Shakespeare’s *Tempest* is a play obsessed with questions of matrimony, procreation and legitimate offspring. Opening with a voyage occasioned by a royal wedding, the stage action ends with the announcement of another marriage which is expected not only to bring about reconciliation for long-standing enmities but also to produce “fair issue” (4.1.24), i.e. children as the genealogical guarantee of a strong and fertile new dynastic line. This, most likely, is the reason why the founding father of this final union, who presents his daughter to the chosen bridegroom as his “gift” (4.1.13), has guarded her and her pure body with such remarkable insistence that he would still admonish his son-in-law, even as he offers him his wife-to-be, strictly not to “break her virgin-knot” (4.1.15) before all nuptial rites have been performed; otherwise, he threatens, “barren hate” is to “bestrew / The union of your beds with weeds” (4.1.19–21).

If it is through marriage and children that Prospero achieves his aim, barrenness would have been his greatest curse. Control over female bodies and fertility, therefore, appears to be the chief way to exercise, or maintain, patriarchal power. Yet Shakespeare’s play also reminds us that such power often finds its limits. Miranda’s earlier question “are not you my father?” (1.2.55) and, even more so, Prospero’s hopeful answer “Thy mother was a piece of virtue” (1.2.56) may be taken to suggest that, for all his scholarship and magic, Prospero can never be quite sure of his own fatherhood; female sexuality lies outside his reach. Above all, this point is brought home through the absent presence of Sycorax, the so-called ‘witch’. Her voice is never heard in the entire play and yet her offspring Caliban constantly reminds us not just of her fertility but also of the strange obscurity surrounding this character that has often given reason for debate.

This paper sets out to continue this debate by looking at issues of witchcraft and fertility in Renaissance texts and contexts. For this purpose I shall explore Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* in relation to Thomas Middleton’s *The Witch*, another play of the same company generally believed to have been written a few years later. Some background is provided by two major tracts on witchcraft, the *Malleus maleficarum* and King James’ *Daemonologie*. The main question to pursue is how issues of fertility and magic are portrayed in these stage plays and what functions these might have in the larger frame-
work of Renaissance gender politics. With regard to *The Tempest* it has already been noted that “one is immediately struck by its obsession with themes of chastity and fertility, which occur in its figurative language as well as in its literal events” (Thompson 236). I would like to show that in both plays, in fact, these themes occur on four different levels: first, on the level of language, second in terms of the bodies of the magical parents, third through means that induce or restrict fertility and fourth in the staging of children and (symbolic) births. To better understand these issues, a short historical overview on fertility and magic may be useful.

**Boundaries of bodies and magical means: fertility and witchcraft in the Renaissance**

Life for Renaissance women, as a rule, was pretty firmly set. After maidenhood came marriage, which was centred around the house and the production and raising of children. Many women also spent a large part of their lives as widows, because women generally lived longer and it was easier and more attractive for men to remarry (Gélis 1991, xiii). In the Renaissance concept of the human microcosm replicating nature’s macrocosm (Gélis 1991, 7), the position of the pregnant mother was most complicated. Herself a microcosm, she contained another microcosm within. This notion is taken up in *The Witch* by Francisca when Isabella asks her whether she is alone and she, in an aside, responds: “No, there’s another with me, though you see’t not” (*Witch* 2.1.62). In the macrocosm, the human body underwent a cycle: at conception it sprang from Mother Earth, to which it returned after death (Gélis 1989, 309). Infertility, however, interrupted this natural cycle of life and had severe consequences: it could cause economic difficulties for the family (Purkiss 99), raise religious concerns that the couple might be “outside of Charity” (Krämer/Sprenger 2.376), be a legal reason for divorce and turn a husband into a cuckold who was thought responsible for his wife’s adultery (McLaren 2007, 58–63). On top of that, infertility could cause personal grief, as expressed by Shakespeare’s Macbeth when he contemplates his and Banquo’s position in the face of the witches’ prophecy:

> Then prophet-like
> They hailed him father to a line of kings.
> Upon my head they placed a fruitless crown,
> And put a barren sceptre in my gripe
> Thence to be wrenched with an unilineal hand,
> No son of mine succeeding; if’t be so,
> For Banquo’s issues have I filed my mind,
> For them the gracious Duncan have I murdered,
> Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them, and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man,
To make them kings, the seeds of Banquo king. (3.1.58–69; my emphasis)

For all these reasons, it is clear that the necessity of enhancing fertility was of great importance. However, the serious risks of childbirth and of being, like the Touchwoods in Middleton’s *The Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, “too fruitful for [...] barren fortunes” (2.1.8) presented strong reasons for limiting fertility. According to Renaissance beliefs, human fertility could mainly be affected in three different ways: The first method was through the mechanics of sex, especially position and timing. For a successful pregnancy, it was essential that couples limited themselves to the missionary position and an averagely active sex life, so as not to weaken the seed or “overuse the womb” (McLaren 1984, 33–45). In terms of timing, spring, new moon and the days following a woman’s period were thought to increase the chances of having a boy (Gélis 1991, 38–39).

