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Witchcraft and the Supernatural

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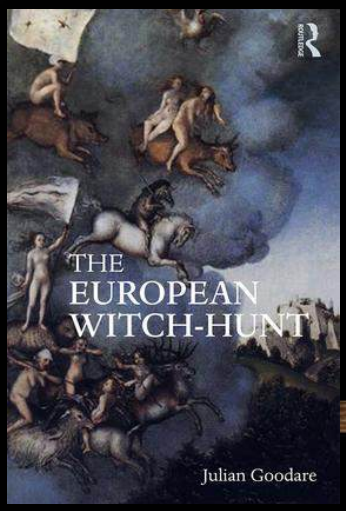
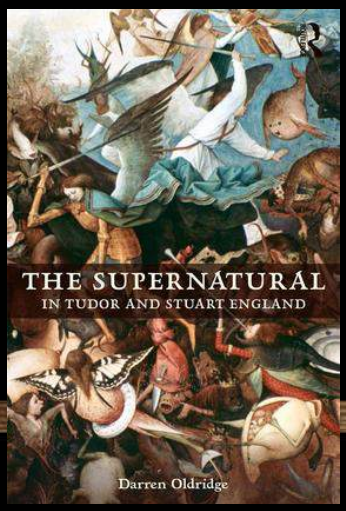
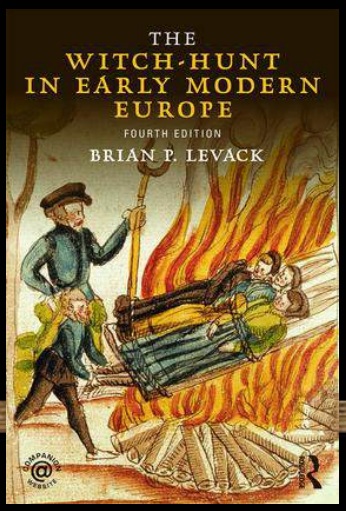
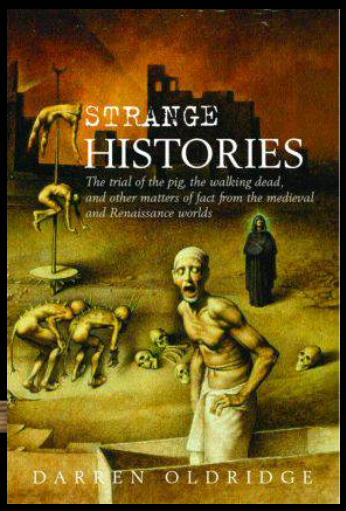
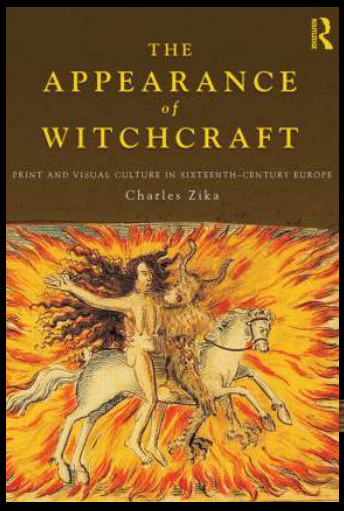
Double, double toil and trouble; Fire burn, and caldron bubble...
Witchcraft and the Supernatural from Routledge

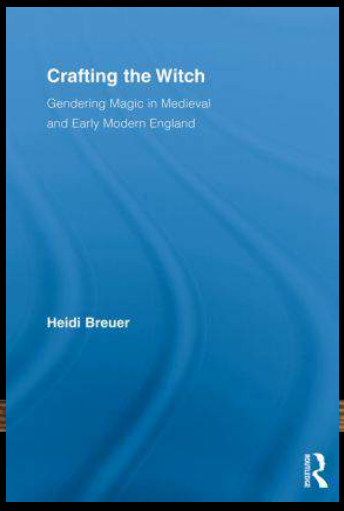


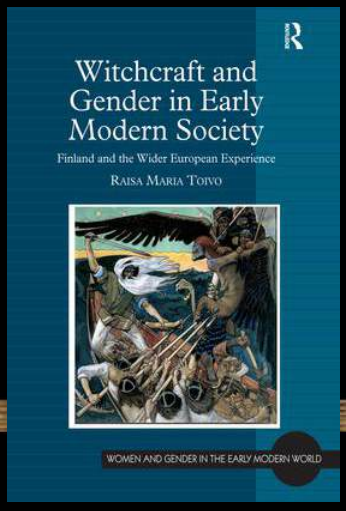


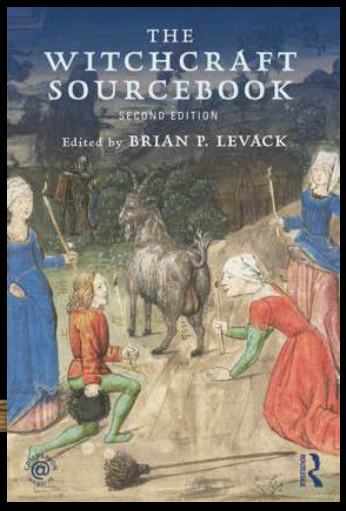












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Introduction

JULIAN GOODARE

Modern culture shows that we remain both haunted and fascinated by ideas about witchcraft and the supernatural that we have inherited from previous centuries. Heidi Breuer's chapter in this Freebook selection (Chapter 5) demonstrates this eloquently. Her starting-point is the Renaissance, mainly in England, and the idea of the 'Renaissance hag' – an old, ugly woman, contrasting sharply with masculine ideals of womanhood, and possessing the power of wicked magic. Where did the idea of such a woman originate, and why does she still disturb us?

This is a selection of chapters from five different books by four different authors. Don't expect a single plan, or a single coherent argument. Instead, you should often expect loose ends and trains of thought that lead off the page. This is especially so with my own chapter in this selection (Chapter 1), which is the introduction to my book on the European witch-hunt. It often refers to topics 'that we shall examine in Chapter 9', and so on. Still, this introductory chapter does introduce the concept of witchcraft – a core concept for our purposes. Indeed it argues that there were four related concepts of witchcraft in early modern Europe: the demonic witch, the village witch, the folkloric witch and the envisioned witch. The demonic witch was in league with the Devil; the village witch worked harmful magic on neighbours; the folkloric witch was the subject of stories; and the envisioned witch was experienced through dreams, nightmares and fantasies, which were then elaborated into folkloric motifs with cultural meanings.

Some of these folkloric motifs reappear, in more detail, in Chapter 2, by Darren Oldridge. This describes a wide range of supernatural and spooky encounters with ghosts, demons and fairies in early modern England. Sometimes the nature of these beings was clear; other times it wasn't. There was sometimes debate about this. The common people willingly accepted fairies and ghosts, but educated people tended to deny that fairies existed, and educated Protestant people also tended to dispute the idea that ghosts would return to earth. But educated people had no problem with the idea of encounters with demons. All early modern people lived in a world also populated by non-humans, a bit like J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-Earth.

Chapter 3 returns to the topic of witchcraft, and indeed of witch-hunting, in early modern Europe. Brian Levack's chapter conducts a tour of European regions, showing that witch-hunting was more intense in some regions than others. There are no simple explanations for why this was so (or for anything else to do with witch-hunting), but Levack shows that close attention to legal procedures in different countries is essential. For instance, the Inquisition in Spain and Italy tended to reduce the numbers executed for witchcraft. The Inquisition was a coercive and feared

institution, but it never tolerated the large-scale panics over witchcraft that occurred, for instance, in some German states.

We encounter more about strange beliefs in Chapter 4, from another book by Darren Oldridge. This time the beliefs concerned are those of the educated elite, at the cutting edge of intellectual theology in medieval and early modern Europe. Intellectuals in those times regarded theology, the understanding of God and religion, as the highest and most important form of knowledge. It might be useful to study the material world, but if you wanted to guide people to heaven and not hell then it was more useful to understand God and his purposes. What exactly *were* angels, demons and other spirits? How could they relate to humans? Oldridge answers many questions like this, and, more importantly, shows why the questions mattered.

Let me return, finally, to Heidi Breuer and to Chapter 5. Breuer's focus in this, the concluding chapter of her own book, is on the present day and the uses that it makes of the past. Breuer shows that modern Western culture has its own uses for witches – in particular in navigating and expressing the wider social opportunities that modern women may be offered. Sometimes this leads to commercial culture reasserting patriarchal norms: women who reject the norms of motherhood and domesticity may be stigmatised as witches. In today's Western world we no longer execute witches, but ideas about witchcraft and the supernatural still possess power.

Note to readers:

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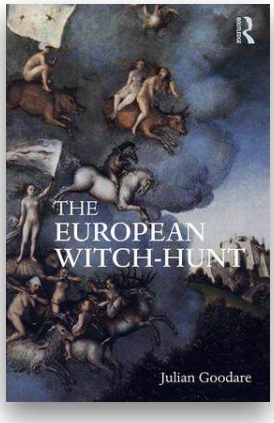
Witchcraft!

1. Witchcraft!



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> In our times the number of witches and of supporters of the Devil is growing rapidly, so that almost all towns and villages in the whole of Germany, not to mention other people and nations, are full of this vermin. These servants of the Devil not only do harm to the precious crops in the fields which the Lord has made grow through the power of his blessing, but also try to do as much harm as possible through thunder, lightning, showers, hail, storms, frost, flooding, mice, worms, and in many other ways which God is permitting and for which they use the support and help of the Devil.
>
> *Further News of Witches*, Germany, 1590

Introduction

Throughout early modern Europe, people feared witchcraft. However, the 'witchcraft' that they feared was not a single, simple thing, easy to define. Anyone who has heard of an 'essential definition of witchcraft' has been misinformed. There were then, and there still are today, several overlapping definitions of it – and the definitions tended to change over time. Here we need to focus on the definitions that were used in the early modern period. Executions for 'witchcraft' were for that specific crime, and a specific word had to be used – though, as we shall see, not all languages used their word or words for 'witchcraft' in the same way. But the specific crime of 'witchcraft' was built up out of a number of components, which can be analysed separately. There are four main fields into which these components can be grouped.

The fourfold concept of witchcraft

The four fields of the early modern concept of witchcraft were all interlinked, but they can be separated out for analytical purposes. There were different definitions of witchcraft because, although everyone feared witches, they did not all fear them in the same way. In particular, the elite had a more intellectual and theoretical fear, while the common people's fear was more immediate and practical. This provides the basis for two of the fields of the fourfold concept. (There is more about elite and popular beliefs later in this chapter.) The third and fourth fields were less about real witches that were feared, but provided essential background for everyone's witchcraft beliefs.

The first field to be discussed, then, is the *demonic witch* of the elite – the witch who was in league with the Devil. Then comes the *village witch* of the common people – the witch who harmed her or his neighbours. Witchcraft was also a matter of story and legend, so we need a third field: the *folkloric witch*. Finally, witchcraft was sometimes a matter of intense personal experience, with people entering trances and seeing visions. They either encountered witches in nightmare visions, or entered

trances and went on spirit-voyages that could make others think that they themselves were witches. The fourth field, therefore, is the witch experienced through trance, dream and nightmare: the *envisioned witch*.

The demonic witch was in league with the Devil. This view of witchcraft saw it essentially as a religious crime – a type of heresy or false belief. The Christian church authorities had been concerned about heresy since the middle ages; they had not usually thought of witchcraft as a heresy, but we shall see in Chapter 2 that they began to change their minds. Combining ideas from various sources, fifteenth-century theologians gradually became convinced that a 'new heresy' had arisen, consisting not of people who worshipped God in the wrong way, but of people who actually worshipped the Devil. They formed a secret, underground sect, who renounced God and promised their souls to the Devil, and gathered at night to perform evil ceremonies in a witches' sabbat.

In Chapter 3, which provides a detailed discussion of the demonic witch, we shall see these ideas becoming elaborated. Witches flew to the sabbat, and the ceremonies included horrific rites: witches had promiscuous sex with the Devil and with one another, they danced naked, and they killed and ate babies and children. Some of these ideas were ancient and stereotypical fantasies of what an evil group would do, much older than the idea of demonic witchcraft. The essence of the demonic witch did not lie in these acts, though; the basic crime was that she or he had promised their soul to the Devil, in a contract known as the 'demonic pact'. The crime of the demonic witch, then, was a thought-crime – the crime of *being* a witch.

The village witch was also an evil figure, but on a smaller scale. Peasants were concerned about their health, their families and their farms, and they feared magical interference with these. Peasants had to work closely with their neighbours, bartering and sharing goods and tools, and this sometimes led to disputes and rivalries. When a peasant suffered a misfortune that was hard to explain, they sometimes feared that a witch had caused it, and they tended to ask themselves whether there was anyone who might have a grudge against them. We shall see in Chapter 4 that village witchcraft was not about threats to society as a whole, nor even (with rare exceptions) about threats to the village as a whole. It was about personal, individual malice. Peasants were likely to ascribe a misfortune to witchcraft if they had quarrelled with a neighbour and believed that the neighbour was out for revenge. They would be particularly likely to do so if the neighbour fitted one of the stereotype images of the witch, with the most common stereotype by far being the quarrelsome older woman – something that we shall examine in Chapter 9. The crime of the village witch, then, consisted in carrying out specific harmful acts – the crime of *performing* witchcraft.

The folkloric witch was a character from stories. These stories were told by villagers, but had their own traditions and their own logic; they did not simply replicate

what was known about village witches. The folkloric witch did not live in the village; her residence, if known, was in a remote region, often a forest. She was always female, unlike the demonic witch or the village witch. She was not necessarily a normal human – she was sometimes related to giants or fairies. She was always maleficent; sometimes her evil deeds resembled those of the village witch (killing and injuring livestock, for instance), but she also committed more fantastic malefices, especially the stealing and eating of children. We shall see in Chapter 5 that stories tended to focus on the witch's remarkable powers, especially of magical travel and flight, and of shape-shifting. There was some mention of witches' sabbats, usually large gatherings in remote locations, but witches in most stories were solitary figures. The main non-solitary witches were the product of folkloric multiplication – there might be three witches in a story, rather in the way that there could be three sons or three princesses. The folkloric witch was not necessarily a criminal, and indeed was not necessarily human, but ideas about her fed into ideas about criminal human witches.

Envisioned witches, also discussed in Chapter 5, were of two related types. First, some people had trance experiences in which they felt themselves carried away to distant lands or to other worlds; sometimes they encountered strange beings there. Although such experiences could be traumatic, they could also be empowering; typically the person would gain powers of healing or prophecy. If the authorities came across such a person, they might think that they had found a witch. Second, more directly envisioned witches arose from another type of visionary experience – a nightmare or other traumatic event when the victim believed that the 'spectre' of the witch had appeared in their room and attacked them. Such 'spectral evidence' would be important in some witchcraft trials. Envisioned witches, then, arose from various intense personal experiences, for which 'witchcraft' provided explanations.

A simple comparative view of the demonic witch and the village witch has the authorities believing in the former, and the common people believing in the latter. This is a useful starting point, but it is too simple for our purposes. The authorities *also* believed in the village witch. As for the villagers, they do not seem to have disagreed with what they were told about demonic witches, though they rarely thought demonic witches important. Their idea of the Devil was less frightening, and they were hardly ever interested in conspiracies of multiple witches. Villagers' testimony against witches almost always stressed acts of magical harm by individuals. The demonic witch, by contrast, was rarely thought to act alone, but was usually a member of a group. How much effort the authorities put into identifying the other members of the group might vary, but worship of the Devil was definitely a collective affair.

The demonic witch of the elite and the maleficent witch of the village could be seen as mirroring the two parts of the Ten Commandments, known at the time as the 'two tables'. The first table (the first three or four commandments) consisted of crimes

against God, notably worshipping other gods. The second table consisted of crimes against one's neighbour, such as theft, murder or adultery. Broadly speaking, the demonic witch broke the first part of these commandments, while the village witch broke the second part. The elite tended to be concerned with crimes against God; peasants were concerned mainly with harm to society. The elite's concern for society tended to be more symbolic and less practical than the peasants' everyday worries. The peasants' concern about malefice was firmly grounded in real, practical misfortune and tragedy. Sometimes their cattle or children really did die, and it is not surprising that they sometimes blamed witches. By contrast, although the elite imagined that witches were killing unbaptised babies and eating them, these babies never existed at all. The elite did have reasons for their beliefs, but – as we might expect for educated people – these reasons were more complicated. The horrific rites of the witches' sabbat were a symbolic inversion of positive human values: not just bad acts, but the imagined *opposite* of good acts.

In the demonic witchcraft of the elite, witches had no power of their own. They appeared to do extraordinary things, such as causing illness and death, bringing hailstorms, sinking ships, or flying; but it was not actually the witches themselves that performed these acts, it was invisible demons acting on their behalf. Demonologists usually explained that the Devil deceived witches into thinking that they themselves performed the actions. A few suggested or implied that the demons were obliged to carry out the witch's wishes, which made witches seem more fearsome (though this idea was arguably unorthodox). All elite thinkers, however, agreed that the power of witchcraft originated with demons.

In village witchcraft, villagers usually assumed that witches did have inherent power. Witness statements by witches' neighbours rarely discussed this, probably because they took it for granted. Sometimes they said that witches' power was taught to them. Another common idea was that the witch inherited her or his power; typically a daughter was said to have got her witchcraft from her mother. These two ideas combined when a mother was said to have taught her daughter. At any rate, once acquired, the power was always something that the witches themselves possessed. When witches were thought to issue curses or cast secret spells, their victims did not usually think that the power came from any other source than the witch.

This should be qualified, however, because some villagers, when cursing their neighbours, *did* invoke the power of others. Typically their curse was a kind of prayer, publicly calling down the wrath of God on their enemy. They might also invoke the Devil, perhaps asking him to take their enemy away. These curses are not entirely distinct from the idea of the witch's inherent power, because certain people's curses were thought to be more effective (just as certain people's prayers were more often answered). However, people who cursed their neighbours probably did not think that

this made them 'witches', even if they thought that the curses took effect.

The power of envisioned witches usually came from outside. People who had visions of fairies or ghosts, and who used these fairies or ghosts in folk healing or fortune-telling, may well have thought that the power came from the fairies or the ghosts. Some people who encountered spirits in trance-voyages thought that they themselves had the power to initiate such voyages. But probably most trance-voyagers were *taken* by their spirit-guide; some, indeed, had no choice about whether they went or not. On the whole, power here rested with the other-world beings – fairies, ghosts or even demons. In this sense, folkloric witchcraft was closer to demonology than village witchcraft was. Indeed, aspects of folkloric witchcraft fed into demonology. When interrogators were told by a witchcraft suspect that they had visited fairyland, the interrogators would tend to assume that the fairies were really demons, and they could use this to enhance their understanding of demons.

Perhaps for this reason, there was no actual conflict between demonic witchcraft and village witchcraft. If an educated priest or pastor explained to the villagers that the power really came from the Devil and his demons, peasants seem to have had no objection to this view. For their own part, educated people seem to have tolerated the beliefs of the uneducated – they simply assumed that they knew better.

Globally, most traditional societies have believed in figures similar to the village witch. The folkloric witch and the envisioned witch, too, are widespread. The demonic witch, however, was unique to early modern Europe. Because demonic witchcraft was collective, this gave the European witch-hunt a uniquely destructive character: witches could readily be multiplied. Although numerous witches were prosecuted as isolated individuals, there were also many panics in which groups of witches were prosecuted. These panics arose largely from elite fears of demonic conspiracy. However, they often involved one of the other types of witch as well. Typically, an individual village witch was identified and arrested, and was interrogated about her or his accomplices. Especially if torture was used, this process could generate names of further witches who could be accused of making a pact with the Devil, attending witches' sabbats, or both. The procedure of the criminal courts will be described in Chapter 7, while the dynamics of witchcraft panics will be explored in Chapter 8. Finally, a global perspective on the European witch-hunt will be outlined in Chapter 11.

Identifying witches

Witches were an enemy within; they were thought to keep themselves secret. Both the authorities and the common folk were aware of other dangerous groups of people, such as Jews or lepers, who were segregated from the community and were feared as

perhaps wanting to conspire against it. But Jews and lepers were publicly known to be such. Witches were not publicly known; they could be anyone.

Today we can see that the 'witches' of early modern times were largely imaginary. Except in cases of mental illness, hardly any villager thought that she or he was a 'witch' until they were called that by someone else. However, early modern folk could have what seemed to be good reasons for deciding that someone else was a 'witch'. This could be because of the person's known magical activities – they could have been folk healers or diviners, for instance. Magical practitioners like this were not usually thought of as witches – more often, they helped identify other people as witches; but, if magical practitioners were perceived to have misused their powers to harm people instead of helping them, they could be accused of witchcraft. To villagers, witchcraft was essentially harmful.

The most common way in which villagers came to see someone as a witch was through neighbourhood quarrels that were followed by misfortune. If someone suffered a misfortune that they could not explain through natural causes, they might begin to suspect that the misfortune was the result of a witch's curse. This would lead them to ask themselves: Who might be cursing me? Who have I quarrelled with recently? Who might have a grievance against me? They might consult a magical practitioner at this point, who could guide them to confirm their suspicions. Early modern villages were full of neighbourhood rivalries, and it was easy to think that one's rival was using witchcraft in revenge. This was particularly so because many quarrels involved threats and curses. The misfortune could be interpreted as the curse taking effect. This will be discussed in Chapter 4.

Once a suspected witch was arrested, the authorities' witchcraft beliefs would start to operate. These included a number of ideas that were distinct from popular belief – in particular the idea that a 'witch' was someone who had made a pact with the Devil. Related to this was the idea that witches were collectively worshipping the Devil and carrying out secret rituals – the idea of the witches' sabbat. The authorities often obtained details of this by questioning the suspect, sometimes through leading questions under torture. Witch-hunting thus began in the village, but the major panics, claiming multiple victims, spiralled outwards through the demonic ideas of the elite. Illustration 1.1 is an unusual portrait of an individual Sicilian witch, Felipa la Calabria; it is unusual because most pictures of witches are stereotyped images rather than portraits of real human beings. Illustration 1.2 shows a group of witches being executed during a panic in Baden, Germany. There is further discussion of witchcraft imagery in various chapters below, particularly Chapter 9.

Illustration 1.1 Felipa la Calabria, a Sicilian witch, 1624
This is a rare portrait of an individual witch. Felipa la Calabria, in Sicily, was convicted of witchcraft by the Spanish Inquisition (Sicily was part of the Spanish dominions) and made to do public penance in an *auto da fe*, ceremony of penance, in Palermo on 19 May 1624. The artist Anthony van Dyck was present, and sketched her carrying a candle and wearing a cap illustrating her crime.

The Inquisition, which exercised jurisdiction over Spanish and Italian witchcraft, usually treated it as a penitential matter; there were very few executions. The Inquisition's fearsome popular reputation for witch-hunting is undeserved.

Illustration 1.2 Three witches burned at Baden, 1574
Most witchcraft executions were by burning. Usually the witch was tied to an upright stake in the centre of the pyre, but here, in Baden, Germany, three witches have been tied to a wooden frame which is being lowered onto the pyre. Note the crowd of spectators; witch-hunting was a popular spectacle, and crowds often attended executions.

The idea of the sabbat – essentially an idea about groups of witches – led to another way in which someone could be identified as a witch: by being named by another confessing witch. If the interrogators thought of witchcraft as a conspiracy, they might well ask witchcraft suspects about their accomplices. When they met the Devil at

the sabbat, who else did they see there? Some suspects tried to evade this demand for further names, but others, perhaps with their reluctance having been broken down by torture, were willing to co-operate. They tended to name people who they thought were likely to be witches, often those who fitted one of the stereotypes of what witches were like – older women, for instance.

Interrogation under torture could be a point at which someone might come to believe that they themselves were a witch. The experience of torture might lead them to believe that God had abandoned them. They normally owed their lives to God who watched over them; surely, therefore, the only reason God would allow them to suffer so terribly must be because they deserved it for their sins. This could lead on to the idea that they must indeed be guilty of the sin of witchcraft. However, some of those accused and convicted of witchcraft resisted all efforts at labelling them, and went to their deaths insisting on their innocence – sometimes with moving dignity.

In general, then, the European witch-hunt involved people accusing other people. Hardly any of those who were executed for witchcraft thought that they were witches before they were accused. People hardly ever admitted to demonological witchcraft except under torture, and sometimes not even then. Village witches, too, were usually identified by their neighbours. People might well think to themselves, 'I have the power to curse my neighbours', but the term 'witch' had such negative connotations that they did not identify with it. If you were a 'witch', you were simply evil – and very few people believe that about themselves. As for folkloric witches, many were not real human beings, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Those who *were* human were all self-identified to the extent that they knew about their relationship with the other world. But, even more than people who cursed their neighbours, the people who visited fairyland or flew out at night did not think that this was 'witchcraft'. Sadly, though, when such a person was arrested and questioned about 'witchcraft', the story they told could well lead the interrogators to believe that they had identified a witch.

Words for witches

The concept of a witch is hard to pin down, and this is reflected in the complex inter-relationships of the words that were used for it. In English, for instance, the word 'witch' comes from the early medieval Old English words '*wicca*' (masculine) and '*wicce*' (feminine), pronounced 'witch-a' and 'witch-eh'. Both meant a witch, and derived from the verb '*wiccian*', to practise harmful magic or divination. (The idea that '*wicca*' meant 'wise one' is erroneous.) In English we also have the terms 'conjuror', 'diviner', 'enchanter/enchantress', 'magician', 'necromancer', 'sorcerer/sorceress', 'warlock' and 'wizard', not to

mention the less familiar 'hag', 'sibyl' and 'pythoness'. Each European language had its own range of such terms.

Some terms implied that the person must be bad, while others could be used for a person who was either bad or good in different circumstances. In English, a 'witch' was always bad; a 'magician' could be bad or good. Similiar distinctions could be drawn in other languages, such as French ('*sorcier/sorcière*' bad, '*magicien/magicienne*' ambivalent) and German ('*Hex/Hexe*' bad, '*Zauberer/Zauberinnen*' ambivalent).

Today we tend to think of a 'witch' as female, and to use other words for men, such as 'warlock'. But, in the early modern period, a 'witch' could be either male or female. That is the way in which the term is used in this book. However, English was unusual in not being a gendered language. Gendered languages, in which all nouns have a gender, operated differently, though the end result was similar. As in the French and German examples above, they tended to have two separate terms for a witch, one masculine and one feminine, showing that they did not think that a witch *had* to be female (or male). This allowed speakers and writers to indicate which gender they had in mind, though this was sometimes obscured by the convention of using a masculine term to embrace both males and females in the plural.

Learned concepts were expressed in Latin. The main Latin words for 'witch' were '*malefica*' (feminine) and '*maleficus*' (masculine), both formed from the medieval Latin word for 'witchcraft' – '*maleficium*'. This originally meant a harmful deed of any kind, but by the middle ages specifically meant harm done by magic. The medieval Latin translation of the Bible used the masculine *maleficus* in Exodus 22:18 ('Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live', in the contemporary English translation). The notorious book *Malleus Maleficarum*, 'Hammer of Witches', used both masculine and feminine forms but showed a strong preference for the feminine – beginning with the title. A few scholars were aware of the original Hebrew and Greek terms used in the Bible; the Hebrew word in Exodus 22:18 was '*mekhashshepheh*', the feminine form of a word meaning 'witch' or 'magician' (it is not clear whether the term was always bad or whether it was ambivalent).

Use of Latin can obscure the vernacular terms used by the common folk. By the early modern period, most court records were kept in the vernacular, but these records may still obscure the way in which people actually spoke of witchcraft. An ethnographic study in the 1970s in the Bocage region of France, where some traditional witchcraft beliefs continued, found that people

usually referred to witchcraft indirectly, using euphemisms: 'that filth' or 'the one who did it' for the witch; 'trick' ('*tour de force*') for spells they cast; 'little father' for an unwitcher; 'what he had to do' for the unwitching ritual. Whatever words we use, there can be a sense in which the reality of witchcraft is always just out of reach.

A world of religion and magic

People felt threatened by witchcraft because they believed in magic. The witches' powers were essentially magical. So what do we mean by magic?

People also felt threatened by witchcraft because they believed in religion. It was Christian religion that told people about the Devil, and it was the Bible that said 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Exodus 22:18). So what do we mean by religion?

In defining magic and religion, one question to ask is: Were they the same thing, or different? The religious authorities in early modern Europe would certainly have said that magic was different. At best, they thought, magic was superstitious: at worst, it was demonic. More recent scholars have often been more struck by how much overlap there was between religion and magic. This is because 'magic' has shifted its definition. In Europe, it has usually been defined by disapproving elites. In early modern times, it was mainly defined as *not-religion*, since religious knowledge was considered the highest and most correct form of knowledge. In modern times, however, the dominant form of knowledge is scientific, and 'magic' is mainly defined as *not-science*. Because modern religion can also be seen as not-science, it can appear to be quite similar to magic.

So what do we, today, mean by magic in the early modern period? A modern working definition of early modern magic could run as follows:

> Magic was a set of traditional beliefs and ritual practices that helped people to understand the unusual forces in the world, and to achieve practical ends by seeking to manipulate those forces.

Magic was thus overwhelmingly practical. People cast spells or carried amulets for material reasons. Magic relied primarily on tradition rather than on what we would call science; people believed that it worked, not because its operations could be demonstrated empirically, but because people whom they respected had said that it worked. It was ancient wisdom. In societies where most knowledge is handed down and where ancestors are respected, this is the most powerful way in which any knowledge is validated.

The word 'magic' was originally a pejorative term for practices of which the writer disapproved. It comes from the Latin word '*magia*' (itself deriving from Greek). Early medieval European vernacular languages had no word for it – not because early

medieval Europeans did not practise it, but because the common folk did not disapprove of it. Churchmen used the term '*magia*' to condemn popular practices, sometimes seeing them as pagan. The word 'superstition' (Latin *superstitio*) meant something similar: unnecessary (and thus false) Christian belief or practice. There is more on superstition later in this chapter. By the late medieval period, the authorities were well aware that the common folk tended to merge the concepts of 'religion' and 'magic'. Then, in the sixteenth century, the Reformation and Counter-Reformation sharpened the official hostility to magic, and defined a wider range of practices as magical (as we shall see in Chapter 6). The witchhunt can be seen as a small but dramatic part of a broader official attempt to stamp out popular 'magical' practices in order to promote correct religion.

This brings us back to the question of what we mean by religion. A modern working definition of early modern religion could run as follows:

> Religion was a system of belief in God, and of organised, public rituals, run by a professional staff, designed to propitiate God. This operated for the spiritual and material benefit of believers, and provided believers with an altruistic code of conduct by which they should behave towards other humans.

On this was based an organisation (a church, with a hierarchy and financial resources), a set of collective and individual 'religious' actions (rituals to worship God), and a code of behaviour in society. Organised religion is a product of human culture; different cultures have different religions, and religions change as culture changes. But religion is always organised, and in our period it was very much a public, group affair. Individuals may have been more 'religious' or less 'religious' by the standards of their church, but they had to belong to a church, and their affiliation to that church was part of the public identity that they carried around with them. In modern Western society, by contrast, religion has become a largely private affair and churches have become voluntary associations. Whether you attend a church, or a chess club, is nobody's business but your own.

The differences between early modern magic and religion were thus numerous and complex. Religion offered a universal interpretation of the world. Priests could discuss and explain any natural phenomenon, or any human behaviour, in religious terms. Magic was limited to individual cases, and did not seek to explain the human condition as a whole. Religion was organised, with churches, staff, property, and formal powers over people's lives. Magic, by contrast, was essentially private. It is impossible to imagine a church of magic. Magical practitioners were not organised, and, if they sought to persuade people to believe in magic, this was a matter of attracting business to themselves rather than of attracting converts to the cause. Here again we see magic as seeking immediate, practical benefits.

Religion offered a system of morality, with precepts and rules for how people

should treat others. We cannot say that religion was straightforwardly 'good' – outrages and crimes were committed in its name, including (we may well think today) witch-hunting itself; but we can say that it *sought* 'good', trying to show people how they should treat others well. Magic, by contrast, was largely about gaining benefits for oneself – a natural thing for people to want, but morally neutral rather than 'good'. Where early modern religion overlapped with magic, it was in this area: people used religion, in the form of legitimate prayers or other rituals, to gain benefits for themselves.

Some scholars have drawn a different distinction between religion and magic. They have argued that magic is a mechanical process, which is held by its practitioners to work automatically once the correct rituals are performed. The equivalent procedures in religion are uncertain because they rely on petitioning divine forces – God may grant your prayer, or he may not. This is largely correct on early modern religion (though not entirely – the miracle of transubstantiation in the Catholic Mass, when bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ, *was* held to work automatically). However, it is incorrect on early modern magic. When people performed a magical ritual, they *hoped* that it would work, just as they *hoped* that a prayer or other religious ritual would work. They knew, from sad experience, that magic frequently failed. Nor is it correct to say that magic did not use petitioning; plenty of magical rituals petitioned spirits, saints or even God.

Magic today, as we have seen, is usually defined as not-science rather than as not-religion. Educated people today do not usually believe in magic, usually because they think that it is unscientific. The handful of educated believers in magic are usually respectful of science, and try to argue that magic is compatible with it. As a traditional belief system, however, magic is largely incompatible with modern science, which relies on observation and experiment and has no place for tradition. New knowledge constantly supersedes the old. But science was different in early modern times, because it was subordinate to religion – at least until the Scientific Revolution of the seventeenth century, which will be discussed in Chapter 10.

The sharpest distinction between early modern religion and magic, then, is that religion was organised while magic was not. Religion had to be organised, because it was about ideology and morality. Religious authorities needed power, to deal out rewards for correct behaviour and punishments for incorrect behaviour. The power of magic was wielded over things more than over people; magicians did not need to preach or to win converts. Early modern magic occasionally sought to coerce people, as with love magic, in which spells were cast to attract the love of a desired partner. But this did not operate through ideological or political power. Science, too, is, and was then, about power over things, not people; it does not preach. Religion requires a church, but there is no church of magic, and no church of science.

Why, though, were the religious authorities so hostile to magic? Paradoxically, it was because of the area in which magic had most similarities to religion. Let us recall that in our working definitions of magic and religion, both could offer material benefits – and sometimes in strikingly similar ways. Churchmen objected to magic because it was a rival.

This rivalry intensified in the late middle ages. The late medieval church offered a large repertoire of material benefits, such as rituals to bless growing crops, in ways that looked very similar to magic. So they had to police the boundaries carefully, upholding authorised 'religious' rituals but criticising or suppressing unauthorised 'magical' ones. A debate on how best to do this was already running in the late medieval church, but accelerated in the sixteenth century. Part of the movement we know as the Reformation – though this aspect of it occurred in both Protestant and Catholic countries – was an attempt to purge official religion of magical practices that had come to seem illegitimate. The result was a dramatic growth in official disapproval of magic. This was connected with a growth in disapproval of witches, since witches were imagined as practising magic. We shall see in Chapter 6 that the Reformation gave the authorities more power to supervise and control the lives of the common people. Unlike late-medieval churchmen, they had more opportunities to put their hostility to magic into practice.

Witchcraft and 'superstitious magic'

As well as the serious crime of witchcraft which is the main subject of this book, the authorities perceived various other magical beliefs and practices around it. They perceived a serious problem of people engaging in 'witchcraft', and, around it, a milder but more widespread problem of people engaging in 'superstition'. Witchcraft, they thought, was a particularly serious variety of 'superstition', or 'superstitious magic'.

'Superstition' is a difficult and much misunderstood term. Today, when people talk of a 'superstition', they usually mean a belief or ritual that they regard as irrational – a belief in lucky or unlucky numbers, for instance. The point to note is that 'superstition' is not an objective word to describe a given belief; it is a pejorative term used by one person to criticise a second person's ignorant beliefs. People rarely apply the term to themselves; someone who believes in a lucky number is likely to say, 'I'm not superstitious, but I do have a lucky number'. It tends to be the beliefs of the uneducated that are called superstitious by the educated; studying mathematics leads to a better way of understanding numbers. We can wish that people were better educated, but, if we are trying to explain people's beliefs, we should do so using neutral rather than pejorative language. I have read many students' essays saying that early modern European beliefs were 'superstitious'; that tells me that the student doesn't

share those beliefs, but it doesn't help me, or the student, to understand the beliefs. As historians, we don't have to share the beliefs of the people we study, but we should try to understand why people's beliefs made sense to them. Calling these beliefs 'superstitious' is thus misguided.

In early modern times, the term 'superstition' was similar, in that it was pejorative. However, there were some important differences. The term was used by the educated to describe popular beliefs or rituals of which they disapproved. These could be pre-Christian survivals, or medieval practices that had been superseded by the Protestant Reformation or by parallel movements of Catholic reform. Sometimes these were seen as harmless or silly, like modern superstitions; but not always. The word 'superstition', as we have seen, literally meant an unnecessary extra belief. Such a belief was essentially *false*. Instead of being false and silly, early modern superstitions could be false and dangerous. False beliefs about Christianity could even be heresy – a serious crime.

