



The devil making love to a witch. Women, widely believed to be sexually insatiable and weak in character, were considered vulnerable to the devil's seductions. From Ulrifig Molitor's *Von den Unholden und Hexen*, Constance, 1489. Courtesy of Dover Pictorial Archive Series.

CHAPTER ONE



Why Women?

Gender, Numbers, Class

On average, witchcraft, the ultimate in human evil, was sex-related to women in much the same proportion as sanctity, the ultimate good, was sex-related to men.

—Christina Lerner, *Witchcraft and Religion*

JOAN PETERSEN, a healer, "was searched again in a most unnatural and barbarous manner by four women" supplied by her accusers, who found "a teat of flesh in her secret parts more than other women usually had." After bribed witnesses testified against her, she was executed.¹

Searching an accused woman's body for the devil's teat was one of the chief proofs of witchcraft. Though the investigation was normally done by women (and not done gently, as Joan Peterson's case demonstrates), the sessions were often witnessed by male court officials. When the constable of Salisbury, New Hampshire, undressed Eunice Cole to be whipped for witchcraft, he saw "under one of her breasts. . . . A blew thing like unto a teate hanging downward about three quarters of an inche longe not very thick." Men standing by saw him "rip her shift down"; moving in closer, they affirmed that Eunice "violently scratched it away," implying that she tried to remove the evidence from her body. When women were appointed to examine her further, they found instead "a place in her leg which was proveable wher she Had bin suckt by Imps."²

This lewd scene can set the tone for much of what will be investigated in this book. An analysis of violence such as this exposes the sexual terror and brutality at the heart of the witch hunts, a topic too little discussed. The American historian Lois Banner has observed that two of the cultural norms

specific to patriarchal society—war and rape—have been little studied by feminist scholars, and a third, pornography, studied only by feminists and not enough by them. In matters pertaining to the abuse of bodies, especially women's bodies, we have been strangely silent.³ To her comment I would add that writers on witchcraft also, feminist or otherwise, have tended to avoid the specifics of what happened to the bodies of the victims and have not asked aloud what difference it made that most of them were female. That historians to date, following traditional interests in legal and intellectual history, have concentrated more on the judges and theoreticians of the witchcraft trials than on the witches may explain this omission. But one must ask if revulsion at the public exploration as well as the torture of female bodies may also have caused them to make that choice.

Having a female body was the factor most likely to render one vulnerable to being called a witch. The sexual connotations and the explicit sexual violence utilized in many of the trials make this fact clear. Just which women were targeted and under what circumstances reveals much about the status of women in early modern Europe.

A Typical Witch

Reginald Scot, the English skeptic about witchcraft, began his definition of witches this way: "women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eied, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles."⁴ If Scot, who was sympathetic to the victims, perpetrated this negative stereotype, it is not surprising that witch hunters like Boguet and Remy used such phrases as "this miserable and damnable vermin" and "[like] a bitch far more hideous to look at than all the others."⁵

Despite these venomous stereotypes, the records reveal that there can be no one definition of persons accused as witches: some, for example, were as young as eight or nine; others were in their prime; a few were male. Yet Scot's and the Frenchmen's caricatures capture the truth about the majority of persons accused of this crime: old, unattractive, disliked, and female.

From a trial in south Germany we find a portrait of a woman who typified the witch image, Walpurga Hausmänin of Dillingen.⁶ Walpurga, an elderly widow, supported herself by midwifery. Long suspect as a sorcerer ("twelve years ago she had killed at birth . . . a girl child"; "ten years ago she had poisoned with her salve the second child of Anna Kromt"), Walpurga was finally brought to trial in 1587, charged with the deaths of over forty babies, two women in childbirth, eight cows, a horse, and numerous geese and

pigs. Her neighbors claimed also that she had caused three adults to languish to the point of death and had brought on a damaging hailstorm.

Finding the real Walpurga in this record is not easy, for it is a mix of her words (given under duress), the judge's promptings, and the court recorder's opinions. But despite the absurd elements in the story, we can learn a certain amount about this woman. The account states that "upon kindly questioning and also torture," she confessed to all these acts and explained that the powers by which she carried out these impressive maleficia (evil acts) were taught her by the devil, or to be exact, her devil-Lover "Fed-erlin," who gave her the ointment that killed babies and caused women to deliver prematurely. Yet despite these fantastical elements and a description of flying to the devil's sabbat on a pitchfork, the account begins in a natural way, in the real world. Thirty-one years before, widowed but still in her prime, Walpurga, living in poverty and need, earned some money cutting corn for Hans Schlumperger. Attracted to his servant Bis in Pfarrhof, she enticed Bis "with lewd speeches and gestures," and he agreed to come to her house one night. She awaited him with "evil and fleshly thoughts," but it was not Bis who came "but the Evil One in the latter's guise and raiment and indulged in fornication with her."

From that point on, the story followed a well-known pattern, familiar surely to Walpurga from other witch trials. Walpurga testified that when she saw and felt the devil's cloven foot and wooden hand, she panicked, calling on Jesus—and her lover vanished. But the Evil Spirit returned, made love to her again, and bound her to him by promising to help her overcome her poverty. At this, "she surrendered herself to him body and soul." Receiving the devil's mark below her left shoulder, she signed a pact with him in her blood as he guided her hand across the paper. Although she was illiterate, she was controlled by him simply by being reminded of this contract; it prevented her from thinking of God or attending church, actions that might have freed her from his grasp.

The question immediately arises as to why Walpurga confessed to this bizarre behavior. She had been, in reality, not a murderess but a respected and useful member of that society, "for nineteen years a licensed and pledged midwife of the city of Dillingen." That she confessed while chained and being tortured explains much. In hope of ending the anguish, she may have told the judge what she knew he wanted to hear, the already widely accepted belief that the devil was sexually irresistible to women. But we know of women who made similar confessions *without torture*. So we must look for further

explanations, in two directions: to female sexual fantasy and feelings of sexual guilt and to the role of healer that many women filled, a high-risk job.

Walpurga, like most of her contemporaries, may well have believed these ideas about demon-lovers herself, internalizing them and fitting them to the circumstances of her own life.⁷ When her jailers demanded a confession, Walpurga may have gone back to an old guilt, her uneasiness over fornication committed thirty-one years before, and dressed it up with the devil lore that the judges expected. A connection between old sexual transgressions and women's confessions of witchcraft turns up in records all across Europe. This story is unusual only in providing a natural beginning, one no doubt taken from Walpurga's own past; it is this portion that is most useful for women's history.

It is possible that Walpurga had connected her sexual desire with the devil long before the court pressured her for a confession, believing that sexual desire in itself is evil, as the account states. In short, she may not have committed fornication but felt guilty over wanting to.⁸ Furthermore, sexual guilt can attract to itself other guilts, as, for instance, a sense of failure over the death of babies whom Walpurga as a midwife could not save. Walpurga may have blamed herself over a long period of years for her infatuation with Bis.

These questions, involving as they do an element of psychohistory, are extremely difficult to evaluate. Yet, given the importance of the victims' confessions to a study of witchcraft, they are essential to our task. Based on fantasy, they are important but limited clues, pointing to the importance of the material in chapters 5 and 6, where we ask what women were actually doing in their work lives and sexual roles.

We have glimpses of what else Walpurga was doing, besides her job as a midwife (which clearly kept her busy—she explained that she could fly only a little way to the sabbat “on account of her duties”). She shared a meal with the chamber scribe's wife, who then blamed her for her premature labor. She gave young Jacob, the late chancellor's son, a hobbyhorse to ride, but when he later died, people said she had given it to him “to ride on it till he lost his senses.” Eight years before this, she had helped Michel Klingler to push a cart, but now that he is dying, she is blamed. She once gave a young girl a drink, but now, years later, she is ill, and Walpurga is suspected. In short, any act of hers, any gesture of friendliness, is twisted into an evil threat. Every unexplained misfortune in Dillingen is blamed on her.

Although people depended on Walpurga for healing, they were also willing to make her the scapegoat for much of their bad luck. How did this

useful woman become a symbol for evil, attracting so much hatred? She qualified for this role because she had long been a single woman, hence suspect in her sexual behavior, was poor and a widow, hence had no man to defend (or control) her, and possessed the power of healing, a power that everyone believed was also the power to kill.

Under the jurisdiction of the bishop of Augsburg, Walpurga was condemned on these charges by a local judge and jury. Her public execution, which took place in her hometown, was carried out in the style of south German witch burnings: her breasts and arms were torn five times with red-hot irons, her right hand cut off, her body burned at the stake, and her ashes thrown into the nearest flowing river. All her goods and estate went to the bishop's treasury.

Walpurga's story contains many of the standard features from witchcraft accounts. The victim was female; she was old, poor, illiterate, widowed, and a midwife-healer. Although her “crimes” were everyday occurrences, her power was seen as supernatural, coming from the devil. She fell prey to him because of sexual desire and economic need; he laid claim to her through a pact and a bodily mark. She flew through the air to a sabbat where she worshiped him, denouncing and denigrating her Christian faith. Long suspect, she ultimately was made scapegoat for an absurd assortment of alleged crimes, accused by the very persons she had tried to help. Originally seen as a useful member of the community (“a licensed and pledged midwife”), she became a pariah (“a malefic and miserable woman”). Under torture she confessed to all the accusations, no matter how lurid; she was put to death in a savage public ritual.⁹

Most notably, Walpurga was a woman alone, facing “a venerable jury,” a lower-class female judged by the male oligarchy of her town. We will find this combination of accused and jurors in tens of thousands of cases. Examining why European society singled out its Walpurgas to be its scapegoats will tell us much about class and economics in the early modern world; it will also throw light on how men perceived and treated women.