A second method concentrated on changing the physical and chemical conditions of the body itself or the humours within. To adapt these, bleedings, purges and diets were recommended (McLaren 1984, 33–34). The remedy and the normal condition of the affected organ generally resembled each other in texture and temperature. For this reason, women with wombs thought to be too dry were advised to eat moist meats and leafy vegetables (McLaren 1984, 34). But the efficacy of a remedy might also be revealed through ‘sympathetic magic’ or ‘signatures’, i.e. secret correspondences between the human body and the natural world evident in physical resemblance (McCann 51). For example, impotent men were advised to take a dose of boiled orchid roots, which look similar to testicles (Gélis 1991, 7). The methods for contraception and abortion, however, were very much like each other because the foetus was not thought to be alive until quickening (Gélis 1991, 49). A third method was the use of rituals, charms and amulets which could either restrict or promote fertility. Parts of non-reproductive organisms, such as mules, were particularly popular as contraceptives (McCann 51–52). “Natural temples”, stones, trees or springs were also thought to transfer nature’s fertile power onto the body (Gélis 1989, 309). Overall, the similarities between a wife’s and a witch’s technique of influencing fertility are patently obvious.

The typical antithesis to the mother, and accordingly to Mother Earth, was the witch as the symbol of complete destruction. She was seen as a serious threat to food supplies, as she would steal or spoil milk and cheese or destroy crops and livestock by conjuring up storms (Hayes 179). Furthermore, witchcraft was often directed against children, especially those still unborn (Willis 108). Nevertheless, ever since antiquity people believed that witches could also promote fertility, especially through love spells
The witch was therefore a paradox representing the “antimother” (Purkiss 100), whilst also sharing qualities with the mother. For example, the witch had ‘replacement children’, i.e. demonic imps who would feed on her body through the so-called ‘witch mark’ and could assist her in her demonic plans, but could also free themselves from the witch’s control and turn against her (Willis 111–112). Additionally, mother’s milk, believed to be a purified form of the blood the foetus had been feeding on, was one of the clearest connections between the mother and the witch, since pre-milk produced during pregnancy was known as witch’s milk (Purkiss 131). Another witch-like power of young mothers was their ability to (accidentally) change the appearance of their children by acts of their imagination, since a child was thought to acquire the characteristics of the animal or creature they had been thinking about or dreaming of (Schwarz 299–300). In terms of such abilities attributed to women, women do not just acquire power through the devil (Denike 14), but they were actually thought to be quite powerful without any such help. Thus, they posed a major threat to any patriarchal line of genealogy, as their control over the child was mostly unclear and out of reach.

Patriarchal society, therefore, had to devise ways to reassert control over the production of progeny. Since direct access to any unborn child was hardly possible, the female was to be controlled by enclosing her within the house (Piazza 168–169), so as to protect her against anything witch-like, which remained outside and was defined by its missing boundaries and ability to shapeshift (Purkiss 119). During pregnancy, the enclosure of women became even more intense, as the mother-to-be would withdraw completely from public life and was surrounded exclusively by women, namely the midwife and the ‘gossips’ who were part of the informal village network (Willis 108). Magical rituals offered additional protection (Purkiss 101). After the delivery, the mother only returned to the community step by step. What lies behind these safety procedures was the fear that witches might gain access to mother and child in their most vulnerable condition. Yet the actual means taken against witches’ influence were themselves magical. Karpinska has pointed out the powerful potential of pregnancy, since “the ‘two become one’ of marriage is reversed within the female body where ‘one becomes two’” (438). What mothers did in giving birth, then, is essentially a classic magic trick which men must fail to understand or to control. Thus, the

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1 The claim that witches’ power over fertility originated in the 12th century is still widespread (e.g. Cotton 320), but Rider has pointed out that even the first Medieval statement on this topic stems from archbishop Hincmar of Rheims writing in the late 9th century (53).
male struggle for enclosure was also doomed to fail since the enclosed mother could be seen to represent the ostracised witch.

All the same, the part of men in this process was not entirely clear. The womb could also signify an attractive concept of self-identification for men. Drawing on Galen’s writings, the Renaissance imagined the womb as the inside-out version of male sexual organs surrounded by membranes (Laqueur 63–69). At the same time, the womb was thought to possess animal-like qualities, e.g. to be able to smell and move around the body, causing mental illnesses such as hysteria (Laqueur 108). The womb and its coldness therefore affected the mental ability of women, as Maus puts it: “What makes women fertile – what makes them women – also makes them stupid” (90). Nevertheless, the womb was also imagined a container of unuttered and hidden thoughts, granting them a sort of freedom to unfold (Maus 93–96). The image of the pregnant female body was therefore taken up for the production of literature and writing as a form of male pregnancy, linking text and female body (Maus 98). As will be shown, this trope of male pregnancy is also relevant for the interpretation of the two plays at hand.