The term 'superstition' operated similarly to the term 'witchcraft' in that it was normally applied to other people's behaviour. We can see today that witchcraft was imaginary, while magic was real; nobody practised 'witchcraft', but people did really carry out magical rituals, mainly with benevolent intent. But nobody called themselves 'superstitious'. In this book I will use the term 'superstitious magic', like the term 'witchcraft', to describe what one person at the time thought about another person at the time. I am not saying that anyone *really was* superstitious, nor am I saying that anyone *really was* a witch. The term 'superstitious magic' is thus shorthand for 'beliefs and practices that someone at the time (probably a member of the elite) thought to be superstitious magic'.

The actual practice of superstitious magic was common, and indeed normal, in pre-industrial society. Its patterns of belief and practice thus validated belief in serious witchcraft. The fact that many people practised benign or harmless magic made it easier to believe that some people might practise harmful magic. And occasionally the line between superstitious magic and witchcraft was crossed. Superstitious magic was reinterpreted as something more serious, or was simply prosecuted more intensely in its own right. Practitioners of benevolent magic might then find themselves in trouble as witches.

Some contemporary thinkers were keen to blur the distinction between superstitious magic and witchcraft. Jacob van Hoogstraten, in Cologne, Germany, in 1510, wrote a treatise on the seriousness of consulting magical practitioners: 'Magicians [*magi*]' – by which he meant magical practitioners – 'are generally referred to as witches [*malefici*] on account of the extent of their misdeeds'. Johannes Geiler, preaching on witchcraft in Strasbourg, Alsace, in 1509, demanded punishment for '*beneficia*' – good deeds done by magic. William Perkins, writing in England in the

1590s, even declared that 'death therefore is the just and deserved portion of the good witch'. Perkins was extreme. Most writers who called benevolent practices 'witchcraft' were using an emotive term to highlight the offences and argue that they should be taken more seriously.

Overall, the dividing line between superstitious magic and witchcraft remained intact. Moralising polemicists might call magical practices 'witchcraft', but the courts did not normally prosecute the practitioners as witches. The elite did not see superstitious magic as being seriously demonic; if they saw the Devil as behind it, that was only because the Devil was behind all human sin in some way. Practitioners of superstitious magic were not thought to make a demonic pact. As for villagers, they simply saw superstitious magic as helpful, not maleficent, and probably did not use the word 'witchcraft' for it at all.

What of the practitioners of magic themselves? We should not call them superstitious, but what should we call them? Surprisingly, there is no universally-recognised term for such people in modern English; in this book I call them 'magical practitioners'. The term 'white witches' is sometimes found, but it was not a common contemporary term, and it also suggests false parallels between 'witches' and magical practitioners. Another possible term is 'folk healers', since much of their business concerned healing; but they also provided other services, such as fortune-telling, or finding lost or stolen goods. Some magical 'charms' were uncomplicated rituals that anyone could perform; others were more powerful, and restricted to professionals with special gifts. Magical practitioners were often called 'cunning folk' in England, and some historians have adopted this term, but it is cumbersome, lacking both a verbal form and a gender-neutral singular form. Hence my preference for 'magical practitioners'. There is more about magical practitioners in Chapter 4.

Ideas about superstitious magic also featured in the folkloric imagination. Many folktales and ballads involved magic; some of these 'fairy-tales' are still told today. In early modern times they were not primarily children's stories; the magic in them, and the magical beings in them, were real. A particular story about fairies or trolls might be fiction, but there was no sense that fairies or trolls were anything but real. The all-pervasive character of early modern magical beliefs is striking; no wonder that people believed in witches.

Elite and popular beliefs

The social structure of early modern Europe was complex, with people's social position being defined not just by class but also by status, gender, education and other things. For many purposes, however, this can be simplified. Belief in witches can be divided, broadly, into 'elite' and 'popular' beliefs – though the difference between the two was

not absolute.

Beliefs of the 'elite' were heavily influenced by intellectuals – those with access to the latest ideas, usually with a university or equivalent education. In the late middle ages these were mostly churchmen, and intellectual knowledge (outside specialised areas like medicine and law) was mainly deployed for religious purposes. With the Renaissance, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, learning broadened its social scope and purpose. More laymen became literate, and by the seventeenth century most leading intellectuals were laymen. Religious concerns continued, but the increasing willingness of intellectuals to approach knowledge of the world in non-theological ways would contribute to the decline of witchcraft belief, as we shall see in Chapter 10. Whether churchmen or laymen, therefore, one can discuss 'intellectuals' as those who created and disseminated the most sophisticated knowledge.

The 'elite', however, was a broader group than the intellectuals: it included the political rulers themselves and social groups attached to them. Rulers included not just kings and great nobles but also local landlords, who often 'ruled' their tenants directly using their own seigneurial courts. Political rulers did not have to receive an academic education themselves; it was almost unheard of for kings to attend a university. Instead, rulers hired whatever talent they required. They employed painters and sculptors to decorate their *châteaux*, poets to sing their praises, churchmen to pray for them, and lawyers to maintain their property rights. Works of political theory were mostly written to uphold the power of these same rulers. (Similarly, modern rulers' power may be underpinned by computers and the media, but rulers themselves are not usually computer programmers or journalists.) So the political 'elite' shared a common culture with the intellectuals: the intellectuals created the culture, but the rulers commissioned it and benefited from it.

The term 'elite' can also be defined in terms of who it leaves out. The main exclusion is ordinary working people, who had little or no formal education. Women are harder to classify than men, because the system was created by and for men. Wives and daughters of elite men usually received little more than a decorative education in such things as music and needlework. Unlike the common people, however, they moved in elite circles and shared in benefits brought by membership of the elite. Ultimately, therefore, the term 'popular beliefs' means the beliefs of the common people – those who worked for a living, and were often not far from the margins of subsistence.

These two systems of belief were distinct, but not wholly separate. There were two reasons for them to connect. One was that some important people were on the boundary between the two. Parish priests, for instance, were often poorly educated and shared most of the culture of the common people, although in the course of the early modern period they were increasingly expected to distance themselves from their parishioners and to adopt elite values. Another connection between elite and popular

belief was simply that *all* members of the elite shared much of the culture of the people, simply adding their own specialised interests to this. They participated in popular festivities, at least in the early part of our period, and listened to folktales. They believed that the common folk were 'superstitious', and to that extent they held themselves aloof, but one can find nobles and propertied folk employing magical practitioners in ways that university-educated intellectuals would themselves have disapproved of. The concepts of 'elite' and 'popular' belief, though essential, denote the ends of a spectrum rather than two wholly separate belief systems.

Understanding 'witch-hunting'

What do we mean by a witch-*hunt*? The term has become conventional in witchcraft scholarship in the English language. There is one curious exception: in studying England itself, a generation of scholars has assiduously avoided it, and the prosecution of English witches tends to be called 'witchcraft prosecution', or even (misleadingly) 'witchcraft'. It is true that 'witchhunting' was not a contemporary term in English, but the contemporary term 'witch-finding' meant the same thing: the discovery and prosecution of hidden witches. Today, we can speak of a European 'witch-hunt' because the authorities did not just prosecute witches who were somehow already known; they searched them out. Indeed, unwittingly, they *created* witches in the process of searching them out.

It could be argued that prosecution of individual witches, already identified by their neighbours before the courts became involved, was not 'witch*hunting*'. Well, perhaps. But we should think about how the neighbours identified a witch. Witches were believed to be ordinary people, or at least to look and behave like ordinary people; they did not identify themselves publicly. They were secret enemies. In that sense, finding a witch was indeed a process of hunting for a witch.

What alternative terms might historians use instead of 'witch-hunt'? 'Witch craze' was common at one time, but tends to imply some kind of psychological derangement, and has fallen out of favour. 'Witch hysteria' suffers from a similar problem. 'Witch panic' is useful, and we shall see in Chapter 8 that the sociological concept of a 'panic' is a useful tool for explaining episodes of serial prosecution. The term 'Burning Times' was fashionable among the neo-pagan movement in the late twentieth century, but has declined with the recognition that the witches of the early modern period were not pagans; this will be discussed in Chapter 11. That chapter will also discuss some of the modern meanings of the term 'witch-hunt' – terms that sometimes carry more connotations of irrationality than would be justified for the prosecution of early modern witches. Finally, one possible term is the undramatic 'witchcraft prosecution'; this is often useful, but ultimately fails to capture the sense in

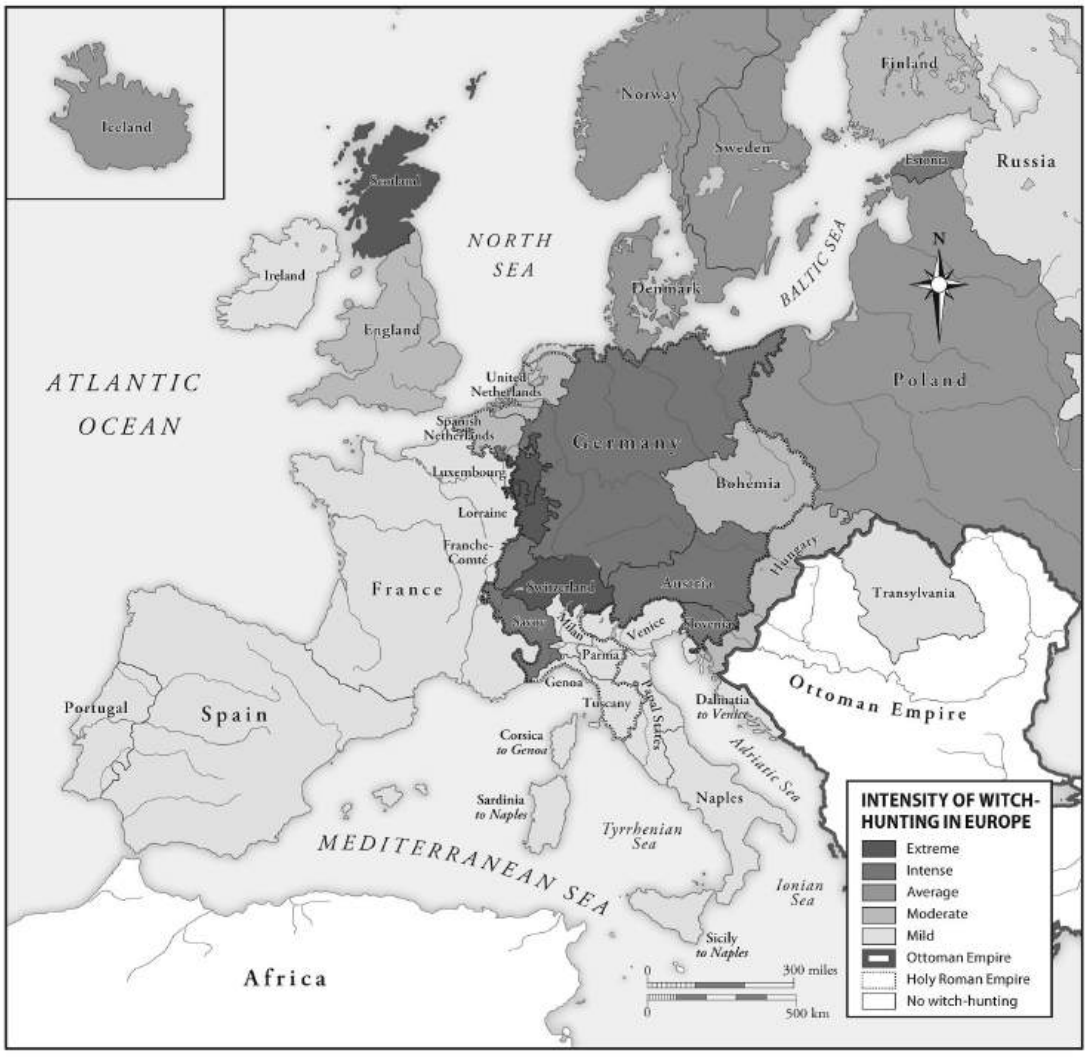
which, even for contemporaries, witchcraft was not just another crime to deal with. It was a dramatic, shocking and controversial business.

It is sometimes argued that the witch-hunt was not a singular thing because it happened only in some places and not others. However, this is false. Carried to its logical conclusion, it would imply that witch-hunting could only have been a single thing if it had occurred in every town, every village and every street. There certainly were individual 'witch-hunts' (plural) in the sense of definable episodes of prosecution, each typically involving a single court and a single group of interlinked suspects. But, when we find similar episodes of prosecution scattered widely across Europe, we are entitled to conclude that there was an overarching pattern. Although each individual episode had its own uniqueness, it also shared common features with other episodes, and we can analyse them collectively as having been caused by broad developments that were important throughout Europe.

Moreover, people at the time thought that witchcraft was a single phenomenon, and that efforts to eradicate witchcraft should be made all over Europe. Many works of demonology were written in Latin, the common language of European intellectuals, and these same works were read in the same way all over Europe. This differentiates witch-hunting from some other common phenomena of early modern Europe, such as peasant revolts. Historians can discuss the common features of peasant revolts in different places and times, but nobody at the time thought that there was just one peasant revolt. With the witch-hunt, they did. This will be discussed further in Chapter 11.

The scale of the European witch-hunt

How many witches were executed? This question has always attracted historians' interest. Past estimates were often wildly exaggerated, with a figure of nine million being widely circulated for much of the twentieth century. In the last thirty years or so, the most common estimates have come down from about 100,000 to about 40,000, before rising again to a current consensus of about 50,000 executions. In order to understand the witchhunt fully, we should remember that beyond these 50,000 there were many more people imprisoned or formally accused but for whom there was some other outcome – sometimes acquittal, or a non-capital sentence like banishment. Some cases ended in escape, or death or suicide in prison, or the case being dropped for some reason. These cases would probably add at least another 50,000 people who were labelled in some official way as 'witches'. Those who had witchcraft reputations in their community but who were never brought to trial are unquantifiable at present, but for some purposes we would also want to include such people in any count of early modern 'witches'.



Map Intensity of witch-hunting in Europe

A figure of 50,000 executions means little on its own. How did it relate to the population at the time? Some outline statistics can help to answer this question. Significant numbers of witches were executed from about 1400 to about 1750, 350 years altogether, so that is about 143 executions per year on average. Let us take the population of Christian Europe (excluding the Ottoman Empire, where no witches were executed) as about 100 million – a figure that would be roughly correct for 1600. From these figures the death rate from witchcraft executions can be established as 0.00143 executions per year per 1,000 of population. The death rate from all causes was about 40 deaths per year per 1,000 of population, so we can conclude that one in every 28,000 deaths in early modern Europe was caused by execution for witchcraft. This is in

the same range as the death rate from air accidents today, which in Britain amounts to one in every 16,500 deaths. Air accidents are a rare, if newsworthy, cause of death; motor vehicle accidents are over 70 times more common (one in every 230 deaths). Witchcraft executions, similarly, were rare but newsworthy.

The crude figure of one in every 28,000 deaths is an average, concealing wide variations in time and space. As for variations in time, quite possibly half the executions were concentrated in the most intense half-century, from about 1580 to about 1630. On that basis, for most of the period 1400–1750 Europe's witchcraft death rate was one in every 48,000 deaths; but, for the period 1580–1630, witchcraft executions accounted for one in every 8,000 deaths – six times more intense.

There were also variations in intensity of prosecution in different places in Europe. The map, 'Intensity of Witch-Hunting in Europe', shows the scale of witchcraft executions, per head of population, in different European states and regions. There are five categories, from 'Mild' to 'Extreme'. The political boundaries of Europe are shown as they stood in about 1600. 'Germany' is shown as a single unit, although it was politically fragmented; the fragmentations are too complex to represent, and there are no readily- available statistics for witch-hunting in each small princely state. As it is, 'Germany' as a whole comes into the 'Intense' category; if the region could have been broken down, quite a few German states would have been added to the map's 'Extreme' category, while others would have moved to a lower classification. Ideally one would want to show regional variations in the other large states too, such as France and Spain. 'Spain' was another politically-divided state, although under one king. Spanish witch-hunting occurred almost entirely in the northern parts. The data are recorded state by state, and so have to be presented using contemporary political boundaries. This has some historical validity, since states had distinct laws and judicial practices, but any suggestion that prosecutions were determined entirely by states would be misleading. An ideal map would plot each individual execution at its exact location, showing a precise regional distribution. The data on which the map is based are

The most striking pattern shown in the map is the concentration of witch-hunting in west-central Europe. About two-thirds of the executions were concentrated in the German-speaking lands ('Germany', Austria, and part of Luxembourg and Switzerland), with only one-fifth of the population. However, language itself does not seem to have been crucial. Frenchspeaking Lorraine, adjacent to this region, was also one of the 'Extreme' witch-hunting states, with Franche-Comté and Savoy not far behind. Within Germany itself, the most intense prosecutions occurred in the west and south, a region adjacent to Lorraine, Franche-Comté and Switzerland. This area around the river Rhine can be seen as a single west-central heartland of European witch-hunting.

Beyond this west-central heartland, patterns varied. Much of northern Europe

saw considerable witch-hunting, with Scotland one of the few 'Extreme' states. By contrast, the kingdom of France saw only 'Mild' witchhunting (at least per head of population – France was heavily populated), as did Spain and the Italian states. It is often said that English witch-hunting was unusually mild, which is not entirely wrong, but the statistics place it in the 'Moderate' category, with more witches than France per head of population. The Ottoman Empire extended far into south-eastern Europe, populated by Christians but ruled by Muslim sultans. The Ottomans did not allow any witch-hunting. Finally, not shown on the map, there were transatlantic colonies, particularly those of Spain, Portugal and England; there was some witch-hunting in the English colonies. It is sometimes suggested that smaller states prosecuted witches more intensely; this possibly misleading idea, along with other geographical patterns, will be discussed in Chapter 6. Broader patterns of witch-hunting, including the influence of different social and political groups within the state, will be discussed in Chapter 8.

Conclusion: Causes of witch-hunting

At the heart of this book, then, are the 50,000 or so people who were executed for witchcraft in early modern Europe. The book's central question is: why were these people executed? In answering this question, we shall have to spend a good deal of time investigating witchcraft beliefs, since it was obviously essential for Europeans to believe in witches in order to hunt them. But it was possible to believe in witches without hunting them, so we shall have to distinguish between beliefs and hunts. Witch beliefs were arguably an essential precondition for witch-hunting, rather than a determining cause.

This should be evident from chronology. The common people can be shown to have believed in witches, in some form, for most of European history, from the early middle ages until the nineteenth century or even the twentieth. Witch-hunting, however, was specific to a much shorter period, beginning gradually in the years after 1400, reaching a climax in the halfcentury 1580–1630, and then slowly fading away, ceasing everywhere by about 1750. What changed – first to cause prosecutions to rise, and then to cause them to decline?

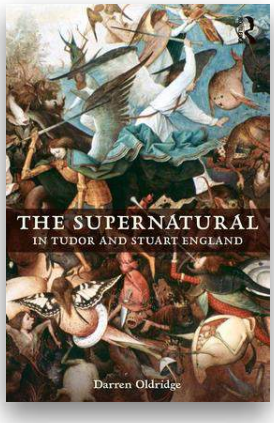
Another way of looking at this is to consider geography rather than chronology. Geographically, the idea of the village witch has been much more widely spread than the idea of the demonic witch. Most traditional societies, all over the world, have believed in the idea of humans who can secretly wreak magical harm. The folkloric witch, too, is a global figure. The demonic witch, by contrast, was tied into a great deal of elite knowledge that was specific to one place – Europe – and one time – the early modern period. Beyond that, it does not feature. This book, then, is a study of that one

place, and one time, when witch-hunting was intense and dramatic.

But, in order to make sense of this, we need first to turn to the medieval roots of European witch-belief and even witch-hunting. That will be the subject of the next chapter.

Ghosts and Goblins

2. Ghosts and Goblins



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"Doubtful spirits"

Among the surviving papers of the astrological physician Richard Napier is a series of notes, written around 1635, which summarise the cases that he dealt with over his long career. The author grouped them by the afflictions of the patients concerned. The first category was for those "haunted by spirits". There were entries for almost every year between 1601 and 1619, and a smattering of cases from the 1620s and early 1630s. Brief notes were appended to some of the dates: on 12 October 1602, "a house haunted at Beckley in Suffolk", and on 17 December 1608, a person "haunted with fairies". Beneath this list was a small group of cases entitled "Apparitions", and a few pages later there was a much larger set headed "Figures of Witchcraft", including a note on one patient "stricken with some ill spirit". The catalogue of afflictions indicates the extent of occult incursions in the lives of men and women in the early decades of the seventeenth century. The spirits that vexed Napier's patients were, it appears, a recurrent and disruptive presence in the early modern period.

For those who took a more theological view of these things, the nature of these creatures was a matter of some interest and concern. The various "bugs" of traditional culture – including the spirits and fairies that troubled Napier's clients – were not easily accommodated within a biblical cosmos: to borrow a phrase from the godly minister Richard Baxter, they were "doubtful spirits". Predictably, Protestant thinkers tended to explain such creatures as part of the larger artifice of the Church of Rome. According to the Elizabethan Bishop of Lincoln, Thomas Cooper, the various agents of Antichrist had "bewitched the world, now these many years, by spirits, ghosts, goblins, and many vain apparitions". An editorial note attached to Edmund Spenser's *Shepheardes Calendar* (1579) reminded readers of the provenance of the fairies and elves that populated some of its pages: they were originally invented by "bald friars and knavish shavelings . . . that sought to [coddle] the common people in ignorance".

This allegation, though common, was no less fanciful than Spenser's poem. Ghosts and goblins were not invented by medieval churchmen; nor did they play a particularly important part in English religion before the Reformation. Rather, they appear to have belonged to an assembly of pagan and semi-Christian spirits that mingled among the saints and angels of the medieval church. In some cases, these were contained quite successfully within the framework of orthodoxy: apparitions of the dead, for example, could be explained as souls freed briefly from purgatory. Fairies, elves and goblins, and the various "startlebugs" of traditional culture were occasionally classified as demons; but more often they seem to have hovered undisturbed at the margins of official religion, just as they lived in the woods, hills and marshes beyond human habitation.

This chapter considers the fate of these beings in the reformation of spirits. The first section is devoted to ghosts, as the returning dead were the subject of particular controversies in Tudor and Stuart England, and retained a lively presence in the period's popular literature. The second section examines the more amorphous collection of spirits that some contemporary writers described as "bugs". These included the overlapping categories of fairies, hobgoblins and imps, alongside more exotic but elusive creatures like "the man in the oak". None of these entities had a secure berth in scripture, and consequently all were effectively abolished by the Protestant authorities. The fact that they fill a whole section of this book testifies to their remarkable and complicated persistence.

Ghosts

Reports of ghosts, wrote Thomas Cranmer in 1547, were fantastical tales conceived to deceive adults and frighten children. They "ought to be taken as old wives' fables [and] the words of liars". The reason was simple and pithily expressed in a marginal note to the archbishop's text: "for souls departed the body cannot walk here on earth". This conclusion arose from the Protestant repudiation of the doctrine of purgatory and from the adoption of a radically simplified model of the afterlife. For medieval churchmen, purgatory provided a temporary residence for human souls pending the last judgement; and in this interim state, the spirits of the dead were occasionally permitted to return to earth. In contrast, the reformers envisioned permanent barriers between the saved and the damned and the living and the dead. Enlarging on a passage from the Wisdom of Solomon, Cranmer asserted that "the souls of the righteous are in the hand of God, and the souls of sinners are straight after their death carried away. . . . The soul therefore, after it be departed from the body, cannot wander here amongst us." This remained the position of the Church of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the memorable words of Peter Marshall, ghosts became "illegal immigrants across a border that was supposed to remain sealed and impermeable until the end of time".

Unlike the saints, or "holy dead", the ghosts of ordinary people had played a relatively small role in medieval Christianity. Appearances of the humble dead were, nonetheless, acknowledged by the English church before the Reformation and occasionally featured in exemplary tales that affirmed the existence of purgatory and the power of sacraments to relieve the suffering of its inhabitants. In one affecting narrative from the late fourteenth century, the spirit of a woman returned to her lover to request the celebration of masses for her soul. The man cut some hair from her head, which in death had turned from golden to black; and as the masses were performed, he saw that each hair recovered its original hue. Tudor Protestants were keen to mock such tales. Preaching at Hampton Court in 1578, William James denounced a cluster of

illusions that had sustained the Roman church: these included "the insufferable pains of purgatory", and myths "of walking spirits [and] of ugly and fearful ghosts". In a similar vein, the Archbishop of York, Edwin Sandys, dismissed in 1585 the Catholic belief that the spirits of the dead could instruct the living. Rather, these "pale and grisly witnesses" were props of the pope's deceitful kingdom. This point was reiterated often in the seventeenth century. The Shropshire minister Robert Horne was expressing a commonplace in 1619 when he remarked that the Roman church was "kept going by necromancies and . . . apparitions of the dead, all damnable and fabulous".

The allegation that the English recusant community actively sustained ghost beliefs was a considerable exaggeration. English Catholic writers were generally circumspect on the subject, not least because they did not wish to lend credence to their enemies' claim that they nurtured superstition. Most of the defences of the concept of purgatory published in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not mention the returning dead at all; nor did Catholic ghost stories place particular emphasis on the doctrine or the practice of prayer for the dead. In 1565 the future cardinal William Allen referred somewhat cautiously to ghosts in his *Defense and Declaration of the Catholike Churches Doctrine Touching Purgatory*. Allen observed that the spirits of the dead could sometimes return to earth, and he cited the example of Moses' appearance at the transfiguration of Christ. While asserting the reality of such manifestations, however, he noted that they were "rare and marvellous works of God" and was keen to distinguish them from the "fantasies" of superstitious men and women.

For Allen's Protestant contemporaries, of course, even these qualifications were unacceptable, as they believed that human souls were consigned irreversibly to another state after death. This doctrine did not, however, rule out all the activities of the "disorderly dead". In theory at least, some Protestants acknowledged that corpses could be possessed by demons. This proposition was less contentious than the claim that spirits could return from purgatory: indeed, it did not touch on the fate of human souls at all. In his treatise on witchcraft in 1597, the future King James made this point explicitly: he noted that demons could occupy cadavers because such unpleasant manipulations did not involve their departed souls. Evil spirits could animate the dead flesh of both the saved and the damned, and use corpses to enter the homes of the living. The Norwich physician Sir Thomas Browne echoed this view in 1645: he rejected the possibility that the souls of the dead could appear on earth, but he accepted that evil spirits could animate corpses in order to copulate with witches.

This caveat did not, in practice, soften the Protestant prohibition on the returning dead. Occasionally, reports of revived cadavers appeared in England. As part of his pastoral advice to a gentleman who had seen a spirit in his bedchamber, the Jacobean minister Daniel Featley described a case from France in which the Devil possessed the corpse of a hanged woman in order to seduce a man at night: the man

awoke to find the lifeless body beside him, with the imprint of the noose around its neck. The majority of English churchmen were sceptical that Satan could exercise this power, however. It also appears that the people of Tudor and Stuart England were seldom troubled by roaming corpses, although such creatures had been described in some late medieval chronicles. A pamphlet in 1659 reported that a dead sailor rose from his grave on the shore to demand reburial further inland; but this unruly spirit – or possessed cadaver – was apparently put to rest when its former shipmates acceded to its request.

While such literal appearances of the dead were rare, it appears that reports of ghosts persisted in the early modern period. This fact was acknowledged in the preface to the English translation of the standard Protestant text on the subject, Ludwig Lavater's *Of Ghostes and Spirites Walking by Nyght* (1572): this observed that "there be many, even nowadays, which are haunted and troubled by spirits", and hoped that Lavater's text would offer them comfort and guidance. The persistence of such experiences was recorded in pamphlets throughout the seventeenth century, as well as in a small number of personal testimonies that historians have studied in depth. The spectres in these accounts were apparitions rather than revived bodies, and they frequently retained the character of known individuals; they were also associated closely with people and places they have known in life. According to the Cambridge philosopher Henry More in 1659, reports of such spirits were "numerous and frequent in all men's mouths".

The persistence of spectral apparitions, alongside historical accounts of the phenomenon, obliged English Protestants to provide alternative explanations for sightings of ghosts. Predictably, many medieval reports were attributed to the lies of Rome, occasionally supplemented by priests dressing in sheets to spook their unwary parishioners. Various natural explanations were deployed to explain contemporary encounters with spirits of the dead. Since hauntings were frequently reported at night, the effects of poor and shadowy lighting were often cited; deficient eyesight was another possible cause. These factors were especially potent when combined with a fearful imagination. When "fear and weakness of the sight . . . meet together", Lavater noted, "then men fall into strange and marvellous imaginations, believing things utterly false to be very true". Black humours could also produce hallucinations. In 1621 Robert Burton identified ghosts among the "thousand ugly shapes" that fantasy presented to the melancholic mind.

Such this-worldly explanations did not, of course, exhaust the resources available to Tudor and Stuart thinkers. The existence of angels and demons meant that these spirits could masquerade as ghosts. Lavater left open the possibility that angels sometimes appeared in the guise of the dead; but the deception involved made it more likely that evil spirits were responsible. English writers strongly favoured this

interpretation. Cranmer admitted that people sometimes heard the souls of the dead apparently calling out to them; but he warned that "these words proceed out of the fraud and deceit of the Devil". In one of the fullest treatments of the subject in Elizabethan England, the London preacher Henry Smith expanded this argument. Just as Satan appeared as an angel of light, he "can change himself into the likeness of a man much more". He spread fear and falsehood among unwary Christians by assuming the shape of the dead. This was, Smith observed, one of the most perilous counterfeits of the enemy, which he practiced "to draw us from the word of God, to visions and dreams and apparitions, upon which many of the doctrines of the papists are grounded".

These theoretical positions were applied to the ghostly experiences of real men and women. In 1583 Henry Howard, the Earl of Northampton, described the apparent manifestation of a gentleman's ghost to his surviving daughters. He noted, however, that this was a cruel deception by Satan, who "lurking under the names and titles of the dead . . . may set snares for the living". In the early seventeenth century the Cornish gentleman Sir Thomas Wise sought the advice of the minister Daniel Featley on apparitions in his household, including the spectral figure of a woman that appeared at his bedside. Featley determined that the spirit was a demon, and he advised Wise to scrutinise his conscience for any sin that might have caused the Lord to permit the creature to disturb him. Satanic deception remained the orthodox explanation for sightings of the dead throughout the 1600s, when such phenomena could not be otherwise ascribed to sensory illusions, melancholy, or popish impostures.

But this was not the end of matters. Despite the consensus of Protestant opinion, reports of the returning dead did not conform neatly to theological expectations. In part, this was because the idea that ghosts were either delusions or satanic tricks was unconvincing to many of those who encountered spirits at first hand. The bereaved daughters described by Henry Howard were, apparently, convinced that they had experienced visions of their father; and Sir Thomas Wise was initially unsure whether he had seen an angel or a devil. In two exceptionally well-documented hauntings from 1636 and 1650, those who witnessed the apparitions treated them not as demons but as the spirits of the dead. Whatever the official position of the English church, it seems that belief in some kind of contact between the living and the dead was tenacious in these cases. It may well be, as Peter Marshall has suggested, that reformed teaching on ghosts "was simply too cruelly counter-intuitive ever fully to take root in the popular consciousness".

The doctrine of divine providence was sufficiently elastic to contain the various tensions between reformed theology and traditional ghost beliefs. Since God bent the activities of evil spirits to suit His will – despite their malevolent intentions – it was possible to accommodate many long-established beliefs about apparitions within an orthodox framework. In practice, this allowed folkloric tropes concerning the returning

dead to persist: the Lord permitted demons-as-ghosts to behave in the ways that such spirits were expected to. The association between ghosts and graveyards is a good example. If visions of the dead were actually demons, there was no compelling theological reason why they should haunt cemeteries. Indeed, Thomas Cranmer had dismissed the idea that spirits were attached to the physical remains of the dead. The connection between ghosts and graveyards proved enduring, however. Preaching at York in 1594, John King remarked that "the common people deem that the spirits and ghosts of the dead walk at their graves and relics, and are most conversant in churchyards". In the middle years of the seventeenth century, Henry More took the fact that spirits congregated in graveyards as one of the starting points for his discussion of ghosts. By the same period, many orthodox writers on the subject had come to accept that both ghosts and evil spirits in general were common frequenters of graves.

The pull of traditional expectations shaped many of the other attributes of early modern English ghosts. Typically, they appeared as the shades of men and women who had died in unusual circumstances, often leaving unfinished business on earth. Many were the victims of crime, apparently bent on retribution: in the words of the poet George Chapman in 1594, "ghosts whom vengeance holds from rest". Such spirits often assisted the cause of human justice by exposing the perpetrators of murder or fraud. Alternatively, they offered guidance or warnings to those who had known them in life. These roles were so familiar that in 1659 Henry More used them to question the supposedly demonic nature of ghosts: why, he asked, were such creatures employed to serve apparently benevolent purposes? The orthodox answer, of course, was the unsearchable wisdom of providence. Nonetheless, there was no strong reason in theology why evil spirits masquerading as ghosts should behave in this way: it appears that they did so because these roles were traditionally associated with the spirits of the dead.

The persistence of these tropes was illustrated in reports of ghosts during the violent upheavals of the mid-seventeenth century. During the Irish rising in November 1641, Catholic rebels killed approximately one hundred Protestant settlers on a bridge over the river Bann in Portadown. In his *Generall Martyrologie* (1651), the godly English minister Samuel Clarke described the supernatural sequel to this massacre:

> These bloody persecutors themselves confessed that the ghosts of diverse of the Protestants which they had drowned at Portadown bridge were daily and nightly seen to walk upon the river, sometimes singing of psalms, sometimes brandishing naked swords, sometimes screeching in a most hideous and fearful manner; so that many of the popish Irish which dwelt near thereabouts, being affrighted herewith, were forced to remove their habitations further off into the country.

What exactly were these doleful apparitions? Clarke could not have understood them

to be the souls of the dead, as these had passed irreversibly to their place of judgement. To interpret them as demons was hardly helpful to his purpose – though this was not inconsistent with divine providence. It was conceivable that they were angels disguised as slaughtered Christians. This was, perhaps, appropriate to the image of psalm-singing martyrs; but it jarred with the spirits' "hideous and fearful" screams. Two things are clear from Clarke's account of the haunting at Portadown: the ghosts were pursuing their traditional role of calling for vengeance against the guilty, and the minister was prepared to relate their appearance without dwelling on the theological questions that it raised.

A similar ambiguity marked reports of the most spectacular apparition of the English civil wars: the appearance in January 1643 of ghostly armies above the battlefield at Edge Hill. According to one of the two pamphlets that described the event, the inhabitants of Kineton were troubled by doleful sounds in the night: the "groans of dying men were heard crying revenge, and some again to ease them of their pain by friendly killing them". These cries were joined by the din of trumpets and drums, "as if an enemy had entered in their town to put them to a sudden execution and plunder all their estates". Through their windows, some people saw troops of horsemen clashing outside, before departing into the air. On the following evening, a group assembled to watch for the spirits. They witnessed the return of the spectral armies, which again joined battle amid a cacophony of drums and gunshot. Then at daybreak they "in the twinkling of an eye did vanish".

Like the apparitions at Portadown, the true nature of these spirits was uncertain. The pamphlets printed in January 1643 related them unambiguously to the battle at Edge Hill: they even named Sir Edmund Verney, the king's standard-bearer who had died in the field, among the spectral troops. The visions at Kineton were also framed as providential judgements on the slaughter: they expressed divine indignation at the sin and horror of civil war. But were the phantom soldiers demons or ghosts? The author of *The New Yeares Wonder* (1642) implied both possibilities. It was the purpose of the apparitions, he wrote, "to terrify the living with dead souls". He also observed that, after the haunting, the people of Kineton had searched for unburied bodies on the battle site, presumably in order to lay their spirits to rest. In a brief epilogue to the pamphlet, however, the incorporeal armies were described as "fiends". The second account of the wonder was less equivocal. It began with a discussion of the prevalence of evil spirits and the Devil's capacity to "condense the air into any shape he pleases". The character of the spectres themselves was not in doubt: despite their appearance as men, they were "infernal soldiers" and "hellish and prodigious enemies".

