

Lamb 1808 Charles Lamb, Specimens of English dramatic poets, who lived about the time of Shakspeare (London, 1808), 164-74.

iii

SPECIMENS  
OF  
ENGLISH DRAMATIC POETS,  
WHO LIVED  
About the Time of Shakspeare:

WITH NOTES.

By CHARLES LAMB.

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1808.

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164

THE WITCH. A TRAGI-COMEDY. BY THOMAS  
MIDDLETON.

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174

Hec. Come my sweet sisters, let the air strike our tune;  
Whilst we shew reverence to yon peeping moon./58  
(The Witches dance, et exeunt.

/58 Though some resemblance may be traced between the Charms in Macbeth, and the Incantations in this Play, which is supposed to have preceded it, this coincidence will not detract much from the originality of Shakspeare. His Witches are distinguished from the Witches of Middleton by essential differences. These are creatures to whom man or woman plotting some dire mischief might resort for occasional consultation. Those originate deeds of blood, and begin bad impulses to men. From the moment that their eyes first meet with Macbeth's, he is spell-bound. That meeting sways his destiny. He can never break the fascination. These Witches can hurt the body; those have power over the soul. -- Hecate in Middleton has a Son, a low buffoon: the hags of Shakspeare have neither child of their own, nor seem to be descended from any parent. They are foul Anomalies, of whom we know not whence they are sprung, nor whether they have beginning or ending. As they are without human passions, so they seem to be without human relations. They come with thunder and lightning, and vanish to airy

music. This is all we know of them. -- Except Hecate, they have no names; which heightens their mysteriousness. The names, and some of the properties, which Middleton has given to his Hags, excite smiles. The Weird Sisters are serious things. Their presence cannot co-exist with mirth. But, in a lesser degree, the Witches of Middleton are fine creations. Their power too is, in some measure, over the mind. They raise jars, jealousies, strifes, *like a thick scurf o'er life*.

Lamb's punchline is an allusion to one of Hecate's speeches:

... well may we raise jars,  
Jealousies, strifes, and heart-burning disagreements,  
Like a thick scurf o'er life, as did our master  
Upon that patient miracle; ... (p 168)

which in turn alludes to Job 2:7.