**Prosperous language: writing magical fertility**

What is striking in *The Tempest* is that its most prominent fertility scenes – namely the storm and the masque – clearly involve magic. That magic and fertility strongly implicate each other may be attributed to the fact that they are both generative powers. While the *OED* defines fertility as “fruitfulness, productiveness” (2003b a; my emphasis), magic can refer to “an inexplicable and remarkable influence producing surprising results” (2003b 2; my emphasis). The practice of magic is therefore tantamount to an act of fertility, whether its result may be constructive or destructive.

*The Tempest* immediately broaches issues of fertility and magic in its opening scene with the conjured up storm. As Wells has remarked, the ship represents a microcosm of the whole play, “in which symbol is important, in which anything that is heard or seen has significance beyond the mundane” (350). The ship is said to be “as leaky as an unstanched wench” (1.1.46–47), suggesting parallels between the microcosms of woman and ship. When Wells remarks that the king’s submission to the captain’s commands recalls the bowing down to medical expertise (350), we can take this even further. As has often been noted, “leaky” may refer to sexual incontinence (Vaughan and Vaughan 147), but it is also refers to the female body, especially that of a expectant mother which is “more ‘leaky’, permeable and problematic than the bodies of men” (Purkiss 99). “Unstanched”, if not read in terms of menstrual bleeding (Thompson 237), but in the sense of blood accompanying birth, underlines the imagery of a delivery. The boatswain’s insistence to
leave “our labour” (1.1.13) with all its “howling” and “stinking pitch” (1.1.35; 1.2.3) to his crew is reminiscent of the clear division in the house between the female ‘experts’ who ensure an enclosed space to protect the child and the public male world.

The way Shakespeare equates the microcosms of ship and mother can be represented in the following diagram:

![Diagram of Male and Female Spheres](image)

Figure1: Male and female spheres.

Both the mother and the ship are placed in, and embedded by, well-defined and given spheres, i.e. the house and the water. House and water, in turn, are embedded in a larger sphere, the earth, which in the play is confined to the island. Earth and island are each contained in yet a larger sphere, the cosmos or, alternatively, the world of the play. At the heart of all these spheres we may locate the figure of the child or, respectively, the characters of the play. The parallel construction of these hierarchies is also evident from the gender order here at stake. Both mother/ship and the natural world are traditionally marked as female. Thus, three female spheres are enclosed by a greater male sphere, as both the cosmos and the play would have been envisaged in the Renaissance to be male domains; this holds true in particular for *The Tempest* where Prospero, the overarching patriarchal figure, takes the role of stage-manager (Bevington 221). Through this opening scene, then, Shakespeare’s play suggests and establishes a close correspondence between ship and womb, as enclosed spaces and tropes of productivity. In giving birth, mothers perform acts of bringing forth, just as the ship here may be seen to bring forth characters onto the stage and so conjure up the world of the play. In both cases, we thus face magic acts of delivery.

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2 To this day, ships traditionally carry female names.
As Thompson has noted, the notion of a birthing sea is parodied both by Antonio and Ariel when they invoke the image of a birth by mouth rather than by the uterus (239). While Ariel tells them “the never-surfeited sea / Hath caused to belch up you” (3.3.55), Antonio describes the courtiers as “sea-swallowed, though some cast again” (2.1.251). Francisco’s report of how Ferdinand swam to land provides another instance in which the magical storm and the issue of fertility are related to each other. Francisco states how he saw him

\[\text{beat the surges under him} \]
\[\text{And ride upon their backs. He trod the water,} \]
\[\text{Whose enmity he flung aside, and breasted} \]
\[\text{The surge most swoll’n that met him. His bold head} \]
\[\text{‘Bove the contentious waves he kept and oared} \]
\[\text{Himself with his good arms in lusty stroke} \]
\[\text{To th’ shore (2.1.115–121; my emphasis).} \]

Water, the stereotypical female element and fertility symbol (Gélis 1991, 26), is here seemingly broken in rape-like fashion by the same man whose sexual drive is later curbed by Prospero. However, Ferdinand’s overpowering male strength is doubtful, firstly because we only have Francisco’s report of the incident and secondly because it is really Ariel, and therefore Prospero, who ensure Ferdinand’s survival (1.2.221–224). In fact, Ferdinand ends up looking rather a fool for crying out dramatically: “Hell is empty, / And all the devils are here” (1.2.213–214) before jumping into the water, as the shore is “Close by” (1.2.216). In the same scene, it is again Antonio who, together with Sebastian, extends the concept of water and fertility to his conspiracy against Alonso. Starting from the imagery in Sebastian’s self-description “I am standing water” (2.1.221), the two proceed through several water-related metaphors3, until Sebastian refers to Antonio’s planned overthrow as a “matter […] and a birth, indeed, / Which throes thee much to yield” (2.1.230–231). This demonstrates the quasi-magical force attributed to water and its fertile power over the play as it drives the action on by developing a new strand of the plot. Just like a delivery, the idea of the overthrow, and therefore an essential element of the plot, only emerges bit by bit until it is finally revealed. They are indeed, as Antonio puts it, “to perform an act” (2.1.252).