Numbers

This discussion does well to begin with a word about my working definition of the term *witch*: I use it, and without quotation marks, wherever the sources use it (*sorcière*, *Hexe*, *Zauberer*, *bruja*, *hechicera*, *strega*, *troll*, *taltos*). Although witchcraft is a crime that cannot be proven by modern standards

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of evidence—an “invisible” crime that provides no witnesses, hence is not dealt with in modern courts of law—still it was widely recognized as a major crime in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Sir Matthew Hale, for example, judge of the witch trial at Bury St. Edmunds, believed that witches were real, as did most learned persons; he claimed this because the Bible, the laws of all nations, and England’s Parliament had decreed it so.¹⁰

This study of European society’s persecutions of the people perceived to be witches will use the term in the sense that it was used at the time. Since long before the sixteenth century, people had believed that some persons had supernatural power, the ability to perform good or harmful magic (or both). A good witch, or cunning woman, as these magic workers were often called, might, for example, heal persons or animals by incantations or potions; she might just as readily kill with a curse or the evil eye. In either case, she possessed a power to be reckoned with. By the sixteenth century, many—especially among the elite—began to hold a new belief, namely, that such supernatural power came from the devil, who bestowed it chiefly on women in return for their absolute obedience to him.

Numbers are essential to this investigation. It is through an analysis of the percentage of women and men accused and of the percentage condemned that the gender bias of this persecution emerges. But first we must look at the overall size of the witchcraze. Contemporary accounts are of limited use. Just as the account of Walpurga’s trial shows us how contemporaries twisted the facts of a suspect’s life, so they showed no more accuracy in estimating the number of witches: Henri Boguet, the French witch hunter active around 1600, claimed there were 1,800,000 witches in Europe. Because by “witch” Boguet meant persons dedicated to serving Satan, he therefore believed there was a terrifying and widespread conspiracy of witches against Christian society. Joseph Glanvill, holding out against the rising tide of skepticism in the 1670s, maintained that England was still home to thousands of witches, but the doubter Bishop Hutchinson concluded in 1718 that there had been only “above 140 [witches]” put to death in England since the Reformation.¹¹

Somewhere between these wildly differing claims we must find a sound compromise, but many modern commentators have not used caution either. Unless speculations are based on court records and other contemporary accounts and adjusted only by educated estimates, they are useless. This limitation, however, has not stopped some modern writers from claiming numbers ranging from two hundred thousand¹² into the millions, and this not refer-

ring to witches in general but specifically to persons executed, thus implying a far larger pool of suspects among the population.

Working on the statistics of witchcraft is like working with quicksand. Because many of the records have been lost or are defective, in most areas we cannot even speculate about what the totals may have been. Of the surviving records, many have not yet been carefully analyzed, a problem especially for Polish accounts. Even the records that have been analyzed raise more questions than they answer, for many are lacking names (hence, gender), ages, and sentences; almost all are silent about class, occupation, and marital status. Worse still is the scattered evidence that many witch accusations and executions never made it into the records. How many persons were driven out of their villages or lynched by mobs, we have no idea. One may well then ask why the historian would attempt an essay on the statistics of witchcraft, and in fact many have eschewed it. Yet despite the hazards, it is well worthwhile to speculate.

One reason for the necessity to grapple with numbers is the unrealistic totals that have been circulated. The current trend among some feminist groups to claim three million, six million, or even ten million female victims is mistaken. A statistically based figure, though lower, still makes the same point: that this was an organized mass murder of women that cannot be dismissed by historians.

Among the feminist writers claiming millions of deaths is Andrea Dworkin. Working from the only estimates available in the early 1970s, Dworkin made the claim, “In Europe, women were persecuted as witches for nearly four hundred years, burned at the stake, perhaps as many as nine million of them. . . .”¹³ The “nearly four hundred years” almost doubles the years of actual major persecution (1560–1760), and the “nine million of them” is off by about 8,900,000. Even further off the mark is the claim by certain German feminists that ten million women were killed.¹⁴ Faced with such exaggerations, the historian is forced to make an estimate based on the records, no matter how incomplete they may be.

An immediate corrective to these modern inaccuracies can be found in surveying the estimates made by contemporaries, which, although lacking a statistical base, are in the realm of the possible. Looking back over the recently ended holocaust, Voltaire claimed that one hundred thousand witches had been put to death. Bodin believed that “many thousands” had died in France. Boguet wrote that there were “thousands and thousands of stakes” in

Lorraine and that "there are witches by the thousand everywhere, multiplied upon the earth even as worms in a garden." Whatever one makes of these figures, one must note that they deal not in millions but in thousands.¹⁵

An even more pressing reason for working on numbers, however, is the simple need to know how many persons shared this fate. Given the chaotic state of the records, the temptation to round off the numbers is strong. Yet I found myself carefully retaining each awkward figure, even though this added hours of work for each region I studied. As Joan Ringelheim, researcher of women in the Nazi holocaust, stated of her work, to drop numbers now is to kill these persons twice.¹⁶ Wanting to record every known victim, to ensure that the historical record finally acknowledges her death, I offer the most complete record available at this time. (See appendix B.)

Though one cannot add up estimates like these and expect any meaningful results, still, in order to settle on a reasonable total of victims, in contrast to figures such as ten million, it is imperative to reach a sum. The most careful totals made so far are those of Brian Levack, who estimates 110,000 accusations and 60,000 deaths.¹⁷ I believe that though his are reasonable figures, they are almost certainly too low.

There are two pressing arguments for raising Levack's estimate of 110,000 accusations. In addition to the fact that many cases were never recorded, and of those that were, many records have been lost or destroyed, many trial entries are for unknown numbers of victims. Furthermore, additional cases are steadily turning up. Especially in view of the rate at which we are learning of new victims, I believe that Levack's estimate should be doubled, bringing us to a figure of about two hundred thousand accused.

Death estimates are even harder to deal with. Many records do not list the verdict of the trial, a strange omission given the severity of the penalties for a verdict of guilty (death or banishment in most cases). Most records do not include those who died in prison, like Issobel Pain of Scotland, who "died the last winter through cold hunger and other inconveniences of the prison."¹⁸ The three women who survived Issobel complained in 1672 that they were kept "in a dark dungeon in a most miserable condition being always at the point of starving . . . and are in such . . . miserie that it ware better for them to be dead than alyve."

Others, driven to despair by torture, or, like Didier Finance of Lorraine, by fear of being burned alive, killed themselves in prison. As an alleged witch and parricide, Didier faced being burned by red-hot tongs and inciner-

ated alive at the stake.¹⁹ Many accused witches were murdered in prison: for example, when the wife of a cobbler in Constance was found strangled to death in her cell, her murder was blamed on a demon.²⁰ Others died in prison from the torture inflicted on them, like two female witches accused of spreading the plague in the French Jura. A widow in Alsace, after being tortured, managed to struggle home, where she was found dead lying on her bed, her neck twisted, bruised, and disjointed.²¹

To these deaths must be added lynchings and posse-style murders of alleged witches (three hundred killed in the Ardennes, for example) that because of their extralegal nature can only be estimated.²² Given all these factors, one must enlarge Levack's estimate of deaths. Claiming two hundred thousand accusations (a conservative estimate, I believe) and using a death rate of 50 percent of those arraigned, one reaches a figure of one hundred thousand dead—exactly what Voltaire estimated.²³

But the convicted were not the only ones harmed. Once accused of being witches, few women ever returned to a normal life. So great was the fear of witchcraft that suspicion and ill will followed them to their graves, even when they moved to other areas.²⁴ Those who were let go often struggled with themselves over having been associated with the hated proceedings. An old Basque woman, Mariquita de Atauri, had, under pressure, named names. She confessed to her own witchcraft and was reconciled at Logroño, but she believed she was damned anyway because she had accused others who were innocent. When she tried to cross their names off the list of the accused and spoke to the inquisitor about her guilt, he called her a liar and a hussy and drove her away. In a desperate struggle with her conscience, Mariquita drowned herself.²⁵

Those whose lives were thus ruined must in some way be taken into account in the total number of victims; the number of accused, therefore, is as important to our story as the number executed. Yet estimates are the best that one can offer.

Gender

Almost everywhere more women than men were accused and killed. The figures show that in fact women were overwhelmingly victimized: on average, 80 percent of those accused and 85 percent of those killed were female. Some areas, however, hunted down women more ferociously than others.

Among the accused in Essex, 92 percent were female, true also for the English Home Counties. The same percentage applied to the witch hunt in Namur County (in today's Belgium), and an even higher figure (95 percent) to the bishopric of Basel.²⁶ I suggest that a restudy of the Essex materials, stressing women's declining economic roles and the increasingly patriarchal nature of England's society, will explain why 92 percent of those accused were women.²⁷ As for Basel, the prominence there of hail-making accusations, a crime traditionally ascribed more often to women than men, may have contributed to the high number of female victims there but does not fully explain it.²⁸

What these numbers meant for women can be seen in the following facts. Not only were over 80 percent of the accused in some areas women, but even more frightening statistics emerge from local hunts: for example, all but two of the female inhabitants of Langendorf in the Rhineland were arrested. In twelfth-century Kiev, when periodic fears of witchcraft arose, all the old women of the area were seized and subjected to the ordeal by cold water (thrown, bound hand and foot, into the Dnieper). Christina Lerner, the chronicler of Scottish witchcraft, observed that there were periods "when no mature woman in Fife or East Lothian can have felt free from the fear of accusation."²⁹ Given these cases, we see that some notorious examples are not unbelievable: the two German villages left with only one female inhabitant apiece, and the Rhenish village where one person, most often female, out of every two families was put to death.³⁰

Though almost every area of Europe hunted women more than men, three countries reversed this ratio: in Finland, Estonia, and apparently Russia, the majority of accused witches were men (see chapter 4). Some other regions had relatively lower percentages of women. In the Swiss Pays de Vaud, for instance, the accused were "only" 58 percent female. The rate for men was high there because the Vaudois thought of witchcraft as heresy, and heretics were chiefly male. The Aragonese Inquisition (1600–1650) prosecuted the lowest percentage of women in any witch trials, 28 percent, but secular courts in Aragon restored the usual balance by accusing sixty-six women to only two men, raising the rate for women in Aragon to 58 percent.³¹

The fact that overall about 20 percent of the accused were male is less an indication that men were associated with witchcraft than it appears. Most of these men were related to women already convicted of sorcery—as husbands, sons, or grandsons—and thus were not perceived as *originators* of

witchcraft. Of the few who were not related, most had criminal records for other felonies, such as theft, highway robbery, murder, the theological crime of heresy, or sexual crimes such as rape, incest, fornication, adultery, or sodomy. For them, witchcraft was not the original charge but was added on to make the initial accusation more heinous.³² Witchcraft thus was perceived primarily as a female offense.