Some later accounts of ghosts preserved their role as instruments of providence but blurred the question of their origin. This meant, in effect, that spectres resumed their traditional roles as avengers of wrongs and dispensers of otherworldly advice –

though they did so as agents of the Lord. A deposition to an Essex magistrate in 1650 preserved a glimpse of this outlook. When a servant was haunted by the vengeful ghost of her former mistress, and appealed to the woman's son for help, she received a brutally providential reply: "this is a just judgement of God upon you, for if she walks she walks to you and to nobody else". Occasionally, it even seemed that the divine hand released spirits from the grave to punish wrongdoers. According to the author of a pamphlet in 1690, God was so determined to pursue those guilty of homicide "that when witnesses are wanting of the fact, the very ghost of the murdered parties cannot rest quiet in their graves till they have made the detection themselves". More often, reports of apparitions simply abstained from metaphysical speculations. A pamphlet in 1679 described an apparition as an "airy form" in the shape of a dead man, but made no comment on its provenance; many others presented apparent appearances of the dead without any gloss at all.

There was no doubt, however, about the heavenly purpose behind spectral interventions. Indeed, true-life ghost stories were framed most often as special providences. In 1677 a man in Devon awoke to discover the ghost of a gentleman at his bedside. Some thirty years earlier, the spirit explained, he had been robbed and killed in the same house; now he asked his host to report the information to a magistrate. The man was understandably hesitant. But a few days later the spirit returned to renew its demand, and promised that "God will raise up witnesses" to support the claim. This proved to be true, though the case remained unresolved at the time of the story's publication. A grisly tale from Lincolnshire in 1679 produced a more definite outcome. A man hired a gang of thieves to murder his brother to obtain his share of their father's estate. Subsequently, a bloody apparition was seen on the land around his house; and the spectre eventually appeared to his brother, with "fresh bleeding wounds" from his fatal assault. Overcome with fear, the man resorted to magic to lay the ghost: he employed a conjurer to summon the spirit and drive it away. This operation succeeded in part: "the image of the murdered youth appeared on horse-back just as he was slain", and it told the magician he could not depart until his killer came to justice. This led his brother to confess. By this awful providence, the pamphlet concluded, "we may see and admire the power and justice of an almighty God, who alone is dreadful and to be feared".

The motifs of these stories suggest conventional expectations of ghostly manifestations. They happened most frequently at night, and especially at midnight. The people of Kineton assembled to see the spectral armies at this hour; and the Lincolnshire conjurer awaited the apparition in "midnight silence". The spirits of the dead were almost invariably attached to particular places, most often the sites of their physical remains, but also the habitations of those they had known in life. In their appearance too, ghosts retained traces of their earthly existence. Often they wore the

winding sheets that had wrapped their bodies in the grave; or they dressed in a manner familiar from their lives. Even though he had never met the spirit that visited his bedside in Devon in 1677, the man took him for a gentleman because of his embroidered clothes. In a deposition to York assizes in 1690, a man explained that he recognised the ghost of his sister-in-law by the petticoat and white hood that she had habitually worn.

Accounts of early modern ghosts also reveal something of the sensory experience of those who encountered them – though here the evidence is mixed. Some references to spirits stressed their apparently insubstantial nature. In 1594 Robert Holland noted this quality in his verses on the resurrection of Christ, which contrasted the flesh of the risen saviour to the flimsy stuff of apparitions. This allowed Jesus to prove to the disciples at Emmaus that he was not merely a ghost:

> And that no feigned shape he had,
> As ghosts or spirits have, To ease their fear, and make them glad,
> His hands and feet he gave
> That they should handle them and see
> That he had flesh and bone:
> And not as spirits wont to be,
> For they have neither none.

The immaterial appearance of spirits was implied in other sources. According to a pamphlet in 1598, the survivors of a fire in Devon were so emaciated that they seemed "more like spirits and ghosts than living creatures". The propensity of spectres to emerge at night also, perhaps, indicates their insubstantial qualities. It was a commonplace that the shadowy effects created by moonlight were sometimes mistaken for ghosts.

These unearthly attributes were balanced, however, by the physicality that was sometimes ascribed to apparitions. Indeed, they were occasionally mistaken for mortals. In 1662 a couple from Yorkshire took the ghost of a young woman to be "some wandering person that might have come for lodging". Spectres also communicated in direct speech, unlike the interior voices associated with demonic temptation or prayer. The most consistent sign of their otherworldly nature was their capacity to vanish. In some cases, it seems, this was the only indication that apparitions were not what they appeared to be. In 1690 a man saw the figure of a woman walking ahead of him as he went to fill a bucket from a pond; then she sat down on a small hill and he continued on his way. As he returned with the water he observed that she was still there; but as "soon as he had emptied his pail, he went into his yard and stood still to find whether he could see her again, but she had vanished". Occasionally, witnesses described the process by which such spirits departed. Bedside apparitions could fade gradually into air, like the spectre that visited Sir Thomas Wise in the early 1600s. More dramatically,

the young woman initially mistaken for a wayfarer in 1662 vanished by "gliding away without any motion of steps".

These motifs reveal the expectations that were conventionally attached to visions of the dead, and to this extent they suggest something of the experience of those that beheld them. Beyond this, it is difficult to speculate on the meaning of apparitions to individuals. The emotion most frequently associated with ghosts was fear. While the appearance of the dead could bring comfort to the recently bereaved, it was more common for such manifestations to produce anxiety and tribulation. This reflected, perhaps, the association between ghosts and social disruptions of various kinds: shocking or untimely deaths, fractured human relationships, and business left undone on earth. It is tempting to read the spectacular haunting that followed the battle of Edge Hill as a response to the traumas of civil war – though such interpretations are inevitably speculative. In this context, it is suggestive that Major George Wither reached for the metaphor of haunting to describe the psychological aftershock of the conflicts of the 1640s:

> What ghosts are they that haunt
> The chambers of my breast!
> And, when I sleep, or comfort want,
> Will give my heart no rest?
> Me thinks the sound of groans
> Are ever in mine ear:
> Deep graves, deaths heads, and charnel bones
> Before me still appear.
> And when asleep I fall,
> In hope to find some ease,
> My dreams, to me, are worst of all,
> And fright me more than these.

Some scholars have sought the meaning of individual hauntings in the exploitation and betrayal that characterised some "disordered households". According to Laura Gowing, the apparition of Priscilla Beauty that in 1650 tormented her former servant, Susan Lay, manifested Lay's guilty and frustrated feelings towards her mistress: she had borne an illegitimate child by Priscilla's husband and entertained hopes of becoming his wife upon her death. For Gowing, Lay's vision "dramatised the intimate ties, fears and conflicts between servant and mistress, lover and wife".

Ultimately, all interpretations of this kind risk the imposition of modern assumptions on the people of the past. Neither the residents of Kineton in 1643 nor Susan Lay in 1650 believed they had witnessed projections of their traumatised minds: they thought they had seen ghosts. As Brad Gregory has noted of historical reconstructions of the supernatural in general, the need to find naturalistic

explanations, including psychological interpretations, belongs to modern commentators rather than those that originally witnessed the phenomena. Nonetheless, the association that contemporaries made between ghosts and social dislocation reveals something of the experience of haunting in the early modern period: unlike the angels that they in some ways resembled, ghosts were frequently accompanied by anxiety and dread. It was for this reason that walking spirits were often named alongside the "bugs, goblins, fiery sights, and diverse terrible . . . shapes of things" that resided in the shadows of Tudor and Stuart England and which provide the subject of the next section.

The reformation of the bugs

In 1584 the English demonologist Reginald Scot presented a marvellous catalogue of monsters that, he claimed, populated the tales that maidservants told to young children. These included witches, fairies and imps, as well as an array of exotic and extraordinary terrestrial spirits: "the man in the oak, the hellwain, the firedrake, the puckle, Tom Thumb, Hobgoblin, Tom Tumbler, [and] Boneless". Scot also named the will-o'-the-wisp spirit "Kit with the Candlestick", the lascivious incubus demon, and "the mare", a creature that paralyzed and smothered sleepers in their beds. These terrors, he suggested, made such an impression on young minds that they lurked in the recesses of adult consciousness. They could make men tremble to walk at night, when spirits might appear as animals or be heard in the shrieks of owls.

Scot's catalogue of "bugs" cannot be taken at face value. For a start, he included creatures from classical mythology that seem improbable visitors to English villages. He also borrowed the incubus demon from continental texts that featured prominently in his critique of contemporary demonology. As Timothy Scott McGinnis has argued, Scot was primarily interested in entering a learned debate with other writers on witchcraft rather than addressing directly the religious ideas of ordinary people. Nor did he see himself as an archivist of the folk beliefs of his community. Nonetheless, his compendium of monsters should be taken seriously for two reasons. First, the bugs he identified were not merely rhetorical, though he undoubtedly added some names to fatten the list. Creatures like the mare and the puckle were recorded in other contemporary texts, and appear to be authentic inhabitants of the popular world of spirits. The activities of fairies, hobgoblins and imps, as well as roaming spirits such as Kit with the Candlestick, were also well attested in the sixteenth century. Thus Scot presents an interesting overview of the bogeys of the late Tudor imagination, though one that cannot be accepted uncritically.

Secondly, the fate of Scot's bugs indicates the wider effects of the Reformation. Scot presented his assembly of monsters as part of the larger argument of his book:

that the fear of witchcraft was a delusion encouraged by Catholicism, and its remedy was the preaching of the unsullied Word of God. The presence of bugs in people's imagination was a marker of the success or failure of this project. Scot was generally optimistic that fear of such creatures had declined. In the preface to the *Discoverie*, he noted baldly that the hobgoblin Robin Goodfellow "ceaseth now to be much feared", and he hoped that one day most people would regard the fear of witches as equally foolish. Elsewhere he was less sanguine. He began his account of "how people have been brought to fear bugs" by stating that the causes have been only "partly reformed by the preaching of the gospel". Some groundless anxieties about goblins and walking spirits remained, and he hoped that "those illusions will in short time (by God's grace) be detected and vanish away".

So what became of Scot's bugs? In broad terms, English Protestants discouraged belief in these creatures, but there was no campaign to abolish or reclassify them. Unlike the cult of saints, they had not played a central role in medieval Christianity; and unlike ghosts, they were not associated with the discredited doctrine of purgatory. Consequently, their expulsion from the supernatural world was a low priority for English churchmen. Official responses to the reported activity of these spirits emerged on an *ad hoc* basis, and depended largely on the attributes of the entities themselves and the circumstances in which they manifested themselves. As a consequence, many of the bugs of folklore survived at the margins of acceptable belief, only occasionally

The fate of the bugs is illustrated by the various spirits in Scot's list that can be classed as "fairies". As well as fairies themselves, these included will-o'-the-wisps, hobgoblins and elves. These creatures appear only passingly in the written sources of the period: they belonged to an oral culture that could not, by its nature, be preserved in detail for future historians. The surviving records suggest considerable fluidity between various fairy forms. This was shown in the cluster of creatures known as "puckles" or "pucks". In one persistent tradition, pucks were believed to be spirits that led travellers astray at night, also known as will-o'-the-wisps or jack-o'-lanterns. The hobgoblin Robin Goodfellow was usually included among them: he appeared in this role in William Tyndale's commentary on the first epistle of St John in 1531, and in tales circulating in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. But Robin also entered houses to steal cream, like a domestic fairy. In the 1590s he provided the basis for Shakespeare's mischievous spirit named Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In another context, "puckrils" were identified as malicious spirits in allegations of witchcraft.

Despite these overlapping identities, several broad characteristics were ascribed to English fairies. They lived at the margins of human habitation, usually on hilltops or in marshes and woods; they could interact with mortals, and possessed the power to heal sickness and locate hidden things; and they could enter homes to steal food or receive gifts from their inhabitants. They appeared in various forms, often as

adult humans but also as animals or "walking fires". This reflected the pleasure they took in deception: in colloquial language, "fairy gold" was an illusion, and "fairy trappings" were decorations that tricked the eye. In their deeds fairies were unpredictable. They could help men and women, especially in domestic work, and took small gifts in return. But they also punished those to whom they took offence, particularly slovenly housekeepers. They could attack or torment unfortunate mortals, leaving them "fairy pinched" or "haunted with fairies". As will-o'-the-wisps, they guided the unwary into remote and treacherous places or abandoned them in bogs.

Numerous sources suggest a continued and lively interest in fairies throughout the early modern period. Indeed, Ronald Hutton has suggested that "fairy mythology was probably more prominent in British culture between 1560 and 1640 than at any time before or since". For a start, there was a demand for medicines for the various afflictions that fairies were believed to cause. In his herbal *The Garden of Health* (1597), William Langham recommended bay oil soaked in a linen cloth as a treatment for fairy pinches, and advised parents to hang peony seeds around their children's necks to prevent "the haunting of fairies and goblins". Charms derived from the devotions of the medieval church – sometimes retaining a markedly unreformed character – were also used to cure children tormented by fairies. Richard Napier treated a patient troubled by the creatures in 1608. More positively, Diane Purkiss has noted the strong association between fairies and buried treasure. This led both scholarly magicians and village cunning folk to solicit their aid in uncovering riches; and it also created openings for fraud. In the early 1590s the scandalous career of Judith Phillips, who gulled and robbed a succession of people by claiming that the fairy queen could lead them to hidden gold, illustrated the allure of such arrangements. Sightings of fairies of various kinds continued throughout the period and were preserved in the collections of proto-folklorists such as John Aubrey in the late seventeenth century. Aubrey himself recalled that as a schoolboy in 1634 he searched for fairies on the Wiltshire downs, after hearing that his curate had been enchanted and pinched by a troop of the dancing spirits.

How did the Reformation affect these beliefs? In many cases, it seems, they were left quietly alone. Unless they attracted the attention of religious or legal authorities, there was little need to explain or reclassify the spirits concerned. The belief in will-o'-the-wisps provides a good example. As "false lights" that led the unwary from the true path, these creatures were comparable to the Devil; and this likeness was often exploited in literature. In *Paradise Lost* (1667), John Milton compared Satan to "a wandering fire" that "misleads th'amazed night wanderer from his way / to bogs and mires". Outside such figurative contexts, however, very little was written on such apparitions. In the English translation of his treatise on spirits in 1572, Ludwig Lavater explained them largely as natural phenomena, though he noted that they might

sometimes be demons. Robert Burton classed them as "walking devils" in 1621. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, will-o'-the-wisps were mentioned as curiosities in compendia of natural history, where they were explained variously as luminous insects or vapours produced by marshy ground.

In the absence of a campaign to discredit their existence, or any official context that required their explanation, will-o'-the-wisps were untouched by the religious reforms of the Tudor and Stuart period. At the same time, the related character of Robin Goodfellow appears to have migrated from popular belief into the pages of jocular fiction. A pamphlet in 1588 noted that Robin was "famous in every old wives' chronicle for his mad merry pranks". Several of these were printed in a jestbook in 1628; and Robin also appeared in a number of comic ballads in the early 1600s. In these texts he was a mischievous but good-hearted spirit, addicted to deception but always willing to "help those that suffered wrong". In this capacity, he assisted two lovers whose union was prevented by a lecherous uncle, and he punished a publican who defrauded his customers; and in a ballad in 1648 he disguised himself as a mare to teach a lesson to horse thieves, whom he rode through filthy "water, earth and mire" when they attempted to steal him. These comic turns appeared to coincide with his decline as a

While some fairy beliefs were ignored by the authorities, or receded into popular entertainment, others provoked more serious concern. This was sporadic, however. Cunning folk were occasionally examined by the courts in connection to magical practices involving fairies. This was the case with the Dorset magician John Walsh, who admitted in 1566 to consulting with fairies to discover the victims of bewitchment. A Leicestershire cunning woman, Joan Willimot, employed a fairy for the same purpose according to a pamphlet published in 1619. The Cornish maidservant Ann Jeffries was examined by clergy and magistrates in 1645 when she claimed to cure the sick through the ministration of fairies. A similar medical scandal was recorded by the demonologist John Webster in *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft* (1677). This involved a magician who cured illnesses with a white powder that he claimed to have acquired from the queen of the fairies, who entertained him in a great hall concealed within a hillside. Webster believed that the powder did, indeed, possess medicinal qualities, but he concluded that the man had obtained it from a travelling chemist

These cases attracted official attention for various reasons. Joan Willimot was questioned in connection with allegations of murder by witchcraft in the neighbouring county of Lincolnshire; these were driven by Francis Manners, the Earl of Rutland, who believed that his sons had been killed by the *maleficium* of Margaret and Phillip Flower. Willimot was apparently drawn into the investigation to testify against Margaret Flower, and mentioned her own dealings with a fairy under examination. Both Ann Jeffries and the healer mentioned by Webster attracted large numbers of patients and freely proclaimed their involvement with fairies. This raised suspicions about the true

nature of the spirits they served. In Jeffries' case, this was compounded by the political message attached to her activities: she was vocally loyal to the king in the civil war, and encouraged people to use the Book of Common Prayer in the years immediately following its suppression by the parliament. In less ostentatious circumstances, it is doubtful that magic involving fairies would have provoked legal interventions: it was far more common for harmful sorcery, rather than magical cures, to provoke allegations to the courts.

The same was true of the operations of scholarly magicians, which sometimes involved fairies. In the second half of the seventeenth century, the antiquarian and amateur sorcerer Elias Ashmole wrote out a series of spells for conjuring and binding these creatures. These texts involved considerable knowledge of the kingdom of fairies, which suggests that Ashmole had immersed himself in practical research: for instance, each spirit had to be conjured by name, and some spells depended on a detailed understanding of the geography of spirits. The recipe for an unguent to be anointed on the eyes required thyme "gathered near the side of a hill where fairies use to be, and the grass of a fairy throne". Ashmole addressed by name the fairies that he sought to bind: these included "Elabigathen", whom he commanded to give "true obedience" in a long and carefully contractual conjuration. He also acknowledged that fairies were employed by other magicians: indeed, he noted that attempts to call and subjugate such spirits would work only if they were "not already bound".

The activities of another class of spirits aroused wider attention and received more frequent scrutiny from churchmen and lawyers. These were the noxious creatures allegedly employed by witches to torment their neighbours. Such bugs appeared in early accounts of English witchcraft in the 1560s and retained a prominent role in allegations throughout the seventeenth century. Their origins and identity are unclear. Those Protestant writers that accepted their existence classed them as "familiar spirits" or demons – though they were careful to point out that their behaviour did not conform to the biblical account of Satan. Villagers fearful of witches' spirits may have understood them as a species of malicious fairy or imp. The Essex minister George Gifford referred to a witch's spirit as a "puckril" in a treatise in 1587. Six years later, a character in his *Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraftes* described an old woman who kept "three or four imps", and noted that "some call them puckrils". In Ben Jonson's unfinished play *The Sad Shepherd*, a familiar spirit is also named "Puck Hairy". The creature reveals its true nature in a soliloquy: it is a demon that both deceives and protects its mistress, and sometimes dances "about the forest . . . like a goblin". The terms "puckril" and "imp" were used rarely in the judicial records of English witchcraft before 1645, but in that year the depositions of several witches apprehended in Suffolk referred to harmful spirits as imps. Whatever they were, it is clear that these creatures had several qualities that set them apart from ordinary fairies: they normally took the

form of small animals, suckled from teats concealed on their owners' bodies, and obeyed their commands. Most pertinently for those that encountered them, they were always malevolent.

These malignant creatures remained a tenacious, if somewhat anomalous, presence throughout the early modern period. Many educated writers followed Scot in dismissing them as figments of the superstitious imagination; others, more cautiously, retained the possibility that demons might masquerade as small animals to prosecute their designs – though this interpretation required some ingenuity. George Gifford viewed the involvement of imps in allegations of harmful sorcery as evidence of popular folly: he mocked the belief "that the Devil lies in a pot of wool, soft and warm, and stirs not but when he is hired and sent". Nonetheless, he acknowledged that evil spirits could assume bodily shapes in order to deceive the unwary. In 1627 Richard Bernard, the godly minister of Batcombe in Somerset, attempted to combine continental demonology with reports of witches' imps. He argued that the teat at which witches suckled their spirits was the Devil's mark, by which he sealed a formal compact with his servants. Such ideas allowed some churchmen to accept the activity of imps within the framework of satanic witchcraft. But they remained problematic. In 1646, for example, the Cambridgeshire minister John Gaule listed testimony concerning imps among the factors that made witch trials an uncertain and dangerous business.

Witches' imps were related to another of Reginald Scot's bugs: the cluster of night terrors known collectively as "the hag" or "the mare". Typically, the victims of this phenomenon experienced a kind of waking dream attended by feelings of dread and sometimes by frightening visions as well; they also suffered paralysis and a sense of suffocating pressure on their chests. Scot himself explained the condition in medical terms, though he noted that others believed it had supernatural origins. Consequently, he observed that its victims sometimes slept with protective charms above their beds. It appears that the mare was sometimes attributed to night-coming fairies. The Robin Goodfellow jestbook in 1628 featured a fairy named Gull that ventured out "when mortals keep their beds" and that delighted in causing nocturnal distress. "Many times", the creature boasts, "I get on men and women, and so lie on their stomachs that I cause . . . great pain, for which they call me by the name of hag, or night mare".

More often, however, attacks of this kind were associated with witchcraft. In these cases the spirits involved did not act independently but at the behest of human associates. In 1579 Richard Galis of Windsor ascribed a series of night terrors to the activity of local witches. The first of these episodes was especially dramatic:

> Suddenly about twelve o' clock in the night a shadow of a huge and mighty black cat appeared in my chamber, which the more as she approached near my bedside, so much the more began my hair to stand upright, my heart to faint, and my pains more and more to increase.

The creature menaced Galis so often that he took to lying awake in prayer with a dagger by his side. Another monstrous cat was described in 1599 in the deposition of Olive Barthram, who was tormented by a witch in the Suffolk village of Stradbroke. This spirit awoke its victim in bed and then "pressed her so sore that she could not speak, [and] at other times he held her hands that she could not stir, and restrained her voice that she could not answer". An anonymous manuscript from the reign of Charles I reiterated the connection between witchcraft and the mare. This described how the victim of a night spirit took magical revenge on his attacker. He rose early in the morning and urinated into a chamber pot, and then he worked a charm over its contents. This caused the witch responsible to visit him and complain of a "grief in her bladder, and that she could not piss".

As Owen Davies has observed, the symptoms of "the mare" are recognised today in the medical condition known as "sleep paralysis disorder". Indeed, some readers of this book will have experienced sensations very similar to those recorded in the early modern period. The physical effects of the syndrome have remained constant across time and cultures, but their interpretation has reflected the assumptions of sufferers and the communities to which they belonged. Even in Tudor and Stuart England, multiple explanations were available. Some shared Scot's belief that the mare was a natural malady, while others viewed it as the work of fairies or witches. When bewitchment was suspected, the attacks were normally attributed to witches' imps; but in some cases these creatures were believed to be wicked angels in disguise. Richard Galis, for example, believed that the thing that attacked him was "the Devil himself in a cat's likeness" – a view consistent with his self-image as a Christian assailed by the satanic enemy. The experience of the mare, therefore, indicates the various interpretative models available to early modern people: it could be perceived as a fairy, a witches' imp, a satanic incursion or a physical illness.

Other creatures in Scot's collection of bugs made fleeting appearances in the records of early modern England. The "man in the oak" may be related to the spirit that lived in a hollow tree in George Gifford's dialogue on witchcraft in 1593. This entity was introduced by the character Daniel, who represented in the text the opinions of an untutored countryman. Daniel bestowed on the creature the role and powers of a witch's imp. It spoke to its mistress from the tree and menaced her neighbours at her command: "when she was offended with any, she went to that tree and sent him to kill their cattle". These claims produced a memorably withering response from Gifford's spokesman in the dialogue. The voice from the tree was either a delusion or a demon; and if the latter was true, it involved a signal diminution of the prince of darkness: "Do you think Satan lodges in a hollow tree? Is he become so idle and lazy? Has he left off to be as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour?" Whatever the provenance of this creature, tree-spirits of this kind do not appear to have featured prominently in later

accounts of English witchcraft.

Another of Scot's monsters, the "firedrake", maintained a presence in the seventeenth century. The firedrake was originally a kind of fire-breathing serpent but could also appear as "a burning fire in the air". In *The Historie of Serpents* (1608), Edward Topsell described a sighting of such a fireball by fishermen on the Cornish coast, reported to him some twelve years earlier. While Topsell regarded the moving flame as a natural phenomenon, it was clearly assigned otherworldly significance by the ship's master:

> There came by them a firedrake, at the sight whereof the old man began to be much troubled and afraid, telling his servants that those sights seldom pretended any good, and therefore prayed God to turn away all evil from them, and withal willed his servants to take up their nets, lest they did all repent it afterward; for he said he had known much evil follow such apparitions.

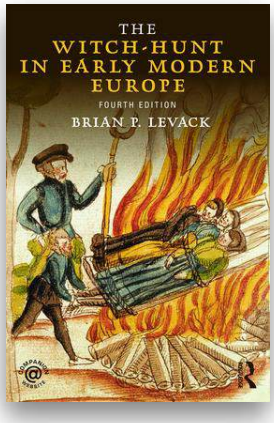
This apprehension proved to be well founded, as shortly afterwards the master was robbed and murdered by his crew. Writing in the 1630s, the pious lawyer William Austin took a more naturalistic view of firedrakes. Like will-o'-the-wisps, he observed, they were mere "exuberances of nature". In his dictionary of 1658, Edward Phillips echoed this scientific interpretation by defining a firedrake as "a fiery meteor, engendered of a hot exhalation inflamed between two clouds".

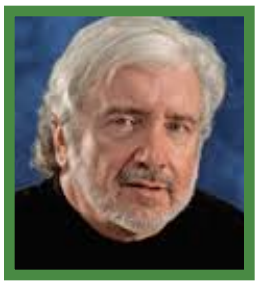
The firedrake, like the other monsters in Scot's compendium, appears to have persisted quietly in the hinterland of early modern belief. In many ways the fate of such creatures resembled that of the grotesque carvings in English parish churches: they were a marginal presence before the Reformation, and remained generally too obscure or unimportant to feel the destructive force of the new orthodoxy. Mostly ignored and unreformed by Protestant authorities – except when they intruded on public affairs in cases of witchcraft – they remained an anomalous but largely uncontroversial presence in English culture. Whether they lost their power to unnerve the unwary visitor to marshlands, forests and remote hills remains an open question. It may be that the goblins, pucks and imps of traditional belief continued to skitter in the dark places, and nightmares, of English communities long into the Age of Reason.

CHAPTER 3

The Chronology and Geography of Witch-hunting

3. The Chronology and Geography of Witch-hunting





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One of the most difficult tasks facing historians of European witchcraft is to account for the variations in the intensity of witch-hunting at different times and places. Why, for example, did more European prosecutions take place between 1560 and 1630 than between 1520 and 1560? And why was witch-hunting so much more intense in Germany than in Spain, or in Scotland than in England? To answer such questions we must pursue two separate lines of enquiry. On the one hand, we must establish the general chronological patterns of witch-hunting throughout Europe, suggesting various reasons for the waxing and waning of prosecutions over the entire period. Then we must survey the history of witchcraft prosecutions in the various states and regions of Europe, an enterprise that will also take into account chronological patterns within those particular areas. Both investigations will provide further illustration of the complexity and the diversity of the general phenomenon.

Chronological patterns

Prior to the 1420s, the concept of witchcraft as a crime involving both harmful magic and Devil-worship was in the process of formation. Therefore, it is problematic to speak of the prosecutions that took place during those years as witchcraft trials. Most such trials before 1420 were prosecutions either for simple *maleficium* or for ritual magic. These early trials can be grouped into three fairly distinct periods, each involving different types of charges against the accused. From 1300 to 1330, most of the 'witches' were ritual magicians who attempted to harm political rivals or to advance their careers. In the second period, from 1330 to 1375, the trial of politically related cases almost ceased, but there were numerous trials for sorcery. Whether these sorcerers were being prosecuted for simple *maleficium* or ritual magic is difficult to determine, but in either case the most noteworthy feature of the trials is the absence of diabolism. During the third period, from 1375 to 1420, the number of prosecutions increased and charges of diabolism became more 184 common, mainly in Italy. This development, which was facilitated by the adoption of inquisitorial procedure in local courts, reflected the gradual assimilation of charges of diabolism to those of *maleficium*.

The first period of witch-hunting, 1420–1520

Beginning around 1420 the history of European witchcraft prosecutions entered a new and distinct phase. Not only did trials for sorcery increase in number but charges of diabolism were more frequently grafted on to them, and witch-hunting began to assume the characteristics it maintained throughout the period of prosecution. During

the 1420s and 1430s the full stereotype of the witch, complete with descriptions of the witches' sabbath, emerged, most notably in trials in the western Alps. For all intents and purposes, these fifteenth-century trials denote the beginning of the European witch-hunt. It was during this period, moreover, that the first witchcraft treatises appeared – most notably Johannes Nider's *Formicarius* [The Anthill, written 1436/7; published 1475], Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum* [The Hammer of Witches, 1486], and Ulrich Molitor's *De lamiis et phitonicis mulieribus* [Concerning Witches and Female Soothsayers, 1489]. The publication of these works, which emphasized the diabolical as well as the magical dimensions of the witch's crime, corresponded to the increase in the number of prosecutions. Some of these early witch-hunts, including a large number of panics in Italian lands, took a heavy toll in human life.

The period of limited prosecutions and small hunts, 1520–1560

At this point the history of European witch-hunting began to follow a somewhat surprising course. Instead of slowly gathering strength and leading into the large panics of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the number of trials levelled off during the early sixteenth century and in certain areas actually declined. The decline did not escape the notice of contemporaries. Martin Luther, writing in 1516, claimed that although there had been many witches and sorcerers in his youth, they were 'not so commonly heard of anymore'. As might be expected, there were some areas where Luther might have heard much more about witches during these years. There were a number of trials in the Basque country between 1507 and 1539; in Catalonia in 1549; in the diocese of Como and in other parts of northern Italy in the 1510s and 1520s; in the northern parts of Languedoc between 1519 and 1530; and in Luxembourg, Namur, Douai and other parts of the Low Countries throughout the first half of the sixteenth century. There also were occasional prosecutions in places like Nuremberg. But it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the early sixteenth century was a period of relative tranquillity as far as witch-hunting was concerned.

The levelling off or reduction in the intensity of witch-hunting during the first half of the sixteenth century was reflected in, and to some extent even caused by, an interruption in the publication of witchcraft treatises and manuals. The *Malleus maleficarum*, for example, while enormously popular between 1486 and 1520 and again between 1580 and 1650, was not reprinted at all between 1521 and 1576. In similar fashion, none of the other fifteenth-century witchcraft treatises found a market during these years. And after the publication of Grillandus's *Tractatus de hereticis et sortilegiis* [Treatise on Heretics and Sorcerers] in 1524 there was very little written in support of witch-hunting until the 1570s. In other words, if the production of witchcraft literature serves as a gauge of the intensity of witch-hunting, there was definitely an early

Europe in the early seventeenth century


FINLAND
(Swedish)
SWEDEN
RUSSIA
ESTONIA
(Danish)
LIVONIA
Moscow
BALTIC SEA
POMERANIA
EAST
PRUSSIA
NBURG
BRANDENBURG
POLAND
SAXONY
SILESIA
Prague
BOHEMIA
BAVARIA
AUSTRIA
Vienna
SALZBURG
KINGDOM OF
HUNGARY
MOLDAVIA
TRANSYLVANIA
KHANATE OF
THE CRIMEA
TURKISH
HUNGARY
WALLACHIA
BLACK SEA
VENICE
SERBIA
TUSCANY
PAPAL
STATES
BULGARIA
DALMATIA
(Venice)
BOSNIA
OTTOMAN
Constantinople
Rome
KINGDOM
OF NAPLES
EMPIRE
Naples
ALBANIA
MOREA
SICILY
CYPRUS
CRETE

sixteenth-century gap, lagging a little behind the actual reduction in the number of trials. Instead of one continuous European witch-hunt, there were really two separate campaigns: an early, geographically limited hunt in the late fifteenth century and a much more intense and widespread series of prosecutions in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries.

The lull in witch-hunting during the early sixteenth century can be attributed both to the development of scepticism among the learned elite and to the preoccupation of both ecclesiastical and secular authorities with the confessional disputes and prosecutions of the Reformation. This period witnessed the spread of Renaissance humanism throughout Europe, and although the humanists failed to undermine the cumulative concept of witchcraft, they did attack parts of it as well as the scholastic mentality that proved receptive to it. For a brief period of time the critiques of witch beliefs and prosecutions that one finds in the writings of men like Erasmus, Andre Alciati, Pietro Pomponazzi and Cornelius Agrippa may have shaken the resolve of various authorities to pursue witches in great numbers. Their insistence that magic could be performed naturally, without the aid of demons, and that witches were harmless creatures victimized by delusion had at least the effect of raising doubts about the practice of the crime. At the same time a belief developed in Germany, especially in the work of the preacher Martin Plantsch of Tübingen, that God was directly responsible for many of the natural disasters like hailstorms that were often attributed to witchcraft. This early sixteenth-century scepticism found its most articulate and forceful expression in the work of the tolerant humanist physician, Johann Weyer, during the 1560s.

The role that the Protestant Reformation played in the early sixteenth century reduction of witchcraft prosecutions is more complex and problematic. There is little doubt that the combined efforts of the Protestant and Catholic reformations did much to encourage witchcraft prosecutions in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. During the early years of the Reformation, however, the confessional disputes between Protestants and Catholics (who considered each other heretics but not the same type of heretics as witches) served to distract European elites from the task of witch-hunting. More specifically, the Protestant rejection of Roman Catholicism naturally led to a desire on the part of reformers to formulate their own theories of witchcraft rather than to rely on the work of fifteenth-century Catholic demonologists and inquisitors. This rejection of Catholic witchcraft theory thus contributed to a decline in the demand for the older, fifteenth-century treatises. Finally and most importantly, the Protestant rejection of the Inquisition, its drastic overhaul of all ecclesiastical jurisdiction, and its transfer of much ecclesiastical jurisdiction from the ecclesiastical to the secular courts involved extensive alterations in the judicial machinery that was used to prosecute witches. Even within Catholic areas the assumption of secular jurisdiction over

witchcraft required both the passage of specific legislation to facilitate it and the acceptance by secular magistrates of the necessity to use it.

The period of intense prosecutions and large hunts, 1560–1630

During the 1560s and 1570s there were many signs that Europe was poised on the threshold of a new outbreak of witch-hunting, one that was much more intense and widespread than the initial assault of the fifteenth century. In the southwestern German town of Wiesensteig some sixty-three witches were executed in 1562, and during the winter of 1562–3 the Parlement of Toulouse heard on appeal about three dozen cases of witchcraft from the diocese of Couserans. A series of trials in the Low Countries offered further evidence that witchcraft was once again on the rise, as did the passage of witchcraft statutes in both England and Scotland in 1563. A number of small panics occurred during the 1570s in the wake of a serious agrarian crisis. The resump tion of the printing of the *Malleus maleficarum*, the appearance of Lambert Daneau's *Dialogue of Witches* in 1574, and the refutations of Weyer's sceptical arguments by Thomas Erastus (1572) and Jean Bodin (1580) also signalled a renewal and an intensification of witch-hunting zeal.

Most European territories experienced the full force of the European witch-hunt between 1580 and 1630. Large-scale prosecutions involving hundreds of victims occurred throughout western and central Europe, most notably in the diocese of Trier in the late 1580s and early 1590s, Scotland in 1590–1 and 1597, Lorraine in the late 1580s and early 1590s, Ellwangen in the 1610s, and Würzburg and Bamberg during the 1620s. Without complete statistics it is difficult to determine which decade between 1580 and 1630 was the time of the most intense witch-hunting. The 1580s were especially bad in Switzerland and the Low Countries; the 1590s in France, the Low Countries, Scotland and in many German territories; the 1600s in the Jura region and in many German states; the 1610s in Spain; and the 1620s and 1630s in Germany.

This period of intense witch-hunting between 1580 and 1630 was related, as both cause and effect, to the proliferation of witchcraft treatises. The well-known works by Peter Binsfeld (1591), Nicolas Remy (1595), King James VI of Scotland (1597), Martín Del Rio (1599), Henri Boguet (1602), Francesco Maria Guazzo (1608) and Pierre de Lancre (1612) were all written during these years, and the power of the rapidly developing printing industry made their works available to an increasingly large literate European population. These witchcraft treatises all used the evidence of late sixteenth-century trials to confirm the reality of witchcraft, deepen elite fears of the crime, and provide guidance for its effective prosecution.

The unprecedented intensification of witch-hunting in the late sixteenth century reflected not only the resolution of learned doubt, but also the impact of both

the Protestant and Catholic reformations. By this time the Bible, with its literal death sentences for witches, was being widely circulated in the vernacular; preachers had heightened people's awareness of the immediacy of Satan; reformers had declared war on magic in all its forms; and the process of Christianization had helped to cultivate the feelings of both moral superiority and guilt that played such an important part in witch-hunting. To make matters worse, the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism on the one hand and between various forms of Protestantism on the other began to reach its peak, a development that reinforced a fear of the Devil and hostility towards witchcraft.

