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**“THAT PUTS IT NOT UNTO THE TOUCH, TO WIN OR LOSE IT ALL”:  
THE MORAL METAPHOR OF WITCHCRAFT IN JOHN BUCHAN’S  
NOVEL**

**Abstract:**

The essay explores how John Buchan uses a cultural gap between the disciplined church world and the living-conditions of peasants in Woodilee to raise questions about the knowledge of evil in seventeenth-century Scotland. Published in 1927, when Scotland was not prepared to cope with a politico-religious struggle between King Charles I and Parliament during the English Civil War (from 1644 to 1646), *Witch Wood* depicts how a young Presbyterian minister, David Sempill, witnesses the pretences and prejudices of three other church elders. The novel depicts how the seventeenth-century Scottish church interprets the concept of evil and convicts its members of witchcraft, focusing on the controversial relationship between nature and morality. This essay will explore how several of Buchan’s more negative political-religious characters lead to the eventual banality of domestic evil within the Scottish church; furthermore, it will point out the ironic moral contrast between the speculations and deeds of the Church’s Chief Elder Chasehope and the secular farmer Shillinglaw. This essay ultimately offers observations, on a somewhat more speculative level, in relation to the novel’s discourse concerning unorthodox, if not Christian, interpretations of evil, using manifestation of several convincing representatives of human nature. It questions whether witchcraft should be recognized as a phenomenon of the human impulse towards natural worship, or as a ritual with evil motive.

**Keywords:**

John Buchan; *Witch Wood*; witchcraft; evil; nature and morality