When brought into court on a sorcery charge, men were often let off with lighter sentences than women (hence the even smaller number executed, 15 percent, out of all persons put to death, whereas 20 percent of all accused were male). Laws favored men: for example, when the rulers of Flanders decreed no more death penalty for prepubescent witches, boys benefited more because they were seen as minors until twenty-one, whereas girls became adults at eighteen.³³ Also, women, unable by law to give legal testimony, did not traditionally know how to use the courts, either for initial defense or for appeal. Therefore, appeals to the Parlement at Paris, which greatly moderated the force of the witchcraze in France, helped fewer women.³⁴

Legal bias led to a notorious French case in which a priest and his mistress were both accused: through money and the influence of friends, he was let go without punishment, whereas she was burned at the stake. In Lorraine, when Claudine Simonette and her son Antoine were imprisoned, she was convicted, but his fate was not mentioned in the record. When a gentleman hired Jeanette Neuve to poison his wife, she was burned at the stake, but there is no record that he received any punishment.³⁵ Of the fifteen married couples convicted in England's Home Counties, more wives were executed than husbands.³⁶ A combination of factors, including the greater value placed on men as workers in the increasingly wage-oriented economy and a greater fear of women as inherently evil, loaded the scales against women, even when the charges against them were identical to those against men.

The effect on the image of sixteenth-century women was dramatic: although women committed far fewer crimes than men, the chief criminal stereotype of the period, that of the witch, was female.³⁷

For all these reasons, the basic fact remains that throughout Europe during the period of major witch hunts (1560–1760), on average 80 percent of the accused and 85 percent of those executed were women. These lopsided figures are sufficiently telling when one thinks of them as individual burnings or hangings, especially considering that many of the victims were not guilty of this or any other crime. There is no need to inflate the numbers into

millions; these statistics are sufficient to document an intentional mass murder of women. By documenting a persecution by gender, these numbers form the basis for this book. To ignore them or acknowledge them and then put them aside is to deny the most persistent fact about the persecutions.

Class

Scot continued in his discussion of witches to describe them as "poore, sullen. . . . These go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milk, yeast, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe; without the which they could hardlie live." In most areas of Europe the accused were very poor, and their accusers were better off than they. Even though most accusers were neighbors who also lived in poverty, still they possessed more goods than their victims. The witch in many cases was the poorest of the poor, dependent on her neighbors to stave off starvation.³⁸ In the sixteenth century, as we will see, the poor were becoming poorer; more peasants were forced to beg or steal in order to survive. Old, single women, especially vulnerable in this economic crunch, came to be seen as nuisances. When they turned them down, people felt guilty, an uncomfortable state often exacerbated when the beggar cursed them for their refusal. Then when misfortune occurred, people turned on the beggars, a classic example of "blaming the victim."³⁹

Those who had a little—and the rising expectations that go with "a little"—took out their frustrations over crop failure and the high death rate of infants on those who were least able to fight back. They also used witch accusations to establish their social position. In northern France, for instance, accusers were often those villagers who could read and write, who may have identified with the new reforms of the Catholic Reformation and the central government and may have seen cooperation with the authorities as the way up in the world. They strengthened their power in the village by attacking the most vulnerable group. As John Webster remarked (in 1677) of women having a bodily mark that could be taken for the devil's mark, "few would go free, especially those that are of the poorer sort."⁴⁰

In some instances, wealthy women were attacked. Late in a witch hunt, after the pool of typical women victims had been depleted, bourgeois and even upper-class women and men might be accused.⁴¹ In some cases poor women sought revenge by naming well-to-do women.⁴² Powerful men

sometimes attempted to destroy other successful men through their wives—some even used their own wives and daughters in order to effect this.⁴³

Temperament and Age

Scot's description furnishes some further clues as to just which women would be singled out for accusation: "They are doting, scolds, mad, divelish; . . . so firme and steadfast in their opinions, as whosoever shall onelie have respect to the constancie of their words uttered, would easilie beleve they were true indeed."⁴⁴ In other words, uppity women—women given to speaking out, to a bold tongue and independent spirit, women who had what Scottish people called "smeddum": spirit, quarrelsomeness, a refusal to be put down. They talked back to their neighbors, their ministers, even to their judges and executioners.⁴⁵

Consider, for example, the case of a woman in the Spanish Netherlands known as the village curser. A poor but proud and outspoken woman, Marguerite Carlier, married with three children, voluntarily presented herself to be cleared of charges of killing animals. When she appealed to the privy council of the Hapsburg archduke, a number of well-off men from her village testified against her, revealing the real reason for their hatred of her—their fear that she had harmed them personally, that she was obsessed with causing them misery. But they had no proof, and under torture she confessed nothing; when released, she defended herself to one and all. Her defiance and open hostility made them fear her all the more, however, and she was banished, sent away from her family. After seven years in exile, she appealed again and was pardoned. Marguerite's case illustrates the price that an independent, outspoken woman might have to pay when she was up against the big men of the village, even when there was no proof against her.⁴⁶ That women talked back in a time when they were increasingly expected to be submissive is a point to which we will return.

Still another way in which women were vulnerable to charges of sorcery was because of their age. Though the majority of alleged witches in New England were middle-aged,⁴⁷ most European victims were older, over fifty.⁴⁸ Older women were frequently notorious as scolds; those no longer beholden to father, husband, or children felt freer to express themselves and often said just what they thought. John Metcalf of Leeds, England, complained in court

that Anne Dixon had cursed him, calling him, "Whoremaster, whoremonger and harlott and did sit her downe upon her knees and cursed and banned him, and his wife, and badd a vengeance light upon the wife of the said John Metcalf and upon that whoremaster and whoremonger harlott her husband . . . and prayed God that they might never thryve."⁴⁹ The ability of early modern women to attack with words was fearsome. Curses like Anne Dixon's were the basis for many witchcraft accusations.

The typical scold and the typical witch were older females, and both were criminalized during the same period. Each had their own kind of power. By laying curses and giving "lip," old women used what power they had to make others fear them, give them "space," and maybe respect them. The fact that people feared their curse was proof that their words carried numinous power. This trait can be interpreted in two ways, as sheer bad nature or as a defensive strategy. John Demos believes that the "uppity" quality of middle-aged and older women in New England was the chief reason they "attracted" witch accusations. Seeing them as quarrelsome and intractable, especially in their relations with their husbands, and as offering unwanted advice to their neighbors, he explains their persecution by their behavior.⁵⁰ He omits from discussion the way women were subordinated to men, especially to husbands, in Puritan New England, and thus does not include the observation that they might well turn to nagging to protect their space in their homes.

Another way of looking at this trait is as a sign of being independent-minded. Traditionally, peasant women in bad marriages had complained of how they were treated, but increasingly now when they did so they were branded as "traitors" to their husbands. The family, not only in New England but across Europe, was becoming more patriarchal in the sixteenth century, causing women's roles within the family to shrink.⁵¹ Outspoken wives were called shrews and suspected of witchcraft; when they spoke out against neighbors who had been unfair or ungenerous to them, they were hauled into court for being a nuisance and a witch.

Scolding done by a female was considered a crime and was punished in Britain by the scold's bridle, which locked the victim's head inside an iron cage that drove spikes through her tongue, and by the ducking stool, used for witches as well, by which they were ducked under water in stagnant ponds or cesspools.⁵² Sixteenth-century females, especially the older ones, were often

scolds—and the punishment they received for scolding and witchcraft was so harsh that women kept a lower profile for several centuries afterward.

Another complaint against women, especially old women, was what was seen as their overassertive sexuality. Men fancied that old women still desired them and found the idea grotesque, hence Reginald Scot's saying that "to enforce a man, how proper so ever he be, to love an old hag, she giveth unto him to eate (among other meates) his owne doong." Likewise the Kent assize reported that Goodwife Swane "vehemently suspected by church authorities [as a witch]," boasted "that she can make a drink, which she saith if she give it to any young man that she liketh well of, he shall be in love with her."⁵³

One aspect of the witchcraze, undeniably, was an uneasiness with and hostility toward dependent older women. Witch charges may have been used to get rid of indigent elderly women, past childbearing and too enfeebled to do productive work. As Barbara Walker has put it, these women "could be called witches and destroyed, like domestic animals past their usefulness. . . . The old woman was an ideal scapegoat: too expendable to be missed, too weak to fight back, too poor to matter."⁵⁴

A final important lead from Scot, one seldom followed up on by historians of witchcraft, somewhat balanced out these female handicaps: these women were "so firme and steadfast in their opinions" that people listened to them. The alleged witch may have been sliding down into economic dependency, but she still had a certain authority, some standing in her community. As a healer, midwife, advice-giver, fortune-teller, spell-lifter, she was sought after; she could therefore boast "that she (as a goddes) hath brought such things to pass." People turned *to* witches as well as turned *on* them. Like female shamans in Korea today, they were both scorned *and* considered essential to the community, were both outcasts and authority figures.⁵⁵ That their day as folk healers and cunning women was passing was part of the tragedy in which they were caught.