While fertility in *The Tempest* draws heavily on water imagery, *The Witch* mainly makes extensive use of two different images. The first is the elaborate use of the pun on *nothing/no thing*, implying the absence of the penis (*OED 2003b 2.11c*). It is striking how maidens, especially Isabella, are described as

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3 “ANTONIO I’ll teach you how to flow. / SEBASTIAN Do so. To ebb / Hereditary sloth instructs me. / ANTONIO […] Ebbing men, indeed, / Most often do so near the bottom run / By their own fear or sloth.” (2.1.222–228)
knowing ‘nothing’ because they are still virgins. While Sebastian notes in an aside about Isabella’s behaviour that “I know what makes you waspish. […] / She’ll every day be angry now at nothing” (Witch 3.2.48–49), Hermio tells Isabella directly, “you know nothing” (Witch 5.1.128). Ironically, it is Isabella herself who tells the pregnant Francisca “you maids know nothing” (Witch 2.1.102). The pun is also used, however, when the sexual intercourse which had supposedly taken place between two of the characters turns out to be fictitious. Sebastian says to Isabella that they are “both undone for nothing” (Witch 5.1.133) after he abandons his plan to seduce her and after the news of Isabella’s ‘infidelity’ has reached the court. In another instance, Antonio, whom Sebastian suitably describes as being “no content” (Witch 2.1.205), confesses after his ‘murder’ of Gasper and Florida/Isabella that he has “killed ‘em now for nothing” (Witch 4.3.98) when Francisca tells him of her intrigue.

The second image describes the pregnant body in terms of weight, speed and travelling. When the letter arrives which asks Antonio to “send [his] sister down with all speed”, Antonio uses the same words in his order to Francisca, to which she responds in an aside, “I know down I must; / And good speed send me!” (Witch 2.1.173–182). The imagery becomes clearest at Francisca’s “coming up again / After her shame was lighted” (Witch 3.2.68–69), i.e. after her return following the pregnancy. Aberzanes, Isabella and Francisca discuss the “speed” to such an extent that it makes Francisca suspicious (Witch 3.2.75–76). The fact that, in the same scene, Isabella wishes Antonio “good speed” (Witch 3.2.171) on his journey, may indicate how through his impotence Antonio has become more effeminate.

All in all, the imagery used here suggests a cycle in which the pregnant woman is brought down, first by the man and then by her pregnant body, only to be raised up again after the delivery. This recalls the Renaissance concept of earth and mankind in general. Both Shakespeare and Middleton therefore use traditional elements of fertility which are strongly associated with magic and womanhood.

Magical bodies

When looking at the parent characters in The Tempest and The Witch, a good starting point is perhaps their names. As Lévi-Strauss has shown, names are of great importance because they assign an individual their class and position within that class (172). In this respect, Prospero, Sycorax and Hecate’s names are particularly important. Prospero in Italian simply means ‘flourishing’, ‘favourable’ or indeed ‘prosperous’ (Vaughan and Vaughan 141). The etymology of Sycorax’s name is less certain, but most suggestions link her name with animals and witches like Circe and Medea (Warner 100–105). Concern-
ing Middleton’s central witch, one might indeed be tempted to ask, just like Daileader, “Who the hell is Hecate?” (12). Since antiquity, Hecate appeared together with Diana and Persephone and was strongly associated with fertility, the moon and child-bearing (Wolf 33–40). Hecate was also, just like the “freckled whelp” Caliban (1.2.283), strongly associated with dogs (Grant and Hazel 199). The Hecate-Diana cult was vigorously attacked by the Church and the tripartite goddesses stylised as God’s enemy just like many other female pagan goddesses such as Circe, Medea and Calypso (Denike 21–23).