A final and perhaps decisive factor in the intensification of witch-hunting in the late sixteenth century was the onset of one of the most economically volatile and politically unstable periods in European history. During the years from 1580 to 1630 Europe experienced unprecedented inflation, a series of harsh climatic changes, periodic famines (the worst being in the 1590s), depressions in trade (especially in the 1620s), and a more general crisis of production. Real wages declined sharply, while the condition of the poor and unemployed reached critical proportions. These developments aggravated the personal conflicts that often found expression in witchcraft accusations, and they also heightened the fears of many members of the ruling and literate elite that witches were complicit in a diabolical campaign to bring dearth and famine to European communities.

The period of decline, 1630–1770

The prosecution and execution of witches did not end in 1630, but it entered a new phase marked by a general decline in the number of trials. There were notable exceptions to this pattern: in the Dutch Republic the prosecutions came to almost a complete end shortly after 1600, while in Spain the Inquisition stopped executing witches in the wake of the great Basque witch-hunt of 1609–11. In France the procedural measures introduced by the Parlement of Paris resulted in a dramatic reduction in the number of executions by the 1620s. In England prosecutions tapered off significantly after 1612, although the largest single witch-hunt in its history occurred in 1645–7, thus interrupting this period of decline. Scotland also had its last and largest witch-hunt in 1661–2, shortly after it had experienced a significant reduction in the number of prosecutions in the 1650s. These late witch panics in England and Scotland, as well as similar episodes in Sweden and Finland in the 1660s and early 1670s, make it even more difficult to establish universal patterns of decline. What is more, a few countries on the periphery of Europe – Hungary, Transylvania, Poland and New England – did not bear the full brunt of witchcraft prosecutions until the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Nevertheless, for most of Europe, especially the core witchcraft area that included the Germanic territories, the Swiss cantons and the predominantly French-speaking lands on the eastern borders of the French kingdom, the period from 1675 to 1750 was a time of contraction in the prosecution of witches. Those trials that did take place, moreover, usually involved only one or two defendants. It took some time, however, before *all* witchcraft prosecutions came to an end. Many courts discouraged prosecutions in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but only seven European countries (France in 1682, Prussia in 1714, Great Britain in 1736, the Habsburg Monarchy in 1766, Russia in 1770, Poland in 1776 and Sweden in 1779) took legislative action either declaring that witchcraft was no longer a crime or seriously restricting the scope of earlier witchcraft laws. The limited number and late dates of those legislative acts, coupled with the determination of individuals to accuse their neighbours of witchcraft, explains why witchcraft trials, and even some executions, continued to take place well into the eighteenth century. In England, for example, the ability of grand juries to indict criminals and petty juries to convict them explains why the last execution took place in 1685 and the last conviction in 1712. In Scotland, where juries had less influence on the outcome of the trials but where authorities were more inclined to allow charges to be brought against witches, the trials continued until 1727. In France the royal edict of Louis XIV ended almost all witchcraft prosecutions, but the failure of the edict to end prosecutions for acts of blasphemy allowed isolated trials until 1745. Within the German territories a number of late executions took place, most notably in Würzburg in 1749 and in Württemberg the same year. The last execution in Europe occurred in the Swiss canton of Glarus (which was also the last territory to ban torture) in 1782. An execution in Poland in 1793, which occurred during a period of great jurisdictional uncertainty, was probably illegal.

Geographical patterns

Any attempt to establish the broad chronological patterns of European witch-hunting is complicated by regional variations. Some clear patterns are evident, but witch-hunting began, peaked and declined at different times and in different places. To make matters even more complex, the sum total of prosecutions, convictions and executions varied greatly in the different states and regions of Europe. A full study of these regional patterns, broken down by individual provinces, counties and towns would be impossible to undertake in a study of this nature. We can, however, establish some of the broader geographical patterns. Choosing the most appropriate geographical units for such comparison presents some difficulty. If we were to use the political boundaries of sovereign states we would have to deal separately with each of the individual states of Germany and Italy and with the various kingdoms of Spain, and we would also have to

take into account the changes in sovereignty that occurred in many European areas during the early modern period.

If we use the criterion of language, we would be unable to discuss Switzerland or, for that matter, Scotland as distinct units. Medium-sized geographical regions are perhaps the most sensible units of analysis, and in this category we have some very fine studies by Midelfort on southwestern Germany, Schormann on northwestern Germany, Behringer on Bavaria, Muchembled and Dupont-Bouchat on the Low Countries, Monter on the Jura region, and Godbeer on New England. It is often difficult, however, to find other regions with which these regions can be conveniently and legitimately compared, and even when such areas can be defined, there is often not sufficient data available to make meaningful comparisons. For the purposes of this study we shall discuss five very large areas of Europe: (1) western and west-central Europe: Germany, France, Switzerland and the Low Countries; (2) the British Isles and Britain's overseas possessions: England, Scotland, Ireland and colonial America; (3) the Nordic countries: Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland; (4) east-central and eastern Europe: Poland, Hungary, Transylvania and Russia; and (5) southern Europe: Italy, the Iberian Peninsula, and the Spanish and Portuguese overseas empires. We shall exclude the area effectively controlled by the Ottoman Empire, with the exception of the relatively autonomous provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia, since no witchcraft prosecutions occurred in that area. Within each of these large areas there were some pronounced regional and national differences with regard to witch-hunting. There were, for example, significant differences between France and Germany, England and Scotland, Norway and Sweden, Poland and Russia, and Spain and Italy. But these large geographical areas, in addition to being fairly cohesive geographically, exhibit enough similarities regarding witch-hunting to make the broader comparisons worthwhile. These similarities are rooted in various religious, legal and political characteristics that the countries in these large areas shared.

Western and west-central Europe

The overwhelming majority of witchcraft prosecutions – perhaps as many as 75 per cent – occurred in Germany, France, Switzerland and the Low Countries, an area that comprised roughly one-half of the entire population of Europe. Not surprisingly, this was also the area where most large hunts and panics took place, and it is mainly because of these panics that the total number of prosecutions and executions was disproportionately high. During the early years of the hunt most prosecutions took place in France, especially in those areas in the eastern part of the country that bordered on Swiss and Burgundian lands. By the late sixteenth century, however, when the hunt had entered its most intense stage, Germany had become the centre of

prosecutions. Trials continued in France, especially in the southern borderlands, and a number of urban cases of demonic possession led to witchcraft prosecutions. But the largest panics of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries took place in German-speaking lands.

More than half of the territory in the western and west-central area lay within the Holy Roman Empire. In 1559 the Empire extended so far in the west and the south that it included all of the Netherlands and Franche-Comté (which were under Spanish control), the Swiss Confederation, and even parts of northern Italy, while to the east it embraced Bohemia, Austria and Silesia. By 1648 its boundaries had shrunk considerably, as both the northern provinces of the Netherlands and the Swiss Confederation had established their identity as sovereign states, while the duchies of Savoy, Milan, Genoa and Tuscany no longer were included within the Empire. The shifting boundaries of the Empire make it difficult even to attempt any sort of estimate of the total number of witch trials held there, but it is not unreasonable to assert that the number was significantly greater than for all other parts of Europe combined. If we restrict ourselves to German-speaking lands within the Empire, the number of executions was probably somewhere between 20,000 and 25,000.

The political weakness of the Empire may have been the single most important reason for the high concentration of witchcraft trials in this part of Europe. The Empire was a very loose confederation of numerous small kingdoms, principalities, duchies and territories that acted either as sovereign or near-sovereign states. Some of these territories, such as the Spanish Netherlands, were possessions of foreign rulers. Others were dependencies of larger units within the Empire, such as Montbéliard, which was technically under the sovereignty of the duke of Württemberg. Still others were ecclesiastical territories under the control of a prince-bishop or abbot. There were, moreover, a number of imperial cities which, while having a direct relationship to the imperial structure, operated with relative autonomy. The judicial effects of all this political diversity and decentralization was to give virtual judicial autonomy to relatively small political units. The Empire itself provided very little legal unity and exercised very little judicial control over the activities of the various tribunals that heard witchcraft cases. It supplied a legal code, the *Constitutio Criminalis Carolina* of 1532, for the entire Empire, but it did not provide effective mechanisms for enforcing it. There were no itinerant imperial judges to ensure that the code was upheld and no procedure for regular appeals to the imperial chamber court, the *Reichskammergericht*, at Speyer. Consequently only 247 witchcraft cases were litigated there between 1500 and 1800. Even the larger political units within the Empire, being either weak patrimonial estates or themselves confederations of smaller entities, often failed to exercise effective judicial control over the various courts within their territories. In most cases, therefore, the trial of witches in Germany was en trusted to courts that

exercised jurisdiction over a relatively small geographical area.

The prevailing pattern of jurisdictional particularism in Germany meant that witch-hunting could easily go unchecked. It would be an exaggeration to claim that this situation gave every lord, parson or magistrate the freedom to 'burn to his heart's content', but German judges did have a latitude in handling witchcraft cases that zealous witch-hunters in other parts of Europe would certainly have envied. One of the most striking examples of this type of jurisdictional independence was the principality of Ellwangen, a fairly small Catholic territory in southwestern Germany which was almost completely independent of outside political and ecclesiastical control and never permitted appeals to higher courts. Not surprisingly, Ellwangen was the location of one of the most severe witch-hunts in German history, an operation that took the lives of almost 400 individuals between 1611 and 1618.

The distribution of witchcraft prosecutions within the Empire provides additional support for the thesis that the size of German jurisdictional units had a great deal to do with the intensity of witch-hunting. Without over-simplifying an immensely complex situation, we can divide Germany into two regions, one of which experienced much more intense witch-hunting than the other. The lands that exercised relative restraint for the most part lay to the north and to the east, the one notable exception to this rule being the north eastern duchy of Mecklenburg, which was a particularly black spot in the history of German witchcraft. The main centres for witch-hunting, however, lay to the south and to the west, a large area that included Würzburg, Bamberg, Eichstätt, Württemberg and Ellwangen, to name only a few sites of famous witch-hunts. As Gerhard Schormann has shown, there are a number of differences between these two regions, but one of the most significant is that the northern and eastern areas consisted of much larger, less fragmented political units than in the south and the west. In keeping with this thesis, Schormann classifies the large, southeastern principality of Bavaria with the northern and eastern lands, for it executed a relatively small number of witches for a political unit of its size. If we include the even larger countries of Austria and Bohemia (both of which were in the Empire) in this scheme, the relationship between the size of autonomous political units and the intensity of witch-hunting becomes even clearer. The total number of executions in Austria was probably about 900 and in Bohemia about 400. The great majority of these prosecutions took place in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, somewhat later than the bulk of other German prosecutions.

Although local German courts usually did not have to deal with appeals to imperial tribunals or with supervision by imperial judicial authorities, they were required to consult with the universities in witchcraft cases. This requirement, which was included in Article 109 of the *Carolina*, was intended to help local judges deal with the complexities of criminal procedure in an area of the law with which they were

often unfamiliar. Before proceeding with torture and before sentencing they would send reports to the law faculty of the neighbouring university (there were twenty-three within the Empire by the early seventeenth century) to request advice. Instead of leading to greater restraint and caution in witchcraft prosecutions, such as often resulted from the intervention of central authorities, this practice usually had the opposite effect. Indeed, since the universities were the centres for the development and dissemination of demonological theory, consultation with learned jurists helped to introduce diabolical ideas to local magistrates whose beliefs were sometimes no different from those of simple peasants. In this case, therefore, local determination to eliminate witchcraft was strengthened rather than weakened by the intervention of 'higher' judicial authorities.

Once we leave the Holy Roman Empire we can still witness the importance of jurisdictional factors in determining the intensity of witch-hunting within the 'heartland' of witchcraft. In Switzerland, where as many as 10,000 witches were tried and more than 5,000 executed, the picture is extremely complex, since the Confederation was religiously, culturally and linguistically pluralistic. The cantons were also jurisdictionally autonomous, a situation that not only encouraged diversity in witch-hunting patterns but also made uncontrolled witch-hunting possible. The severity of Swiss witch-hunting is best illustrated in the Pays de Vaud, where more than 90 per cent of those tried for witchcraft were executed and the total number of victims exceeded 3,000. On the other hand, Geneva, while experiencing a few severe plague-spreading panics from time to time, had a very mild record of witch persecutions.

As we move north from Switzerland we encounter a whole string of territories which, while technically within the Empire, were virtually autonomous, such as Franche-Comté, Lorraine and the Low Countries. In all of these areas witch-hunting was encouraged by de facto jurisdictional independence, although in the case of the Spanish possessions it was aggravated by the attempts of royal agents to define witchcraft as a crime and encourage its prosecution. In these areas there was in fact a lethal combination of central and local involvement in witch-hunting, with the king of Spain, the Holy Roman Emperor, or the archduke of Burgundy providing the legislation and sometimes the initial inspiration to witch-hunting and the small duchies or states possessing the freedom to proceed as they wished. As might be expected, prosecutions for witchcraft took a heavy toll in these small territories. In Lorraine, where Nicolas Remy sent more than 800 witches to their deaths between 1586 and 1595 (and more than 2,000 during his entire career), travellers could see 'thousands and thousands of the stakes to which witches are bound'. During the entire period of the witch-hunt, approximately 3,000 witches were executed in that duchy. In Luxembourg there were 358 executions between 1509 and 1687 and in the other parts of the Spanish

Netherlands there were many more.

The only political units in this part of Europe that did not conform to this general pattern of intense prosecution were the northern Netherlands. In this region, later known as the Dutch Republic, which had more than one million inhabitants, fewer than 150 witches were executed. Executions for witchcraft also ended earlier in this region than in any other part of Europe. The Netherlands did experience a few large hunts in the provinces of Groningen, Utrecht and North Brabant, but none of these areas executed as many witches as the region of Limburg, which at that time was not part of the Republic.

It is unlikely that jurisdictional factors, which account for the intense persecutions in so many parts of Germany, can be used to explain the pattern in the Netherlands. The entire judicial system was highly decentralized – a situation which elsewhere often facilitated prosecutions – and the degree of central control within each province varied widely. It is noteworthy, however, that in the province of Friesland, where justice was centralized, there were virtually no prosecutions, while in the province of Groningen, where local courts were given considerable freedom of action, two fairly large witch-hunts took place in the sixteenth century.

The Dutch system of criminal procedure may have played a role in keeping the total number of prosecutions low. Although Dutch courts followed inquisitorial procedure and allowed the use of torture, torture was never employed excessively, and in 1594 the central court in the province of Holland forbade the use of torture as well as the swimming test in witchcraft cases. This decision made prosecutions very difficult and certainly contributed to the early decline and end of prosecutions throughout the Republic. A further procedural explanation of the relatively low number of witchcraft convictions and executions was the opportunity that accused witches had to bring countersuits of slander against their accusers. These too played a role in bringing Dutch witch-hunting to an early end.

The main explanation for the tameness of Dutch witch-hunting appears to be more ideological than judicial. Although Dutch judges had all the procedural tools for conducting massive witch-hunts, including the right to use torture, they never believed that witches were engaged in the activities described in the demonological literature. The cumulative concept of witch-craft developed slowly in the Netherlands, and even when it finally appeared, it never found fertile ground. Magistrates accepted the reality of the pact with the Devil, but they never subscribed to the notion of a vast diabolical conspiracy. Without that frightening belief, they were more likely to respect the rules for judicial caution that were readily available to them.

In accounting for the weakness of Dutch witch-hunting, two other possible explanations deserve consideration. The first was the intense preoccupation of the country with the struggle for independence from Spain, a conflict that was

all-consuming between 1568 and 1609 and not formally resolved until 1648. As mentioned in Chapter 5, witchcraft prosecutions did not generally occur during periods of war or domestic political crisis, and in this case the conflict with Spain covered the entire period of witch-hunting. The second explanation was the reluctance of either Catholic or Protestant ecclesiastical authorities to engage in campaigns against magic and superstition. Those same authorities were also reluctant to assist secular authorities in the detection and prosecution of witches.

Turning finally to France, the question arises as to whether political and jurisdictional factors played as much of a role in determining the intensity of witch-hunting as in the Empire. The overall pattern of witchcraft prosecutions, especially after secular courts assumed the main burden of prosecution in the sixteenth century, suggests that they did. The areas within France that were most heavily affected by witchcraft were situated on the frontiers of the kingdom: the north, the east, Languedoc, the southwest and (belatedly) Normandy. All of these areas were resistant to the efforts of the French monarchy to establish a centralized, absolutist state. It is possible that this situation led royal judges to prosecute witches as part of a general programme of disciplining and Christianizing the population and of curbing rebellion in these outlying regions. As we have seen, contemporaries made associations between witchcraft and rebellion in Languedoc, and they may have been at least partially correct. But the main reason for intense witch-hunting in the peripheral regions of France is that courts in these regions operated with greater independence from central governmental control than did those in the centre of the country. And, as we know from the late seventeenth-century trials in Rouen, the right of particular localities to prosecute witches without interference from the central government was one of many issues that pitted Louis XIV against the various provinces in his kingdom.

The struggle between the centre and the periphery in France did, therefore, have a great deal to do with witchcraft prosecution in that kingdom, and the greater success that France had in establishing a powerful central monarchy in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries goes a long way towards explaining why far fewer witches were executed within its boundaries than in Germany. Another factor, not unrelated to this process of centralization, was the regular system of appeals from local courts to the nine provincial parlements. In some cases, as in Normandy in the 1590s, when the provincial Parlement of Rouen fully supported the trials and confirmed sentences that were appealed to it, this system of provincial control did little to discourage prosecutions by local authorities. But the reversal of many sentences by the Parlement of Paris, which exercised an appellate jurisdiction over most of northern France, and which set the standards for the other provincial parlements, did have a negative effect on the entire process of witch-hunting in France. More than any one factor it explains why France, with a population only marginally smaller than that of the Empire,

prosecuted far fewer witches. Until more work is done on the records of the provincial parlements most estimates will remain a matter of guesswork, but it would not be unreasonable to suggest a figure of 3,000 prosecutions and perhaps only 1,000 executions for the areas that actually came within the king's jurisdiction. The numbers of illegal executions, such as the 300 that occurred at Ardennes in the early seventeenth century, might swell this figure some more. Even so, this larger figure would not denote a persecution much more intense than took place in England, provided we take into account the relative size of the population of the two countries.

The concentration of the great majority of witchcraft prosecutions in the west-central core of Europe had religious as well as political and judicial causes. There is no question that this was the most ecclesiastically volatile region in all of Europe. It was a hotbed of heresy in the late Middle Ages and the very centre of the Protestant Reformation. After the Reformation the region became ecclesiastically unstable, with certain areas changing their religious affiliation more than once and others becoming religiously pluralistic. In Germany each prince determined the religion of his lands after 1556, while in France a period of qualified religious toleration occurred from 1598 to 1685. Throughout France, therefore, there were many religiously divided areas, and in both France and Germany there was extensive religious conflict. All of this religious dissent, instability and diversity encouraged the prosecution of witches. The mere tradition of dissent, of course, made authorities conscious of the possibility of witchcraft, since witchcraft was, after all, a new and particularly virulent strain of heresy. The close proximity of adherents to a rival faith may also have strengthened the consciousness of the Devil in these areas, while the frequency and intensity of outright religious conflict contributed to the mood of anxiety that lay at the foundation of witchcraft prosecutions.

The British Isles

Once we leave the west-central area of Europe and survey witchcraft prosecutions on its periphery, we confront a general pattern of witch-hunting that is relatively mild and restrained. All of these peripheral areas had their witch panics, but they were far more limited in size and in number than those in the European heartland. Looking first at England, Scotland and England's overseas possessions, we find a pattern that varies considerably but which as a whole stands in stark contrast to that which prevailed in west-central Europe. England, to be sure, experienced a major witch-hunt in the 1640s, while Scotland had a number of national panics in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and Salem, Massachusetts, was the site of the notorious hunt of 1692, but few of these hunts can compare in size or intensity to the holocausts that occurred at Ellwangen, Würzburg or Bamberg. The total number of British trials, moreover, probably

did not exceed 6,000, and the number of executions was less than 2,500 and may have been as low as 2,000.

The main reason for the relative tameness of witch-hunting in Britain was the belated and incomplete reception of the cumulative concept of witchcraft. The failure of the great medieval heresies to cross the Channel and the absence of papal inquisitors to extirpate them made both Englishmen and Scots less paranoid about the introduction of a new heresy like witchcraft in the fifteenth century. And when the cumulative concept of witchcraft began to spread throughout all of Europe in the sixteenth century, it did not find very fertile ground in Britain. It received only reluctant and half-hearted support from the administrative and ruling elite in England, and even in Scotland, where the new ideas were more eagerly embraced, the concept was never fully developed. The witch belief that was most responsible for the development of large witch-hunts – the belief in the sabbath – worked its way into a number of English trials in the seventeenth century and also into the major Scottish hunts, but it was never embellished as it was on the Continent. English and Scottish sabbaths were relatively tame affairs, where witches dined with the Devil but did not usually engage in cannibalistic infanticide, participate in orgies, or fly to and from their gatherings. The belief in the sabbath, when it found acceptance, was sufficient to provoke a search for accomplices, but the number of participants was invariably small and the general picture did not inspire the type of horror that the standard continental nightmare did.

The slow and incomplete acceptance of the cumulative concept of witchcraft in Britain had a great deal to do with the second main reason for the mildness of witch-hunting in this region: the spare use of torture in witchcraft cases. In both England and Scotland torture could be used only at the specific command of the Privy Council and only when matters of state were involved. In England this prohibition was strictly enforced, with the result that only once, during the disruptive period of the Civil War, was torture used illegally in witch-hunting. In Scotland, where central control of local justice was less effective than in England, torture was used without warrant more frequently, very often during pre-trial investigations. It was also used by official order in one very important witch-hunt, when King James VI was considered to be the intended victim of witchcraft.

The relatively spare use of torture in Britain had a two-fold effect on witch-hunting. On the one hand, it weakened the reception of continental witch beliefs, for it was mainly through confessions to such activities as attending the sabbath and flying through the air that judicial officials, let alone the common people, accepted such beliefs. It is certainly worthy of notice that the British hunts in which the idea of the sabbath was most fully developed were those in which torture was in fact employed, legally or illegally. On the other hand, the infrequent use of torture prevented the development of chain-reaction hunts. There were only two of these in

Britain, the Scottish hunts of 1590–1 and 1661–2, and in both cases torture was used. Even in these hunts, however, the majority of prosecutions originated independently of the others and could not be considered part of any sort of judicial chain.

A further legal reason for the relative mildness of British witch-hunting was the practice both in England and in Scotland of trying witches by jury. Although juries were not bound by the strict laws of evidence that prevailed on the Continent, and although they could convict a witch on the basis of either reputation or circumstantial evidence, in practice they proved to be relatively lenient, returning a number of acquittals in both countries. The presence of juries, moreover, reflected another characteristic of British justice: the absence of inquisitorial procedure, which of course is the system that led to the use of torture. Scottish justice, being influenced by Roman law, did incorporate some features of inquisitorial procedure, but until the late seventeenth century the Scottish system remained essentially English in its character. Not only did juries retain their independence, but another feature of inquisitorial procedure, the initiation of prosecutions by the courts themselves, occurred only rarely in Scotland, and never in England.

Although witch-hunting throughout Britain was much tamer than in Germany, France and Switzerland, prosecutions in Scotland were much more intense than in England. When we consider the fact that as many as three Scottish witches were executed for every one in England and that England had a population four times that of Scotland, we can appreciate how great the differences between the two countries were in this regard. The main reasons for these differences were the reception of some continental witch beliefs in the northern kingdom and the more frequent illegal use of torture. Another Scottish practice, of possibly even greater consequence, was the custom of granting commissions to local magistrates to try witches without the supervision of itinerant judges. In those cases the conviction-rate and the executionrate were higher than when cases were heard before the central judges in Edinburgh or on circuit. In England almost all witchcraft cases were heard before circuit judges at the county assizes.

A number of other legal and religious factors contributed to the greater intensity of Scottish witch-hunting. Scottish juries required only a majority to convict a criminal, whereas English juries required unanimity. It is hard to determine the precise effect of this difference on the total number of convictions, but we do know that many Scottish convictions were majority decisions. The differences in the sentencing provisions of the witchcraft statutes of the two kingdoms may also have led to a higher number of Scottish executions (although not convictions). Whereas the English statutes of 1542, 1563 and 1604 provided for non-capital sentences in certain types of cases for the first offence, the Scottish statute of 1563 called for death in all cases, a grim example of the notorious severity of Scottish justice. In fact, some Scottish witches

were given non-capital sentences, but the number was far lower than in England.

Religious factors may also have played a part in the different results of English and Scottish witch-hunting. Both countries were Protestant after 1560 and both countries had their fair share of religious conflict, but there were significant religious differences between them. The greater strength of Calvinism in Scotland does not appear to have encouraged witch-hunting, but the Scottish clergy did play a more active part in the religious life of their country than their English counterparts. Not only did Scottish ministers assist in the initial interrogation of witches by virtue of their status as members of the kirk sessions of their parishes, but as members of the General Assembly they also applied constant pressure on the government to establish a godly state by prosecuting witches. This type of pressure stands as one of the clearest examples of the way in which religious reformers influenced secular governments to redouble their efforts at hunting witches.

Witchcraft in England's overseas possessions deserves special comment. In Ireland, where the fourteenth-century trial of Dame Alice Kyteler had marked an important stage in the development of the cumulative concept of witchcraft, witch trials in the early modern period were surprisingly rare. Although the land was believed to abound in sorcerers and warlocks, and although the Irish Parliament passed a witchcraft statute in 1586, the number of trials does not appear to have been very large. It is possible that this low number reflects the incompleteness of the judicial record, but the absence of literary evidence regarding witch-hunts suggests that neither Catholics nor Protestants (who settled mainly in the northern province of Ulster in the seventeenth century) lodged formal accusations against suspected witches. The unsettled state of Irish justice, the conflict between English law and native Gaelic or Brehon law, and a general reluctance to use the law courts to resolve social conflicts may help to explain the absence of significant witch-hunting in the country.

In any event, the evidence that we have regarding witchcraft accusations and prosecutions makes it clear that continental ideas of diabolism did not penetrate Ireland to any appreciable extent. The statute of 1586, which was passed at least to some extent to remedy the legal difficulty encountered in 1578 when judges had to resort to the natural law to convict two witches, resembled the English statutes of 1563 rather closely, and the charges brought against Irish witches resembled those raised against their typical English counterparts rather than German or French witches. One of the few cases that we know about, that of the Protestant clergyman John Aston in 1606, involved charges of digging for treasure, an activity with which English witchcraft cases were occasionally concerned. The most famous case of the seventeenth century – that of Florence Newton, 'the witch of Youghal', in 1661 – also conforms closely to an English model. Newton's problems began when she demanded a piece of beef from the household of John Pyne and upon being refused went away

cursing. Shortly thereafter she violently kissed one of Pyne's servants, Mary Longdon, and when Longdon subsequently experienced fits, trances, and vomiting of pins and nails, she named Newton as the cause of her afflictions. (Kissing was often cited as a method of bewitchment.) Newton's predicament worsened while in prison, for she allegedly kissed the hand of David Jones, the prison warden, through the grate, thereby causing his death. The case, which resembled that of two English witches executed for witchcraft at Bury St Edmunds in the following year, did not involve continental ideas of diabolism. Nor should we expect such charges to have been made, since torture was not used in this or in any other Irish cases. Witchcraft in Ireland, as in England, was essentially the crime of *maleficium*, not Devil-worship.

Turning to the English colonies in America, we find a somewhat different situation from that which existed in Ireland. In the middle and southern colonies witch-hunting was either restrained or non-existent. There were about forty known cases of witchcraft in these mainland colonies, and only one of these, a prosecution in Maryland in 1685, ended with an execution. In Bermuda witch-hunting was more intense, with twenty-one cases and five executions between 1651 and 1696. These figures, however, pale in comparison with those for New England, where 234 New Englanders were indicted or presented for this crime in the seventeenth century, and of these thirty-six were executed. When we realize that the population of New England was on average only about 100,000 at this time, we can appreciate the intensity that witch-hunting reached in that locale. It was significantly more intense than in the county of Essex, England, and perhaps even more intense than in Scotland. New England, moreover, exhibited many of the signs of a witch panic. Continental European witch beliefs were current there, and a large witch-hunt, claiming more than half of the total number of victims for all of New England, occurred at Salem in 1692.

The presence of 'continental' witch beliefs in New England should not strike us as highly unusual, for such notions did exist, at least in literary form, in England by the early seventeenth century and were readily available in New England by the time of the Salem hunt (see Figure 7.1). Nor should the conduct of a large witch-hunt in an 'English' world prove incapable of explanation. Not only did an extraordinary combination of political and social tensions provide a foundation for the panic that developed at Salem, but the court's decision to allow spectral evidence in what was originally a case of demonic obsession allowed the afflicted girls to implicate a larger number of suspects than might normally be expected in an English hunt. In one case, moreover, a mild form of torture was used in order to obtain the names of accomplices.

The real problem connected with New England witchcraft is why the entire population was more fearful of witchcraft and more eager to prosecute it than in the southern colonies, Ireland or even England itself. The explanation is almost certainly religious rather than social or economic. The New England colonies were, at least in

Figure 7.1 The Devil and witches flying on broomsticks. This woodcut appeared in Cotton Mather, *Wonders of the Invisible World* (1693), written during the Salem witch-hunt. The belief that witches flew never gained acceptance in England but was given greater credence in colonial Massachusetts.

their inception, theocratic institutions whose purpose was to create a New Jerusalem. The same urge to create a godly state that was evident in Scotland also existed in New England, and in both cases the mission entailed the prosecution of witches as God's enemies. Witchcraft in Massachusetts, just as in England, was a secular crime tried in a civil court, and most of the charges brought by villagers against their neighbours were mainly for *maleficia*. The clergy, however, and the magistrates whom they advised, viewed witchcraft exclusively in terms of a demonic compact and interpreted the Massachusetts witchcraft law of 1641 in those terms. For these influential men, who directed the witch-hunt at Salem, the prosecution of witches was part of a general assault upon diabolical power, not an attempt to punish the perpetrators of harmful magic. The belief that Indians, with whom the colonists had been engaged in a series of wars on the Maine frontier, worshipped the Devil, only deepened the fear of witchcraft that gripped the area and made it more imperative to identify the Devil's confed erates in their communities.

The Nordic countries

Witch-hunting in the Nordic countries was somewhat more intense than in the British Isles. The total number of prosecutions in Denmark–Norway and Sweden–Finland was roughly 5,000, of which somewhere between 1,700 and 2,000 resulted in executions. These figures are roughly equivalent to those for the British Isles, but they denote a more intense prosecution since the population of the Nordic lands was only about 40 per cent of Britain's. In other respects Nordic witch-hunting bore a close resemblance to its British counter part. In both areas the cumulative concept of witchcraft met with an incomplete and belated acceptance, entering Sweden and Finland only in the middle of the seventeenth century. Throughout the Nordic countries, moreover, there was a general reluctance to use torture in order to obtain the confessions of accused witches or the names of their accomplices. The combined effect of ideological weakness and judicial restraint explain the relative mildness of Nordic witch-hunting, but as in Britain, these characteristics were not universal and large witch-hunts took place in certain areas at specific times.

Denmark was the first of the Nordic countries to engage in witch-hunting. As early as the 1540s Peter Palladius, the Lutheran bishop of Sealand, urged the prosecution of witches, arguing that those who exhibited Catholic tendencies were culpable of the crime. Palladius reported in 1544 that a fairly large chain-reaction hunt had claimed the lives of fifty-two persons. In 1547, however, the government declared that the testimony of those who had been convicted of infamous crimes, including sorcery, could not be used to convict another person. It also forbade the application of torture until after a death sentence had been pronounced. These two laws, taken together, prevented the development of large witch-hunts, kept the total number of convictions at a fairly low level, and also prevented notions of Devil-worship from being fully received. This is not to suggest that beliefs in diabolism were absent in Denmark. A number of Danish witches were in fact accused of making pacts with the Devil and of worshipping him collectively. In 1617 a royal ordinance defined witchcraft for the first time in terms of diabolical compact and specified that those convicted of such charges would be burned. But the legal reforms of 1547, together with the mandatory appeal of all death sentences to the county courts after 1576, kept Denmark from going the way of many German states. According to the most reliable estimates, there were approximately 2,000 witchcraft trials in Denmark and about 1,000 executions. These totals are roughly proportional to those from Scotland, which had a population almost twice as large as that of Denmark.

Witchcraft prosecutions in Norway, which during this period was governed by Denmark, were slightly less intense than those in the southern kingdom. With a population about three-quarters the size of Denmark's in 1650, Norway tried more than

900 witches between 1566 and 1747, but only about 25 per cent of those tried were executed. A disproportionately high number of prosecutions and a higher percentage of executions of took place in the northern province of Finnmark, where 91 of the 135 witches brought to trial were executed. As in other countries where witch-hunting was relatively mild, a combination of legal and ideological factors provides an explanation. The main form of criminal procedure in Norway was accusatorial, according to which the testimony of two eyewitnesses to any crime was required for conviction. Public prosecutions based on rumour could, however, be used in witchcraft cases, since witchcraft was a *crimen exceptum*. Torture was allowed in Norwegian trials, but it was used only occasionally, and this probably explains why charges of diabolism figured in less than one-fifth of all cases. Notions of diabolical conspiracy did penetrate Norway, mainly from Danish sources, and were apparent as early as the 1590s, but they did not predominate in the trials whose records are extant. There was, to be sure, a widespread belief in Norway, both among common folk and elites, that witches frequently assembled with the Devil in the northern parts of the country. Because of the remoteness of such assemblies a belief in the ability of witches to fly also gained currency, and this belief was closely connected to a belief in metamorphosis. In the actual trials, however, charges of attending the sabbath appeared only occasionally, and such accusations usually did not become central to the case against the accused. The belief remained much more a part of popular legend than of demonological theory. The related beliefs in metamorphosis and flight, however, often did become central to the trials and were grafted on to traditional charges of *maleficium*. Those persons who, for example, were accused of causing storms at sea – a frequent charge in all seafaring countries – were often accused of work ing their craft while airborne, and others were accused of having performed *maleficia* after having taken the form of a wolf, raven, dog or cat.

The most famous case of Norwegian witchcraft was that of Anne Pedersdotter Absalon, who was executed at Bergen in 1590. The case owes its fame to a Norwegian play by Hans Wiers-Jenssen, an English translation by John Masefield, and a brilliant film by Carl Theodor Dreyer, *Day of Wrath*. Although the play and film possess little historical accuracy, the actual trial throws a great deal of light on the nature of Norwegian witchcraft. Anne Pedersdotter Absalon was the wife of Norway's most famous humanist scholar, the Lutheran minister Absalon Pedersen Beyer. The charges against Anne arose out of the opposition that had developed in Bergen to the efforts of Absalon and the clergy to destroy the holy images that had been prominent in the pre-Reformation Church. The impetus for witch-hunting was therefore different from that in Denmark fifty years earlier, where the Lutheran clergy apparently took the initiative in spreading the fear of witchcraft and perhaps even in drafting accusations. In this Norwegian case the reforming clergy were the victims, although since they

themselves were too highly placed to be attacked successfully, their wives served as their surrogates. This was a pattern of witchcraft accusations that occurred frequently in German towns, where members of political factions used charges of witchcraft against their rivals' wives in order to advance their own political careers. It is also important to note that the court in which Anne was tried was a civil tribunal and not, as both the play and the film suggest, a Lutheran church court.

Although Anne was exonerated when the charges were first brought against her in 1575, the year of Absalon's death, the case was reopened in 1590. The most interesting aspects of this second trial were the charges brought against Anne. Most of them were traditional charges of *maleficia*: putting into a coma a man who had refused her prior payment for a weaving frame; inflicting sickness on a man who had refused to give her wine, beer and vinegar; and causing the death of a four-year-old boy by giving him a bewitched biscuit. As so often happened in cases that began with accusations of *maleficia*, charges of diabolism were introduced. Anne's servant testified that Anne had turned her into a horse and had ridden her to the sabbath at a mountain called Lyderhorn in Bergen, where a number of witches plotted a storm to wreck all ships arriving at Bergen and then, on subsequent occasions, to burn the town and cause it be flooded. The sabbath, however, was dispersed by a man in white who said that God would not allow it. On the basis of the testimony by Anne's servant and others, Anne was burned as a witch.