At this public execution of witches, four women hang while others (left and center) mourn. Men officiate: note the witch-finder receiving his payoff at right. From Ralph Gardiner, *England's Grievance Discovered*, 1655. Courtesy of the Rare Book & Manuscripts Library, Columbia University.

CHAPTER TWO



The Structure of a Witch Hunt

WHAT DID PEOPLE expect to accomplish by calling for and cooperating in a witch hunt? A complex social matrix was created once an accusation was made: the accusers would hope minimally to prove the source of what had been troubling them, and ideally to gain control over that source by forcing her to back away and remove the curse. As a witch hunt progressed and local authorities intervened more decisively, accusers might hope to destroy a woman's reputation, banish her, or kill her. The accuser might hope in addition to gain part or all of her property. More than one victim might be targeted, with a group of friends or an entire family wiped out.

But before neighbors would turn against neighbors in this way, they must believe in the reality of harmful magic. Almost everyone in sixteenth-century Europe did believe. The importance of the connection between a belief in harmful magic and witch hunts is shown by southern Spain—such belief was not important there, and no witch hunts occurred.¹

Simple belief in the hurtful power of magic, however, would not alone cause a witch hunt. Throughout the Middle Ages, a period when such beliefs were widespread, there were few prosecutions. The something further required was that someone in the regional power structure believe that the devil and his servants, the witches, were attacking the Christian world. Why this belief developed and spread during the sixteenth century will require our

attention in the final chapter. The connection with the devil made the crucial difference between, on the one hand, local people working out tensions through charges of harmful magic and countermagic and, on the other, the regional elite laying down the death sentence in ever-widening circles.

The nature of the law further determined whether and how harshly an area would prosecute—whether the law allowed torture, as it did in the German lands, for example, but not in England. Where torture and other inquisitional procedures were allowed, major witch trials could occur; without them, no mass prosecutions could be achieved. But again, these factors do not fully explain the mass persecutions that broke out in the sixteenth century. Inquisitional courts had been developed during the thirteenth century by the papacy in order to eradicate heretical groups, so these measures had been available for several centuries before the major witch hunts began. True, the secular courts of Europe did not begin to adopt inquisitional processes until the fifteenth century and did not take up witch accusations in a major way (take them away from church courts, that is) until the sixteenth. This timing, however suggestive it is for our chronology, still does not fully explain why European society was willing for the first time to prosecute and execute women on a large scale.

A look at long-term changes in European legal customs is pertinent here. Medieval Europe had originally practiced restitutive justice, a form of community customary law that functioned through arbitration with a goal of reconciliation.² Because the objective was the restoration of communal peace, it was not advantageous to wipe out one's enemies or to inflict long-term punishment on them. In the effort to keep the community functioning as peacefully as possible, accusers were made responsible for their charges—a false accusation carried a heavy penalty. Early medieval justice, like justice in most primitive societies, was thus personal, requiring face-to-face accusation and judgment by a panel of one's neighbors.

In the twelfth century, however, a very different system of law developed on the continent. Based on Roman law, it stressed punitive justice, emphasizing fines, punishments, and the death penalty. Its goal was to protect and purify the state. Because this law was administered by the state rather than the community, it was impersonal law, with magistrates reporting to superiors in far-off towns and cities. Although this distancing allowed for a certain objectivity of judgment and in some cases provided for appeals, it interjected alien values into communal settlement customs. The judge became the initiator of charges, compiling evidence against suspects, interrogating

the accused in secret, using torture when necessary to ascertain the truth, acting always in the name of the state. These changes have been described as "constituting a revolutionary change in legal methods and techniques of societal control."³

In addition to the use of torture and impersonal, punitive law, I suggest a third factor of equal importance: whether or not an area still maintained the medieval *lex talionis*, the mandate that an accuser must prove his or her accusation or suffer the punishment that the defendant would have received. Because the legal penalty for witchcraft was death, this law acted as a powerful restraint on potential accusers. But in many parts of Europe by the sixteenth century, the personal justice of the *lex talionis*, carried out by the injured parties in a way that restored community relations, was being replaced by a more abstract justice administered by state officials;⁴ now one could accuse with impunity. This shift rendered European justice more rational but less humane, and it opened the door wide to witchcraft accusations.

Given the necessary beliefs and legal conditions, what might prompt a witch hunt to begin? Though personal calamity was the most frequent trigger, natural disasters like hailstorms, a desire for revenge, or possession by demons (bewitchment) also turned up frequently as the cause. Hard times, caused by political, religious, or economic upheaval, were often in the background. The ensuing accusations might lead to a restrained witch hunt causing no deaths but only the whipping, fining, banishment, or ruined reputation of one or a few persons. They might produce a witchcraze, however, a mass hunt involving the deaths of hundreds of victims. Whether or not these actions restored the longed-for reconciliation and health to the community is another question; I find increasing evidence that they usually did not achieve this goal. That they harmed the status of women and women's self-image is, I believe, not to be questioned.

In chapters 5, 6, and 7 we will consider evidence for the social and economic harm that it did women to become associated with demonic witchcraft. But first we must look at the process of the witch hunts themselves. What do they tell us about the way sixteenth-century Europeans settled their problems, or about the level of violence in that world? And what do they tell us about how men and women related to one another?

THE TRIAL of a young Dutch woman is instructive of how witchcraft accusations often served as a cover for other problems, and how the women of a family could be made scapegoats for men's quarrels.

When Neele Ellers was about ten years old, her mother and paternal grandmother were accused of witchcraft: some soldiers stationed near Neele's village of Nijkerk in the Netherlands warned a village neighbor not to let these women into her house, because they could travel one hundred miles in a night.⁵ This obvious reference to a witch's ability to fly through the air was made, not by neighbors who might have the usual grievances against the two women, but by outsiders, leaving us unsure as to what they based their charge on. Perhaps it was retaliation for a slight; perhaps the two women had overcharged the soldiers for food or laundry. Or they may have already had a reputation for working magic that the soldiers picked up on—we do not know.

In any case, this slander seems not to have affected Neele's early life. She faced at least one other problem, family violence, for when she was thirteen or fourteen her brother Jan hit her in the face with a flail, scarring her forehead. When she grew up she married a local man, Hendrick Bessens, no stranger to violence himself—he and his father had killed a man of the Van Brenen family four years before. Still, Neele's husband stood by her later, in her time of trouble. She also became close friends with a new woman in town, Luyt Hermans, but Luyt, as we shall see, turned against her. We can surmise that Neele and her husband lived with her family, not his, because she often quarreled with the poor widow who was allowed to live on the strip of common land immediately in front of Neele's parents' farm. Neele (and her mother) took Communion every Easter and at midwinter.

Neele's story would not be known to history had not a local man accused her of bewitching a young girl; this occurred in January 1550, when Neele was twenty-three. Her accuser, Jochum Bos, was just her age and had known her since they were both small. When he was a penniless child, Neele and her mother Diel had, out of compassion, given him a piece of bread.

When Jochum made his highly damaging charge, he was the first person ever to associate Neele with witchcraft. True, there may have been something suspect about her, for when Luyt Hermans and Neele were enjoying their friendship, Luyt's husband and Neele's father-in-law forced the women to break it off, saying that there was too much gossip about it. The nature of people's suspicions was not spelled out: Were the women neglecting their work? Was Luyt neglecting her two children and her two young brothers who lived with her? Or was the husband's nose out of joint over the pleasure that Luyt took in someone other than himself? His dissatisfaction may indeed have had something to do with the children, for we know that Luyt's

younger brother, Rutger Hermans, lived with Neele's family in the summer of 1549. But her husband's criticism of her friendship with Neele breathed no hint of witchcraft.⁶

The young man who first libeled Neele as a witch had returned to live in Nijkerk the previous spring after six years away. But Jochum Bos did not settle down, instead taking to the road again, this time accompanied by the nine-year-old son of Goosen Heynricxz, the immediate neighbor of Neele's family. Goosen had tried several years before to get them to give up their lease so that he could add their property to his. When they refused, he made them into his bitter enemies.

Jochum Bos's summer travels were profitable. An old friend taught him how to conjure the face of a witch in a bucket of water, and somewhere he picked up a book of magic. He was lucky to be out of Nijkerk during those months, for the village was struck with an epidemic of illness caused by bewitchment. Returning just before Christmas, he looked in on the local convent, stirring up the nuns in the bakery and brewery so much that they began to sing lewd songs and to run away; he even became engaged to one of them. Forbidden to enter the convent again, he replied that no lock could keep him out (meaning that he had the power to break locks). He got drunk at the local tavern, so drunk that on his way home he fell repeatedly into the ditch and a companion had to fish him out.

Basing himself now at Goosen's house, Jochum put his new magic skills to work, reading from his sorcerer's book to the bewitched victims, including Goosen's fifteen-year-old daughter, Geertgen. He enlisted the hired hand, Peter van Brenen, to find more patients, such as Luyt Hermans's young brothers Rutger and Derrick.

Jochum's reputation as a cunning man depended on his ability to name the person responsible for the bewitchings. Finally he named Neele Ellers—he added four older women to his list, including Diel, but he mainly accused Neele. All four of the others already had reputations for witchcraft, but not Neele.⁷ One can only speculate what led him to name her: Did thirteen-year-old Rutger Hermans nurse a grudge from the previous summer when he had lived at Neele's house, a grudge that he passed along to Jochum? Or did fifteen-year-old Geertgen have reason to fear her? Every time she saw Neele (who lived next door) she fainted, and on recovery had seizures and vomited up horsehair, iron nails, and other strange objects.⁸ Or was there bad blood between Jochum and Neele, so that hers might be the face he would conjure up in the bucket of water? Although he was vague about his

charges against the older women, he singled out the young one, blaming her for all the bewitchments in Nijkerk.