What Prospero, Sycorax, Hecate share is their ability to transcend their human bodies. In the case of Prospero, this happens in two different ways. His first method is changing his clothes, as Prospero twice takes off his magician’s robe (1.2.24; 5.1.85) to separate himself from his role as a magician. He is the only character in The Tempest to change roles successfully. Whereas the noblemen remain in the same miraculously dried garments, Trinculo’s and Stephano’s dress-up is an unsuccessful attempt at changing roles, as the ‘rule’ of “King Stephano” (4.1.222) is of short duration. Prospero’s second method is a change of gender, suggested by the way in which his account of how he lost his dukedom to his brother appears to be a process of symbolic feminisation. While Antonio is “l lorded” with Prospero’s power, – i.e. symbolically emasculated – which makes him “beget” his treason (1.2.94–97), Prospero shows no resistance and is cast out to sea where only Miranda’s “smile, / Infused with a fortitude from heaven” preserves him (1.2.153–154). Prospero here recalls the figure of the outcast mother, such as Hagar in the biblical narrative of Genesis, who only survives the harshness of nature with the help of God while the child will eventually find another country (Michel 101–102). Prospero’s feminisation is further stressed when he remembers how he “decked the sea with drops full salt, / Under my burden groaned, which raised in me / An undergoing stomach to bear up / Against what should ensue” (1.2.155–158). Besides crying, which in the Renaissance was widely perceived as a feminine disease (Vaught 163), Prospero’s description of the determination awakened within him draws on the trope of pregnancy, as the idea of his restoration begins to take shape. Here again, the connection between womb and mind becomes clear. It is only through the stage-managing on the island that Prospero reverses his “substitution” (1.2.103) by the rival stage-manager Antonio (Johnson 688) and re-establishes his manliness.

Clear though the relationship between Prospero’s magic of stagecraft and fertility might be, the bodies of Hecate and Sycorax are even more intriguing in this respect. Both represent the witch-whore who challenges the boundaries between human and animal – especially Sycorax, the “hag-seed” “got by the devil himself” (1.2.366 and 1.2.320). As Jordan has noted, the sexual desire attributed to a certain person depends on their social position (196–
197). Witches, being female and very much on the margins of society, are therefore perceived as particularly lustful. However, since witches extensively engage in sexual activity, they are also experts in the field and thus are the best consultants in all love matters. This is particularly evident in The Witch, where Almachildes is the client and the love interest at the same time. In fact, it is surprising just how good and how benign Middleton’s witches are at being consultants (Daileader 13). Quite in contrast to their usual depiction in demonologies, they never ask for payment, but only for respect for their art, as the Duchess finds out the hard way (Witch 5.2.14–36).

In contrast to Middleton’s unusual witches is the odd couple of the “married maiden” Isabella and the “pregnant maiden” Francisca (Karpinska 436). They are both in a state that is unnatural for their current position in life. As was shown earlier, Francisca is characterised by her pregnancy’s heaviness or “ballast” which is set in contrast to Isabella’s “lightness” (Witch 2.3.6; 3.2.152). As has been noted, the women of the court, especially Francisca and the Duchess, are actually more witch-like than Hecate herself (Keller 43). Francisca, especially in her pregnancy, is extremely self-centred. Most of the remarks she makes about it are asides in which she expresses the difficult position the child has put her in, but does not express any concern for its well-being (e.g. Witch 2.1.113–114). She even goes so far as to blame her pregnancy fully on the fact “These bastards come upon poor venturing gentlewomen ten to / one faster than legitimate children” (Witch 2.1.43–44). Furthermore, Keller points out that Francisca possibly contemplates infanticide, as her expressed need for a “yard of lawn” (Witch 2.1.121) might be interpreted here as meaning ‘burial ground’ (48). All in all, Francisca turns out to be more of a child-harming witch than Hecate. Although partly for her own pleasure, the latter at least keeps an eye on her son when he leaves his bed and assures him “Thou shalt have all when I die” (Witch 1.2.69), therefore granting her son his rightful inheritance, something that Francisca does not do.

The question of witches’ motherhood is particularly interesting since Satanic conception is not attested to prior to the fifteenth century (Mackay in Krämer/Sprenger 1.46–47). As Gilman points out (106), a witch pregnancy is at odds with King James’ Daemonologie since here demons are said to have “no seed proper to themselves, nor yet can they gender one with an other” (68). Furthermore, the seed that the demons steal from dead bodies is “wanting the naturall heate, and such other naturall operations, as is necessarie for working that effect [i.e. a pregnancy]” (James 68). However, the prominent witch tract Malleus maleficarum insists that human-demon intercourse is exactly the method witches use to increase their number (Krämer/Sprenger 2.261). The demon, in the form of a succubus, collects semen from criminals and then, in the form of an incubus, directly releases it
into the witch or passes it on to another demon which fulfils this task (Krämer/Sprenger 2.262). According to the Malleus, demons are even particularly careful to use sufficiently strong sperm, therefore rejecting sperm from nightly ejaculations, and to only release the sperm into fertile women to give the best chance of a pregnancy (Krämer/Sprenger 2.262–263). In the case of Hecate and Sycorax, it is hard to say whether their pregnancies are due to the playwrights using poetic licence or whether these witches conceive naturally. In the case of Hecate, no father is ever named for her offspring and in the case of Sycorax, Caliban’s devilish heritage may simply be attributed to the “power of the storyteller”, i.e. to Prospero and his views (Lara 83).