The trial of Anne Pedersdotter Absalon reveals how charges of collective Devil-worship influenced but did not dominate Norwegian witchcraft trials. The sabbath that allegedly took place at Lyderhorn derived mainly from Norwegian belief, not demonological theory, and it lacked most of the distinctive features of German, French and Swiss assemblies. There was, for example, no infanticide or cannibalism, and although Anne and her servant allegedly took the sacrament on their journey home, there was no alleged demonic administration of that sacrament. The sabbath was in fact a more restrained affair than those that allegedly occurred in Scotland or even in England. In fact, Anne was convicted mainly on the basis of her individual and collective *maleficia*, the occurrence of a storm in Bergen at the time of the sabbath proving to be the conclusive evidence. Her burning as a witch reflects a belief that witchcraft was a crime of heresy rather than sorcery, but the charges upon which she was convicted reflected her putative status as a magician, not a person who made a pact with the Devil and worshipped him.

Two other features of Anne's trial provide us with insights into the nature of Norwegian witchcraft. First, although the testimony of two women previously executed for witchcraft was introduced at her trial – a procedure that would not have occurred in Denmark – this testimony did not have a decisive impact on the outcome of the trial. Second, Anne was apparently not tortured during her trial, and her confession was not

required for conviction. Nor was she tortured to secure the names of accomplices. While torture was not unknown to Norwegian law, it was apparently used as sparingly as in Denmark, and this restraint prevented both the full imposition of demonological theory upon a body of native folklore and the development of large chain-reaction hunts. It also probably explains the relatively low number of Norwegian executions, which on a proportionate basis was as low as in England.

Sweden originally followed a pattern of witch-hunting which resembled that of Norway, but in the late seventeenth century it experienced a large panic that was, by Scandinavian standards, quite exceptional. Prosecutions for witchcraft had begun in the 1580s, but most of those early trials were for simple *maleficium*, and very few of them resulted in executions. A law of 1593 requiring either the testimony of six witnesses or a confession for a capital conviction, together with a requirement that all death sentences be appealed to a royal court in Stockholm after 1614, were in large part responsible for holding witch-hunting in check. Charges of diabolism were not absent from these trials, however, and since torture was often allowed in witchcraft cases, the potential for large-scale witch-hunting clearly existed. Soldiers returning from Germany from the Thirty Years War may have introduced more extreme diabolical ideas during the 1640s.

Queen Christina, who put an end to the witch trials that were being conducted in Sweden's German territory of Verden during the Thirty Years War, claimed many years after her abdication that in 1649 she had forbidden the death penalty in all Swedish witchcraft cases except those involving murder. She also said that she had attributed the confessions of witches to female disorders or diabolical illusions. There is reason to doubt the queen's honesty in this claim to leniency in such matters, but whatever action she did take was insufficient to prevent a major hunt from occurring during the reign of Charles XI. The hunt began in 1668 in the northern Swedish province of Dalecarlia (now Dalarna) and eventually spread throughout the entire northern part of the country and even spilled over into the Swedish-speaking sections of Finland. The hunt was unusual in that a large number of both the accusers and the accused were children. Drawing on a body of Swedish legend about witches visiting a mythical site called Blåkulla (Blue Mountain), where they allegedly feasted, danced and married demons, a number of children accused parents, neighbours and older children of having taken them to this Swedish version of the sabbath.

Charles appointed a number of royal commissions to investigate the matter in the localities and try the accused witches. To make matters worse, the first wave of trials, which took place in the vicinity of Mora, encouraged parents and magistrates in many small villages to demand the prosecution of witches in their communities, a task that was entrusted to newly appointed commissions. The commissioners were forbidden to use torture, but it appears that in the hysterical mood that prevailed they

did not always follow that policy. These royal commissions pronounced a number of death sentences, including more than a hundred in 1675, the year marking the height of the panic. The hunt did not end until after it had spread to the south and affected Stockholm. Two new commissions, appointed in 1676, acted more cautiously than their predecessors and exercised a moderating influence on a panic-stricken population. At the same time the Court of Appeal, which had confirmed many of the sentences during the past eight years, began interrogating witnesses directly. When many of the children began to confess that their charges were groundless, the court reviewed all the evidence and set the most recently condemned witches free.

More than 200 persons were executed during the north Swedish hunt of 1668–76. Like Matthew Hopkins's hunt in England in the 1640s, the entire episode reveals that even countries not known for their severe treatment of witches could occasionally experience large panics. All that was required was a belief in the sabbath, a relaxation of judicial restraint and a popular mood that pressured authorities to take action.

Finland at this time was a part of Sweden, and the two provinces in which the largest number of Finnish witch trials took place were Swedish-speaking. For these reasons witch-hunting in Finland must be considered in connection with the Swedish experience. Indeed, a large number of Finnish prosecutions occurred as a part of the panic that began in Dalecarlia. On the other hand, the history of witchcraft in Finland followed a course that differed in large measure from that of Sweden. Among all the Nordic countries, Finland was the last to begin its prosecutions for witchcraft. Witch beliefs, including reports of Devil-worship, were not unknown in Finland in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They entered the country both from the northern, Swedish-speaking provinces and from the lower Baltic countries of Estonia and Livonia, which were part of the Swedish state and had extensive cultural contacts with both Finland and Germany. Despite these influences, however, Finland did not concern itself with witchcraft until 1640, when the Swedish bishop, Isaac Rothovius, became the vice-chancellor of the first Finnish university, Turku Academy. Rothovius, who was a champion of the Lutheran cause against both Catholics and Calvinists, did not express concern over witches attending the sabbath, but he did encourage the extirpation of sorcery (which he regarded in an old-fashioned way as a form of residual pagan superstition) and he also inaugurated a campaign, which was joined by other officials and his successor, against the practice of demonic magic in Turku Academy. In this respect Finland was beginning an operation in 1640 that other European countries had started more than two centuries earlier.

It was not until the 1660s that the full concept of witchcraft appeared in Finnish trials, and the person most responsible for the introduction of these ideas was Nils Psilander, a judge of the civil court in the Swedish-speaking province of

Ahvenanmaa. Psilander had been educated in the Baltic area at Tartu Academy, where he had become familiar with current German juridical thought regarding witchcraft. Between 1666 and 1674 he conducted a protracted chain-reaction hunt in which original accusations of soothsaying and sorcery were overlaid with demonological theory and were also fused with Swedish legend concerning trips to Blåkulla. In many of these trials the Devil's mark was located and torture was used, but sceptical juries and a somewhat less sceptical court of appeal at Turku kept the hunt from getting out of control. Although the first suspect, Karin Henriksdoteer, denounced thirteen accomplices, only four of them, together with Karin and one later suspect, were executed.

In Finland's other predominantly Swedish-speaking province of Ostrobothnia, a large number of witch trials took place between 1665 and 1684. This hunt, in which at least 152 persons were accused of witchcraft, resulted in twenty death sentences (most of which were probably confirmed on appeal) and the execution of another eight persons for whom trial records are missing. These trials were inspired by the great northern Swedish witch-hunt of 1668–76. Somewhat surprisingly, however, these trials did not centre on charges of Devil-worship. With the charges of witchcraft coming mainly from below, and in the absence of a counterpart to Psilander to introduce learned theories of witchcraft, the charges against the accused remained essentially those of *maleficia*. Only when children and one servant denounced their elders for taking them to Blåkulla, a charge that occurred only in a small percentage of cases, did charges of Devil-worship surface, and even then they did not form the basis of the case against the accused.

All in all, the Ostrobothnian witch-hunt of 1665–84 was a relatively tame affair. Since only about one-third of the witches were denounced by others, it was not primarily a chain-reaction hunt. The denunciations, moreover, were not extracted under torture. Those denunciations that did not spring from juvenile imagination either arose out of malice or were elicited by zealous clergymen. Nor were the sentences especially harsh. More than half (57 per cent) of those accused were acquitted or released, while a smaller number were given ecclesiastical punishments, fined, or sentenced to prison or hard labour. The death-sentence rate was only 13 per cent, and some of these sentences may have been reduced on appeal.

Looking at Finland as a whole, one is led to the conclusion that witchcraft prosecutions never got out of control. The total number of trials probably did not exceed 1,000; notions of Devil-worship were never fully received and only occasionally became the focal point of witch trials; torture was used sparingly; juries tempered the zeal of witch-hunters; and the execution-rate was lower than in other Nordic countries. Among Finnish-speaking people the process of witch-hunting was even more restrained. At least one-half of the Finnish trials took place in the province of

Ostrobothnia and only one execution is known to have taken place outside of the two Swedish-speaking provinces of Ostrobothnia and Ahvenanmaa.

East-central and eastern Europe

It is difficult to make many broad generalizations about witchcraft prosecutions in eastern European lands – those that lay to the east of the Holy Roman Empire and north of the uncontested boundaries of the Ottoman Empire. In all of these areas witch-hunting began much later than in western Europe and it also lasted much longer, until the middle of the eighteenth century. The intensity of this witch-hunting, however, varied from region to region. In certain parts of Poland, where the cumulative concept of witchcraft found fertile ground, prosecutions were most intense, although not on the scale of the prosecutions in many German states. In Hungary, where learned notions of witchcraft were only partially and reluctantly received, there was a substantial but by no means exceptionally large number of trials and only a few large hunts. In Transylvania, Wallachia and Moldavia, where demono logical ideas were weak or non-existent, prosecutions were much less common. In the most general terms, we can say that those areas that were closest to Germany, had cultural contacts with Germany or were populated by Germanspeaking people prosecuted far more witches than those that were more exclusively Slavic. It is also readily apparent that those regions which followed the rites of Orthodox Christianity did not engage in intensive witch-hunting. We can no longer claim that witchcraft prosecutions were entirely absent from these areas, since there were a number of Russian trials and also some in the Orthodox and Uniate sections of Lithuania. But there is little question that the lands in the easternmost parts of Europe did not participate in the European witch-hunt with the same degree of enthusiasm as their western and Latinized neighbours.

The only eastern or east-central European country that acquired a reputation for intense witch-hunting was the kingdom of Poland, and that reputation is not fully deserved. Because of the incompleteness of the judicial record (most of the trial records were destroyed during the Second World War), the total number of trials and executions in that country cannot be determined with any degree of accuracy. It appears, however, that Bohdan Baranowski's original estimate of 10,000 legal executions was too high; even he later scaled back his original estimate to a few thousand executions, and more recent estimates have been as low as 2,000. These revised figures would make Poland's record of witch-hunting not much more intense than that of the Nordic countries. Witchcraft in Poland also resembled its northern neighbours in its witch beliefs. Polish theories of diabolism were not any more elaborate than those in the Nordic countries, and they appeared in the trials only somewhat more frequently. Just as Norwegian witches were believed to assemble at Lyderhorn and Swedish witches at Blåkulla,

Polish witches allegedly gathered at a similar site named Lysa Góra (Bald Mountain). The activities at Polish gatherings were not much different from those that transpired in Norwegian and Swedish assemblies. The main distinction between Polish and Nordic witch-hunting is that prosecutions in Poland reached a peak much later and lasted much longer. More than half of the Polish executions took place between 1676 and 1725, the worst years being those of the early eighteenth century.

The greater intensity of Polish witch-hunting in relation to other eastern European countries can be attributed to three related factors: the presence of theories of diabolism, the absence of effective central control over prosecutions, and the unrestricted use of torture. The theories of diabolism were mainly a foreign import, just as they were to a large extent in Britain and the Nordic countries. Poles had long believed in *maleficium*, and the early witchcraft trials reflected that belief almost exclusively. Learned witch beliefs were received first in those parts of Poland that were close to Germany, had a large Germanspeaking population, and had close commercial or cultural links with German lands. From there these ideas spread to the other provinces of the country, a process that was greatly facilitated by the translation of the *Malleus maleficarum* into Polish in 1614. Charges of making pacts with the Devil and attending the Sabbath began to appear in the trials the late seventeenth century, and in the early eighteenth century the Devil began to 'take centre stage' in the trials. The only areas where these beliefs did not take root were the far eastern section of Lithuania (which became fully integrated into the Polish state in the sixteenth century) and Galicia to the south. It should come as no surprise that these sections of Poland did not experience the full force of the European witch-hunt.

The majority of Polish witchcraft cases took place in the municipal courts, despite the fact that a law passed by the *sejm* in 1543 had entrusted jurisdiction over witchcraft to the ecclesiastical courts. Although Bishop Czartoryski of Leslau made an effort to enforce the Church's jurisdictional monopoly in 1669 and demanded that he authorize all prosecutions, the municipal courts continued to hold the trials. Royal edicts of 1672 and 1713 – themselves evidence of the failure of the bishop's efforts – also failed to control the jurisdictional appetite of the local courts. Since the Polish state was exceptionally weak at this time, it is not surprising that these efforts did not succeed. In any event, the success of the municipal courts in ignoring central edicts had a profound effect upon the progress of the witch-hunts, since the municipal courts, which adopted many features of inquisitorial procedure in the seventeenth century, repeatedly violated the procedural rules that were designed to protect the accused. We know from the instructions of Bishop Czartoryski himself that these courts were withholding the proofs from the accused, denying them counsel and, most importantly, torturing them without restraint to obtain both their own confessions and the names of accomplices. In Poland, therefore, all of the conditions that encouraged large-scale

witch-hunting – diabolical theories, secular prosecutions, local autonomy and the unrestricted use of torture – were present, and consequently the number of victims was higher than in other eastern European countries.

The problem still remains why witch-hunting in Poland began so much later than in Germany. Theories of a slow transmission of ideas, which might be used to explain Sweden's belated adoption of demonological theory, are less applicable in a country where German influence was more direct and immediate. It seems as if Poland, despite the availability of advanced witchcraft theories, was simply not disposed to engage in witch-hunting in the early seventeenth century, but then rather suddenly began a significant legal campaign in the later period. One reason for this delayed inauguration of witch-hunting was the sudden and unprecedented devastation caused by the wars of the mid-century. During the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Poland experienced neither civil war nor invasion. In the middle of the seventeenth century, however, a Cossack rebellion (1648) and the first northern war against Sweden and Russia (1655–60) signalled the beginning of 'the deluge', during which hostile forces ravaged the country and paralyzed the government. As in other parts of Europe, the wars did not lead to an immediate intensification of witch-hunting, but the long-term effects of the deluge created the necessary social, economic and psychological preconditions for witch-hunting, which had not been present before.

A second, less tangible cause of the belated seventeenth-century inauguration of witch-hunting in Poland was a change in the religious atmosphere. The Reformation ran an unusual course in Poland. The growth of Protestantism and the successful efforts of the Counter-Reformation to reclaim its converts led neither to religious warfare nor suppression but to the establishment of a policy of toleration that had no parallel in Europe. For a variety of practical reasons (including the weakness of the central government and the attitude of an unzealous and religiously divided nobility), Poland became a 'state without stakes', in which a Protestant minority coexisted with a Catholic majority. In the seventeenth century, however, especially after 1648, Catholic intolerance increased and led to a number of restrictions of Protestant freedom. It is possible that this new spirit of intolerance towards religious dissent encouraged witchcraft prosecutions. Religious dissent and witchcraft were of course different phenomena, but since they were both forms of religious rebellion they also shared many similarities, and intolerance towards one *could* lead to harsher treatment of the other. It is probably no coincidence that the burning of Polish witches coincided with the rise of a more militant, uncompromising Catholicism and the ostensible decline of toleration, even if this did not involve the actual burning of heretics. One might even speculate that the burning of witches was one of the means by which an intolerant Catholic majority expressed its will to impose religious uniformity on a country which, even in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, remained religiously

pluralistic.

A final reason for the slow development of the witch-hunt in Poland was the prolonged maintenance of ecclesiastical jurisdiction over the crime of witchcraft. As we have seen, the intensification of witch-hunting in Europe was encouraged by the decline of ecclesiastical jurisdiction and the transfer of jurisdiction over witchcraft to much more ruthless secular courts. In the late sixteenth century Polish ecclesiastical courts were, like so many of their European counterparts, restricted in their jurisdiction, but they were not deprived of their traditional jurisdiction over *maleficium*. Throughout the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, therefore, the church courts, which adopted a rather tolerant attitude towards witchcraft, continued to prosecute cases of malefic witchcraft. Only in the second half of the seventeenth century did the municipal courts establish their jurisdictional predominance. In this way the rise of Polish witchcraft prosecutions did in fact reflect a decline in ecclesiastical jurisdiction, even if the decline occurred much later than in other parts of Europe.

Witch-hunting in Hungary was less intense and took a lower toll than in Poland, although the total number of trials and executions was by no means insignificant. Between 1520 and the 1777, just under 1,500 individuals were tried for witchcraft, of whom some 450 are known to have been executed (most by burning), while at least 225 suffered non-capital punishments. Most of the trials took place in the kingdom of Hungary, the only part of the country to remain independent of the Ottoman Empire after King Louis II was defeated at the battle of Mohács in 1526. There were also a number of prosecutions in the southeastern province of Transylvania, which remained an autonomous province within the Ottoman Empire between 1526 and 1699 and which did not become fully reintegrated into the kingdom of Hungary (which was ruled by the Habsburgs) until 1711.

Although witchcraft has a long history in Hungary, it took a long time for intense witch-hunting to develop. As early as the fifteenth century sorcery was defined as a form of heresy, and in 1421 the *Stadtrecht* of Buda decided that sorcerers were obliged to wear the Jew's hat. Western demonological ideas, however, took a long time to penetrate the country, except in areas inhabited by Germans, and they were never fully developed. A few copies of the *Malleus maleficarum* circulated in the sixteenth century, but there was no significant volume of witchcraft literature, and the few Hungarian intellectuals who addressed such questions tended to take a sceptical position. It was not until Benedict Carpzov's *Practica rerum criminalium* was codified for Austria in 1656 and incorporated into the body of Hungarian law in 1696 that Western demonological ideas were made readily available to Hungarian judges. Those judges succeeded in extracting confessions to most of the charges of diabolism that were commonplace in the West. The way in which this process worked can be seen in a series of trials in 1728–9 in Szeged, where thirteen witches were executed and another

twenty-eight were spared by the intervention of Emperor Charles VI. This hunt began with accusations of destroying vineyards with hailstorms, but these charges easily led to the further charges of making explicit pacts with the Devil, receiving his mark (usually in the shape of a chicken's foot) and attending the sabbath.

In addition to these standard demonological ideas, a variety of native Hungarian folk beliefs found expression at the trials. One of the most interesting of these beliefs, which dates back at least to 1656 and which was present in the Szeged trials, was that the witches were organized in military fashion, with the Devil as commander-in-chief. There may be some connection between this belief and that of the *benandanti* in the Friuli, who were likewise organized militarily to fight against the witches. Many native Hungarian beliefs dealt with the *táltosok*, shaman-like magicians and healers whose souls left their bodies in a trance and went out to fight with other *táltosok*.

The slow reception of learned witch beliefs in Hungary was matched by a belated adoption of inquisitorial procedure, which was not introduced into the kingdom of Hungary until the 1650s. Predictably, the first significant trials and convictions did not take place until that decade. In the province of Transylvania, which had a separate legal system, inquisitorial procedure arrived even later. Until 1725 all accusations in Transylvania were made publicly and under the threat of the talion; witnesses were presented on behalf of both parties; and the main method of probation was the water ordeal, the purpose of which was to produce a confession. Torture was used only if there was strong suspicion of witchcraft and if the water ordeal failed. It was also used on one occasion to secure the names of accomplices. This system was in large part responsible for keeping the number of convictions in Transylvania at a minimum. Most of the Transylvanian trials about which we have information occurred in Siebenburgen, an area originally settled by Germans in the twelfth century. The witch trials that took place in this region were all conducted by secular authorities, although local pastors often played an important part in the process.

The chronological pattern of witch-hunting in Hungary resembles that of Poland. Beginning in the 1580s there was an irregular succession of isolated trials and an occasional small panic, such as in 1615, when a number of witches allegedly attempted to destroy all of Hungary and Transylvania with hailstorms, a danger that somewhat ironically emerged when the country was suffering from a drought. The great majority of witchcraft prosecutions, however, did not occur until the eighteenth century. The reasons for this belated intensification of witch-hunting in Hungary cannot be explained simply in terms of heightened German and Austrian political and legal influence after 1699. It is much more likely attributable to a more general historical pattern by which the social, economic and cultural conditions that facilitated witch-hunting in the west did not develop until much later in eastern regions.

In Russia the most distinctive feature of witch-hunting, apart from the high proportion of men among the accused, was the weakness of Western demonological theory. Prosecutions for harmful magic have a long history in Russia. During the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries, when prosecutions in the West for simple *maleficium* were rare and executions even rarer, Russian men and women who allegedly used magic to cause droughts were executed in sufficient numbers to attract the notice of chroniclers and foreign travellers. The clerical interpretation of these acts of sorcery was not much different from that which prevailed in the West at that time: they were vestiges of pagan superstition and in that sense were demonic. But whereas in the West this interpretation of demonic magic gradually gave way to a belief that sorcerers were allies of Satan and adherents of a new form of heresy who worshipped him at nocturnal assemblies, in Russia the old interpretation prevailed. Prosecution for the crime increased somewhat in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including a mass burning of twelve female witches at Pskov in 1411, but the theory upon which the prosecutions were based did not change.

In 1551 Ivan IV, being concerned about the practice of magic at the royal court, summoned a church council to condemn a variety of magical practices. This council also resulted in bringing the crime under the jurisdiction of secular as well as ecclesiastical courts. Prosecutions in substantial numbers did not begin, however, until the early seventeenth century, and most of these trials took place between 1625 and 1700, with the heaviest concentration of prosecutions taking place between 1645 and 1660. The most prominent of these were the prosecutions in the small town of Lukh between 1656 and 1659, which resulted in the accusation of twenty-five persons, five of whom were executed. These numbers indicate that there was something resembling a 'witch-scare' in seventeenth-century Russia, but no 'witch-panic'. Witch-hunting was probably more common in Russia than in the province of Transylvania, but more restrained than in Poland, which for reasons of proximity and comparable size is the most appropriate standard of comparison.

It is unlikely that the Russian system of criminal procedure had very much to do with the relatively low number of convictions and executions in that country. It is true that all criminal prosecutions in Russia were supposed to come from the local community rather than the officers of Church or state. This requirement, however, did not prevent local officials from bringing charges against suspected witches when private parties failed to do so. Once the original accusation was lodged, the state took over all prosecutions, thus making the Russian system essentially inquisitorial. Torture, sometimes in the most severe form, was freely used, both to secure confessions and to obtain the names of accomplices. The torture of the male healer Tereshka Malakurov during the Lukh witch-hunt was so severe that he incriminated his wife, who was promptly arrested and tortured until she confirmed her husband's testimony. Judgment

could be reached without the participation of lay jurors. Indeed, the only procedural rule that served as a restraint on unlimited witch-hunting in Russia was the requirement of referring cases to Moscow. Between 1622 and 1700 the reports of forty-seven trials, involving ninetynine defendants, were referred to Moscow for confirmation and sentencing. Of the forty-one of these witches whose fates are known, ten were sentenced to death, five were exiled, three died during torture and interrogation, and twenty-one were acquitted. These figures represent a fairly low execution-rate, comparable to that in countries that provided for appeals or confirmation of witchcraft sentences.

The main reason Russian witch-hunting never developed into a major witch-craze was the absence of Western demonological theory. If the witch beliefs that flourished in German intellectual circles had penetrated Russia and had been embraced by local and central authorities, Russia would probably have had a witch-hunt similar to that in western Poland. But the ideas simply did not become available. The Devil was not unknown in Russia, and references to the Devil or other demons occasionally made their way into witchcraft trials, such as when one male witch, Ivan Zheglov, allegedly renounced Christ and made an oath of allegiance to Satan. But Orthodox Russian clergy and writers did not make the connection between the Devil and the practice of magic, which became a central tenet of Western demonology. Nor did they develop a belief in the sabbath, cannibalistic infanticide or flight. Russian witchcraft, even more than English witchcraft, remained a crime of practising harmful magic, not Devil-worship. As Valerie Kivelson has shown, the Devil cast a 'pale shadow' over the charges of *maleficium* that remained the main basis for witchcraft accusations. Fear that maleic witchcraft would undermine the hierarchical social order explains the substantial number of Russian prosecutions, but the main reason Russia did not experience a massive witch-hunt was the failure of Orthodox Christianity to develop the same demonological world-view as the Latin Church did in the late Middle Ages.

Southern Europe

It may seem inappropriate to consider the Mediterranean region last in this survey of European witchcraft, for it was in Spain, Portugal and Italy that the most durable symbol of witchcraft prosecutions – the Inquisition – maintained its strength longer than in any other parts of Europe. It was in Italian lands, moreover, that some of the earliest witchcraft prosecutions took place. Yet if we use the total number of executions as a standard for evaluating the relative intensity of witchcraft prosecutions, then these southern countries deserve to be treated last. About 600 witches were executed in Italian lands, and another 500 or so in the Iberian kingdoms. Most of the Spanish executions were ordered by secular courts rather than the various tribunals of the

Inquisition. In the Spanish and Portuguese American colonies there were very few executions. We must not conclude from this, however, that witchcraft was of little concern to Italian, Spanish and Portuguese authorities. The total number of prosecutions in these countries was in fact fairly substantial. In Spain, for example, the Inquisition tried more than 3,500 persons for various types of magic and witchcraft between 1580 and 1650. In Italy, where the records of the Inquisition are still being researched, the numbers were even higher: the tribunal in Venice alone tried more than 700 persons. In Portugal, where work on the records is also incomplete, a total of 291 witches were tried in the southern part of the kingdom alone. The mildness of Iberian and Italian witchcraft, therefore, derives mainly from the reluctance of Spanish, Portuguese and Italian courts to put witches to death. This reluctance can in turn be explained by the way in which inquisitors viewed the crime they were prosecuting, the procedures they followed and the careful supervision of their work by central authorities.

One of the most striking features of Italian and Iberian witchcraft prosecutions was the rarity of charges of collective Devil-worship. The belief in such assemblies was not unknown in either peninsula, and in a few large hunts it appeared in a rather dramatic form. The confessions of the Basque witches of 1610 provide us with some of the richest descriptions of the witches' sabbath in all of Europe. But in the large majority of cases heard by Spanish, Portuguese and Roman inquisitors, especially in the southern parts of both peninsulas, these charges are completely absent. In Portugal the demonic pact figured in most witchcraft prosecutions, but not the sabbath. In colonial Brazil, where beliefs regarding the pact with the Devil, familiars, and metamorphosis were prevalent, the legal record makes no mention of sabbaths. Peasants and town-dwellers in Mediterranean lands were accused of performing various types of magic, including love magic and healing, and their magic was considered to be heretical, but this was not taken to mean that they had worshipped the Devil collectively. Some of the magical practices of these people were considered to be maleficent, but charges of *maleficium* were usually not amplified by charges of collective Devil-worship. The practitioners of magic were to be prosecuted, of course, but the purpose was to correct error and purify the faith, not to protect society from a conspiratorial menace. The end result, therefore, was the frequent administration of non-capital sentences by the Inquisition in the traditional manner of ecclesiastical justice.

There is no single explanation for the prevalence of this view of witchcraft in Spain, Portugal and Italy. One important factor was the widespread belief in classical forms of witchcraft. Both the Spanish and the Italian witch were very often viewed in the manner of Horace's Canidia or the even more widely known sorceress Celestina, a woman depicted in Fernando de Rojas's play, *Tragicomedy of Calisto and Melibea* (1499),

who engages in love magic, fortunetelling and divination. Such women were believed to use the flesh of children to make their spells and to acquire the power to summon up the Devil, but they had little in common with the German and Swiss witches who flew to the sabbath. As Julio Caro Baroja has shown, this type of witch tended to flourish in urban rather than rural environments, not only because such women actually plied their trade there but also because the Renaissance culture that supported the belief in such figures was predominantly urban to begin with. It is no coincidence that the areas of both Italy and Spain in which the cumulative concept of witchcraft was widely known and in which a majority of the prosecutions took place were both rural and northern, subject to northern (i.e. either German or French) influences.

A survey of Italian, Spanish and Portuguese witchcraft literature reinforces the conclusion that the stereotypical view of the witch never gained widespread acceptance in the Mediterranean world. It is true that in the late Middle Ages Italian and to a lesser extent Spanish intellectuals had made important contributions to the cumulative concept of witchcraft, while the papacy itself was largely responsible for equating magic and heresy. Once the full concept of diabolical witchcraft had been constructed, however, very few Spanish, Portuguese or Italian writers provided explicit support for the definition of witchcraft that had emerged or contributed to its further development. The overly credulous Italian judge Paulus Grillandus did subscribe to most of the learned notions of witchcraft in his *Tractatus de hereticis et sortilegiis*, drawing upon cases that he had adjudicated in Rome and southern Italy, but after that time the only Italian author who fully subscribed to the cumulative concept of witchcraft was Francesco Maria Guazzo, a Milanese friar who based his popular *Compendium maleficarum* not only on numerous French and German sources but also on his own experience as a witchcraft prosecutor in the Rhineland. It can be argued, therefore, that at the height of the great witch-hunt the most extreme and credulous Italian witch beliefs had northern rather than native sources.

The same can be said for Spain, where the demonological ideas that prevailed during the Basque trials can be traced to southern France and the work of the demonologist Pierre de Lancre. Overall, the cumulative concept of witchcraft did not become firmly established in Spain, especially in the south. Nor was it widely held in Portugal. Reports of night flight and sabbaths were not unknown in that kingdom, but Portuguese inquisitors tended to treat such stories with extreme scepticism. There were hardly any demonological treatises written in Portugal during the period of the trials, and the only European works cited by Portuguese authorities in discussing witchcraft were the *Malleus maleficarum* and Martín Del Rio's *Disquisitionum Magicarum*. Neither of these works was primarily concerned with the sabbath, and both were intended as manuals for inquisitors.

The failure of many learned witch beliefs to take hold among Italian, Spanish

and Portuguese inquisitors may have had something to do with the popularity of Nicholas Eymeric's *Directorium Inquisitorum* (1376), the inquisitorial manual most widely used in Italy throughout the period of the great witch-hunt. The form of witchcraft described in Eymeric's manual was ritual magic, which Eymeric considered in true scholastic fashion to be a form of heresy, since it involved a pact with the Devil. Eymeric had nothing to say about the sabbath or, for that matter, *maleficium*. By relying on Eymeric's definition of witchcraft, therefore, Italian inquisitors perpetuated an earlier view of the crime that excluded many of the elements that had been added to the cumulative concept of witchcraft after he wrote the manual.

Another reason for the relative tameness of witchcraft prosecutions in Italy, Spain and Portugal was the adherence of the Inquisition in each country to fairly strict procedural rules. In the Middle Ages papal inquisitors had become notorious for their unrestrained use of torture and the many other ways in which they had prejudiced the case against the accused. By the time the European witch-hunt began, however, inquisitors had produced a large body of cautionary literature, and two of the early modern institutions that succeeded the medieval inquisition – the Spanish and the Roman inquisitions – demonstrated exceptional concern for procedural propriety. Indeed, the Roman Inquisition has been referred to as 'a pioneer in judicial reform'. Unlike many secular courts, it made provision for legal counsel; it furnished the defendant with a copy of the charges and evidence against him; and it assigned very little weight to the testimony of a suspected witch against her alleged confederates. One of the most noteworthy features of both Spanish and Roman inquisitorial procedure is that torture was rarely employed. In Spain it was used only when there was strong circumstantial evidence but no proof, and it was applied towards the end of the trial, just before judgement was pronounced. Even in the great Basque witch-hunt of 1609–11, which involved thousands of suspects, the Inquisition tortured only two of the accused, and since the torture actually allowed their sentences to be commuted from death to banishment, it can be legitimately considered an act of mercy. The only pressure to use torture as a deliberate means to extract confessions came from local secular authorities and local mobs, groups whose extra-legal tactics the Inquisition sought to restrain. In Italy there was no less of a reluctance to use torture. Even the *benandanti*, the members of an ancient fertility cult in Friuli whom the Inquisition gradually convinced they were witches, were never put to torture.

The restraint shown by both the Spanish and the Roman inquisitions in the use of torture had a predictable effect upon witch-hunting in the Mediterranean world. It did not completely prevent large witch-hunts from taking place, since local panics and dream epidemics were by themselves capable of supplying large numbers of suspects. But without the unrestricted use of torture the hunts that developed did not produce as many convictions or result in as many executions as the large hunts that occurred in

Germany and Switzerland. Even more importantly, the reluctance to use torture prevented the development of extreme, diabolical witch beliefs. Without torture the potential for transforming simple acts of superstition into crimes of diabolical conspiracy was greatly limited, since only through confessions adduced under torture could diabolical beliefs gain the widespread legitimacy that was necessary to sustain further witch-hunting. Without torture it was certain that the learned as well as the popular view of witchcraft would remain essentially an individual moral transgression, not a large-scale attack upon Christian civilization.

In explaining the relative tameness of Spanish and Italian witch-hunting one additional factor – the strength of central control – must also be mentioned. Although medieval inquisitors had always received their commissions from Rome, they had never been subject to central regulation or coordination. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, however, inquisitors lost this autonomy. The loss was most apparent in Spain, where a new national institution under the king was established in 1478, superseding the medieval inquisition that had operated only in Aragon. The main organ of this new institution was the Supreme Council at Madrid, which exercised strict control over a large number of regional tribunals (eventually twenty-one) throughout Spain and its overseas possessions. In the early sixteenth century some of these regional courts had managed to exercise a large measure of local autonomy, but by 1550 the Supreme Council had established its superiority over all local tribunals. The effect of this assertion of central control on the process of witch-hunting became evident in Barcelona in the 1530s, when the council put an end to a witch-hunt by establishing its right to confirm all sentences. Even more dramatically, the council put an end to the great Basque witch-hunt of 1609–11 when, upon the recommendation of Salazar, it issued a very strict set of procedural rules for the prosecution of witches throughout the country. The authority and influence of the council was even evident in secular witchcraft prosecutions. In a number of seventeenth-century cases, most notably in northern Vizcaya in 1621, the council managed to bring about modifications of very severe sentences.

The various inquisitorial tribunals that operated in Italy outside the Papal States were not subject to the same degree of central control as those in Spain. Some of the regional bodies, such as the Inquisition in Venice, which included lay members representing the secular government, operated with a certain measure of independence from the Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome. Nevertheless, the Roman Inquisition achieved some success in its efforts to standardize procedure and sentencing practices throughout Italy. It gave prior approval to all sentences and, what was even more important, occasionally demanded that provincial inquisitors should conduct further investigation of cases that it believed required such action. Even the Venetian tribunal of the Roman Inquisition, which jealously defended its independence, often consulted

with Rome on matters of procedure and sometimes extradited suspects to Rome for trial.

Before leaving the subject of Mediterranean witchcraft we must consider H. R. Trevor-Roper's thesis that witchcraft prosecutions in Spain were relatively mild because the Spanish directed all their hostility towards Jews instead of witches. This thesis is based upon the assumption that the prosecution of witches was just one manifestation of a more general need of society to find scapegoats for its problems and to release social tension by prosecuting them. Witches and Jews (and for that matter heretics and any other minority groups) were in a certain sense interchangeable. Either of them could serve as an object of social fear and discrimination; it simply was a question of which group appeared more threatening. One of the corollaries of this argument is that the elimination of the fear of one group can lead to the prosecution of the other, as society finds new scapegoats after the old ones are dispensed with. Another corollary is that judicial officials have only so much time to devote to the prosecution of deviant groups and that it is likely therefore that only one such group would be prosecuted at one time.

This thesis has only limited value in explaining the mildness of Spanish witch-hunting. It can help us to understand why relatively few Spanish witches were prosecuted in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Although Spanish inquisitors had been concerned with ritual magic in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, they did not maintain their vigilance as such magicians in France and the Rhineland were transformed into witches. Instead they turned their attention almost exclusively to Jews, who were the main reason for the establishment of the Inquisition in 1478 and who bore the full brunt of its force until about 1540. It is difficult, however, to attribute the mildness of Spanish witch-hunting *after* 1540 to the presence of Jewish scapegoats, since by that time the problem had been largely resolved and the Inquisition had turned its attention to other matters. Now, one might argue that the increase in the number of Spanish witches after 1540 was in fact a result of the decline of the Jewish threat; that would be consistent with the general tenor of Trevor-Roper's argument. But it is impossible to explain the *mildness* of Spanish witch-hunting – which as we have seen is not to be measured by the number of trials but by the number of executions – in this way. There is simply no way we can attribute the 'moderate wisdom' of Spain in handling witches after 1540 to the presence of Jewish scapegoats in Spanish society. The fact of the matter is that Jews were *not* being prosecuted during this period and witches were. The reasons for the lenient treatment of witches had a great deal to do with the nature of the Inquisition and the way in which the crime of witchcraft was perceived at the time, and precious little to do with the Jews.