We cannot know at this point in the story what led the cunning man to Neele, but we do know the reaction of her family. Her husband, father, and father-in-law chased Jochum, intending to thrash him, once even driving him with a drawn bow to the home of Goosen's brother, one of the bewitched. At this point the sheriff stepped in, arrested Jochum, and accepted Neele and Diel's charge of slander against him. But the women were not let off; presumably there was too much fear surrounding the epidemic of bewitchments to let them go. Finally everyone involved, the five accused witches and the cunning man, were taken by cart to the regional capital, Arnhem. One of the women escaped, but Neele and Diel gave testimony before the court of their own free will.

Neele's husband procured a letter of good character for them from the chaplain of Nijkerk, confirmed by the opinion of several leading citizens. They needed all the help they could get, for Jochum, through his helper Peter van Brenen, arranged for nine Nijkerkers, all suffering from bewitchment, to come to Arnhem and give evidence against the accused women.⁹ Goosen's sister-in-law claimed that Diel had bewitched her cattle and made them ill; Geertgen complained that she often saw Neele's face in the fire and then fainted and had seizures. Rutger and Derrick Hermans averred that Neele had given them apples and pears that made them ill, and that while bewitched by her, a black cat, which no one else could see, jumped over them and could only be chased away with holy water. Luyt, Neele's former friend, did not accuse her but struck instead at Neele's sister, who she implied had bewitched Luyt's young daughter, causing her twice to see the devil. Another neighbor claimed that after giving Diel's granddaughter a piece of bread, her butter would not churn; Jochum had the nerve to accuse Neele of knocking him into a ditch when he was walking with a friend. The court inquired about the scar on Neele's forehead, implying that it was the devil's mark.

All these claims were the stuff of local magical beliefs, typically found in cases throughout Europe. They concern misfortune to one's person or animals. There was a whiff of demonological belief in references to seeing the devil and the devil's mark, but none of the more frightening myths appeared, such as having sex with the devil or worshipping him at a sabbat. The most dangerous moment for Neele came when Geertgen insisted that Neele bless her. If Neele did so, and the girl was healed, then that was strong proof that Neele had indeed caused the curse, that is, that she was a witch. When the

court ordered Neele to give the blessing, she did so, and Geertgen was healed. When the other victims asked to be blessed also, the case looked dangerous for Neele.¹⁰

But Jochum, a known alcoholic and womanizer, was not a credible accuser. When the court applied torture to him, he broke and retracted his accusations. Still not satisfied about Neele's innocence, they cross-examined her again but finally let her, as well as the other women, go free, with the admonition that no one was to hurt them in word or deed. The fact that none of Neele's accusers had been willing to call her a witch before the unsavory Jochum did so stood in her favor. The magician got off light, sentenced only to banishment from the duchy of Gelderland for life.

Though the court's restraint in not using torture against the women and in not pressing charges of devil worship contributed to making this a mild witch hunt, it was probably mostly limited by the threat of the *lex talionis*, still in effect in Gelderland. Although this law did not prevent the rash Jochum from making accusations dangerous to himself, it did seem to restrain the witnesses, who held back from direct accusations of witchcraft out of fear of receiving the punishment themselves.

It was typical of many hunts in that it was based on a bitter quarrel over property in which men used a woman as target. Note that Jochum, acting for his protectors, the Heynricxz family, did not accuse the men of Neele's family, their obvious enemies in the property dispute, nor did he help his assistant, Peter van Brenen, get revenge for his relative's murder by smearing the Bessens men. Instead he got at them all through the one young woman who connected the two families by marriage, Neele Ellers. As the researcher of this trial, Hans De Waardt, concludes, "Whoever got her, got both families."¹¹ Although women were seldom acknowledged as heads of families, they could serve as scapegoats in family feuds, thus gaining a perverse kind of power. An accusation of witchcraft therefore could be based on troubles quite unrelated to harmful magic itself.

A witchcraft accusation casts a long shadow. Over forty years later Neele was accused again as a witch, along with her daughters, son-in-law, and grandchildren. By this time they were living just across the border in the province of Utrecht, where they may have fled to escape from continuing persecution in Nijkerk. By the 1590s, Utrecht was undergoing a fresh wave of witch hunting, and Neele and many of her family were burned at the stake.¹²

Once accused, few persons lived down the label of witch. Thus the cunning man Jochum Bos had the last word—his naming of Neele in 1550

destroyed her and her family in the end. People believed that witchcraft ran in families, was handed down from mother to daughter, and passed along to in-laws. Neele, granddaughter and daughter of witches, and mother, mother-in-law, and grandmother of others, could not escape the onus of being seen as an enemy of her society.

Though this trial did not identify the source of the illnesses (bewitchments) in Nijkerk, it did take care of the witch scare. True, by ruling that it was the cunning man rather than the alleged witches who had disturbed the peace, it offered a twist to the usual scenario. The court was wise enough to see that if Jochum had not returned to Nijkerk to practice magic, there would have been no witch hunt, and it dealt with that problem by banishing him. But it cannot be said that it restored the village to peace or harmony; that Neele and her family moved to another province probably means that they continued to be harassed, and their later executions show that the charge of evildoing followed them.

That the trial itself was moderate is all the more remarkable, given the level of violence in Nijkerk, where among our small cast of characters we know of two murders in the previous four years. As for how men and women related to one another, we find cases of marital loyalty, even in the face of witchcraft charges, though families often deserted an accused relative, so greatly were the charges feared. We also find restraint on the part of local and provincial authorities, who did not stereotype the women as criminals. These positive signs were contradicted, however, by several indications of the powerlessness of women and a general suspicion of them. Neele's close friendship with Luyt was broken up by her father-in-law and Luyt's husband, indicating that patriarchal family power was stronger than the ability of women to bond. Community suspicion of witchcraft in five generations of women exposes the depth of belief in women's weakness for witchcraft, and in its inheritability. But it is primarily the rash attacks of the cunning man against five women that confirms how vulnerable women were in Gelderland. In order to set himself up as a village healer, Jochum would have sent the women to their deaths.

The events in Gelderland might have had worse results for the accused if the Netherlands had had its own centralized government instead of being one small part of Charles V's great empire. We may draw this conclusion by contrasting the events in Nijkerk with those in another rural area, the Lancashire of James I's England. A famous trial there in 1612 reveals the powerful

effect of royal edicts on local witchcraft customs—and on the lives of village women.

ANY DISCUSSION of sixteenth-century witch persecutions must mention the growing power of the state. In England in 1604, for example, in the second week of King James I's first Parliament, the House of Lords passed a much stricter witchcraft law. Whereas before the death penalty was invoked only when a witch's powers caused death, now merely causing hurt through evil spirits or a second offense of using magic for finding stolen property, causing unlawful love, or *intending* to hurt or destroy a person would also bring the death sentence. The king's intense interest in witch hunting bore early fruit.¹³

The ducal and royal governments of Europe were becoming more efficient, centralized, and powerful, in other words, more capable of controlling many aspects of more people's lives. Taxation, which fell primarily on the peasantry, increased greatly.¹⁴ Royal agents asserted their influence in parts of Europe never before interfered with. They demanded not only taxes and military levies but also a new ideological conformity: nationalism as we know it first reached rural western Europe in the seventeenth century. Secular courts took over prosecution of sexual crimes, matters formerly reserved for judgment in the more private sphere of church or neighborhood. The state was willing to take on the responsibility and expense of this jurisdiction because these moral judgments helped to define what it stood for and allowed for the control of the most intimate aspects of the lives of its citizens.

These governments were as intolerant as they were interfering. In an important study, R. I. Moore demonstrated how the European state became an organ of persecution, how, in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, European governments began, for the first time, to identify groups as enemies of the state—heretics, Jews, lepers, homosexuals—and to *create the myths* that would enable rulers to destroy those groups. Observing that there have been two major periods of persecutions in Europe since, the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (the witchcraze) and the twentieth (the Holocaust), Moore states that intolerance "became part of the character of European society," and that in each case it was the rulers, not the people, who originated and carried out the pogroms. In short, the chief motive behind European racism and bigotry was the drive for political power. Even though none of the victims were powerful enemies, they served as an excuse for governments to use powerful weapons against their own people.¹⁵

This new system of social control in which centralized governments were willing to prosecute on sexual and religious matters fell heaviest on the lower class, those unable to use the law to protect themselves—too uneducated to learn to use its ways or too poor to afford it. The women who suffered from these handicaps were particularly vulnerable when the state turned its attention to witchcraft.

As for the status of women in European legal history, one notable fact about them is their absence. Until the sixteenth century, women made up a very small number of the defendants, accusers, or witnesses in legal cases,¹⁶ and the personnel who ran the courts, whether secular or ecclesiastical, were, of course, male. When women were arrested it was primarily on sexual charges. Married women, in fact, as dependents of their husbands, were not held accountable for many types of crimes.¹⁷ Few females appeared as witnesses, because a woman's testimony was not legally acceptable. Furthermore, women rarely took the initiative in bringing charges, because whatever problems their lives contained were settled mostly outside the courts, by extralegal methods.

Women seldom engaged in violent crime, but when they did, they typically attacked other women. In England, for example, Joan Marvel hit Agnes Fordan during church service, and Joan Sleaf attacked the woman who blocked her way into a field by hitting her in the teeth.¹⁸ Women were known to steal—behind many witchcraft charges lie small thefts of domestic items. The courts took little interest in domestic theft, however, seeing robbery of business property as much more threatening to the right ordering of society.

