

When I tell people I'm studying Renaissance magic, I always get an interesting response. There are the 'that's not a proper subject' comments and the usual Harry Potter associations, but for the most part, people are interested in my research, particularly at the University of St Andrews. I am not studying something that can be dismissed as pure fantasy. I am exploring the truth of the time, a system of beliefs that were constantly contested and questioned in this extraordinary period of human history.

For my PhD thesis, I am conducting a comparative study of the witch and the magus in Renaissance drama. I am looking at how magical identity is constructed on the Shakespearean stage, considering the different implications for male and female practitioners. I am interested to find out why the supernatural arts of the male practitioner were often regarded as valid intellectual pursuits, while women displaying the same magical skills were labelled as demonic and persecuted as witches.

During this first year, I've been looking at the characterisation of the magus and have finished a draft of my first chapter, on Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*. Written sometime between 1588 and 1592, the play is based on the legends of Roger Bacon, the medieval proto-scientist and reputed necromancer. It is an unsettling text, a quirky mix of ridiculous comedy and hellish tragedy. Greene's play is a comic version of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and it anticipates Shakespeare's characterisation of Prospero in *The Tempest* twenty years later. Bacon was an especially important figure in Renaissance 'science', and although this play is set in a mythical medieval past, it is very much influenced by Renaissance occult philosophy and intellectual magic.

I am focussing on the objects that mark the man as a magus, considering how the Protestant Reformation, Renaissance intellectual thought, and the beginnings of the scientific revolution influenced the way the early modern audience related to the material world. Bacon is of particular interest because of two remarkable objects in his possession: a 'glass prospective', which enables him to see anything happening in the country and a brazen head, which, when completed, will "unfold strange doubts and aphorisms and read a lecture in philosophy". This is an early modern *Frankenstein* story, an attempt to create artificial life and intelligence that is (quite literally) disembodied. I am now working on *John of Bordeaux*, the little-known sequel to Greene's play, and then will shift my focus to consider the characterisation of the witch.

My first year in St Andrews has been busy, eventful, and exceptionally worthwhile. I have found that my research has taken on new significance here. Early modern Scotland had one of the highest rates of witch persecution (in proportion to its population) and there are sites in St Andrews where women were publicly executed for witchcraft. This makes it all frighteningly real. The rare books section of the library here includes an extensive collection on alchemy, and the images are of particular interest. The documents often include intricate pictures of men surrounded by esoteric tomes and delicate machines, and I'd like to incorporate these into my research. It's wonderful to have access to so many valuable resources. I have been to the Globe theatre and the British library, and will be making a pilgrimage to Stratford-upon-Avon later this year. I've also attended a symposium in

Glasgow and will be presenting a paper at another, at Anglia Ruskin in Cambridge, in honour of Leverhulme scholar György E. Szöny.

The other English postgraduates here are all very supportive of each other. I am in the unusual situation of being one of three Renaissance literature students taken on by the same supervisor at the same time. This gives it a 'class' like feel at times. We're each focussing on different authors but are going through the same stages with our research. It provides motivation to keep up with each other -- and to keep each other in check! We often discuss our work together, and consequently I am learning about John Donne, John Milton and Aemilia Lanyer as well. This is an ideal situation, as writing a PhD thesis could be a rather isolating experience in less agreeable circumstances. Having plenty of other like-minded students around ensures that one never takes oneself too seriously, a malaise that befalls many postgraduates if left alone for too long.

There is ample opportunity for meeting other postgraduate students as well. I am living at Deans Court, a small postgraduate college. It's said to be the oldest residential building in St Andrews, and there is even supposed to be a tunnel from Deans Court to the cathedral ruins, though I am yet to uncover evidence of this. The residence is made up of a tight-knit group of fifty students, about a third British, a third American, and a third everything else. I am surrounded by a healthy mix of arts and science students: chemists, anthropologists, philosophers, physicists, historians, mathematicians, geographers, and economists, as well as several other students of literature. The long tables in the cave-like dining room are the focal point of much lively discussion, and I am doing a lot of my learning via mealtime banter.

St Andrews itself is a particularly unusual place. Half university, half golf, the town doesn't really feel like Scotland, and one is more likely to hear an English or American accent in passing, rather than a good Scottish voice. There is a pleasantly spooky ambience to the narrow streets, old stone buildings, and the castle and cathedral ruins. As I write this, Britain has a heatwave warning, but St Andrews is blanketed over with a week-long sea haar. The mist is so thick that one can barely see the buildings on the other side of the street. It's the bane of golfing tourists. They've waited a long time and paid a lot of money to play on the Old Course, only to find that they can't see a thing and are hitting the ball into an eerie obscurity. There has also been snow, and lots of it. One of the first things I was told about St Andrews is that it never snows here, but it has snowed several times already. The entire student population reclaims some innocence, and it's especially nice to see even the most pompous of postgraduate students condescend to take a day off and build a snowman.

St Andrews is one of the oldest universities in Britain, and the place is saturated in traditions that are both eccentric and extraordinary. I've watched a torch-lit procession of red-robed undergraduates walk to the end of the pier and back to mark the installation of the new Rector, run into the North sea at sunrise on the first of May, and participated in the truly bizarre Raisin weekend in November, an explanation of which would take up this entire report. In May the town was swarming with dripping and dishevelled undergraduates and masters students. According to tradition, St Andreans must be doused in water by their friends on completion of the last exam. I've even found myself habitually skirting round the initials of protestant martyrs marked out in the cobblestones, having picked up the fear of jeopardising my chances of graduation by stepping on them.

As St Andrews is a very small town, it is necessary for one's sanity to leave it on a regular basis. I have joined the Hill-walking Society, which takes weekend expeditions into the

Cairngorms. I've spent a few days in the Orkney Islands, a desolate, haunting place that really fired my imagination, and led to a brief flirtation with the idea of switching to archaeology. I've also enjoyed exploring the coastal areas of Fife and venturing into the Highlands.

I've had an extraordinary time in St Andrews so far. The town is very conducive to the imagination and has certainly intensified my curiosity about the Renaissance intellectual culture of science and magic. I greatly appreciate the contribution made by the New Zealand Federation of Graduate Women, which has gone towards my tuition fees. The new regulations imposed by the Home Office in March this year are making it increasingly difficult for international students studying in the UK, and I realise I am exceptionally lucky to have been given the opportunity and the financial support to be able to do so. Thank you very much NZFGW, your help has made all the difference.

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