Conclusion

In describing the general patterns of European witch-hunting, historians frequently compare the European continent with England, showing how the prohibition of torture and the incomplete reception of demonological theory in England prevented witchcraft prosecutions from becoming as intemperate and extensive as they were in places like Germany and Switzerland. The comparison is both valid and instructive, but its frequent use can lead to an oversimplified view of the geography of European witchcraft. On the one hand, it can lead to the unwarranted conclusion that England was the only European country in which authorities prosecuted witches in moderate numbers. On the other hand, it can lead to the equally false assumption that there was a common 'continental' European pattern of witchcraft prosecutions. The foregoing regional survey of witchcraft should make the invalidity of those assumptions readily apparent. England, with its distinctive body of national law and its failure to adopt either Roman law or inquisitorial procedure, may have been very different from France and the various states of Germany in the way it dealt with witches (just as it was different from them in many other ways), but it was by no means the only exception to the prevailing European norm. One can just as easily claim that witchcraft prosecutions in Denmark, Norway, Russia and Spain were 'exceptional' by German or Swiss standards.

There were in fact so many regions in Europe where demonological ideas were only partially received, where the application of torture was effectively restricted, where the conviction- and execution-rates in witchcraft cases were kept fairly low, and where mass witch-hunts occurred only on rare occasions, that one must seriously question whether there really was a general European witch panic. There was certainly a general European witch-*hunt* in which various countries participated to a larger or somewhat smaller extent. But a witch panic, characterized by an unrestrained and paranoid pursuit of large numbers of witches, really only took place in west-central Europe. Although we shall never have complete statistics, those that are available suggest that as many as 75 per cent of all witchcraft prosecutions occurred in that large and populous area. Within that area we can define the boundaries of intense witch-hunting even more narrowly, since the number of trials in the kingdom of France was relatively small. The real centre of the witch-hunt was the area that encompassed the Holy Roman Empire, Switzerland and the various French-speaking duchies and principalities that bordered German and Swiss lands. By comparison to this area, all other regions were temperate in their pursuit of witches and mild in their treatment of them.

There are of course no simple explanations for the rather uneven geographical pattern of prosecutions we have traced in its broader outline. Generally speaking, however, four separate but related variables had the greatest effect. The first was the

nature of witch beliefs in a particular region and the strength with which they were held. Wherever witchcraft was defined primarily as *maleficium* and not as Devil-worship, witch-hunts tended to remain limited in scope, mainly because the suspicion that one person practised sorcery did not usually lead to a search for accomplices. The contrast between Germany, where the belief in diabolism was widespread, and Russia, where it was virtually absent, could not be more pronounced. In many areas, however, the crime of witchcraft could be defined in either way, with theories of diabolism receiving only occasional expression and commanding only limited subscription. This was certainly the situation in England, the Nordic countries and Spain, and in each of these countries the pattern of witchcraft prosecutions included both a number of individual trials for *maleficium* and a few larger hunts for Devil-worship.

The second major factor in determining the relative intensity of witchcraft prosecutions was the system of criminal procedure that was used in the courts. Although we tend to assume that all European courts, with the exception of those in England, followed 'inquisitorial' procedure and used torture freely, we have seen that witchcraft trials were conducted in a wide variety of ways. Methods of initiating cases, rules regarding the use of torture, customs regarding the appointment of advocates and procedures for appealing sentences all differed from place to place. Differences in procedures had profound effects on the process of witch-hunting, since they greatly influenced the chances of conviction and execution. Legal procedures also had an effect upon the reception of witch beliefs among judicial authorities, for it was often only under torture that certain witch beliefs could be legitimized through confessions.

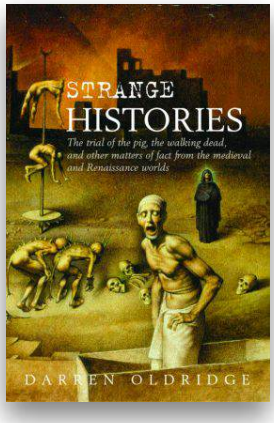
The third major determinant of the intensity of witchcraft prosecutions was the degree of central judicial control over the trials. Central control did not necessarily serve as a restraining force in witchcraft cases, since some rulers were often very eager to see witchcraft eliminated and occasionally even initiated witch-hunts. But in most cases local authorities (the magistrates of a particular town or village or the judicial officers of a small region) were more determined to detect, prosecute and execute witches than those who occupied higher positions of authority in Church or state, and more likely to violate the procedural rules formulated by central governments while doing so. The relative mildness of English, Swedish, Russian and Spanish witch-hunting, as well as that which took place in the central areas of France, can be attributed at least in part to the success of central secular or ecclesiastical authorities in restraining the enthusiasm of local authorities for waging a full-scale war against Satan's allies.

The final factor that must be taken into account in explaining regional patterns is the degree of religious zeal manifested by the people of a particular region. It is of course difficult to measure religious zeal, and it is even more difficult to demonstrate its effects upon witchcraft prosecutions. But it did inspire many judicial authorities to pursue, interrogate and convict witches, and those jurisdictions that convicted and

executed witches in great numbers were known for their Christian militancy, their religious intolerance and their vigorous participation in either the Reformation or the Counter-Reformation. Differences between witch-hunting in New England and the other North American colonies, between England and Scotland, between Poland and Russia, and between Italy and Germany can all be attributed in some measure to these elusive differences in religious 'enthusiasm' among those who conducted witch-hunts. These differences can in turn be linked to the religious stability of the countries in question, for it was areas that had experienced religious change or felt threatened by it that tended to pursue witches with the greatest determination. These areas were, moreover, much more likely than others to become preoccupied with diabolical witch beliefs and to allow their magistrates to use torture to protect the Christian faith. In this way religious zeal tended to reinforce other reasons for intense witch-hunting, just as its absence allowed public officials to develop a more 'enlightened' and moderate attitude towards the whole process.

Angels on a Pinhead

4. Angels on a Pinhead



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Are there toilets in heaven? Do angels eat food? How big is a soul? These questions evoke the naivety of childhood. They appear to be innocent and unsophisticated, and few adults would give them serious attention. The same can be said about most speculations concerning the physical nature of heavenly beings and life after death. Do angels have real bodies? How fast can they move? Will everyone be the same age in heaven? These questions seem pointless, but this response should not prevent us from asking why – exactly – they deserve to be treated so lightly. Viewed from a historical perspective, the peculiar nature of modern attitudes towards these matters becomes apparent. Western intellectuals gave serious consideration to all the problems mentioned above from the early Middle Ages to the eve of the Enlightenment. It was only in the eighteenth century that European thinkers began to dismiss such speculations as pointless. In the early 1800s, Isaac D'Israeli, the father of the Victorian British prime minister, summed up this attitude by mocking those scholars who asked "how many angels can dance on the head of a very fine needle, without jostling one another?" Most westerners now share D'Israeli's assumption that such questions are inane. But why?

The simplest reason for dismissing the kind of enquiries that D'Israeli lampooned is because they deal with things that do not exist. An atheist might argue that all speculations about the nature of God, angels, heaven and hell are misplaced: if these things are not real, it is futile to wonder what they may be like. Viewed in this light, our reluctance to study the behaviour of angels or the living conditions in heaven is just one aspect of a general decline in religious belief. But this is only part of the answer. The arguments of atheists may be compelling, but their impact appears to be limited: opinion polls show consistently that a majority of Europeans believe in God and the afterlife. In America, both church attendance and religious belief remain impressively strong. It is reasonable to argue that religion remains a significant feature of many modern societies, but other aspects of contemporary culture tend to discourage the kind of precise metaphysical speculations that were once commonplace. Three major trends stand out. First, empirical science has replaced theology as the normal method for establishing the physical facts of life. Second, there has been a general decline in confidence in the Bible as a source of information. This decline has been challenged to some extent by the rise of Christian fundamentalism, but even in the United States literalist interpretations of scripture are some way from enjoying the status of intellectual orthodoxy. Finally, the acceptance of religious pluralism means that Christianity is no longer treated as a source of universal knowledge. While scientists can legitimately attempt to establish general principles about the cosmos, the statements of theologians are always matters of opinion. Even if Christian scholars successfully calculated the number of souls in heaven, they would not expect their

findings to gain support among their Jewish or Muslim fellows.

These characteristics of western culture are relatively new. Before the widespread acceptance of empirical science among intellectuals in the late seventeenth century, theology provided the surest method for discovering the facts of this world and the next. The Bible remained an authoritative source of information until well into the nineteenth century, and religious pluralism emerged only gradually in western societies in the last 200 years. In the very different conditions of the pre-modern world, it was no more absurd for theologians to speculate about the physical dimensions of heaven than it is for modern physicists to contemplate the shape of the universe. Critics could accuse both groups of pursuing knowledge to the point of impractical abstraction. After all, do we really need to know if amputees will regain their limbs in heaven? Or for that matter, whether the universe is expanding or contracting? But in their defence, both modern scientists and medieval scholars could claim that the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake is a virtue. If it is worthwhile for scientists who believe in particles of light to speculate about their composition and behaviour, it is valid for theologians who believe in angels to ask the same kind of questions. Until the comparatively recent past, Christian thinkers enjoyed the confidence to do just this. The results of this enterprise may strike us as bizarre. But we would be arrogant to dismiss them as foolish, and we would be profoundly mistaken to regard them as trivial. On the contrary, these metaphysical conjectures reflect the great seriousness with which religious matters were addressed in the pre-modern world. They also offer a striking indication of the gulf between that world and our own.

Angels and Demons

Since the counting of angels on a pinhead is the most common charge made against pre-modern theologians, it is appropriate to begin this tour of the fine points of metaphysical speculation with the study of "angelology". The existence of good and bad angels was a given in early Christianity. In the magisterial *City of God*, St Augustine included both humans and the good angels in the company of the redeemed, and argued that demons would suffer damnation alongside wicked men and women. The attributes and behaviour of our celestial companions was the subject of careful analysis in the Middle Ages, culminating in the painstaking studies of the thirteenth-century Dominican friar, St Thomas Aquinas. During the Reformation in the 1500s, both Protestants and Catholics accepted the reality of angels, viewing them as allies in the pursuit of religious purity and the struggle against confessional opponents. Throughout this period, the existence of angels was proven by the unimpeachable testimony of scripture. The Bible contains frequent examples of angelic interventions in earthly affairs, such as the appearance of two angels in Sodom to destroy the sinful city

and rescue the virtuous Lot (Gen. 19). The prophetic books of Daniel and Revelation also describe the role of angels in the events of the Last Judgment. This scriptural evidence was supplemented by numerous later accounts of human encounters with angels. Bede offered an engaging instance in his eighth-century biography of St Cuthbert:

> One morning he left the inner monastery buildings to go to the guest chamber and found a youth sitting inside. He gave him the usual sort of kindly welcome, thinking, naturally, that he was a man. He got him water to wash his hands, washed his feet himself, dried them, put them in his bosom, and humbly chafed them with his hands. The youth was asked to wait till after terce, when a meal would be ready; otherwise if he left at once he would faint with hunger in the winter cold . . . But the youth said he must leave immediately and hurry to a far distant place. Cuthbert asked question after question, and finally abjured him in God's name to stay . . . When he came back the youth had vanished. The ground was covered with fresh snow but there were no footprints to be seen.

Cuthbert noticed a "wonderfully fragrant odour" after his guest had vanished, and discovered in the storehouse three loaves of bread "such as cannot be produced on earth, whiter than the lily, sweeter than roses, more delicious than honey". The saint concluded that his visitor was an angel, "come not to be fed but to feed".

In meetings such as this, angels appeared to God's children to test their obedience and demonstrate divine favour. But they could also act as instruments of wrath. The Bible made it clear that they could visit dreadful retribution on those who displeased the Lord. The Protestant reformer John Calvin noted in 1554 that "angels are the ministers of God's wrath as well as his grace", and could "descend with the purpose of executing divine vengeance, and of inflicting punishment". In popular traditions, this role was described in lurid tales of criminals destroyed by avenging angels. When the Englishman Gabriel Harding murdered his wife, an angel appeared in his house to announce God's sentence against him and hand him over to Satan, who promptly snapped his neck. A sixteenth-century ballad described the celestial visitor:

> His eyes like to the stars did shine,
> He was clothed in a bright grass green,
> His cheeks were of a crimson red,
> For such a man was seldom seen.

The folklore concerning angels included many fabulous tales of this kind, and educated contemporaries were quick to condemn the more colourful or theologically dubious reports as "vulgar superstition". Nonetheless, the clear evidence of scripture, combined with a wealth of testimonies by reputable witnesses, ensured that even the most sceptical pre-modern thinkers accepted the reality of the angelic host.

So what were angels like? Theologians consistently maintained that they were creatures of enormous power. According to Augustine, they enjoyed "powers surpassing those of all living creatures on earth", as well as the ability to overcome demons. Paradoxically however, this power came at the expense of independent action. It was a measure of their status as the most perfect beings beneath the Lord Himself that their will conformed totally to His own. As a consequence, they acted always as His agents. "Even when His angels listen", Augustine noted, it is God Himself "who listens in them, being in them as in His true temple". The Lord employed angels to perform miracles and communicate with mortals, but these acts were never truly their own. In this respect, humans had more in common with demons than angels, since both had rebelled against God to assert their own will. The angels' fidelity had been rewarded with perfect communion with the Lord, while the demons – and a sizeable part of humankind – were condemned for their disobedience to eternal darkness.

Throughout the medieval and Renaissance period, reports of the earthly activities of angels emphasised their perfect conformity to God's will. Indeed, this was one of the signs that a visitation was truly angelic in character. When a woman from Amsterdam was cured miraculously of lameness in 1676, the published account made it clear that the angel who worked the miracle acted solely as an agent of God:

> Being in bed with her husband, she was three times pulled by her arm, with which she awakened and cried out: "Oh Lord! What may this be?" Hereupon she heard an answer in plain words: "Be not afraid, I come in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Your malady, which has for many years been upon you, shall cease, and it shall be given to you from God almighty to walk again." . . . Whereupon she cried aloud: "Oh Lord! That I had a light, that I might know what this is." Then she had this answer: "There needs no light, the light shall be given you by God". Then came light all over the room, and she saw a beautiful youth, about ten years of age, with curled yellow hair, clothed in white to the feet, who went from the bed's head to the chimney with a light, which a little after vanished.

As the angelic child disappeared, she experienced a gushing sensation in her legs as feeling returned to the previously dead limbs, and within two days she could walk again. Like the unnatural light that suffused the room, this act of healing was accomplished solely through the power of God, with the golden-haired child apparently serving as the conduit for His will.

While scripture and the Church Fathers offered a clear picture of the behaviour of angels, there was less agreement about their physical nature. Augustine was ambivalent on whether they possessed real bodies, though most other early writers assumed that they did. This derived partly from the belief that the reprobate angels fell from grace by committing sexual sins, a view supported by the apocryphal book of

Enoch and the passage in Genesis where the "sons of God", normally taken to be angels, begot children by the "daughters of men" (Gen. 6:2). Other biblical incidents suggested that angels had physical bodies, such as Abraham's meeting with three celestial messengers who accepted his offer of food (Gen. 18). This view was consistent with the belief that God, as the most perfect being, was the only entity that could exist in a completely disembodied form. The idea of angelic bodies persisted into the Middle Ages, but was increasingly challenged by new opinions. In the twelfth century, Peter Lombard expressed doubts about the corporeality of angels in his *Sentences*, which became one of the core texts for theological study in medieval universities. More decisively, Thomas Aquinas argued that both angels and demons were immaterial beings in his exhaustive exposition of the Christian faith, the *Summa Theologica*.

This new perspective raised an obvious problem. If angels were immaterial creatures, how did they interact with humans? Did they appear to mortals in visions? Or did they assume temporary bodies when they descended to earth? Aquinas and most subsequent writers took the latter view. As he noted in the *Summa*, the Bible recorded instances where angels were seen by large groups of people, making it unlikely that they were merely projections of the mind. They also appeared to engage physically with human beings, like the angel who wrestled with Jacob before revealing his message from God (Gen. 32:24–8). Aquinas concluded that celestial beings took on earthly bodies for our benefit, since as embodied creatures we could not relate to them in their natural form. "Angels need an assumed body, not for themselves, but on our account: that by conversing familiarly with men they may give evidence of that intellectual companionship which men expect to have with them in the life to come". This solution left open many questions, which the "angelic doctor" pursued with exacting tenacity. Did the "assumed bodies" of angels perform the normal functions of life? Did they need to sleep and eat? Here the evidence of scripture was ambiguous, since angels appeared to share food with the patriarch Abraham (Gen. 18:8). Nonetheless, Aquinas argued that "properly speaking the angels cannot be said to eat, because eating involves the taking of food convertible into the substance of the eater". But when an angel assumed a physical body, it was not "of such a nature that food could be changed into it". Moreover, as immaterial beings they had no need for physical sustenance. It followed that angels only appeared to eat food as a courtesy to their mortal companions, who were thereby able to offer them earthly hospitality.

Could angels have sex? Augustine had raised this prospect when he noted the evidence in scripture "that angels appeared to men in bodies of such a kind that they could not only be seen but also touched". While he rejected the view that the "children of God" who paired with women in Genesis 6:2 were angels, he left open the possibility that "spirits with bodies of air (an element which even when set in motion by a fan is felt by the bodily sense of touch) can experience lust and so can mate, in whatever way

they can, with women who feel their embraces". Aquinas followed him in this, but denied that immaterial spirits could ever experience sexual desire. This was impossible because "a spiritual nature cannot be affected by such pleasures as appertain to bodies, but only by such as are in keeping with spiritual things". Thus angels were non-sexual beings. It was possible, nonetheless, for fallen angels to assume physical bodies in order to copulate with humans, but they did so only for the intellectual pleasure of encouraging sin.

As well as the physical properties of angels, Aquinas devoted scrupulous attention to their mental abilities. Could they read minds? Or predict the future? Here he was careful to preserve the special powers of God. While the will of angels was aligned to divine purposes, only the Lord Himself possessed a sure knowledge of human hearts. Nonetheless, the friar observed that telltale signs often revealed the hidden thoughts of men and women, and conjectured that angels were exceptionally good at reading these signs:

> A secret thought can be known . . . in its effect. In this way it can be known not only by an angel but by a man . . . For thought is sometimes discovered not merely by outward act, but also by change of countenance; and doctors can tell some passions of the soul by the mere pulse. Much more then can angels, and even demons, the more deeply they penetrate those bodily modifications.

If angels were exemplary judges of character, they were also preternaturally skilful at guessing the future. Only God had perfect knowledge of events to come, but many occurrences could be predicted accurately by careful observation of signs in the present, just as accomplished doctors could predict the future health of their patients. Aquinas suggested that angels used the same method, only with better results "as they understand the causes of things both more universally and more perfectly". They would make superb gamblers if their disembodiment did not render them immune to material desires.

Precise speculations of this kind were valid in their own right: they supplied details of the pattern of God's creation and focused attention on some of His most sublime works. But the study of angels also had practical applications. Since celestial beings could appear on earth, angelology offered guidelines on how the recipients of these visits should conduct themselves. This advice was necessary in order to avoid demonic deceptions, since even Satan could appear as "an angel of light" (2 Cor. 11:14). The theological consensus was that men and women should listen humbly to angelic visitors, who would reveal their true nature in their words and deeds. Since they always acted in accordance with the will of God, their pronouncements would be consistent with scripture and their actions would promote true religion. It was prudent, nonetheless, to be cautious. In the sixteenth century, the Swiss Protestant theologian Ludwig Lavater suggested that men and women should avoid all conversations with

angels. "Ask them not who they are, or why they have presented themselves to be seen or heard. For if they be good, they will like it well that thou will hear nothing but the word of God; but if they be wicked, they will endeavour to deceive thee with lying."

Advice of this kind assumed that people would not deliberately exploit their contact with angels for illicit purposes. But like all forms of knowledge, the science of celestial spirits could be abused. The medieval church condemned attempts to conjure angels to obtain secret knowledge, but surviving texts on ritual magic suggest that the practice was sometimes attempted. A thirteenth-century work attributed to Honorius of Thebes provides a striking example. This includes a ceremony for obtaining a prophetic vision of "the majesty of God in his glory, and the nine orders of angels, and the company of all blessed spirits". The author claims that this rite was revealed to him through an angelic visitation. A manual of ritual magic from fifteenth-century Germany includes a conjuration to obtain visions of angels in dreams. These will impart their knowledge to the sleeping magician. Such practices reversed the normal relationship between angels and mortals by placing the magician in control of the encounter. From the perspective of orthodox churchmen, they also exposed the unwary to contact with evil spirits disguised as "angels of light".

As these anxieties suggest, the activity of demons necessitated their careful study. Like their angelic counterparts, the existence of demons was confirmed by scripture and the writings of the Church Fathers, as well as contemporary reports by reputable witnesses. The Old Testament contains relatively few references to the fallen angels, though the apocryphal book of Enoch describes their rebellion against God and expulsion from heaven. The New Testament, in contrast, features several encounters between Christ and the devil, as well as numerous descriptions of "unclean spirits". Augustine devoted much of his later work to the study of demons, and the lives of the desert fathers described lurid and often violent encounters with them. St Jerome's fourth-century life of Hilarion includes this dramatic episode:

> One night he started to hear babies crying, sheep bleating, cattle lowing, women weeping, as well as lions roaring and the din of an army. In short, many different terrifying sounds. He was driven back by terror at this noise, rather than anything he could see. He realised that the demons were mocking him, and so he fell down on his knees and made the sign of the cross on his forehead. Armed in this way he fought more bravely as he lay there, but he half-wanted to see what he was terrified to hear, and so he carefully looked around him in every direction. All of a sudden, in the moonlight, he saw a chariot with neighing horses rushing over him; but when he called upon Jesus, the earth opened wide and the whole procession was swallowed up.

As this tale suggests, demons were more varied in their appearance than angels. This was confirmed by a wealth of medieval sightings, in which they assumed the guise of

handsome men and women, animals, monsters, and even swarms of bees. St Catherine of Sweden was tormented by demons in the shape of children's dolls. When a demon appeared at the bedside of the fourteenth-century mystic Julian of Norwich, she was able to provide a remarkably detailed description of its face:

> I thought the fiend had me by the throat, putting his face very near mine. It was like a young man's face, and long and extraordinarily lean: I never saw the like. The colour was the red of a tilestone newly fired, and there were black spots like freckles, dirtier than the tilestone. His hair was rust-red, clipped in front, with side-locks hanging over his cheeks. He grinned at me with a sly grimace, thereby revealing white teeth, which made it, I thought, all the more horrible. There was no proper shape to his body or hands, but with his paws he held me by the throat and would have strangled me if he could.

Other sightings presented demons as little more than vermin. Around 1230 the German monk Caesarius of Heisterbach described how a priest from Mainz spotted foul spirits on the skirts of a woman in his congregation. "They were as small as dormice and as black as Ethiopians, grinning and clapping their hands and leaping hither and thither like fish enclosed in a net". The priest abjured the creatures to be still and ordered the poor woman outside, where a crowd gathered to watch him drive them away.

Since they lacked the perfect integrity of angels, the behaviour of demons was much harder to predict. They rejoiced in deception. Demons showed remarkable ingenuity in their efforts to dupe mortals, masquerading as angels and even mimicking the miracles of God. But their intentions were always wicked. Augustine observed that they were "spirits whose only desire is to do us harm, who are completely alien from any kind of justice, swollen with arrogance, livid with envy, and full of crafty deception". This ill will manifested itself in several ways. Demons could physically assault the faithful, as they did St Antony during his years in the wilderness. More subtly, they could terrorise the mind with perverse thoughts and temptations. After their nocturnal assaults on Hilarion were thwarted, the demons turned their attention to his mind: "often naked women would appear to him as he lay resting, often the most splendid banquets would appear to him when he was hungry". Medieval saints faced similar trials. In one memorable episode in fourteenth-century Italy, demons tempted Catherine of Siena with "vile pictures of men and women behaving loosely before her mind, and foul figures before her eyes, and obscene words to her ears, shameless crowds dancing around her, howling and sniggling and inviting her to join them". We can only admire Catherine's fortitude in resisting these advances. In their most complex and successful strategies, demons erected whole systems of false belief in which they were venerated as gods. Early Christians explained the pagan religions of Greece and Rome in these terms and later thinkers applied the same logic to the native cultures of America. In a seventeenthcentury manual for priests working among South American tribespeople,

Jacinto de la Serna identified medicine men as "ministers of Satan", and explained the local custom of identifying babies with animals "as further evidence of the way in which the devil, by means of his pacts, deceives these miserable people". Back in Europe, demonologists viewed the secret conspiracy of witchcraft as a more explicit means by which demons achieved the same objectives; and both Catholic and Protestant theologians denounced their confessional opponents as "dupes of Satan" during the Reformation.

Given the pervasive involvement of demons in human affairs, theologians were keen to establish the limits of their power. In this they applied similar principles to those used in the study of angels. Like angels, demons were constrained by God-given laws of nature, but unlike their heavenly rivals, they never willingly assisted God in the performance of miracles that involved the temporary suspension of these laws. It followed that the feats performed by demons were always restricted by natural boundaries: they were "wonders" or "marvels", not true miracles. In 1616 the English pastor William Gouge set out the conventional view that evil spirits could only perform acts "in the compass of nature"; they never contravened the laws of the universe, but could exploit these laws to create remarkable effects. In this respect, demons were like modern-day conjurors: they pretended to achieve impossible feats by manipulating objects and gulling their audience. But they were conjurors par excellence. They possessed the same extraordinary knowledge and mental ability as angels, and put these advantages to ruthless use.

One common form of demonic deception was the creation of hallucinations. Augustine noted that demons pretended to effect miracles by tricking the human senses, so that extraordinary feats were performed "merely in respect of appearance". In the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), Heinrich Krämer and Jacob Sprenger speculated on the mechanics of this process. They suggested that devils transferred images from the human memory to the organs of sight. As a result, the victim "is compelled to think that he sees with his external eyes" something that exists only in his imagination. Demons employed less subtle manipulations to convince mortals that they could see into the future. Nicolas Rémy suggested in 1595 that their ability in this regard resulted from little more than life experience:

> The longevity of the first men is said to have given them much leisure for observation; and out of this rose the science of astrology, by which it is thought to be possible to have precognition of the overthrow of kingdoms, of wars, the yields of crops, pestilences, and such matters. What wonder, then, if having lived continuously, without even sleeping, from the beginning of the world, the demons with their vigorous memory and unfettered powers of reasoning have acquired some faculty for conjecturing the future?

Some demonic prophecies were not even clever guesses. Rémy observed that wicked

spirits sometimes exploited the inadequacies of human systems of communication by "predicting" events that had already taken place. He noted how "demons are able to announce, almost at the very moment of its occurrence, that which has happened in remote and distant regions, so that men in the slowness of their perception marvel at it and regard it in the light of a prognostication".

While angels acted as messengers of God, a role that tended to limit their physical contact with humans, demons engaged in various kinds of corporeal relationships. They could assail human bodies with blows, and enter these bodies in cases of possession. As Caesarius of Heisterbach explained, "when the devil is said to be within the body of a man, this must not be understood of the soul but of the body, because he is able to pass into its empty cavities such as the bowels". Given these remarkable abilities, there was much speculation about the physical composition of demons. Most early Christian writers assumed they had real bodies, normally composed of some type of air. Augustine lent credence to this view by speculating that the original, celestial bodies of demons were transformed as a result of their fall. He suggested that they were reconstituted with aerial bodies so they could suffer punishment in the element of fire. This view commanded support throughout the Middle Ages, but in the thirteenth century it was challenged by the rival position that demons, like angels, were immaterial beings. Aquinas denied that demons possessed bodies of their own, but maintained that they assumed an artificial form when they appeared to mortals. Most writers on witchcraft in the Renaissance upheld this view. Whatever their natural state however, the material reality of the "assumed bodies" of demons was never in doubt. Medieval reports of demonic encounters were often violently physical. When a foul spirit appeared to the fourteenth-century saint Peter Olafsson, it hurled stones at his door that left visible marks. The fate of a wicked knight from Cologne was more terrible: Caesarius described how he was snatched up by a demon that "dragged him through the roof so roughly that his bowels were torn out by the broken tiles". Demons were also vulnerable to assaults on their assumed bodies. According to legend, St Dunstan grabbed a devil by its nose with a pair of tongs. In an incident from the 1440s, the friar Simon Granau described how a similar act led to tragic consequences. A carter arrived at the Prussian town of Thorn during a carnival, in which local men dressed up as demons to chase women outside the town walls. Not knowing what was happening, he jumped down from his cart to rescue one of the women, driving an axe through her attacker's head.

While the assumed bodies of demons could suffer physical harm, this had no material effect on the foul spirits themselves. Lacking human flesh, they were incapable of suffering in the same way as mortals. Some medieval writers derived a surprising conclusion from this fact: demons were unable to do penance for their sins, even if they regretted their rebellion against God. They shared with humans the misfortune of living

in a fallen state, but they could never atone for their crimes through bodily punishment. A firsthand account of this novel tragedy was provided in thirteenth-century France, when a demon spoke through the mouth of a possessed Dominican friar. The spirit began by talking about the good angels, then declared that "you don't know how sublime they are, but I know – I who fell from the company of them. And since I do not have flesh in which I can do penance, I am not able to climb there anymore". The creature added remorsefully that "if I had as much flesh as is in the human thumb, I would do so much penance in it that I would yet rise to a higher place". Tales of this kind reminded contemporaries that demons, despite their great powers, were irretrievably doomed. As Aquinas noted, they were sorrowful as well as malignant. The fate of the demons also provided an incentive for mortals to practise the repentance they could never perform.

The angels and demons studied by pre-modern academics belonged to a parallel, "invisible" world that occasionally intersected with our own. Their study was part of the general enterprise of understanding the works and purposes of God. Knowledge of angels was important in this light, though relatively few people experienced direct contact with them. But another area of metaphysical speculation dealt with events that would affect everyone, bringing them face to face with the judgments of God and the facts of the invisible world. This was the study of the afterlife.

Things to Come

Pre-modern people embraced two distinct ideas about life after death, both of which derived from the Bible and the Church Fathers. The first was the general resurrection of the dead. This would take place at the end of time, when Christ would restore life to the saved and the damned before consigning them to their eternal fates. St Paul looked forward to this final day, when "the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible". They would be restored to life "in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye" (1 Cor. 15: 52). This vision was elaborated in the book of Revelation, which described how the earth and the oceans would yield up the dead for their final reckoning. The resurrected would stand before God to be "judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev. 20:12). The redeemed would become citizens of a heavenly city that would descend from the sky, and the damned would be tossed into the eternal furnace of hell, which most scholars located beneath the surface of the earth. In the thirteenth century, Gerardesca of Pisa described the luminous habitation of the risen saints, revealed to her in a vision of the world to come:

> She saw a vast plain called the territory of the Holy City of Jerusalem. There were castles in amazing numbers and very beautiful pleasure-gardens. All the

> streets of the city-state of Jerusalem were of the purest gold and the most precious stones. An avenue was formed by golden trees whose branches were resplendent with gold. Their blossom remained rich and luxuriant according to their kind, and they were more delightful and charming than anything we can see in earthly pleasure-gardens. In the middle of this territory lay Jerusalem – holy, sublime, very beautiful and ornate.

Today a minority of Christians hold steadfastly to the belief in a future world remade by divine intervention, but most westerners are probably more familiar with the second kind of afterlife envisioned in the pre-modern age. This was the immediate transition of the soul to another place after death. This view was implied in Jesus's parable of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus. When the beggar died he "was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom", while the rich man was ushered by death to a "place of torment" (Luke 16:22, 28). Psalm 49 echoed this promise: the psalmist rejoiced that "God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me" (Ps. 49:15). These two beliefs co-existed in the pre-modern world, with the immediate fate of the soul upon death normally viewed as a preliminary to its eventual state at the end of history.

Both forms of the afterlife raised technical questions. In the case of the general resurrection, one obvious problem concerned the restoration of corpses. Did they need to be intact at the moment of regeneration? What would become of those people whose bodies had been dismembered or burnt to ashes? St Paul offered one solution in his second letter to the Corinthians, where he inferred that when the last trump sounded the blessed would discard their earthly remains to be clothed in "spiritual bodies". This view implied that corpses were merely abandoned husks. Paul's opinion was challenged, however, by the physical resurrections described in the book of Revelation, and the later Church Fathers also insisted on the bodily reconstitution of the dead. Augustine faced the problems this raised squarely in the *City of God*. What would happen to "those bodies that have been consumed by wild beasts, or by fire, or those parts that have disintegrated into dust?" The answer lay in the incomparable power of God. "It is inconceivable", Augustine reasoned, "that any nook or cranny of the natural world, though it may hold those bodies concealed from our detection, could elude the notice or evade the power of the creator of all things". Cannibalism posed a more testing problem. What would happen at the general resurrection to those whose corpses had been eaten by other people? Here he argued that the flesh consumed by the cannibal would be converted back to its original owner, while the cannibal would be restored to the condition he enjoyed before his meal. Peter Lombard restated these arguments in the twelfth century in his standard theological text, the *Sentences*. An encyclopaedia of Christian doctrine compiled in the same period by the abbess Herrad of Hohenbourg contained a picture of beasts, birds and fish regurgitating the bodies of the saved. As the accompanying text explained, the "bodies and members of people

once devoured" will be disgorged in this way so the "members of the saints will rise incorrupt". In the thirteenth century, Aquinas agreed that bodies would be restored to their original state when they were raised up for judgment. He also conjectured that minor body parts, such as fingernails and hair, would not be ignored in this process. While these parts were not essential to life, they contributed to the perfection of the human body, and "since man will rise again with all the perfections of his nature, it follows that hair and nails will rise again in him".

As well as the issues raised by the reassembly of dead bodies, the physical nature of the general resurrection presented theologians with a tangle of technical problems. Once the dead were raised, what form would their bodies take? They were, after all, destined for eternal life, and could not be composed of the same perishable flesh worn by men and women before the Last Days. Other questions concerned the life cycle of the resurrected. How old would they be? Would babies be restored in their original bodies, and would they grow up to be adults? Here again, Augustine provided the standard answers. He argued that resurrected bodies would "have the substance of flesh, though never having to experience corruption or lethargy". Just as God furnished men and women with bodies suited to their earthly lives, He would provide them with new flesh fitted "for living in heaven". These renewed bodies would not need to eat or drink, or perform the other functions required for our present existence. There would be no toilets in heaven. On the question of the resurrection of infants, Augustine employed an argument reminiscent of modern genetics. He surmised that all human beings were imprinted at birth with the "pattern" of their future growth:

> All parts of the body are already latent in the seed, although a number of them are still lacking even at birth, the teeth, for instance, and other such details. There is thus, it seems, a kind of pattern already imposed potentially on the material substance of the individual, set out, one might say, like the pattern on a loom; and thus what does not yet exist, or rather what is there but hidden, will come into being . . . in the course of time. And so in respect of this pattern or potentiality an infant can be said to be short or tall in that he is destined to be the one or the other.

It was this pattern that would be realised at the general resurrection, not the physical state of the body at the time of death. Thus infants would "not rise again with the tiny bodies they had when they died"; rather, they would "gain that maturity they would have attained by the slow lapse of time". Peter Lombard endorsed this opinion in the twelfth century. Aquinas confirmed that the "imperfections" of physical immaturity and old age would not afflict the bodies of the redeemed. Men and women would be restored "in the youthful age", when the body was fully formed but not yet touched by signs of physical decline.

Regarding the appearance of the risen bodies, Augustine argued that they

would enjoy unblemished skin and physical beauty. "This means that fat people and thin people have no need to fear that at the resurrection they would not be the kind of people they would not have chosen to be in this life, if they had had the chance". As well as physical perfection, the renewed bodies of the elect would possess a lightness and agility unknown in this life. According to Aquinas, this would result from a new harmony between the soul and the body, which would react more quickly to execute its commands. This ability was also consistent with the purposes of God, who wished to enhance the happiness of the blessed. Most medieval and Renaissance scholars endorsed these ideas. In 1692 the English Protestant theologian Thomas Watson described the luminous glory of the risen servants of Christ:

> Though the bodies of the saints shall rot and be loathsome in the grave, yet afterwards they shall be made illustrious and glorious. The bodies of the saints, when they arise, shall be comely and beautiful. The body of a saint in this life may be deformed; those even whose minds are adorned with virtue may have misshapen bodies – as the finest cloth may have the coarsest list; but those deformed bodies shall be [made] amiable and beautiful.

Watson observed that "the bodies of the saints, when they arise, shall be swift and nimble". While our earthly bodies are heavy and unresponsive to the spirit, our "new flesh" will reflect the perfection of the remade world. "Now the body is a clog: in heaven it shall be a wing. We shall be as the angels".

Scholars also pondered the biology of eternal damnation. Would the damned enjoy the same complete and uncorrupted bodies as the blessed? Aquinas noted that this appeared to be unjust, since physical deformities were sometimes "appointed as punishments for sin". This was certainly true of the mutilations imposed on criminals by the law courts of medieval Europe. Would these punishments be erased when sinners were resurrected with perfect bodies? He countered this objection by observing that "the punishments which in this temporal life are inflicted for sin are themselves temporal", whereas a different order of retribution awaited the damned in hell. Medieval scholars agreed that the bonfires of the afterlife would provide the principal torment of the damned. This was confirmed by the book of Revelation, which predicted that sinners "shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Rev. 20:8).