Because women were frequently suspect as infanticides, we know that they were capable of murder. European courts, however, did not begin seriously to prosecute infanticide until after the middle of the sixteenth century. Medieval women therefore appear to have committed less crime than men, and to have done so in less observable ways, settling their minor thefts among themselves, covering up the murder of a baby whenever possible. The courts, meanwhile, busied themselves with the affairs of men, matters such as quarrels between heads of families over property and issues touching male honor.¹⁹

Even when women did take part in what were seen as major crimes—receiving stolen goods, poisonings, and so on—they were often acting as their husband's agents, carrying out a supporting role in the schemes and vendettas of the family. The courts regarded women as minors; married women, it was assumed, would be kept in line by their husbands, and single

women, a more problematic group, were left to the community to control. I conclude that until the late sixteenth century the European legal system lumped women, children, serfs, and slaves into the category of dependent property and therefore largely ignored them, except when they got too far out of line.

Then around 1560 European secular courts began to hear accusations of witchcraft and sexual crimes, and women began to appear in court in large numbers, an entirely new phenomenon. Larner was correct to point out that women were criminalized, as witches and infanticides, for the first time in this period.²⁰ These were heinous crimes, newly perceived as so threatening to society that they could no longer be left to the control of the women's world. But in the process of bringing these offenses under their jurisdiction, sixteenth-century courts were forced to admit their perpetrators to a new legal standing.²¹ No longer seen as too dependent to be prosecuted, women were now held accountable in court for their actions. Because witches were believed to freely choose their craft, they were held responsible for the harm they reputedly caused. Even though they acted through the power of the devil, they alone (and certainly not their husbands) must be punished. The surprising number of husbands who joined others in accusing their wives of witchcraft makes it clear that on a charge so dangerous many men would not be responsible for their wives nor dare to be identified with them.²² That European women first emerged into full legal adulthood *as witches*, that they were first accorded independent legal status in order to be prosecuted for witchcraft, indicates both their vulnerability and the level of antifeminism in modern European society.

The trials that followed these two major legal changes were in many ways a clash of cultures, with the elite theories of diabolical conspiracy set against the traditional sorcery, magic, and clan loyalties of the folk culture. Nowhere was this better illustrated than in the mass trial of the Lancashire witches in 1612, when two rival families of self-identified witches were dragged into the juridical net of England's royal circuit judges.

Living in a remote area called Pendle Forest, the families of Old Demdyke and Old Chattox were the poorest of the poor, living mainly off begging and the proceeds of their charms and curses.²³ Old Demdyke, the matriarch of all the witches in Pendle Forest, was an eighty-year-old widow who ruled over her daughter, son-in-law, and three grandchildren at Malking Tower. Too poor to own a cow, she sent her grandchildren out to beg for milk and forage for old clothing. Although now blind, she was still in

demand as a healer: when John Nutter's cow became ill, she was called to "mend" it.

But Demdyke's reputation was mixed. Her daughter Elizabeth Device asked her to go to the miller Baldwin to collect pay for Elizabeth. When Demdyke, led by her teen-aged granddaughter Alison, approached, the miller shouted, "Get out of my ground, whores and witches. I will burn the one of you and hang the other." To which Demdyke replied, "I care not for thee. Hang thyself." When Baldwin's young daughter took ill soon after and eventually died, there was murmuring against Demdyke.

She had become a witch forty years before, when she gave her soul to "a spirit or devil in the shape of a boy," in return for a promise of having whatever she wanted. The spirit appeared to her as a dog named Tibb, who sucked blood from under her left arm. The first time he came, she went mad for eight weeks.

Five years later she initiated her neighbor, later known as Old Chattox, a wool carder, "a very old, withered, spent, and decreped creature," "her lippes ever chattering," who supplemented her income with a protection scheme, promising not to harm those who gave her an annual bribe of meal. With Demdyke she found three skulls in the graveyard and extracted eight teeth, sharing them equally between them. Chattox knew how to place curses through clay images, and several local children died after she made images of them.

Both women taught their daughters witchcraft, and Old Demdyke initiated her granddaughter Alison Device as well. The two families competed for business as conjurors and cursers, and because they were forced to share the trade with a number of other women and several men, competition was fierce. Bad feelings between the two families were not eased when Old Demdyke's daughter Elizabeth Device was robbed of clothing and food and later found some of these items in the possession of Old Chattox's daughter Anne Redfearne.

Thus the clans feuded for years, far from the reach of royal justice. Had a wealthy local family not intruded into their lives, they might have continued their practices of magic and sorcery for generations more. But when Robert Nutter, a son of local gentry who were the Redfearne's landlord, tried to seduce Anne Redfearne and she refused him, their troubles began. Nutter threatened that he would evict Anne from her home when he inherited the land. In retaliation Old Chattox attempted to kill Nutter by witchcraft, egged on by three women, Nutter's cousins, who coveted the land. When three months later he died, Old Chattox and Anne were in deep trouble. At this

point cooperation arrived from an unexpected source, the rival clan, when Elizabeth Device made a clay image of one of the Nutter women.

Shortly after, the granddaughter Alison had an altercation with an itinerant peddler whom she met on the road. A few minutes later he suffered a stroke, for which he blamed Alison. The teenager accepted the charge and asked his pardon. In doing so, she followed custom: a bewitcher was expected, when faced with the damage she had done, to ask pardon *and receive it*. But no doubt Alison did not know about the strict witchcraft law of 1604, which greatly increased the penalty for white or black magic. The peddler's family may have known about it, however, for the peddler's son complained to the local justice of the peace. Alison not only confessed again that she had lamed the peddler, but described how her grandmother had many times urged her to accept a familiar;²⁴ finally Alison had allowed a black dog to suck at her breast. Then, no doubt pressed by the J.P., she described several examples of Demdyke's harmful magic. Not content with implicating her grandmother, she added that Chattox had bewitched her (Alison's) father to death when he fell behind in paying her a bribe. On Alison's evidence, Old Demdyke was brought before the local J.P. on a general charge of witchcraft. She soon implicated her granddaughter Alison and Old Chattox, and the three females were imprisoned in Lancaster Castle, some thirty miles away, to await the next royal assizes.

Families involved in the Lancashire Trial of 1612

OLD DEMDYKE	OLD CHATTOX
ELIZABETH DEVICE	ANNE REDFEARNE
ALISON, JAMES, JENNET	
CHRISTOPHER NUTTER (d. 1594)	
ROBERT, JOHN, MARGARET	
ALICE NUTTER (<i>relation to above unknown</i>)	

Witch hunting was in the air in that region—eventually nineteen persons were arrested, fifteen women and four men. But before the roundup occurred, the clans tried to strike back. United by this outside threat, about twenty persons met under Elizabeth Device's leadership at Old Demdyke's home at Malking Tower and planned to rescue the prisoners. While plotting a jail escape, they feasted on a mutton that Elizabeth's son James Device had stolen.

Events up to this point are believable enough, a narrative straight out of the culture of folk magic. But from the meeting at Malking Tower on, that is, from the moment a conspiracy of witches was spotted, details begin to get out of hand. A constable was ordered to question Elizabeth Device and her two younger children, James and nine-year-old Jennet. The two young people blabbed on and on, naming about sixteen persons who had been present at the cabal; most likely they had no idea that they were implicating them in a crime that since 1604 had carried the death penalty. They even included Jennet Preston from nearby Gisburn, recently released from her trial for witchcraft in York. Astonishingly, instead of lying low, she had come to this gathering, even though she was not implicated in the Pendle Forest troubles. Either she wanted revenge on her accusers and came seeking allies (as Elizabeth Device claimed) or she was a confederate of the Pendle witches and feared they would name her if she refused to help them in their time of trouble. In either case, she made a fatal mistake, for she ended up being retried, and this time she was found guilty and hanged. Her presence adds greatly to the sense of a coven or "working group" of cunning women and cursers in the Pendle area.

Equally damaging was Jennet and James's declaration that their mother had been a witch for a number of years, that she carried out curses by making clay images of her victims, and that she had caused the deaths of several men. Elizabeth at first denied all charges, but when faced with the accusations of her children, she admitted all, adding the information that she had brought about the death of John Robinson because he had accused her of bearing an illegitimate child.²⁵ After these revelations and James's showing the constable where to dig up the teeth his grandmother had buried, the J.P. ordered Elizabeth, her two younger children, and seven more whom they had named to be jailed in Lancaster with the others.

The court's account of the Good Friday cabal claims that they plotted to kill the jailer of Lancaster Castle and then blow up the place, an obvious steal from the Guy Fawkes plot to blow up Parliament seven years before.

Elizabeth Device denied this, but not the description of the gathering's end, when they all "went out of the said house in their owne shapes and likenesses. And they all, by that they were forth of the dores, gotten on Horsebacke, like unto Foales, some of one colour, some of another; and Preston's wife was the last; and, when shee got on Horsebacke, they all presently vanished out of sight." This first English description of a sabbat implies that they had changed shape at the sabbat, and then changed back again, and perhaps that they flew away at the end. Yet despite these far-fetched notions, all the court witnesses who mentioned the Good Friday meeting agreed on these details.

Before the royal justices arrived at Lancaster, the prisoners had incriminated one another, and the case was built. Old Demdyke had died in prison, raising the question of brutal treatment. Her death left ten from Pendle Hill to be tried on charges of signing a pact with the devil in blood; turning into dogs, cats, or rabbits; and making clay images in order to cause others to languish or to die. Perhaps because of the numbers involved and the consequent notion of demonic conspiracy, or perhaps because of the outlandish image of "wild" rural folk, the case drew unprecedented attention around the country. It stirred up so much furor in Lancashire that it even drew a member of the gentry onto the accused list, Alice Nutter, identified by Jennet as present at the Malking Tower cabal and as the murderer, together with Elizabeth and Demdyke, of a local Pendle Hill man, Henry Mitton. Although she was wealthy, respected, and apparently well liked, she could not extricate herself from charges that she had attended the Good Friday gathering and had previously assisted Old Demdyke in bewitching a man to death. It seems that the court did not find it strange that a woman of the gentry would take part in peasant black magic. Once the Devices, mother, son, and younger daughter accused her, nothing her family did could save her. As for the Devices, perhaps they figured that if they were going down, they would take a member of the hated gentry with them. What had the local upper class ever done but pour scorn on them?