In this respect, it becomes clear that Hecate and Sycorax belong to a larger group of pregnant females whose story only appears briefly and fragmented through the “contact zone” of male discourse and whose bodies are used as a palimpsest by the dominant men to inscribe their story (McBride 306–307). For example, by forcing Ariel to recall Sycorax’s ‘tyranny’ Prospero establishes himself as the “noble master” (1.2.300). Although the witch receives an opportunity to speak for herself in Middleton, she only surfaces because Sebastian or Almachildes seek her out. The fact that Hecate has “had him thrice in the incubus already” (Witch 1.2.198), has no effect on Almachildes or the world of the court.

Promoting and restricting fertility by magic

Attempts to influence fertility are prominently staged in The Witch and The Tempest. Prospero’s masque and Hecate’s love charms have, however, rarely been analysed in the context of fertility. Recent research has emphasised that the masque here is a household rather than a Jacobean court masque. Household masques were performed for guests, or at special events and frequently featured the banishment of witchcraft and the display of “magical fecundity” (Knowles 120–121). In The Tempest it is not witchcraft itself which is to be banished through the masque but rather what Höfele has called “Calibanismus”, i.e. the tendency of humans to give in to their carnal, animalistic desires (72). The “hymen mania” of the Renaissance (Karpinska 437) requires Prospero to provide some means of delaying the benefits of fertility. All pre-marital sex is ostracised as “barren hate, / Sour-eyed disdain and discord” (4.1.19–20). Despite its effectiveness on the bridal couple, the employment of the masque is ambiguous. This is due to the fact that the masque’s generative power of theatre attempts to expel the generative power of passion, that “thing of darkness” which Prospero later has to “acknowledge” as his (5.1.275–276). It is doubtful whether his project would have succeeded with a daughter less docile than Miranda.
Of all the characters in *The Tempest*, Ceres is particularly important here, as she is the ancient goddess of fertility conjured up by magic. She is the “most bounteous lady, thy rich leas / Of wheat, rye, barley, vetches, oats and peas” (4.1.60–61) and therefore characterised especially by food attributes. The first five foods mentioned here were the most important grains of the time and therefore a vital source of nourishment for livestock and humans (Spencer 1220). Peas, on the other hand, were widely used in love divination and thought to promote fertility (Vickery 277). All this places her in contrast to Prospero’s self-description with which he ends the masque: “my old brain is troubled. / Be not disturbed with my infirmity” (4.1.159–160). While Prospero here presents himself as an ailing and withered old man, all of his spirits, especially Ceres, stand for life in full flower. This astonishing contradiction may indicate that Prosper is here using a flimsy excuse for ending the masque to prevent his threatening overthrow led by Caliban.

Middleton’s witches, on the other hand, are also clearly characterised by images referring to fertility, but in their case they follow the traditional role as being destroyers of all things fertile. Their abilities include the power to “raise [...] all your sudden ruinous storms / that shipwreck barks and tears up growing oaks, / [...] destroy the young of all [...] cattle” and “starve up generation [...] / To strike barrenness in man or woman” (*Witch* 1.2.135–153). It is interesting that Hecate here lists a quality that Prospero also claims for himself, namely that of cracking open trees. This may serve to strengthen the arguments of the ‘antisentimental’ school of thought which has stressed Prospero’s darker side (Knowles 108–109). The witches also make use of traditional means to manipulate infertility, such as voodoo-like enchantments or placing a magical object in the house (Purkiss 97–98). They use typical ingredients in their potions such as infants’ blood or mandrakes and rely on the influence of the moon for their spells (*Witch* 3.3.23–30). For his lists of ingredients, Middleton drew heavily on Scot’s *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (Purkiss 218). Despite all their powers, the witches “cannot disjoin wedlock” as “‘Tis of heaven’s fastening” (*Witch* 1.2.172–173). At this point, Middleton diverges from the *Malleus maleficarum* and the notions formulated there (Krämer/Sprenger 2.376), but he is still well within the English Renaissance tradition (Corbin and Sedge, see Middleton, *Witch*, 224).

