus?  
/The Witch, I.ii.18-21; 28-31/*

Scot writes in his book:

*Then he teacheth them to make ointments of the bowels and members of children, whereby they ride in the aire, and accomplish all their desires. So as, if there be anie children unbaptised, or not garded with the signe of the crosse, or orizons; then the witches may and doo catch them from their mothers sides in the night ..., otherwise kill them with their ceremonies; and after buriallsteale them out of graves, and seeth them in a caldron, until their flesh be made potable. Of the thickest whe-roef they make ointments, whereby they ride in the aire... /Scot, 1972:23/.*

It is noticeable from the above cited passages that Middleton closely follows *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, and obviously the presented extracts from the play are based on the latter. Moreover, witchcraft components - ‘unbaptised brat, dance, kiss and coll’, found in the above extract, derive directly from Scot’s Book 10, chapter 8, where Scots literally mentions every single component which later Middleton alludes in the play /Scot, 1972: 105/. Middleton gives a full description of the witchcraft tradition of singing, dancing, flying of the Continental Sabbaths, and via the use of these long and ridiculous descriptions he forms and presents a hyperbolic figure of the witch in the play, which, in turn, can be marked as being more grotesquely comical rather than scary both in her character and in her actions. Thus, step by step Middleton introduces the figure of a comical witch in his play. Obviously, through the hyperbolic images Middleton expresses his ironical and sceptical attitude toward the subject of witchcraft and magic in general.

Middleton’s witch is a ridiculous and funny image, the figure of which as a comical character is formed and developed and gradually introduced within the play. The witch’s grotesque language use and her invocation of several colorful sprits give ridiculous adherent overtones to the figure. Middleton endows his witch simultaneously with some certain attributes of English village witches and with some features of Continental ones: she boils an unbaptised child in the cauldron for making ointments in order to fly, and at the same time she is ready to take

revenge on anyone who has refused her to give food by killing or laming their domestic animals.

Middleton's sceptical view on the subject can also be noticed in the moments where he creates ridiculous situations and a grotesque witch figure which is revealed through the long description of senseless magical herbs, words, ingredients and other objects. Middleton also describes in details Hecate's plan of revenge via damaging the livestock of those people who often denied her food. And in this scene Middleton endows his witch with another feature of village witches, power of laming or killing domestic animals, which is also mentioned in Scot's Book 1, chapters 1 and 2. Scot claims that they were poor and old women who were unreasonably suspected in witchcraft and accused for cattle killing or spoiling milk, while in the play Middleton emphasizes ridiculousness and grotesqueness of the witch by providing a long and ridiculous list of what, when, and how the witch is going to act. Moreover, Hecate's speech itself is too long and exaggerated.

The next instance introduces the image of Firestone the latter being Hecate's both son and lover:

*Hecate: And who shall lie with me then?*

*Firestone: The great cat*

*For one night, mother 'Tis but a night -*

*Make shift with him for once.*

*Hecate: You're kind son!*

*But 'tis the nature of you all, I see that.*

*You had rather hunt after strange women still*

*Than lie with your own mothers.*

*/The Witch, I.ii.96-101/*

In this scene Middleton portrays his witch according to a belief that states those supposed witches usually had incestuous relations. In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* we find the following lines:

*... the Eutyichians, assemblie themselves everie good fridaie at night ...; doo commit incestuous adulterie, the father with daughter ... , and the sonne with the mother... /Scot, 1972: 25/.*

So, in the play Hecate's character as an incestuous mother is also revealed through the lines stated above: 'You had rather hunt after strange women still / Than lie with your own mothers'. Thus, Middleton also introduces the notion of Hecate's figure as being an incestuous mother. And immediately after this scene Hecate's grotesque and ridiculous speech follows where she calls all the possible and impossible ridiculous spirits and witches:

*Hecate: Urchins, Elves, Hags, Satyrs, Pans, Fawns,  
Silens, Kit-with-the-candlestick, Tritons, Centaurs,  
Dwarfs, Imps, the Sporn, the Mare, the Man-I'-th'oak,  
The Hellwain, the Fire-darke, the Puckle. A abhur hus!  
/The Witch, I.ii.105-108/*

So, in the following scene first Hecate evokes several spirits with different absurd names, and then she finishes her speech with a Latin phrase. And again the following list of spirits' name is verbatim taken from Scot again:

*... and they have so fraied us with ... urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfs, giants, imps... /Scot, 1972: 86/.*

According to Scot, this is a list of bugs and creatures through which 'in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us'. As for Middleton, it is more likely that he used this long list of a hyperbolic number of spirits in order to emphasize again the hyperbolic character of Hecate's speech and her figure. The Latin phrase 'A abhurhus!' is also verbatim taken from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* /Scot, 1972: 139/. Interestingly, in Scot's passage this phrase was used as a charm against toothache, while in Middleton's work it has nothing to do with toothache at all. This is just a phrase with which Hecate ends her invocation of spirits.

So, the witch's grotesqueness is expressed and emphasized more and more throughout the whole play. All these dancing-singing rituals of the

witch and her supernatural baggage, which is full of colorful spirits, are also mentioned in Scot's book as part of Continental witchcraft traditions.