In prison family loyalties further broke down. Elizabeth, who had already accused her mother, was accused in turn by Jennet and James; they claimed that she used a spirit in the form of a brown dog called Ball to bewitch and kill people. Jennet in turn accused James of using his demon spirit, a dog named Dandy, to bewitch to death, a charge he then confessed to. Killing was the main charge against Old Chattox, Elizabeth and James Device, Anne Redfearne, Alice Nutter, and Katharine Hewitt. Causing illness

or "wasting away" was charged against Alison Device, Isabel Robey, and a husband and wife named Bulcock.

The case of Anne Redfearne stands out: accused of Robert Nutter's murder by his brother and sister and further tainted by Old Demdyke's claim that she had seen Anne make an image of Robert, she nonetheless maintained her innocence and was acquitted. But the crowd cried out against her, and she was charged again, this time for the bewitchment and murder of Robert's father, Christopher, eighteen years before; this time the charge stuck.

In the end, five members of the Pendle families confessed (all except Anne), but none of the others did, raising again the question of where reality ended in this testimony. Perhaps the five who had indeed practiced black magic confessed to it, and those whose names were added as accomplices, but who were in fact not sorcerers, refused to confess what they were not guilty of. If so, Anne Redfearne was not guilty of sorcery; thus her story needs more analysis. Known as a witch and daughter of a witch, she might have been as much a sorcerer as any of them; a number of witnesses accused her of "many strange practices," whatever that meant. But she had clear reason for hating the man she was accused of killing; Robert Nutter had tried to seduce her and had then threatened to throw her off her land. That, having been cleared in his death, she was then charged with the murder of his father many years before, implies that the Nutter family was out to get her, come what may. This tells us less about Anne than about Robert and his family: it was *he* who was guilty (of sexual harassment) and *they* who were left to deal with that guilt. In blaming Anne it seems that they were engaging in the classic projection of guilt outward onto the victim, a transference documented in hundreds of witchcraft accusations. Yet it was Old Chattox who had actually hexed him—why were they not content to see her condemned? The Nutter family and the crowd appeared determined to destroy Anne. The case is an example of the price a woman paid for refusing a man's sexual advances and of how vulnerable a poor woman was to attack by a family of the gentry.

And neither was Alice Nutter guilty, if refusal to confess is the criterion. Historians and novelists have pondered why this respectable woman of the gentry joined the cabal that Good Friday.²⁶ It is possible that out of hatred for her neighbor Henry Mitton she had earlier asked Demdyke to hex him, that she now feared that she would be named by Demdyke or the Devices, and had therefore gone to Malking Tower to try to buy them off or otherwise silence them.

Whatever the cause, enmity between the two peasant clans and this gentry family ran deep, eventually ending in the execution of seven of their numbers. The court sentenced in all ten persons to be hanged, acquitted five, and sentenced one to a year's imprisonment. It was the largest trial and second largest hanging thus far in the English witch hunts.²⁷ This case stands in sharp contrast to the continental trials we will consider next: no mention was made of searching for the devil's mark (thus no body searches were carried out), and no apparent force was used to generate testimony or confessions. The judge was credulous enough about nine-year-old Jennet's testimony about demonic animal spirits.²⁸ Nonetheless he acquitted five of the prisoners and three more women brought in on witchcraft charges in the midst of this trial.²⁹ It was not a hanging jury. Still, the prosecution destroyed two peasant families in the name of explaining and punishing some recent deaths.

These families were matriarchal clans, where knowledge of witchery was handed down from mother to daughter, from mother to son. They survived on their wits and their ability to conjure and heal—survived, that is, until the alien language of J.P., jailer, and judge was put to them. Then this female-dominant society unraveled fast, mothers, daughters, and son accusing one another. What deep hatreds were triggered in the presence of officials of the law? Why did Old Demdyke name her own granddaughter to the officials—and almost immediately at that? Even more unnatural was Jennet and James's turning on their mother. James, a prisoner, may have tried to save his own skin, but Jennet, being underage, was not even under indictment. Too much poverty or too much magic or (most likely) too much community rejection had left this family vulnerable to attack from outside. But how many peasant families could have stood up to close examination by the J.P. and a notorious trial before the king's judges?³⁰

We cannot know the answers, but perhaps the surest clues lie not in family relationships but in how village people experienced the new impact of the law. Neither paralyzed nor divided by the first arrests (Elizabeth, remember, had organized the defense of her mother, her older daughter, and Old Chattox soon after they were arrested), once in prison they fell on one another like wolves. Did the jailers promise them release if they incriminated one another? Or, more likely, were they panicked by the apparatus of the law? Having lived their lives like outlaws in Pendle Forest, settling their squabbles among themselves, they may have become desperate when caged in prison, pursued by judges sent from London. To face even a minor charge

as defendant before a court is an overwhelming experience; to be brought up on a charge carrying the death penalty was apparently sufficient to tear this family to shreds. The long arm of royal justice reached into a remote corner of English society, destroying two matriarchies of sorcerers and dragging down one gentlewoman with them all. The centuries-old female bonding that went on around magical practices of healing and harming was no match for the threat of being hanged by a royal court. The force of a witchcraft accusation was powerful indeed.

The amount of sexual content was low, compared with that in many continental trials, but it is present. Elizabeth was known as the mother of an illegitimate child; Demdyke and Alison were called whores. Anne Redfearne's tragedy stemmed from her rejection of an upper-class man's sexual demands. It was as dangerous then as now for a woman to tell certain men no.

As we saw in the Dutch trial of Neele Ellers, the tragedy does not end with the trial. The residents of this small rural area had to go on living together, across barriers of suspicion and hatred. Class tensions must have been raw, and women were suspect by their very nature. Young Jennet was left an orphan. We don't know who took her in, but we do know that the shadow of her family's history stayed with her. Rumors of witchcraft continued to be whispered around Pendle Hill until they built up twenty-one years later into a second witch hunt, again one that rested on the accusations of a child, an eleven-year-old boy. One of the women charged was Jennet Device, now about thirty.³¹ After the 1633 trial found seventeen guilty and acquitted several, four of the women were sent to London for examination by royal physicians, including William Harvey, and midwives. This time the search for the devil's mark was a prominent part of the procedures, so body searches were carried out. Harvey's report was in favor of the women, who were returned to Lancaster but, strangely, not released. In 1636 a sheriff's report listed nine still in jail, including Jennet.³² Because four had died from the harsh conditions of prison life, the outlook for her cannot have been good.

THESE CASES produced only mild witch persecution. Utilizing almost no torture other than psychological and not concerned with the classical accusations of devil worship, they did not spread beyond the immediate circumstances that produced them. Witch hunts in south Germany, drawing heavily on both torture and demonology, had a very different structure and result.

These hunts, deserving of the name *witchcraze*, could not have happened unless a major legal change had taken place: the adoption by secular courts of inquisitional procedures. Secret sessions, withholding of the source of charges, denial of counsel, acceptance of evidence from prejudiced sources, lack of cross-examination, passing of indeterminate sentences, assumption of guilt—all these were justified to protect the church from heretics and society from witches. The judge was both prosecutor and confessor, trying to condemn the defendant as a follower of Satan but to do so in such a way as to save her soul.³³ Undeniably the most influential change brought in by inquisitional procedure, however, was the use of torture to force confessions and the naming of accomplices.³⁴

By the sixteenth century both municipal and royal courts freely used these procedures, especially in cases of witchcraft, sexual crimes (including infanticide), and treason. This was an ominous trend, for the secular courts turned out to be more murderous than the church courts had been. Although the church must be charged with developing the demonic theories, the misogyny, and the extreme legal processes that made massive witch hunts possible, and with offering continuing encouragement to secular authorities to prosecute, still one must remember that the major witch hunts were carried out not by churches but by temporal authorities. In that process, witchcraft became a secular crime, one seen, rather like treason, as an assault on the very existence of the community or commonwealth. To understand the full damage that these persecutions could cause to women and to communities, one must look at several typical sets of German trials. Keeping in mind the case of Walpurga Hausmänin of Dillingen, consider events in Eichstätt and Offenburg.

A Catholic town in Bavaria, Eichstätt was ruled by its prince-bishop. It suffered three waves of witch persecutions, in 1590, 1603–30, and 1637.³⁵ The exact number put to death is not known, but about 1629 a judge claimed he had examined 274 witches "who had to all appearances died." For the period when the gender of the victims is known, the ratio of women to men was about fourteen to one. Every village in the region had its victims; for almost fifty years the area can have known no rest from the terror, because between the waves of arrests, accusations were constantly being made. *Terror* is the accurate word, for the accused were tortured not once but repeatedly, convicted witches suffered the hot pincers, and one had her right hand cut off. Add to this the psychological terror of neighbor accusing neighbor, and one begins to see the disruption that a witchcraze caused.

The trial of a poor woman at the end of the Eichstätt witchcraze (1637) epitomizes the mind-set of the times.³⁶ Known to us only as "N. N.," she did not know the names of her parents or where or when they were born or died. Apparently she kept a little store. Forty years old, she had been married twenty-three years and had borne eight children, two of whom had died of smallpox and a six-year-old of unspecified causes, all some years ago. Because of "these suspicious circumstances of death" she has now been summoned to the Town Hall. But there is more to the case: she is accused by fifteen persons of passing through locked doors, riding through the sky, attending the sabbat, having a demon lover, raising storms, exhuming corpses—but, surprisingly, not of harming humans or animals. South German definitions of witchcraft had by this time been so demonized that they no longer depended on maleficium at all.

