Transcription: Elizabeth Day on fear of witchcraft

When I imagine Heinrich Kramer, I visualise him as a sort of 15th century troll. If you can imagine an online troll. So many of them are still around and so many of them hate it when women express any kind of opinion. I personally have been the victim of that. I used to work for a Sunday newspaper and whenever I put any of my articles online, I was constantly criticised in the most horrible language by a lot of male commentators – everything from having sand in my vagina to being someone who should have remined on work experience and who clearly slept her way to the middle. And as unbecoming as these things are to repeat, I think what it shows us is they have their roots in a long and ignoble history, started in texts such as these, which were specifically designed to portray women as ‘other’ because of their power, because of their witchcraft, because of the magical ways that they had, which were specifically designed, in Heinrich’s eyes, to disempower men.

And there’s something very scary about that for the established order. Women, like all human beings, are complex and multifaceted, and we don’t always make sense, and I feel that historically we haven’t really allowed our women to be real, to inhabit the fullness of themselves. Those women who didn’t conform to what society perceived to be quote unquote ‘normal’, which is often quite one dimensional, existed on the margins, they were outsiders, they lived on their own island. And I think that although we might not be accustomed to seeing women with hair made out of snakes anymore, we still have that very real sense of women who don’t conform, who are seen to be other than the norm. We still criticise them on a daily basis. You only have to look at certain tabloid newspapers and certain sidebars of shame – online – to see that that still happens, that we still ‘other’ those women who we don’t fully understand or who we don’t allow to be real.