So, drawing parallels between the context of the play *The Witch* and Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, which obviously served as a sourcebook for Middleton, it becomes clear that via verbal borrowings from Scot's treatise Middleton creates **a grotesque figure of the witch**. It even seems that Middleton presents a more exaggerated character than Scot does in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*. Hecate can be considered as a sample of 'a museum display of grotesquerie' /Purkiss, 2002: 223/. Middleton's version of the witch is distinguished by her cynical and licentious manner of speaking, and acting with a bunch of her colorful sprits and of a hyperbolic number of familiars, with 'leagues' or 'troops' of witches. She destroys other people's livestock, prepares love portions, sings and dances around the cauldron, boils an 'unbaptised brat' in the vessel. She also tries to guess her clients' problems, and whenever her art and problem-solving skills are doubted, she disguises her acts and rituals very skillfully by uttering some Latin phrases as a proof of her mastery and professionalism /*The Witch*, V.ii.15-30/. She is partly an English village witch and partly a Continental witch, but these can be considered as her secondary functions, as for the heroes of the play her cunning art is much more important rather than her ability of laming domestic animals, rising storms or singing and dancing around the cauldron. The explicit representation of her cynical and grotesque behaviour makes us think that like learned Reginald Scot, Middleton was himself sceptical about the supposed witches' power. By creating a very grotesque image, and applying grotesqueness as a method of portraying his witch throughout the whole tragicomedy, Middleton obviously shows his ironical attitude toward the subject.

Scot's book is an invaluable source of information on witchcraft and magic. Drawing parallels between Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* and the play *The Witch* enabled us to observe the influence of Scot's book on the plays at three levels. The first is the level of borrowings which in turn can be observed in two categories – in the form of verbatim borrowings. i.e. explicit/ direct allusions, and in terms of implicit/ indirect references. The next is the level of portraying figures: via the above mentioned borrowings Middleton creates his own version of witch in the

play. Thus, the borrowings serve as a tool or means for the author in the process of creating and depicting witch's character. And finally, at the third level we could observe the author's position on witchcraft. So, the author not only alludes to Scot's book only for depicting literary characters in their plays, but through making allusions he is able to express his own attitude towards the subject of witchcraft in general. Taking into consideration all the analysis of the examples and textual parallels between the texts we may conclude that not only Middleton's play stands much closer to Scot's book but also Middleton's position does. Middleton creates the image of the witch as a grotesque character in his play. Hyperbole is a means through which literary characters are created and the most ridiculous and sarcastic sides of life are expressed. Grotesqueness, in turn, can be considered the highest level of hyperbole, hence we may conclude for Middleton grotesqueness was the best device both for creating a ridiculous and comical figure, and at the same time for expressing his position on the whole subject. Hence, by choosing to present the witch figure in a grotesque manner, Middleton also chooses to present his ironical attitude to the phenomenon.

## REFERENCES

1. Scot R. The Discoverie of Witchcraft. New York: Dover, 1972.
2. Three Jacobean Witchcraft Plays/ Corbin, P., Sedge D. (eds.), Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.
3. Almond Ph. England's First Demonologist: Reginald Scot and 'The Discoverie of Witchcraft'. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.
4. Purkiss D. The Witch in History, Early Modern and Twentieth-century Representations. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

**Ա. ԿՈՉՈՅԱՆ** – *Ռեզիմալը Սկոտի «Կախարդության բացահայտումը» աշխատության ազդեցությունը Թոմաս Միդլթոնի «Կախարդը» պիեսի վրա.* – Հոդվածն ուսումնասիրում է վաղ ժամանակակից անգլիական ամենատիպիկապես հեղինակներից մեկի՝ Ռեզիմալը Սկոտի և նրա գրական ժառանգություն հանդիսացող «Կախարդության բացահայտումը» (1584) սկեյտիկ աշխատության ազդեցությունը նույն ժամանակաշրջանի հայտնի դրամատուրգ Թոմաս Միդլթոնի «Կախարդը» (1609/ 1616) պիեսի վրա: Նյութի ուսումնասիրությունը թույլ է տալիս

եզրակացնել, որ դրամատուրգը ոչ միայն բառային մակարդակում է կատարել պատմական և գրական անդրադարձ Սկոտի հայտնի աշխատությանը, այլև որդեգրել է Սկոտի սկեպտիցիզմը: Այնուհետև, համեմելով այն իր իսկ գրական ճաշակով՝ Սիդլթոնն արտահայտել է իր վերաբերմունքը կախարդություն ասված երևույթի նկատմանը. մի երևույթ, որը բավականին ակտուալ էր, բայց և վտանգավոր տվյալ դարաշրջանում գրելու, քննարկելու, և հատկապես սեփական կարծիքը ձևավորելու և արտահայտելու համար:

**А. КОДЖОЯН – *Влияние работы Реджинальда Скота «Открытие колдовства» на пьесу Томаса Миддлтона «Ведьма».*** – В годы преследования ведьм (1550-1610) в Англии немногие пытались воззвать к голосу разума. Среди них был англичанин Реджинальд Скот. В 1584 году он опубликовал книгу «Открытие колдовства/Словарь колдовства» (“The Discoverie of Witchcraft”), в которой опровергает суеверия, связанные с силой ведьм и колдовства. Данная статья изучает влияние работы Реджинальда Скота «Открытие колдовства» на пьесу Томаса Миддлтона «Ведьма». В статье проблема соотношения интертекстуальности рассматривается на трех уровнях анализа.