This grim promise raised some interesting physical questions. How could a fire burn forever without consuming the bodies within it? Was the fire of Hell the same as that found on earth? The first problem was resolved by the incorruptible nature of the bodies of the damned. As the Saxon monk Hugh of St Victor argued in the early twelfth century, these bodies were designed to endure everlasting flames. While the immortal flesh of the saved brought them eternal pleasure, the same attribute permitted the condemned to suffer endless agonies. Peter Lombard and Aquinas shared this view. As

for hellfire itself, Aquinas conjectured that it was the same as earthly fire except "it needs no kindling, nor is kept alive by fuel". The same arguments were applied to the flames of purgatory, which purified sinful souls as they awaited the Judgment. The effects of earthly bonfires on human remains confirmed their similarity to the purgatorial pyres. Condemned heretics burnt to a cinder because they were utterly riddled with sin. The relics of saints, in contrast, were uncorrupted by earthly flames, and this method was sometimes used to confirm their authenticity.

As well as the physics of the afterlife, scholars addressed questions of location and space in the world to come. Was hell in the centre of the earth? Given the vast numbers who would suffer there – with real bodies no smaller than our own – an enormous space would be needed. "Since the multitude of the damned will be exceeding great", Aquinas noted, "the space containing that fire must be exceeding great". It was therefore reasonable to ask whether there "is so great a hollow within the earth" to contain them all. To resolve this dilemma the friar turned to the book of Proverbs, where hellfire was identified as one of the three things that are "never satisfied" (Prov. 30:15–16). He took this to mean that the pyres of hell would never lack space for the condemned. Moreover, divine power was sufficient to "maintain within the bowels of the earth a hollow great enough to contain all the bodies of the damned". Some later thinkers adopted a more mathematical approach. Italian Jesuits attempted to calculate the precise dimensions of hell in the seventeenth century. Allowing 6,000 years since the world was made, and estimating the number of the damned at between 20 or 30 thousand million, Francisco de Rivera suggested that an area equivalent to the Italian peninsula would be sufficient. Others challenged this calculation. "It is very probable", argued Leonardo Lessio, "that in that place of punishment there is not room for them to stand upright, but rather they are piled on top of one another and heaped together in the same way as wood in a pile". This allowed Lessio to reduce the space needed to a twentieth of Rivera's estimate. His work was challenged in turn by Cornelio a Lapide, who favoured a much larger inferno:

> It does not seem probable that the bodies will be so tightly packed in hell, but rather they will have more space so that the violence of the flames can carry them up high and then plunge them back into the fire, turning them and captivating them in many ways . . . Since it is probable that after the Day of Judgment the demons themselves will be enclosed in bodies in order to be tormented and to suffer the sight of the damned, but since there are so many of these spirits, the space calculated by Lessio would be too small.

Similar calculations allowed the curious to estimate the living space that the risen saints would enjoy. Speculations in this area were assisted by the book of Revelation, which described the dimensions of the heavenly city that would descend to earth following the Last Judgment: "the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the

breadth; and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs" (Rev. 21:16). Some medieval and Renaissance scholars followed the specifics in Revelation 21 to produce scale drawings of the celestial city. More ambitiously, others attempted to measure the space required for the Day of Judgment itself. As late as 1692, the esteemed New England pastor Samuel Lee suggested the entire event could occur in an area smaller than the British Isles. This allowed for the world to last 10,000 years, with an average of a thousand million people in each generation, and assumed that each resurrected body would require "a place five foot square to stand upon".

The future world described so confidently by Samuel Lee would be the final abode of all men and women who died. But the fate that awaited the dead in the years before the Judgment was another matter. The Bible had less to say on this subject than the Last Days, and St Paul referred to the dead before the Judgment as merely "sleeping" (1 Cor. 15:6, 20). Augustine held that God would receive the spirits of the dead in "secret abodes" before they were reunited with their bodies. In accordance with Jesus's parable of the rich man and Lazarus however, it was generally assumed that these holding places involved some form of judgment. At his death the rich man was tormented with flames, and was separated by a "great gulf " from the redeemed Lazarus. The nature of this judgment was elaborated in the Middle Ages, so that Aquinas could declare that "a place is assigned to souls in keeping with their reward or punishment, as soon as the soul is set free from the body". While the world remained in its present state, the condition of the dead was temporary and incomplete. Peter Lombard noted that the souls of the dead would only find perfect contentment when they were dressed in the new flesh of their resurrected bodies. Dante expressed the same thought in *The Divine Comedy*. Here disembodied souls looked forward to the day "when our flesh, then glorified and holy, is put on us once more". On that day they would "be in greater perfection, as being complete at last".

While the Bible provided few details about the migration of souls after death, many later accounts described the process more fully. In the fourth century, Jerome described how St Antony tramped across the desert to meet Paul of Thebes, only to discover that the holy man was dead. Antony was forewarned of this outcome in a vision as he neared the hermit's cave: "he saw Paul among the hosts of angels, among the choirs of prophets and apostles, shining with a dazzling whiteness and ascending on high". Rushing on to his destination, he found Paul's corpse in a kneeling posture with its arms stretched out towards the skies. Bede recorded a similar incident in his life of St Cuthbert. As Cuthbert was watching sheep one night, "he suddenly saw light streaming from the skies, breaking the long night's darkness, and the choirs of the heavenly host coming down to earth". He watched as the angels gathered up "a human soul, marvellously bright, and returned to their home above". The next day he heard that Aidan, the pious bishop of Lindisfarne, had died in the night, and he immediately

resolved to take monastic vows. Other reports of the afterlife were more direct. Around 1230 Caesarius of Heisterbach recorded the experience of Gosbert, a monk whose soul passed temporarily into heaven as he lay on his sickbed. Gosbert offered this first-hand account of his journey:

> When I was lately sick and in the greatest pain, something came over my bed. And having touched first my feet, ascending step by step, it touched my belly and then my breast, and yet I felt no harm from the touch. But when my head was touched, at once I expired and was brought to a very pleasant and most delightful place, where I saw different kinds of trees and flowers of many colours. There met me too a youth of great beauty, by whom I was most courteously saluted and led before Our Lady the queen of heaven, with much joy. A seat was placed for me at her feet, but as I sat in it in much happiness of heart, I was ordered to go back to the body.

Before this untimely resurrection, Gosbert was promised that he would return to his place at Mary's feet in a short while. He died three days later. Many similar deathbed revelations were reported in medieval and Renaissance Europe. In an example from Elizabethan England, the puritan Philip Stubbes described how his wife Katherine received a celestial vision in the last moment of her life. Katherine exclaimed to the people gathered at her bedside that she saw "infinite millions of most glorious angels stand about me, with fiery chariots ready to defend me". She used her final breath to proclaim that "these ministering spirits are appointed by God to carry my soul into the kingdom of heaven".

While visions of this kind affirmed the glorious reward awaiting redeemed souls, other deathbed experiences confirmed the wretched fate of the damned. As a "notorious usurer" lay dying in Bacheim in thirteenth-century Germany, she was suddenly beset by a flock of demonic crows. She watched as these creatures blackened the fields outside her window, then they swooped down on her body, making her scream that "they are tearing out my breast, now they are dragging out my soul". On other occasions, the spirits of the damned were released from their place of punishment to instruct the living. Around 1125 William of Malmesbury reported an especially grisly episode of this kind from the French town of Nantes. This concerned two impious young scholars who were curious to discover the fate of souls after death. They pledged that the first of them to die would return to the other within thirty days. When death "came crawling and snatched the last breath from one of the two friends", the survivor waited anxiously until the appointed time, when his friend appeared at his bedside from "the sulphurous abyss of hell". The hideous spectre implored the scholar to mend his ways, and provided a graphic demonstration of the reality of his pains:

> In order that his friend might learn from his countless torments, he held out a

hand dripping with ulcerated sores and said: "See here, does this seem insubstantial to you?" When his friend replied that the hand did indeed seem light and lacking in substance, the other bent his fingers and flicked three drops of pus on to him. Two of them struck his friend on the temple, so that they pierced his skin and flesh like cauterising fire and made a hole the size of a walnut. When the living man gave a great shout of pain, his dead companion said: "This will mark you as long as you live. It will serve as a proof of my suffering and, unless you ignore it, a special reminder of the need to look to your own future health."

Unsurprisingly chastened, the man sold his possessions and joined a monastic order. Caesarius of Heisterbach reported a similar apparition in thirteenth century Bavaria. The spirit of a corrupt court official appeared in his widow's bedroom, accompanied by the crashing sounds of an earthquake. Driven forward by a demon in the form of a "gigantic black man", the man warned his wife not to perform good deeds merely "for vain glory". He was then called out of the room "and driven on, the whole castle being shaken at his departure and his cries of woe long heard".

The general acceptance that souls were judged at the moment of death, and consigned to an appropriate waiting place before the general resurrection, led medieval academics to ponder the geography of the afterlife. Where exactly did the spirits of the dead reside? The Church Fathers were largely silent on this technical question, but a revival of interest in the scientific theories of Aristotle in the thirteenth century allowed thinkers to map out the abodes of the blessed and the damned. Aquinas accepted the Aristotelian view that the universe was composed of a series of concentric spheres with the earth at the centre. The infernal region of hell was within the earth's core, while the heavenly region, or "empyrean", existed outside the last circle of the visible planets. This provided a home for the spirits of the saved before the Judgment. In the words of the fourteenth-century theologian John Ruusbroec, the empyrean was "the exterior dwelling-place and kingdom of God and of his saints". According to Aquinas, this celestial space would also provide the habitation of the risen saints after the general resurrection. Rejoined with their bodies, the blessed would ascend to the region beyond the stars, leaving the remade universe unpopulated except for the suffering bodies of the damned.

As well as the location of the souls of the dead before the Last Judgment, scholars contemplated the circumstances in which they existed. One ticklish problem concerned the punishment of damned spirits in the inferno. How could disembodied souls feel the fires of hell? Aquinas resolved this question by asserting that immaterial beings could experience "spiritual contact" with material things, just as the human soul enjoyed contact with the body. Moreover, he noted Christ's definitive statement that there was an "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Since

he regarded demons as disembodied spirits, he reasoned that it must therefore be possible for immaterial entities – including human souls – to suffer in a material fire. Could the dead return to earth? The Bible implied this was possible, and a host of later sources testified to the appearance of departed spirits in this world. The precise mode of their transportation, and the nature of the bodies in which they appeared, were matters for speculation, but most authorities agreed that the souls of the redeemed enjoyed greater freedom to travel than those of the damned. The medieval cult of the saints encouraged frequent sightings of the glorified dead, who intervened miraculously in human affairs. Appearances of the damned were less common, and were often presented as limited and transient excursions controlled by higher powers. Thus the damned courtier from Bavaria informed his wife that he could not stay long before the demons hauled him away. During the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, Lutheran and Calvinist theologians challenged the medieval consensus by denying that any spirits could leave their abodes before the Day of Judgment. In an effort to explain the continued sightings of spirits in Protestant territories, they argued that all such manifestations were either demons or angels with dispensation from God to appear in the guise of the dead.

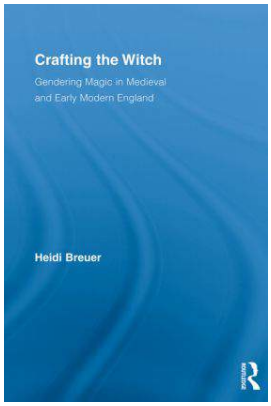
The close scrutiny of the afterlife by pre-modern scholars strikes many people today as shockingly "literal-minded". This is a telling phrase. For the great majority of people in pre-industrial Europe, as well as the colonies of seventeenth-century America, there was nothing allegorical about life after death. The heaven they believed in was real. In the same way, modern scientists assume that the objects they examine – atomic particles, chemicals, gases or planets – really exist. They are literal-minded too. What is truly remarkable about medieval thinkers like Aquinas is their complete acceptance of the reality of heaven and hell, angels and demons. Once this belief is granted, the questions they asked can be accepted as rational and important. If human souls survive death, it is reasonable to ask where they go. If the future resurrection of the body is sincerely anticipated, enquiring minds may be expected to ask questions about the physical processes this will involve. It is possible, of course, to argue that some areas of knowledge are in principle off limits to human investigators. This argument was sometimes used in the pre-modern world against "over-precise" theological speculations; it is still employed today by some people who are wary of certain areas of science, such as human genetics. If we accept, however, that the pursuit of knowledge should be unfettered, it is hard to deny that the pre-modern thinkers who pondered the physics of heaven and the biology of angels were engaged in a legitimate activity. In fact, this understates the case. If the reality of the Christian afterlife is accepted, then thinkers like Aquinas were pursuing a project more important than anything attempted in contemporary science: to describe the eternal destiny of the human species. Since most modern westerners still appear to believe in life after death, it is rather strange

that we no longer treat this project with the same rigour.

CHAPTER 5

Hags on Film: Contemporary Echoes of the Early Modern Wicked Witch

5. Hags on Film: Contemporary Echoes of the Early Modern Wicked Witch



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In this project, my purpose was to describe and analyze trends in the literature (favoring literary evidence over social, cultural, anthropological, or historical studies), and that task occupies the bulk of the preceding pages. What we have seen is that, in Arthurian literature, male magical threats transform over the course of five centuries into female magical threats. I identified a few of the most salient social factors for the authors and representations of gendered magic considered—from feudal violence and economic disaster to nascent capitalism (and the resulting extreme gender anxiety)—but my discussion is by no means an exhaustive one, and the complex web of power structures which comprise societal relations cannot be explained adequately in as short a space as I have devoted to them. My analysis of Arthurian witches adds one more perspective to the ever-growing conversation about literary and cultural representations of magic. I have argued that while twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers utilized magic to construct a normative gender binary, emphasizing the threat of male violence, writers producing Arthurian narratives after the fourteenth century began to represent female magical power as threatening, a shift which resulted in the re-appropriation of the wicked witch-hag. Specifically, the witch-hag assuages a profound cultural anxiety about the position of women within the shifting economic pressures of nascent capitalism (i.e., mercantilism) by stigmatizing and punishing (both symbolically and actually) women who do not conform to an idealized maternal norm.

The Renaissance hag still bewitches contemporary American audiences. We watch her in Disney films and extravagant musicals (old and new), read about her in fantasy fiction and neo-gothic horror stories, dress up like her on Halloween, and evoke her iconic image with a mere cackle. We write about her—legions of us!—still fascinated with her appeal, still interested in why, for about 200 years, she became so important and dangerous that she required quick, decisive, and widespread extermination. The European witch-craze, in particular, has been the subject of an extraordinarily large amount of writing, as scholars from just about every discipline have taken on such queries as why witch persecutions dramatically increased after about 1500, why they varied by region yet were so maddeningly pervasive, and, more recently, why women were accused and prosecuted over eighty percent of the time. Theories abound: groups of women secretly worshipped a horned god and sought to reclaim matriarchy in a patriarchal world; narrow-minded misogynist, heterosexist, patriarchal (and perverse!) clerics foisted elite demonological beliefs onto a naïve and needy populace, who happily utilized the church-provided scapegoats (women, mothers, homosexuals, the poor, and so on); long-festering village-level domestic conflicts between women escalated when unexplained tragedies coincided with a particularly nasty quarrel; real practitioners of magic or ignorant rubes rubbed psychotropic ointments on their skin or ate fungus-filled rye bread, resulting in hallucinatory visions

about night-flying, orgiastic sex, and strange twitchy fits; and early modern Europe fell prey to record numbers of mental and physical illnesses, from mass hysteria to syphilis. And that's only a few of the theories in circulation! Even when critics privilege one particular causative factor, most ultimately acknowledge the need for a multi-causal approach (as do I); surely a huge variety of factors combined to create and sustain the cultural milieu in which the early modern witch-hunts flourished. One factor often addressed by critics is the question of belief in magic, and more specifically, in witches.

The reason that the nexus of religious change, scientific experimentation, economic crisis, sexist backlash, and local politics coalesced around the witch figure (rather than landing on an Amazon, an elf, or a dragon) is that early modern people believed in witches. Not all people, but a lot of people. The majority of people, it seems, believed that things sometimes happened because *someone* (a witch) desired them to happen, because *someone* used secret magical power to transform reality. They inherited belief in witches from ancient sources—Europeans, North Africans, and Middle Easterners all had vibrant traditions of magic featuring various kinds of witches. Their beliefs were specifically inflected for different individuals and different groups (as are all beliefs), depending on such factors as socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and nationality—and resulting in such radically different figures as the devil's whore of clerical fantasy, the grotesques of romance, and the crabby village mom of the trial documents— but there was a fundamental cultural agreement in magic's efficacy that allowed government officials to prosecute successfully the crime of being a witch.

There are as many theories of why belief in witches (and thus the prosecution of witches) ended as there are about why it began, and they are equally as plausible and, ultimately, as unsatisfying. The general consensus seems to be that forces like scientific rationalism, urbanization, and secularization simply became too powerful to ignore. But nobody can say why with any certainty. Why do paradigm shifts happen? Why do beliefs change? They do so slowly, with no easily pinpointed spot—there it is, the moment people stopped believing in witches, the minute they began believing the world was round, the second when people stopped believing that Christopher Columbus was a hero. It's fairly easy to document changes of belief—as I have done here—creating complex narratives about when a particular idea entered the discourse and when another idea displaced it. But to explain *why* the change happened, why individual humans (and large groups) change their minds, their speech, their beliefs, we can speculate, if we wish, narrate precise timelines, even—but how can we know? There's no way to determine definitively what people actually believe (let alone why that belief should change) in any period, including our own. We know what we believe (perhaps), and we know what others tell us they believe (whether over a cocktail or with a keyboard), and we can observe people's behaviors (which may tell us something

about their beliefs)—but we cannot know with certainty what they believe. In lieu of certainty, we can at best hope to explore and interpret the evidence (whatever we consider that to be). Two types of evidence seem especially relevant to the question of belief: legal and literary.

Why is the analysis of a legal system potentially useful to the question of belief? Because generally we don't bother to go through the ponderous processes of the legal system unless we believe the grievance is serious. Though people with money can surely take advantage of legislation more easily than those without (and this must have been even more true for those who lived in the highly stratified society of England from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries than it is today in the U.S.), bureaucratic procedure prevents most of the frivolous cases from bothering the authorities (although some might argue that's no longer true). Even when people abuse the judicial system by making unfair accusations, they must provide a charge likely to be believed by a judge or jury. Analysis of the legislation against witchcraft and the circumstances of specific cases thus offers some insight (though limited) into what was considered threatening enough—and believable enough—to demand legal action. In the Renaissance, the multitude of witchcraft cases that reached the inquisitors demonstrates deep-seated fear of (and therefore belief in) witches and witchcraft.

Literary evidence is also useful to understanding how a culture's discourses construct and maintain particular beliefs. Literary production is generally understood by both creator and consumer as imaginative—that is, as representing events and characters that do not necessarily exist. Literary evidence can't tell us whether or not the things represented actually happened, but it can tell us how a figure or plot functioned mythically, psychologically, and socially: literature performs cultural work, assigning certain representations privilege while divesting others of importance, constructing certain sets of behaviors as normative or as other, and negotiating social tensions by resolving them within a safe narrative space. Literary evidence can't tell us what people in a particular culture believed, but it can tell us something of what they believed *in*. Literature can show us what people find honorable and reprehensible, what fascinates them and what they find uninteresting or unimportant, and what latent assumptions and biases color their daily lives. If the law can show us what behaviors people found intolerable, literature can show us what they found acceptable, exciting, tragic, or ridiculous.

As we might expect, when we compare the literary representation of magical users with prosecution and punishment histories for the twelfth through the sixteenth centuries, we find a strong correlation: generally, in times when the law is relatively relaxed, when few cases of magic-use or witchcraft are prosecuted, the literature tends to represent magical characters as less threatening, but when legislation becomes more strict and cases come to trial more frequently, the literature tends to feature

representations of magical figures which are more extreme and sinister. In other words, the cultural resonance of certain figures—wicked witches—is greater at certain times than at others. Early medieval English writers and readers did not find the witch-hag as powerful a figure as did later writers, whose villainization of female magical figures provided an ideological justification for accusing and punishing real women (who may or may not have been magic–users).

Many scholars have analyzed the legislation about and prosecution of witches and witchcraft. I cannot possibly hope to add original scholarship to the monumental works produced in this field in just a few pages, nor do I attempt such folly. Rather, I would like to highlight a few major aspects of the development of magic- and witchcraft-related law in England to illustrate the manner in which the literature and the law influence one another.

In medieval England, secular courts usually prosecuted magic-users only if the magic was both heretical and harmful, and the method of prosecution was accusatorial. Kieckhefer outlines accusatorial procedure as follows:

> Until the late Middle Ages . . . municipal courts retained what is known as "accusatory" procedure: a trial would begin only when an aggrieved party pressed charges in court and took responsibility for proving them; if the accusers did not prove the allegations, they would typically be liable to the same punishment that the accused would otherwise have suffered. (189)

In light of the consequences for accusing someone else of using harmful magic, it's no surprise that few cases against sorcerers and witches appear in legal records. Anglo-Saxon laws were generally lenient towards magic use, and prosecution generally occurred only when the magic was used for harm or destruction. In fact, when it came to night-flights, a precursor to the more fully developed witch's sabbath of early modern witchcraft, the attitude of the court was often one of skepticism. In this time of few prosecutions and significant skepticism about the actual ability of women to possess harmful magic, the magical figures who appear in the texts surveyed in this study are represented in positive (though hegemonic) ways, as Chapter Two demonstrates. The early narratives construct magical giants and churls as the most prominent threats (although usually easily dispatched) while the records of prosecution suggest that violent men were prosecuted in secular courts far more often than were magic-users of either gender. During a time when state prosecutions of violent male behavior were on the rise, the knights of Christian romance rode around valiantly, lopping off the heads of those dangerous super-men, symbolically castrating those who did not conform to the dictates of the chivalric ethos, whose masculinity is too violent. While the representation of violent masculinity was relatively simple (follow the rules=good; break 'em=bad), the most complex and ambiguous representations of magic in the early Arthurian material involve prophetic power, a kind of magic important to

Christian doctrine and thus probably more widely believed in than other forms of magic less connected to or disparaged by the church (like medicine or necromancy). Here, skepticism about certain magical figures (e.g., witches) provides space for playful use of those figures, but writers embedded the more familiar, commonly practiced magical behaviors (e.g., wizardly prophecy) within a matrix of ambivalence and fear.

At some point after the thirteenth century, English secular courts began to adopt an inquisitorial procedure influenced by both ecclesiastical and secular law in continental Europe. I say at some point because different scholars support a variety of opinions about when inquisitorial practice really came to England: Richard Kieckhefer and Alexander Murray name Pope Gregory IX's appointment of inquisitors for heresy from 1227 to 1241 as the beginning of inquisitorial procedure, but Michael Bailey cites the decree of Pope John in 1326 (*Super illius specula*), which condemned all sorcerers to excommunication and "other appropriate penalties" (967); others, such as Pennethorne Hughes, point to Pope Innocent III's 1484 bull, *Summis desiderantes affectibus*, which condemned magical practices as heretical; and still others maintain that inquisitorial practice didn't fully set in until the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when the parliaments of Henry VIII (in 1542), Elizabeth I (1563), and James I (1603) each passed successively more strict acts punishing the crime of witchcraft. What this timeline suggests is that from about the middle of the thirteenth century, church officials and inquisitors increasingly conflated magic-use and heresy. The slow, constant build-up of anxiety about magic is demonstrated by the regular reiterations of its prohibition.

If it is difficult to indicate precisely when the legal system institutionalized certain practices (even though it is in this area that we have some of the most extensive, clearly dated records), it is even trickier to pinpoint the moment in a cultural tradition when a paradigm shift has happened—in this case, when anxiety about women's roles grew enough to demand the villainization of women through the wicked witch figure. What is clear is that the series of economic and social crises that dominated the fourteenth century had an immediate and lasting impact on the literary and legal traditions. The crises of the fourteenth century exacerbated the growing fear of demonic magic, and the end of the century brought increased numbers of witchcraft trials. Kieckhefer documents the number of trials in Europe from 1300–1500, arguing that after 1375, there was a "steady increase" in witchcraft trials, from the fourteenth-century rate of "roughly one each year" to the mid-fifteenth-century rate of over twenty trials per year ("Witch Trials" 25–30). The rising presence of witches as trial defendants collided with the country's need for economic scape-goating, and in the aftermath, writers adapted the familiar Arthurian stories and characters to do a new kind of cultural work. Rather than villainizing giants and super-manly masculinity, writers dredged up that ancient staple, the wicked witch, polished her off, and dropped her smack in the middle of the medieval family. Specifically, she appeared as a

step-mother, a figure of domestic intrusion, a dispossessing, (step) child-hating, scheming representation of all that was wrong with the new estates-threatening, money-oriented economic system. The witches of the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries reinforce an ideological commitment to land ownership as the fundamental class determinant; upstart women with new money might enjoy certain benefits, but they are easily revealed as power-hungry monsters whose destruction sets the feudal hierarchy back to rights.

In the courts of late medieval and early modern England, fear grew that all magic might actually be the result of traffic with demons, and this judicial climate soon permeated a variety of genres featuring representations of magic (most notably, drama). As scholars have exhaustively documented, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries saw prosecutions (and executions) for witchcraft in record numbers. Here, where belief is strongest and the criminal witch is the most threatening, the literary wicked witch also reigns queen, experiencing perhaps her greatest interlude of popularity in what's been far more than fifteen minutes of fame throughout the history of western literature. The fifteenth century saw the rise of writing specifically designed to link women, witchcraft, and diabolic activity (the quintessential work of this nature is Jacob Sprenger and Henry Kramer's *Malleus maleficarum*), and some of the most influential authors of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries participated in the conflation of femininity with demonology and monstrous maternity. The witch figure, in both legal and literary contexts, functioned as a warning to all women: stay in the home, caring for children, or risk becoming a wicked hag. This warning was particularly ominous because it was, in effect, backed by the legal system. Literature told women what behaviors were witchy, and the courts punished them if they didn't toe the line.

But belief went away. In England, witch persecution officially ended with George II's repeal of penal laws against witchcraft in 1736, and suddenly, instead of it being illegal to practice witchcraft, it became illegal to feign the possession of magical power. Across Europe and into the U.S., prosecutions for witchcraft stopped. Belief simply disappeared, crushed by the weight of that growing behemoth, Rationality, which was to replace the church as the state weapon of repression and control. Why science, reason, and Enlightenment rationality should come to dominate culture at the moment they did is a question for someone else to answer. What's far more interesting to me than why belief in witches stopped is why, once belief had vanished, the wicked witch remained.

In particular, contemporary American media keeps utilizing wicked witches—and in almost exactly the same ways as the Renaissance authors did—even though the majority of people in the U.S. don't believe in magic. There are many differences between the culture of medieval and Renaissance England and that of the contemporary U.S., but the salient difference here is simple: in the early modern period,

people believed in magic, but now, we don't. Some people do—like my Wiccan student, like children before they learn there's no Santa, like those of us reading about that indefatigable Potter boy—but the majority of people do not believe that things sometimes happen because *someone* desired them to happen and used secret magical power to transform reality.

If we have any witchcraft legislation still existing in the U.S. (and we might), it is not enforced. As Christina Larner puts it in *Witchcraft and Religion*, "the truth is that nobody cares" about practicing witches these days (83). Larner overstates the case here—people who practice witchcraft today probably care very much about what they do. But mainstream attitudes about witches in England and the U.S. are no longer comprised mainly of fear. We indulge modern witches, with some notable exceptions. Perhaps with contemporary witchcraft manifestations like the Satanic cults analyzed by Larner or with some groups engaged in religious or spiritual practices called "witchcraft" by white Americans, there may be fear (especially about rituals and sacrifices), but the women associated with neo-pagan witchcraft practices don't suffer accusations of cannibalism and night-flights. Instead, they are accused of relatively benign things such as dancing, self-help, or gullibility. Perhaps the most culturally loaded charge is that of lesbianism, which of course carries its own complex matrix of social signifiers. Generally, though, mainstream U.S. society treats people who self-identify as witches as I treated my student, with affectionate (or for some, perhaps, irritated) contempt. The contempt reflects the widespread lack of belief. Most contemporary Americans don't worry about witches hurting us because we simply don't believe they can.

From 1939 to 2008, U.S. witches have appeared frequently in two related genres, children's literature and fantasy literature, and the witch-hag especially enjoys showing her ugly face when these two combine, in children's fantasy literature. What this suggests is that modern audiences view witches as suitable for art forms that are overtly representing imaginary, not-real spaces. Literature of the fantastic (written for whatever age) makes no claim to verisimilitude—rather, quite the opposite, as the fantasy world makes impossible things possible; thus, within fantastic literature we find it completely acceptable to represent figures (like witches, dragons, hobbits, house-elves, and talking Beasts) which do not conform to modern biological norms. Children's and fantasy literatures reflect the things audiences want to believe, but don't, things like "love is all we need," "presents and candy can magically appear in your home overnight," or "good triumphs over evil"—the things that we want our children to believe in for as long as they can, preserving the magic until the day when Santa and the Tooth Fairy become gaping holes in the fabric of reality. Evidence from fantastic literature can show us what people don't believe.

The two evidential records (legal and literary) for 20th-century U.S. culture

show that despite the absence of prosecution and the normative lack of belief (a complete 180-degree-turn from Renaissance culture), the witch figure persists—and in almost exactly the same form. Writers and directors in the U.S. continue to represent and resolve anxieties about women and femininity in the spaces of popular literature and film. The gnarled, cackling Renaissance crone still has meaning for us—but what's amazing is that she still has predominantly the same meaning. Why is the witch figure still here if we no longer believe in or persecute witches? Why do we still find her so fascinating, her threat to children so terrifying, and her demise so satisfying? If belief has changed, what has stayed the same? In short, what's stayed the same is capitalism.

The shift away from land and toward capital as the primary determinant of wealth altered women's social function. In the land-oriented feudal estate system, people could not easily alter their socio-economic and gendered positions: peasants stayed peasants, aristocrats stayed aristocrats, women stayed in the private sphere and men in the public, with few notable exceptions. While the church offered an alternate path, and the working classes had some mobility within their own estate, individual agency was severely circumscribed by governmental and religious institutions, which regulated land ownership. The pervasive ideology of a divinely-ordained microcosmic hierarchy rested on the solid foundation of the land: if you owned it, you were powerful. The primacy of the land, however, did not remain. Growing regional, national, and international trade increased the utility of owning production materials and the importance of what they represented—capital. The population buckled to the pressures of plague, war, and climate, and the lack of workers rendered land a far less valuable commodity. Population loss coupled with the increasing role of international exchange meant that ownership of goods and labor for trade production was potentially more valuable than a large estate in the country. Merchants were lending nobles money, towns were becoming independent, self-governing, and prosperous, and the third estate was developing a new and powerful group of wealthy families who could buy land (and the accompanying titles) if they wished. Capital changed everything.

The effects of this economic paradigm shift on women were less radical than they were for men, yet still profound. Opportunity knocked. Women could live without husbands and outside the church, supporting themselves (albeit barely). Single women were still ghettoized anomalies, creatures to be explained and suspected, but they were able to take jobs as domestic servants, as weavers and seamstresses, laundresses, victualers, field-workers— even, for a brief period, guild-members. The upshot of all this: women could engage in paid labor, giving them opportunities to both expand and reject outright the maternal feminine norm. These opportunities, while certainly slim in comparison with modern freedoms, nevertheless represented a remarkable gain in agency for medieval women. The chance to refuse motherhood (without becoming a nun) had materialized. The neat system whereby women were controlled by husbands

(wife) or church officials (nun) opened a loophole, one which, despite Herculean efforts on the part of governmental and religious institutions over the next three centuries, never quite closed.

Today, women in the U.S. have a wealth of opportunities—we can head large, multi-national companies, fight in combat, and serve in Congress and Presidential Cabinets, for example (each of which would have been unthinkable for a medieval woman). There are still institutionalized restrictions, of course—we can't be professional football players or President of the U.S.A., apparently. The threat (and reality) of women moving further and further away from an idealized maternal role has only intensified over the years, prompting countless backlashes and sometimes violent attempts to contain female-ness within the domestic sphere. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, there are so many ways for women to avoid being mothers, it's dizzying (as evinced by my female students' frequent remarks to that effect). Reinscription and reinforcement of rigidly defined gender roles (especially in relation to maternity) therefore remains a primary ideological agenda in hegemonic cultural representations. Renaissance writers used the witch-hag to push women back towards the home, and contemporary writers and filmmakers do exactly the same thing. Lack of belief in witches as efficacious magic users does not impair their functionality as warnings to women.

In the twenty-first century, witches are still anti-mothers. The version of the anti-maternal witch-hag which impacted current representations of witches most indelibly is the iconic Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz* (1939, dir. Jack Haley, Jr.), as played by the remarkable Margaret Hamilton. The Witch is physically marked as post-reproductive: her body is hidden in a shapeless dress, lacking conventionally maternal signifiers such as large breasts or corseted waist; her face is both warty and green, deemphasizing her lips and eyes (so enticing to romance writers and directors) and contrasting the pale skin of most 1930s film heroines (and Glinda); and her nose is exaggeratedly large, a grotesque capstone to the erased sexuality of the Wicked Witch. She wields a broom, symbol of domestic power, but instead of removing dirt and mess, the Witch's broom creates chaos and fire—here, domestic power has gone terribly wrong. Not only does the Witch menace the sweet, blue-eyed orphan Dorothy, threatening to kill her, but her sister, the Witch of the East, was the tyrannical ruler of an entire land of child-like Munchkins. In Oz, witchcraft is a family heritage, an evil bond allowing the two women to hurt children instead of nurture them. Property rights (those pesky slippers!) prompt the Witch to take action against Dorothy, bringing her in conflict with another female figure, Glinda, recalling the village-level conflicts between Renaissance women which ended in accusations of witchcraft.

Glinda represents idealized femininity: her conventional feminine markers

include her pink dress—cinched tightly at the waist, low-cut to expose the bosom slightly, and adorned with sparkling jewels—and her face— ivory surrounded by a cloud of golden hair, with blue eyes, small nose, and red lips, all of which are reminiscent of conventional western aesthetics. An idealized mother-figure, Glinda protects Dorothy from the Wicked Witch of the West, guides her on her quest, and confirms the meaning of Dorothy's experiences in Oz: "there's no place like home!" Glinda is all the things the Witch is not: she cares for Dorothy and the Munchkins (saving the girl's life in the poppy fields), she wishes to return the girl to her family, and she floats in and out of Dorothy's life in her own protective womb, a beautiful pink bubble.

An early scene in Munchkinland emphasizes the opposition between the Wicked Witch and Glinda, between anti-mother and idealized mother: just after she arrives, the Wicked Witch approaches Dorothy. The Witch dominates the left side of the screen, leaning in toward Dorothy, broom at ready, curled into the now-familiar gnarled silhouette. Glinda and Dorothy occupy the other side of the frame together, connected by both proximity and Glinda's arm, which is wrapped around Dorothy, pulling her away from the Witch and into her own bosom. Highlighting her moral superiority, Glinda's hat reaches to the very top of the frame, far above the Witch's pointy black chapeau, making Glinda the tallest figure on screen. Dorothy's face reflects the horror we are supposed to feel, the terror of the anti-maternal crone's challenge to the make-shift mother-daughter pair.

Dorothy herself is a motherless child, an orphan whose aunt doesn't provide her with the type of nurturing she wants: her Aunt Em and Uncle Henry shoo her away at the very moment she desires their attention the most. Her dilemma is motivated by a stereotypically feminine desire to protect her dog (a child-surrogate, practice for the future), and it places her into conflict with a powerful single woman with lots of money but no children. Gulch's solution to the problem is typically witchy—she wants to have the dog (child-surrogate) killed—and it is this threat that motivates Dorothy's decision to abandon the only home she has. Here, a small town suffers when an anti-mother threatens a child, a situation so unnatural it spawns a tornado. Like the Renaissance conflicts between women which were mediated by male authorities via witchcraft trials, the supernatural events that follow the conflict between the Gales and Miss Gulch eliminate the problem of over-reaching female agency and restore hegemonic domesticity.