But it is not only the witches who attempt to influence fertility. Antonio wants to cure his impotence with the help of “two cocks [...] boiled to jelly” (*Witch* 2.1.11). In this sense, his behaviour is in line with Renaissance medical tradition because he uses a remedy which signifies exactly what he is missing, namely a ‘penis’ (*OED* 2003b 20). That the spell should cause impotence in Isabella’s case and allow Florida “the joy on’t and the fruitfulness” (*Witch* 3.2.188) is not as surprising as it may seem. Already the *Malleus maleficarum* mentions this phenomenon as a clear sign of magical impotence (Krämer/
Sprenger 2.141). Almachildes’ love charm is also very typical for an era which attributed strong powers to seemingly harmless ribbons (Corbin and Sedge 229). Here, it is used very much for comic effect in the exchange between the love triangle of Amoretta, Duchess and Almachildes (esp. Witch 2.2.44–140). But what it also emphasises is that the differences between an enchanted woman and a woman pretending to be enchanted are hard to make out. When Amoretta seems to give in to Almachildes’ advances, he attributes this to the efficacy of the charm, while she is in fact only fulfilling her promise to “perform / In all that [she] vowed” (Witch 2.3.109–110, my emphasis). Another method of influencing fertility is mentioned by Francisca who fears that the Duke’s toast, which more resembles a potion, will “make [her] come / Some seven weeks sooner” (Witch 1.1.135–136). She also attributes a similar effect to “those egg-pies; they are meat that / help forward too fast” (Witch 2.1.50–51). It is significant that the provider of the pies, Aberzanes, is later shown serving up exactly such delicacies which Antonio attributes to his “kindness in excess” (Witch 2.1.149). Ironically, this remark reveals the difference that separates these men, the excessive fertility of the bachelor Aberzanes and the insufficient fertility of the husband Antonio. Therefore, the two mirror their partners Francisca and Isabella in that they are also in the wrong state for their position in life.

**Being a witch child and giving birth: staging magical fertility**

The first thing worth noting in respect to all the children born of witches or witch-like characters, such as Francisca, is that they are nearly all male. This is surprising since witches supposedly pass on their knowledge to their daughters (Purkiss 146). In fact, the only daughter appearing in the two plays considered here is Miranda. Another significant point is that all the children are raised by single parents. In these plays, parent and child are therefore of the opposite sex and lacking the other parental figure. This seems to have the effect that certain characteristics of the parents are transferred onto their children. Miranda is the exception to this, as her main characteristic, her chastity, does not have a Renaissance equivalent for men (Schabert 139). Caliban and Firestone seem to have adopted the animalistic and sexual drive from their mothers though (Briggs 82). The fact that Caliban’s advice to Stephano to “bring forth brave brood” (3.2.105) with Miranda so much resembles his own intention to have “peopled […] this isle with Calibans” (1.2.351–352) makes it probable that he is genuinely attracted to Miranda and wants to use Stephano to possess her. Firestone’s sexuality is more complicated as he has several ‘love’ interests, including his mother (Witch 1.2.95–101). Furthermore,

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4 Except of course for Francisca’s child who is to grow up without any parents at all.
for Firestone his mother is not his role model or legal claim to power at all, as is the case with Caliban (Lara 85), but rather a figure of hatred.

As shown above, pregnancy in *The Witch* is particularly associated with weight. Aberzanes takes up this notion when he says, “you can swell a maid up / and rid her for ten pound. There’s the purse back again / Whate’er becomes of your money or your maid” (*Witch* 2.3.13–15). However, when he and Francisca run through their expenses on food for their trip, he soon begins to suspect “what ‘tis [...] to get children” (*Witch* 2.3.49). The swelling of the body has the opposite effect on the purse, as it does not become heavier but lighter. As “purse” can also refer to the scrotum, a pregnancy may imply not only the loss of sexual freedom for men (Corbin and Sedge 226), but also of sperm which is transferred onto the woman, making her heavier. This makes it clear why Aberzanes fails to “rid away a scape”\(^5\) (*Witch* 2.3.9). The old midwife also wants to dispose of the newborn boy, as she tells him there is “No matter for the house” since she knows “the porch” of the baby’s new home (*Witch* 2.3.3). This just goes to show how bastard children are literally kept outside society (Belling 93).

Along with the actual children born of magicians and witches, several symbolic births or rebirths take place both in *The Tempest* and *The Witch*. In *The Tempest*, no actual human pregnancy is staged, but the characters are freed from an enclosed space leading to some sort of revelation or change. These are both instances of a delivery, in the sense of an “action of setting free” (*OED* 2003a 1a) and “the fact of being delivered of, or act of bringing forth, offspring” (*OED* 2003a 2a). The first symbolic birth staged in *The Tempest* is Ariel’s. As Prospero reminds him, Sycorax

\[
\text{did confine thee [...]}
\]

\[
\text{Into a cloven pine, within which rift}
\]

\[
\text{Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain}
\]

\[
\text{A dozen years, [...]}
\]

\[
\text{where thou didst vent thy groans}
\]

\[
\text{As fast as millwheels strike. [...]}
\]

\[
\text{[T]hy groans}
\]

\[
\text{Did make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts}
\]

\[
\text{Of every-angry bears. [...]}
\]

\[
\text{It was mine art,}
\]

\[
\text{When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape}
\]

\[
\text{The pine and let thee out. (1.2.274–293)}
\]

As Johnson has noted, Prospero’s language here “suggest[s] that his is an imprisonment within the womb, a torture inflicted by the island’s only real motherly presence” (690). A clear distinction between the ‘good’ brother

\(^5\) Note the pun of “a scape” meaning “escape”.
Ariel and the ‘bad’ brother Caliban is not possible, not only because Ariel is a shape-shifter (ibid.), but also because the stories of the two run parallel. Even in Prospero’s account, Caliban’s story is embraced by Ariel’s (1.2.274–285).

The second symbolic birth, namely that of Trinculo, draws more heavily on the visual aspect of theatre than Ariel’s ‘delivery’. When Stephano first appears on stage, he sees the feet of Trinculo and his “bedfellow[...]” (2.2.39) dangling out from Caliban’s gaberdine. This initially leads him to believe that he has come across a four-legged monster or a devil. When he pulls Trinculo out by the “lesser legs”, he exclaims “Thou art very Trinculo indeed! How cam’st thou to be the siege of this mooncalf? Can he vent Trinculos?” (2.2.102–105). Though the suggestion of excrement is also likely, this scene may just as well be interpreted in the context of a delivery, especially since Trinculo’s legs seem to be smaller than Caliban’s. While “vent” may indeed refer to urination and excretion (Vaughan and Vaughan 213), it may equally refer to issuing blood (OED 2003f 2.9a), words (OED 2003f 3a) or emotions (OED 2003f 1b). This allusion to delivery is indeed taken up in Peter Greenaway’s film version of The Tempest, in which both Trinculo and Stephano assume typical positions for a midwife and a mother giving birth (cf. Greenaway 0:59:45–1:00:08). Since there are no stage directions to suggest whether Trinculo and Caliban face each other under the gaberdine from opposite ends or whether they lie on top of each other facing in the same direction, it is hard to say whether this scene depicts a ‘natural’ birth by the uterus or if this is another mock birth via the mouth. In any case, this scene makes it clear how the newborn Trinculo magically appears on stage, as here Shakespeare uses one of the basic tricks of magic and stagecraft, namely that of disappearance and reappearance.

The same trick is used later in the play when Prospero reveals Miranda and Ferdinand, whom his father supposed dead. It can also be found in The Witch during the unexpected rebirth of the Duke, as well as that of Florida and Gaspero. In all three cases the miraculous rebirth is revealed by one of the male characters (Prospero, the Governor and Hermio), which serves to indicate that men are very much in charge of stagecraft. The critical moment in these rebirths is the revelation that the ‘victims’ are in good health, as the potential and alleged murderers then undergo a dramatic change in character. Before Prospero lifts the final curtain in his last little play within the play, Alonso becomes teary-eyed when he imagines everything that the future had in store for Ferdinand and Miranda (5.1.149–152). The display of her husband’s body suddenly makes the Duchess regretful about her plotting (Witch 5.3.90–98), while the killing and his apparently approaching death prompts Antonio to confess his tricking Isabella into marrying him (Witch 5.1.59–64).

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6 Stephano stands between Trinculo’s raised legs and then grabs him by the feet to pull him out from under the gaberdine.
These rebirths are therefore fertile indeed for the play itself, because they provide new and unexpected twists and turns. In this respect, they demonstrate how stagecraft and fertility are entwined, as they “bring forth a wonder” (5.1.170) of new perspectives.

**Conclusion**

In this essay I have attempted to outline the significance and interrelations of three generative powers – magic, fertility and theatre – which are at work in *The Tempest* and *The Witch*. It should have become clear that magic – including that of witches – cannot be seen simply as a destructive force because it also possesses a strong productive side. What the magic of witches shares with the powers of fertility and theatre is its ability to make things or people suddenly appear and to produce an abrupt change. As was demonstrated, “magical fecundity” (Knowles 120–21) is expressed especially through its ‘magical means’, verbal images and stage representations of pregnancies or deliveries.

Means for promoting and restricting fertility are extensively employed both by magical and non-magical characters of both sexes. They use two of the three powers mentioned above to influence fertility by, firstly, attempting to influence the body and, secondly, using rituals, charms and amulets. The fact that the mechanics of sex are not discussed in the plays is hardly surprising for a Renaissance stage. It is perhaps worth pointing out that there are not only male attempts to enclose the female body (e.g. as Prospero does with Miranda), but also female attempts to influence male fertility (e.g. as the Duchess and Hecate try with Aberzanes in *The Witch*). However, the latter are almost exclusively initiated by witches and witch-like characters. Nevertheless, this just goes to show the inherent difficulty in differentiating between ‘witch’ and ‘woman’.

As has been shown, parents of both genders identify with or are associated with female fertility in language and staging. A change in gender from male to female can either serve the purpose of depicting unmanly frailty (e.g. as in Prospero’s experience at sea or Antonio’s impotence in *The Witch*) or used for comedy (e.g. as in Trinculo’s ‘birth’). On the level of language, the use of puns and the imageries of water, birth by mouth and the heavily pregnant body are especially prevalent. In some cases, it is probable that even the movement of the actors onstage hinted at the topic of fertility. It should additionally have become clear that female fertility is also an attractive concept here because of its link to male literary productivity. Therefore, the play itself appears as a product of magical female/male fertility.
Works Cited