Dorothy leaves home in revolt against what she perceives as a lack of domestic nurture: Aunt Em doesn't pay her enough attention. Told to "find a place where [she] won't get into any trouble," Dorothy dreams of a place she "heard of, once, in a lullaby" where "troubles melt like lemon-drops." Details such as the lullaby and the lemon-drops evoke early childhood, an idyllic time when distractions like broken incubators did not intrude upon maternal attentiveness. Dorothy is no longer simply a

child, but she's also not yet an adult, a fact emphasized by her fall into the pig-pen, necessitating her rescue. Her domestic frustration is confirmed when Prof. Marvel cold-reads Dorothy, saying "They don't understand you at home; they don't appreciate you." Dorothy is amazed; it is as if he can "read what was inside of [her]." Dorothy's resistance to moving toward adulthood (and her own maternal role) prompts the journey to Oz, which, in turn, catalyzes the journey into the home.

The entire world of Oz is designed to demonstrate that there really is "no place like home," that the domestic world is the only proper place for a young woman to be. In Munchkinland, Dorothy sees firsthand an example of rejection of maternal norms: she meets the Wicked Witch of the West, anti-mother extraordinaire. She also meets the perfect mother, Glinda, who provides her with the kind of nurturing she always wanted. Dorothy is caught between these two poles, the Good Witch and the Wicked, the perfect mother and the perfect anti-mother, and it is no coincidence that she confronts this particular choice at this particular moment. Just as Dorothy is on the verge of becoming an adult, she must choose between motherhood and the alternative, witch-hood. Unlike Kansas, where the world is black and white but the moral dilemmas aren't, the Technicolor world of Oz makes choices easy. Hmmm, will you follow the menacing "other" trying to kill you or the pretty lady with the magic wand? Dorothy's presence in Munchkinland has already killed one anti-mother, setting her on the journey that will lead toward her adulthood, towards the home. Does the Witch of the West ever stand a chance?

Dorothy continues her journey to adulthood by consulting the top patriarchal authority, the Wizard of Oz, following the yellow-brick road to find the answers she needs. The Wizard of Oz confirms what we have suspected all along: to get home, Dorothy needs to kill the Wicked Witch, the anti-maternal model. Once the option for non-mother no longer exists, where can Dorothy be but "home?" Even Dorothy's companions emphasize the gendered nature of the yellow-brick road quest: while the Scarecrow searches for brains (intellect), the Tin Man for a heart (faith), and the Lion for courage (courage!), Dorothy searches for home. Male quests can be varied and involve developing one's character, but female quests are focused steadfastly on the one place women can claim for themselves, the home. Little girls may think they desire adventure and freedom, but once they leave the protective domestic space, they soon realize that the land of freedom and Technicolor is a dangerous place, and there truly is "no place like home."

The Wizard of Oz relies directly on the witch-hag developed in the Renaissance, using the figure, exactly as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers did, to frighten women back into domestic roles. The film's communication of domesticity as normativity is reliant upon the changes made to the original story by the writers, directors, and producers: the film version adds the entire Gulch scenario (and the

beautiful song that attends Dorothy's desperate straits, of course) and the first meeting between Dorothy and the Wicked Witch of the West in Munchkinland; it alters the Wicked Witch's appearance, turning the one-eyed lady of the book into the classic Renaissance witch-hag in all her glory; and where in the book Dorothy asks the silver shoes to "take [her] home to Aunt Em" (Baum 217), the film girl chants "There's no place like home" over and over again. While these changes are relatively subtle, they reflect the radically altered economic situation in the U.S. Baum wrote the story at the turn of the twentieth century, but the filmmakers adapted it during the late 1930s, at the end of the Great Depression. It is no coincidence that during a time of extreme economic hardship, the filmmakers turned Baum's story into a warning about the dangers of rejecting traditional roles, about the way in which home may seem bad at first, but really is the best place to be (especially for young girls). Just as the medieval writers adapted existing figures to suit new narrative needs (e.g., Morgan le Fay turns from good to bad), so modern filmmakers freely shape their sources to more effectively satisfy audiences. As far as I can tell, in the case of *Wizard*, the changes work pretty well: friends routinely explain how their children couldn't watch the entire movie the first time, because the Witch frightened them so effectively. She is a powerful Witch indeed. Children easily recognize her physical markers as "other," so embedded are the cultural conventions of femininity, and respond to them with fear and loathing. Clearly the Witch represents a choice we should not make, and both adults and children receive the message with ease. Really, the Witch tells us, for women, there's no place BUT home.

While Margaret Hamilton's Wicked Witch is perhaps the most iconic of the twentieth century, Disney's animated films feature a long line of wicked witches who function in extremely similar ways. *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1937), *Alice in Wonderland* (1951), *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), *101 Dalmatians* (1961), *The Sword in the Stone* (1963), *The Rescuers* (1977), *The Little Mermaid* (1989), and *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000) all feature hag-crone "witches" who threaten little children. *Snow White*, the first and the most explicit in its adherence to the witch-hag icon, sets the stage for the rest of the wicked witches who will terrorize Disney's innocent, beautiful heroines for years to come. As we all know, the wicked Queen in Snow White begins as a beautiful woman.

The Queen is known for her beauty, and it is no coincidence that Snow White is beautiful too. In a world dominated by the male gaze (which reaches even into animated spaces), women are judged by our beauty, by adherence to culturally-specific norms. It is beauty that attracts men so that women can be what we know we're supposed to be, mothers. The Queen is a mother, of sorts—she's that especially frightening beast who reared her nasty head in the loathly lady romances in Middle English, the step-mother. We have already seen the danger presented by step-mothers to their non-biological children: step-mothers in romance are likely to dispossess their

children, stealing land and resources from their unlucky new spouse's offspring. The Queen acts true to form, but her immediate motivation is no longer merely possession of land (though she does get the castle all to herself); instead, the Queen wants to be the most beautiful, to have the most power to attract the male gaze. What makes her desire for beauty poisonous is its competitive nature—if she didn't have to be the most beautiful woman in all the land, the Queen could have let Snow White live in peace.

Beauty and competition within patriarchy are so intimately connected that we all know what will happen when two beautiful women get together: they'll fight. Inevitably, one will envy the other. How can she help it? The male gaze evaluates females against an ideal set of beauty conventions, ranking them as pretty, prettier, and prettiest. Naomi Wolf analyzes the late twentieth-century operation of "the beauty myth," or the false assertion that "the quality called 'beauty' objectively and universally exists. Women must want to embody it and men must want to possess women who embody it" (12). In the beauty myth (currently perpetuated largely by advertising, cosmetics, and pornography industries), beauty is the only way women can access the scraps of power thrown to them by male-dominated institutions. The Wicked Queen's obsession with beauty presented in Disney's film is just one of many manifestations of the beauty myth, which Wolf suggests began as early as the fourteenth century (59–61). Snow White, a younger, and therefore better, beauty, must be eliminated for the Queen to win the (beauty) contest.

In *Snow White*, Walt Disney began a trend he and his animators would perfect over the course of the next eight or nine decades: they marked a particular kind of beauty as dangerous, lethal, and deviant, as indicative of an evil anti-mother, a wicked witch. The Wicked Queen created an aesthetic type: tall, so thin as to lack the conventional secondary sex markers of femininity (like breasts and/or hips), with pallid, chalky skin, bright red streaks as lips, and lots of black eye make-up, wearing a shapeless black dress. While on the one hand this figure adheres to certain norms of beauty, including the use of make-up and high heels, on the other she deviates from the most important rule for women: she refuses to be contained within the roles assigned to her within patriarchy. The Wicked Queen has no male master, no husband or father to reign her in, to make her submit. The lack of male control is a defining marker of Disney's wicked witch villains: *Alice*'s Queen of Hearts repeatedly screams "cut off his head" while her physically and symbolically miniscule husband sputters ineffectively; *Sleeping Beauty*'s Maleficent works entirely on her own, to the dismay of the entire kingdom; *Dalmatians*' Cruella de Vil buys everyone and everything, including all the men around her; *The Sword in the Stone*'s Mad Madame Mim openly fights Merlin, the only man on the planet who could hope to curtail her wild agency; *The Rescuers* Madame Medusa uses and abuses a "soft" male goon in her search for a gigantic diamond; *Little Mermaid*'s Ursula threatens everyone under the sea, seducing and using

males as she wishes; and *Emperor's* Yzma uses a male thug to threaten the male king.

The story marks the women as free (and thus dangerous) agents in a patriarchal world, and the film marks the women visually as witches through one of the two options set out in the blueprint of *Snow White*: 1) a beautiful grotesque, marked by extreme thinness, pasty skin, and stark make-up (ala the Queen before she takes the potion) or 2) the classic hag-crone, marked by round, shapeless body, exaggerated (or deformed) facial features, and wild hair (the Queen after she takes the potion, as the Hag). The figures are connected, two sides of the same coin, tainted beauty signaling the true ugliness within. The appearance of the iconic witch-hag in *Wizard of Oz* one year after *Snow White* connected her to the Wicked Queen solidified the connection between tainted femininity and anti-maternity. The beautiful grotesque is dangerous because she is the witch-hag.

Malificent, Cruella de Vil, and Yzma are all examples of the beautiful grotesque. While not stooped with age, each woman's beauty is nevertheless mature, over-ripe with stark redness and the pallor of age, contrasted with the soft pastels and nubile bodies of heroines like Aurora, Belle, and Ariel. The angularity of the witches' bodies also starkly differentiates them from the matronly curves of Disney's "good" mothers, like the three good fairies of *Sleeping Beauty* (Flora, Fauna, and Merryweather) or *Dalmations*' Nanny. Emphasizing their anti-maternal function, Maleficent, Cruella, and Ymbra directly threaten children (Cruella symbolically, of course, through the puppies). In each case, it is the children who are able to neutralize the threat, the children whose actions rid the world of the bad mother. It's up to children, Disney tells us, to stop wicked witches, to choose maternity.

The Queen of Hearts, Mad Madame Mim, Madame Medusa, and Ursula all conform to the conventions of the witch-hag. Their bodies are large and lack the conventionally feminine hour-glass shape, their faces have exaggeratedly large features (noses, mouths, and chins, especially), and their hair is wild and unkempt. Like Snow White's Queen in disguise, these women are visibly recognizable as non-maternal, as witchy. Unlike Disney's matrons, who are plump but maintain recognizable feminine markers like breasts, waists, and hips, these women resist being defined by gender conventions (recalling the androgynous Weird sisters), shifting and seeming to change size at any moment; in both Mim's and Ursula's cases, the changing is literal, as they possess shape-shifting magic. As hags, they are post-maternal women who threaten children like their thin, pasty counterparts, and children play important roles in neutralizing them. Children are clearly the intended audience of Disney's messages—the marketing, if nothing else, makes that fact apparent. Messages about gender roles are especially important to children, who are engaged in the complex processes of identity-formation, and Disney's use of wicked witches targets young girls, in particular.

Why does it matter that Disney and MGM represent witches as barren, anti-maternal hags? Witches, especially wicked ones, are steeped in a patriarchal ideology that essentializes women as mothers, a "compulsory maternity" which is in some ways the logical extension of what Adrienne Rich so insightfully called "compulsory heterosexuality." In this centuries-old story, a daughter (future mother) rids herself of the barren hag preventing her from participating in hetero-normative behaviors so that she can end up married to the prince, safe at home, the epicenter of a patriarchal, capitalist economy. Just like medieval and Renaissance writers, contemporary Americans are invested in the maintenance of censures against child-less women, especially ones who possess power and autonomy, as do each of the witches in these films. When they watch films like these, children learn that older, single women are anomalies, monsters who need to be tamed or perhaps chased off a cliff.

The investment in an essential maternal female identity grounds even the more positive representations of witches popular in the late twentieth century, especially those witches appearing on television. Two U.S. shows, in particular—the quaint 1960s sit-com *Bewitched* (1964–1972) and the late 1990s cult "drama," *Charmed*—provide excellent examples of positive, yet ultimately hegemonic witch-figures. Let's start with *Bewitched*. Samantha (Elizabeth Montgomery), beautiful housewife to Darrin Stephens (Dick York, 1964–1969, and Dick Sargent, 1969–1972), is a good witch, but her husband prefers that she not use her witchcraft. Witchcraft, to Darrin, is innately dangerous. The admonition against witchcraft happens in the first episode of the show ("I, Darrin, Take This Witch Samantha"), where an otherwise "typical American" couple meet trouble in the form of Samantha's magic use. After Darrin learns that his "wife is a witch," a phrase he repeats a few times throughout the episode, he makes a pact with Samantha to try to make it work as long as "there's not going to be any more" witchcraft. Darrin can't even say the words "witchcraft" or "magic"; he simply waves his hand in a vague evocation of conjuring, a tactic he employs twice in the episode. Samantha promises to try not to use witchcraft from then on, but breaks that promise in the next scene, a pattern which will provide the conflict in every episode throughout the rest of the series: Samantha routinely attempts to avoid magic-use, but often finds herself with no other choice (frequently because of Darrin's thick-headedness). Samantha is circumscribed by domesticity; she rarely leaves her house, she's responsible for all the cleaning and cooking, and her tasks center around supporting Darrin (who is often supporting his boss, Larry Tate). The show argues that witchcraft belongs in the domestic space, an idea also emphasized by Samantha's mother and daughter. Whenever Sam's mother, Endora (Agnes Moorehead), uses magic or encourages Sam to use magic, havoc ensues. Domestic tranquility is ripped apart by the unmarried mother-in-law, who, while extremely mischievous, stops just short of being wicked. Tabitha (Erin Murphy), Samantha and Darrin's daughter, inherits her mother's magical

abilities, and Samantha's role as mother includes shepherding and containing her growing powers. Samantha's connection to domesticity situates her firmly within a matrix of conservative television families like the Cleavers who preceded her and the Keatons who would follow. Each of these families privileges heterosexual marriage, the primacy of children, and above all, the importance of the mother as primary care giver and unpaid domestic worker.

A more recent show which updates, yet still inscribes, the message of domesticity is *Charmed*. On the surface, the show appears to offer a postfeminist alternative witch: three unmarried sisters gain magical power, and use it to right wrongs and end injustice, eventually saving both the magical and human worlds from destruction. Prudence (Shannen Doherty), Piper (Holly Marie Combs), Phoebe (Alyssa Milano), and Paige (Rose McGowan, who joined the series when Doherty left) Halliwell are hot sisters who kick demon butt! Is this female agency or what? A closer inspection, however, reveals that this series, despite its promise and charm, produces an essentialized female domestic identity. The premise of the show suggests that the Halliwell sisters are special, the Charmed Ones, a prophesied group of witches who will save the world, and the show presents the sisters very positively, emphasizing not only their conventionally feminine beauty, but also their compassion, intelligence, and willingness to stick together when the going gets tough. We're supposed to like the sisters, just as we're supposed to hate wicked witches.

While the representation of the *Charmed* witches is overwhelmingly positive, it is also overwhelmingly domestic. The physical home—the Halliwell Manor—sits on a nexus of magical power, and all their magical endeavors begin and end there. Their own magical powers come to them through their maternal line: their mother and grandmother were both powerful witches. Though each sister possesses different powers (like the ability to blow things up or telekinesis), they all share the responsibility of brewing potions. Potion brewing happens frequently in the kitchen itself, especially at the beginning of the series, when Piper, a chef in her non-magical life, makes the connection between brewing and cooking explicit, complaining that she'd like to get back to brewing soup instead of potions. Piper is not only a cook, she is also a mother, and her maternal role structures her character's narrative arc. Throughout the series, Piper repeatedly reminds us that she would rather be exclusively a mother, and not a witch—she wishes for domestic tranquility and only leaves her homey oasis when demonic activity forces her to act. While Piper is maternity realized, her sisters represent women on the journey to motherhood.

Phoebe and Paige are overtly sexualized, wearing tight, revealing clothing and heavy make-up; the men in their lives all behave as if they are extremely sexually appealing, and the Halliwell sisters engage in a constant process of rejecting dating only to find themselves, well, dating. For most of the series, Phoebe overtly desires

male companionship, marriage, and children, whom her prophetic knowledge assures her will exist. She says things like, "How am I supposed to find true love if I'm busy fighting demons?" or "I'm committed to the search for true love, even if it takes a while." Phoebe's obsession with love is emphasized when she takes a position as a relationship advice columnist for the local newspaper in Season Five, and when Cupid (Coop, played by Victor Webster) takes on the task of finding Phoebe's true love (which turns out to be him, of course). Phoebe's even-sexier sister, Paige, joins the family when Prudence, the oldest sister, dies in a demonic brawl; Paige is perhaps the most sexualized of all the sisters, a fact consistently reasserted with such details as the belly-baring clothes she favors and her bright red lipstick. She does not yearn for true love, as Phoebe does, but her attempts to abandon dating and relationships and focus exclusively on her career as a witch eventually lead her to the man she will marry, Henry (Ivan Sergei). The allure of these women recalls the beautiful temptresses of Renaissance literature like Duessa, but is really more akin to the earliest incarnations of Morgan le Fay, whose beauty and power were used in service of a patriarchal system. The Halliwell sisters work in service of "Good," or a set of values that embraces heterosexual, nuclear families, domesticity as a defining characteristic of women (even career-oriented ones), and upholding the status quo. The character who has the most fraught relationship with domesticity is the oldest sister, Prudence (Prue).

Prue is the least sexualized of all the sisters except Piper, but as the oldest, she functions in a maternal role toward her younger siblings. Prue is uncomfortable with the role of older sister precisely because of the maternal elements which somehow innately obtain. Not only is she angry at the deaths of both her mother and grandmother (who leave her in the maternal role), but she rejects her magical power at first, only becoming a witch reluctantly. She complains about her situation, highlighting many of the same factors that second-wave feminists railed against: the unfairness of the automatic expectation that she should be the one to take care of the family, the pressure of being responsible for everyone else but never getting any time for herself, and her desire to focus on her career. Her character dies at the end of Season 3 ("All Hell Breaks Loose"), leaving the younger sisters in despair (and opening the door for a new sister); even though the character's death surely had more to do with Doherty leaving the series than with any original intent of the writers to kill her, the effect is remarkable. The one witch who challenged the compulsion to be domestic dies violently, replaced by someone who embraces her (hetero)sexuality and domesticity (giving up everything else to focus on magic). While the Charmed Ones are charming and powerful women, the show ultimately confines femininity within the domestic space, essentializing women as mothers.

Television programs like the ones I've described work alongside films, such as *The Witches of Eastwick* and *Practical Magic*, which represent witches in positive ways.

Like their small-screen counterparts, even the "good" silver-screen witches ultimately reinforce hegemonic constructions of femininity as maternity. In *The Witches of Eastwick*, for example, the three witches transgress the normative conventions of their small New England town, with what are ultimately disastrous results. The women physically evoke the three "types" of Euro-centric, feminine beauty—the blond (Suki, played by Michelle Pheiffer), the brunette (Alex, played by Cher), and the red-head (Jane, played by Susan Sarandon). In the first scene with all three women, the director demonstrates a connection between the repressive culture of New England (and thus, by extension, the U.S.) and the women's desperate resort to magic. After enduring the singing of a local goody-goody, Felicia, our three witches look terribly annoyed as the sexually-harassing school principal prepares to make a long-winded speech. Through quick cuts from the women to the sky, the editing suggests that the three women call up a violent thunderstorm through some form of unified wish-magic, forcing the empty ceremony to a quick end. This scene promises a story of transgressive power, a protective magic which will disrupt patriarchal norms and free the women from societal expectations. For a while, it does.

As the women sip martinis later in Alex's home, apparently successfully freed from the obligation of their children, they talk of their relationships (ended by "death, divorce, and desertion"), their lack of sex, and their unfulfilled desires—in short, their dissatisfaction with the hetero-normative lifestyle demanded by the town. That this behavior is transgressive is demonstrated by Jane's shock at some of the things Alex says, as when Jane tells Alex she's "over-simplifying" when Alex points out that the other two women's marriages were reduced to procreation: "[Suki's] husband leaves her because she has too many kids. [*To Jane*] Your husband leaves you because you can't have any." Alex has pointed out an important truth, however, one which the women will learn by the end of the film: patriarchy views women primarily *vis a vis* their reproductive power, it over-simplifies femaleness to a maternal function.

Ultimately, the promise of transgression offered in the thunderstorm scene remains unfulfilled. The witches' major act of communal magic—their first "intentional" magical act—conjures up, not an alternate reality where women are freed from patriarchal essentialized maternity, but a dream-guy. They create "the perfect man," playing into the exact set of expectations they expressed frustration with only moments before. This scene posits the solution to patriarchy as another man, albeit a unique one. When Jane asks Suki and Alex, "Who should we be looking for?" the qualities mentioned in response include, in summary: nurturing tolerance ("someone nice, someone you could like"; "someone you could really be yourself with"; "someone you could talk to"), sexualized body ("handsome," "not too handsome," "nice eyes," "nice ass," "huge" [said of his penis], "who cares—as long as it works" [also]), and a mysterious, unknowable quality ("a stranger, interesting," "a tall, dark prince traveling under a curse,"

"a foreign prince on a big, black horse"). What they want is a man with feminine qualities, a female with the phallus. What they get is the devil.

The relationship between Daryl and the women evokes the discourse of Renaissance witch-hunting. The devil figures prominently in Renaissance texts, sealing his demonic pacts by fornicating with a coven of prospective witches, and this is precisely what Daryl van Horn accomplishes when he arrives. He seduces Alex, Jane, and Suki one after the other, playing on their frustrations with mundane life, sexual repression, and the responsibilities of motherhood, respectively. Their sexual liberation marks their cultural liberation: they no longer care about the rules of Christian morality, abandoning monogamy and heterosexuality for sexual freedom and experimentation, and for a time they experience an Edenic world where they slowly become more cognizant of their magical abilities. Though the women are certainly happier with Daryl, their "transgression" is strictly sexual and, frankly, not transgressive at all. While it appears that Daryl is satisfying all their needs (sexual, emotional, financial, etc.), what results is that the three women's lives revolve around the whims of one man. As they interact with Daryl, the women become more and more overtly sexualized, wearing bigger hair, bolder make-up, higher heels, and fewer clothes, until they all conform to the same male-centric notion of feminine beauty.

The turning point comes when Daryl encourages the three witches to focus their anger on another woman, employing an ancient trick of patriarchy designed to prevent female solidarity. The film seems to reject patriarchy at this moment: when the women stop seeing Daryl in the aftermath of Felicia's death, he employs force (psychological torture) to punish them for their disobedience. We are clearly meant to sympathize with the suffering women, and not with Daryl's sudden resort to aggressive patriarchal strategies, which literally turn him into a monster. Patriarchy, we learn in these scenes, is mean and monstrous. But then the women employ the same tactics, finally killing Daryl by means of a wax doll, which they have stabbed with pins, thrown around, and finally burned in their pursuit of Daryl's demise. The same violence which was so condemned in Daryl is lauded in the women—as a reward for their efforts, they receive possession of the lush mansion and nature conserve Daryl owned. Why is force acceptable for the women when it was condemned for Daryl? Because they are protecting the demon-babies they carry in their bellies.

The final trick of the film is to cap the entire story off with the birth of three babies (blond, brunette, and red-headed, of course), including one from the previously barren Jane. Daryl's parting gift was the most momentous, placing all three women squarely within the maternal role and reversing the potentially subversive elements of their sexual freedom. The final scene of the film emphasizes the importance of the maternal function, the way it provides the perfect ending for the women's stories. The women tend their baby boys (Daryl's brood), looking happy and loving in the communal

utopia (Daryl's old house). Alex, Suki, and Jane appear to have discarded the lifestyle that asked them to find male partners, instead banding together in a supportive community of women. This community successfully replaces the need for witchcraft, we are shown: in this utopian space, the women work and tend their children together, free from the hassles of their prior lives—like jobs, sexually harassing bosses, and judgmental ladies. The female community seems to resolve the problem of patriarchy by replacing it with an egalitarian democracy, and this makes feminine magic unnecessary. It is in this moment that the film takes the biggest step towards a transgressive view of women; though cooperation between women can only exist in relation to maternity, at least it exists, which is more than most texts representing magical women allow. The moment is short indeed, as the film quickly reminds us, with a final image of van Horn (who is never really gone), that patriarchal appropriation of maternity is never far away, and, in fact, is always already there.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century visual representations of witches, which link women securely to reproduction, work in service of patriarchy. Representations like these, whether positively or negatively presented, have negative ramifications on women who do not conform to this particular feminine identity, whose particular racial, class, national, religious, or sexual circumstances differ from those demanded by the normative maternal ideal. They have consequences for little girls playing "good fairies" together in a park, for little boys watching endless Disney films showing them how bad (non-maternal) women are, and for any little children who wish to reject mainstream thinking and transcend the paradigms of today, imagining endless tomorrows. Contemporary representations of magic no longer bring with them the power of law or science, as they did during the early modern period. While magic has lost its efficacy in these fields, it has retained its ideological power through its relationship to gender. What brings Renaissance and contemporary witch-stories together is their joint insistence that women who do not marry or who marry without bearing children have access only to a false power, one easily overthrown if young women will simply reject any lifestyle or familial arrangement except the nuclear, hetero-normative, white western family. In the contemporary world, witches are still anti-mothers.

Witches became strictly anti-mothers in the late medieval period, eclipsing the more positively constructed healing maidens of early Arthurian legend, and have remained as anti-mothers throughout centuries of literary and (now) cinematic productions. If the figure of the witch is so pervasive and so consistently configured, as I have argued, how can we possibly hope to reclaim her for modern feminists? One answer to that question perhaps lies with my shy Wiccan student, the one who hoped (only for a moment) that I might share her belief in witches, her desire to live in a magical world.

Writers like Margaret Murray and Gerald Gardner developed some of the early

narratives that ground the beliefs of many neo-pagan witches, like the people who practice Wicca, feminist witchcraft, and other forms of feminist spirituality. Murray, in particular, suffered virulent critiques based on her anti-academic methodology and lack of traditional historical evidence to support her claims about the secret survival of an ancient pagan fertility cult lead by a horned god. There are many elements of modern feminist and neo-pagan spiritual practices, which I'll call witchcraft, that are problematic at best. One of the most significant problems with modern witchcraft is, as Diane Purkiss explains, "its insistence on an identity grounded in the maternal body" (33). It is true that modern witchcraft practices often essentialize women as mothers, as Purkiss documents, or construct idealized female identities which neglect material realities, as Susan Greenwood observes (129–31). Just as the films and television shows which present positive witch figures nevertheless reinforce patriarchal ideology, so some of the positive discourses of neo-pagan witchcraft fall prey to essentialism.

When even discourses which attempt to reconfigure positively constructions of the wicked witch collapse under the pressure of normative heterosexual maternity, what are folks like myself and my Wiccan student, who want to believe in a world where witches (and other women who don't conform to patriarchal norms) can be good, where little girls (and boys) can indulge in positive self-fashioning using models that don't circumscribe their options before they've even started? Is there power to be found by seizing the production of discourse and telling new stories? As someone who analyzes literary production for a living, I clearly believe that there's something useful, something potentially transgressive, and more importantly, something transformative about analyzing and constructing discourses.

Discourse is a tricky subject. Perhaps one of the most influential writers to address discourse is Michel Foucault, who describes the operation of power and its connection to discourse. For Foucault, power is not only a hierarchical, top-down force; instead, "power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization" (*Power/Knowledge* 98). Janet Jakobsen described Foucault's description of power memorably in a formulation something like this one: it's not just Power (capital *P*), but lots of small moments of power, or little *p*s. Power relations are not simply monolithic, in other words, but the operation of power happens in small moments between individuals as well as in large ways through governmental and other institutions. While some progressive tasks, like divesting corporations and multi-national conglomerates of economic power or white men of political power, seem impossible because of the enormous amount of resources devoted to the maintenance of inequity, there are myriad simple, local, and individual opportunities for progressive change. Foucault says power "traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be thought of as a productive network which runs through the whole social body" (*Power/Knowledge* 119). If power "runs through the

whole social body," then there are moments when each of us possess power. Individuals, Foucault says, "are always undergoing and exercising this power" (98). We have economic, sexual, intellectual, racialized, physical, discursive, and myriad other forms of power to varying degrees at any given moment.

The operation of discourse, and its relationship to power, is complicated. Foucault argued that, as the phrase now goes, "nothing has any meaning outside of discourse." As many have pointed out, Foucault doesn't mean that material objects do not exist, but that their meanings are dependent on discourse. Discourse is the way we assign meaning to the things and concepts we encounter. Stuart Hall explains it this way: discourse is the "group of statements which provide a language for talking about—a way of representing the knowledge about—a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (44). Both language-use and social interactions are discursive, because both "entail meaning, and meanings shape and influence what we do—our conduct"; in fact, "all practices have a discursive aspect" (44). Discourse is the medium through which knowledges are generated and disseminated. Knowledge, the saying goes, is power, but that's only true because, as Hall explains, "knowledge linked to power, not only assumes the authority of 'the truth' but has the power to make itself true" (49). Discursive formations generated by corporate, governmental, religious, and educational institutions are exchanged so frequently and with such connection to power they dominate many cultural spaces. But they are not the only spaces in which discourse can be generated, adapted, manipulated, and deployed—opportunities to harness discursive power exist in the "little *p*" ways as well.

Foucault's radical assertion that the subject is produced through discourse (i.e., the subject is forced into a particular subject-position by discourse) seems to eliminate the individual subject's potential agency—if we are produced by discourse, how can we turn around and create it? One way of approaching this question is to analyze discursive change. Discursive formations do not stay the same; Foucault's own work focuses far more on the breaks and shifts between cultures than on their continuities. As Foucault indicates, often he "confine[s himself] to describing the transformations themselves" in the hope that identifying the change would be a first step towards developing a theory of "change and epistemological causality" (*The Order of Things* xiii). Discursive change happens. If we extrapolate logically from Foucault's own analysis of the architecture of power, which disperses the operations of oppression and agency through a web of individual discursive power relations, we find that change must happen individually. Each tiny nexus of power and agency, each moment when one individual asserts power over another, requires the individuals engaged in the power struggle to make choices—to assert agency or not assert it, to resist or not resist another's attempt to curtail agency, to oppress or be oppressed or compromise. A subject is subjected to discourse, but must also utilize that discourse, construct it

individually, and deploy it in daily interactions. A subject must internalize an external discursive formation as a prerequisite to subject-hood, but once the subject has dived into the sea of discourse, she alone can choose how to use it, to sink or swim.

The operation of discourse reminds me, in a way, of a child playing with Legos. The little plastic blocks pre-exist the child, and the child can't change the basic block formations (rectangles and squares, mostly), but each child playing with Legos will create something unique, something that uses the blocks in a distinct way. Sometimes, particularly creative or spatially-oriented children will even use the blocks to make things that the Legos creators didn't anticipate or expect, creating constructions that make the original shapes (rectangles and squares) unrecognizable. Discourse pre-exists the subject, but the subject can use the "building blocks" of discourse to construct ideas and realities that may not even seem possible, at first. Where discourse outperforms the Legos is in the potential for change; whereas plastic building blocks retain their original shape under a great deal of pressure, language responds to pressure by changing, by altering sounds, words, meanings, and significations. An individual speech or writing act may not constitute a change in discourse, but eventually, millions of individual speech and writing acts will. Each of those acts happens when an individual chooses how to deploy the blocks at her disposal.

Hélène Cixous famously described the process of seizing discursive power as "writing the body": "Women must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve-discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word *silence*" (256). We must "invent" our own "impregnable language[s]," telling ourselves new truths about our lives and our positions in the world. Creative use of language, reclaiming positive meanings for negative words, retelling ancient stories and writing new ones, telling our own stories: these are powerful tools. Our lives are narrated for us, our subject-positions interpellated by the overwhelming crush of discourses, a phenomenon often described as "the media" by people who recognize the discursive pressure but perhaps don't have the theoretical language to describe it. As we take control of narrating our own lives, one person at a time, we engage a profound resource for change.

Modern neo-pagan witchcraft practices, like Wicca, feminist witchcraft, Gaians, Goddess-worshipers, and so on, often focus energy on self-transformation. In particular, the transformation sought by many witches is the replacement of internalized misogyny with self-love. Elinor W. Gadon describes Goddess-worship, a common form of modern witchcraft, as helping women "be healed of the destructive psychological impact of our culture's pervasive negative image of the female" (261). Gadon focuses on the potential for psychological change offered by witchcraft, and Cynthia Eller has a

similar explanation for its transformative power: "feminist spirituality is the attempt to transform handicaps into blessings, to take negative identities that have been imposed on one and convert them into positive identities that have been freely chosen" (215). Again, individual self-transformation is the goal, to alter "identities." The process of transforming the self is a discursive process, the construction of a new "group of statements" to describe (and thus alter) the self. Wendy Griffin argues that Goddess-worship can "transform gender identity by subverting traditional meaning and representation of what it means to be female, simultaneously creating new definitions of appropriate gendered behavior for women. This process redefines the boundaries of what is acceptable" (85). "Creating new definitions" of femaleness and femininity and "subverting traditional meaning and representation" involve self-consciously altering discursive formations. I do not mean simply that the spells or rituals utilized to achieve desired results use language as a locus of power, though that does happen in many of the spells. The discursive transformation process involves a multitude of tactics, from the myriad performative and collaborative acts of practicing witches to the engendering of countless books, journals, and publishing houses dedicated to sharing women's stories. Women and men achieve transformative change—they become witches—by reading and hearing stories about witches, by writing and creating narratives about themselves and their relationship to the world, and by sharing those new discursive formations with others.

Discursive generation is a particularly powerful attribute of neo-pagan and feminist spiritual practices. Purkiss explains: "the entirety of modern witchcraft offers a unique opportunity to see a religion being made from readings and rereading of texts and histories. No one person is in charge of the process, so modern witchcraft is not a unified set of beliefs; every interpretation is subject to reinvention by others" (31). While Purkiss goes on to critique the way in which modern witchcraft discourses often boil down to "a male fantasy about what femininity should be" (39), her description of the process through which modern witchcraft discourse is generated is worth analyzing more fully. Here, new meaning is created by multiple "readings and rereading of texts and histories," or by expropriation of previously male-dominated narratives about women. Within the religious literature, there's not one privileged text that hierarchically trumps all other texts, but a variety of interpretations each "subject to reinvention" at any given time. Witchcraft discourses offer practitioners a space where not only can they write their own stories, but they can rewrite the stories handed down to them by centuries of men. Sparhawk argues that "true social change can only come about when the myths and symbols of our culture are themselves changed" (213). Modern witchcraft creates a space for women to seize discursive power and use it to change the stories told about women by changing the stories women tell about themselves.

The most transgressive aspect of the generative discourse encouraged by

modern witchcraft is the way in which it allows women to transform themselves. Much like 1960s-70s feminist consciousness-raising groups which provided spaces for women to rethink oppressive paradigms, many witchcraft groups overtly address issues of patriarchy and gender inequity; in particular, Greenwood suggests feminist witchcraft emphasizes that "witches must work actively to change patriarchal society" (130). While all consciousness-raising and feminist endeavors must carefully negotiate a complex web of power dynamics to achieve change without simultaneously further disenfranchising people whom economic and ethnic inequities have already marginalized, practices like feminist witchcraft, which both implicitly and explicitly seek progressive change through discursive rejection of patriarchy, offer critical opportunities for personal transformation. Personal transformation is the first stone thrown into the deceptively placid patriarchal pond; its ripples move outward in ever-widening rings, expanding to local, regional, national, and international proportions. This is the lesson taught by feminist activists seeking the vote in the late nineteenth century, by civil rights activists in the middle of the twentieth, and by the variety of twenty-first-century programs dedicated to one-on-one mentoring of "at-risk" children today: transforming individuals is transforming culture. My Wiccan student was on the path of transformation. If I had listened more closely, she might have told me how she got there.

I'm listening now. Throughout my academic career, I have seen that personal transformation comes in many ways, and one of the most powerful transformative tools, despite its problems, is discourse. Discourse helps construct reality: we tell stories about our pasts, our presents, and our futures, and, eventually, those stories become truth. If I want Morgan le Fay to be a positive, non-sexualized, not-necessarily-maternal figure who rejects patriarchal norms and works in harmony with the women and men around her, then I need to write her that way. Witches teach us that the past is a story we tell about ourselves. I need to tell Morgan's story, to tell my version of her story, which is really a story about me. We can rewrite the past, and we should. I'll start with that conversation I had with my Wiccan student. Here's how it should have gone:

> A young woman with intelligent eyes approached me after class one day. "I really enjoyed your lecture on medieval magic," she said. "I'm Wiccan, you know."
> "Really?" I asked, excited. "How did you become a witch?"
> "Well," she began, her whole face brightening into a smile. "It all started when I read this book. . . ."

Rewriting the past is a way of beginning again. Writing our own beginnings can be powerful, even if some of them get appropriated by patriarchy and some reinforce stereotypical norms, because they allow us to change our world. Writing and rewriting stories gives women and girls agency, at least one way to choose not to be mothers without fear of becoming wicked witches, at least one opportunity to begin again. I

must admit that I like these beginnings, these bids for a new kind of acceptance, which whisper to me that next time I meet a witch, I should try not to scare her away. I like these beginnings very much indeed.