Imprisoned, subjected to an "indecent" examination, and identified as having a devil's mark, she begins bravely enough, laughing heartily and denying all charges, until she is stretched on the ladder. Then she confesses she is a witch, only to retract the statement as soon as the ropes are loosened. This process of denial, torture, confession goes on until she admits to practicing evil magic. One night after she had just given birth to another child, her husband had come home drunk and cursed her, wishing the devil would take her and all the children. And she thought, "Oh, when would he come! Oh, soon!" She then had a love affair with the hangman, who turned out to be the devil himself. The devil-hangman forced her to deny God and do evil everywhere.

As the torture continues, day after day, she confesses to many crimes, even some she was not accused of: poisoning her six-year-old and causing her former mistress's four-year-old to die of plague. When she is not repentant enough to satisfy the court, she is flogged, and then admits that some years ago she had killed her own horse and cow and had had intercourse with the devil in her prison cell. She also tries to commit suicide there, by scratching open an old wound in her arm so she would bleed and by suffocating herself. But each time they lessen the torture, she denies all that she has said.

Throughout her trial the judges have assumed her guilt and worked only to get her to confess and to name others. Although this was a secular court, it opened each day's session with prayer (was a priest present also?). Finally her mind grows confused; she now confesses without the prompting of the ladder. Describing in detail her visits to the sabbat, she names (and thereby implicates) a number of other persons whom she saw there. The twelfth day into the trial, the court presses charges relating to harm to the

community, namely, storm raising. In order to elicit her confession to this monstrous crime, she is placed in the Spanish boots (which crush the leg bones) and is lashed "while the bells tolled the Ave Maria." Discord is suspected between her and her husband.

Her most shocking confession is of exhuming the corpse of her own child, buried six years and all rotted away, in order to cook the remains to make a magic powder that she gave to her devil. But what haunts her most are her sexual failings: because of her seduction by the devil she cannot pray anymore and fears she will not go to Heaven. Yet she got no pleasure from her affair, for the devil beat her and caused her pain when they were in bed together so that she screamed out, waking her husband, who then began to sleep in a separate bed.

Confessing finally the one action she may in fact have taken out of all this fantasy, she says that she often seduced her servant, "indeed, he had let her show it to him often." She dies penitent, having assured the judges that they have helped her to salvation.

I will argue that this fully developed form of witch trial was designed to drive the accused insane. First, the stark imbalance of power, between the top officials of the district and a poor woman who does not know her parents' names, would be enough to paralyze her with fear. Condescendingly, they repeatedly assure her that they can protect her from the devil, all the while torturing her to force her to confess her "guilt," playing with her as cat with mouse. They have every advantage over her—of education, community prestige, and, of course, of access to the implements of torture.

Second, the gender imbalance, one woman against at least six men (for we must count in the torturers too), would further intimidate her. Not even a female jailer is mentioned; N. N. says that "being alone, she feels afraid and does not know why." When she confesses to having a devil-lover, she describes him as "the hangman," possibly a clever jibe at a hated local figure, possibly a sign of the disintegration of her mind. Or it may be that she was indeed having a forced relationship with him; it was the hangman who searched the bodies of accused women for the devil's mark, giving him every opportunity to rape his prisoners.

Her relationship with her husband had been fractured long before; she implies that it was his rejection of her that made her long for the devil in the first place, and we know of many women who claimed that the devil seduced them when they were down. It is not surprising that the husband does not support her at the trial.

In fact, no one supports her. Fifteen of her acquaintances *accuse* her, and she takes revenge by naming forty-five individuals as co-witches. But she was alone indeed—although she was a religious person who went to confession and took communion, no priest is mentioned as advising or consoling her. She had to go through this physical and mental ordeal unaided.

The charges cleverly tear down all that she might have been proud of. Attacking her as a mother, the court blames her for the deaths of her three children, even though two died of smallpox, a common contagious disease. The worst of it for her, however, seems to have been the issue of the truth about who and what she is. Again and again she risks being sent back to torture in order to protest that *she is not a witch*. To clear her name, to make the world acknowledge the truth about her, seems to have been what drove her. When the torture breaks her down and she describes every possible lurid detail of the sabbat, confessing finally even to infanticide, the shock of telling these lies deranges her mind. When she pleads, "O Jesus Christ, be with me, and because I have grievously sinned against thee, please, dear God, open your ears again to me," she is not begging to be released from torture but to be forgiven for having *said* that she had sex with the devil. The extent of her derangement is shown in the alarming number of persons she was willing to implicate, her attempts at suicide, and the way she finally groveled in front of the authorities.

The case of another woman of Eichstätt, Anna Kaserin, wife of an innkeeper, shows again the lengths the authorities went to in order to crush suspects. Brought to trial in 1629 and accused of crimes almost identical to those of N. N., Anna was even more severely tortured (thumbscrew and strappado) and chained to her cell wall, in this case with a female jailer as guard.³⁷ First denying everything, she finally admitted that twice when she was drunk and had lain down, "someone" had come in and had sex with her. Trying to satisfy the court, she names him "Beelzebub" and says that he placed his devil's mark on her right foot. She also confessed to having killed her own child. What ties her story most closely to that of N. N., however, was her attempt at suicide; emptying her bowels and bladder into a bowl, she broke bread into it and tried to eat it, hoping this would kill her. But she vomited it up and survived to be beheaded and burned. The way in which these trials were carried out was designed to reduce people to animal-like behavior, to break their spirits and minds.

N. N.'s family was apparently not implicated with her; in fact, the witchcraze ended in Eichstätt shortly after her execution. But as we have seen

in both the Dutch and Lancashire cases, blood relationship, and even relationship by marriage, counted heavily in identifying witches. The way in which family relationship triggered witchcraft charges is amply illustrated in Offenburg, a strongly Catholic free city near Strasbourg.³⁸ Five mother-daughter groups, three mother-son, one father-son, one husband-wife-son, and two groups of three generations of women suffered from trials. In Offenburg and the immediate vicinity, 102 persons were killed and one banished between 1557 and 1630. Reaction to witches was vicious from the start: in 1557 two women were burned alive, and confession was often extracted by placing the accused in the witch chair, a metal seat heated from beneath. One woman died from torture; another had her right breast torn by hot pincers; still another committed suicide in prison; a fourth went mad.

Several women claimed that the devil appeared when they suffered from their husbands' cruelty. This echoes N. N.'s *hope* that the devil would come to her after her husband cursed her. Others testified that their demon gave them a switch that would kill man or beast with a single blow, a useful weapon to raise against an abusive husband. This motif of the demon as protector of battered women is strengthened by frequent references to marriage to the demon: a woman's relation with her demon often began with a wedding celebration and was called a "marriage." Lea comments that this motif became an indispensable part of witch lore in the Offenburg area.

Families were bound to an accused witch, come what may. Required to pay not only prison costs but execution expenses as well, some families were ruined financially as well as by reputation when members were convicted.

What stands out in the Offenburg record is the way accusations tore through important families. The first executions that took place in the city proper included the wife of Georg Laubbach, a member of the Rat, the ruling council.³⁹ Soon his three daughters were accused, two by another councillor, Silberrad, the leader of the witch-hunting faction. Counteraccusations ended in the arrest of Silberrad; totally polarized, the town must have been paralyzed by this time. What underlay this crisis is not clear; it may have been debates over whether or not the town should turn Protestant. Although in the end it remained firmly Catholic, the town fathers had to bar the gates on Sundays and feast days to prevent people from attending Protestant services elsewhere, and only sworn Catholics could be citizens. These precautions indicate a volatile ecclesiastical situation.

Two of the Laubbach daughters were let off, but the third was not so fortunate: after heroically enduring torture, Else finally broke when her

young daughter, after being beaten, confessed to practicing witchcraft. This, of course, implicated the mother, who was soon put to death. The young girl was spared death but was banished. In the prominent Laubbach family a grandmother, mother, and daughter were accused, and two lost their lives.

Trials continued apace, the victims drawn heavily from the women of the ruling class, until 1629, when finally a member of the council itself was executed. The death of Ratsherr Hans Georg Bauer so shook the town that Offenburg killed no more citizens on the charge of witchcraft.⁴⁰ The use of elite women as surrogates for their powerful husbands, men far harder to get at than the wives, exposes the strange value of women in an early bourgeois urban setting: powerless to defend themselves against witch charges, still they *counted* in the political struggles of the Rat. Killing them smeared the reputation of their families. The inability or unwillingness of their husbands and fathers to protect them must be noted: one official, his wife incarcerated, tried to write to her to convince her to confess to unfaithfulness and said she should be tortured about her relationship with a certain young man. She was executed. Add this hostility to the fact that many women spoke of their longing for marriage to the devil and their need for protection from men, and we are left with a disturbing picture of marriage in Offenburg.

The process in this secular court followed inquisitional method throughout. No defense was allowed, nor communication with the accused; torture was used repeatedly, and a promise of lighter torture was traded for the naming of accomplices, virtually assuring that more trials would be needed; priests worked with the court to obtain confession, worked so hard that they asked for (but did not receive) pay.⁴¹ But the town fathers went beyond even what inquisitional procedures called for: gratuitous torture was applied even after conviction; women's bodies were repeatedly examined by the executioner; two male guards were ordinarily stationed in the cell with the woman, exposing her to the possibility of constant sexual harassment.

During the years of these trials, an orgy of hatred against the convicted was built up, as evidenced by the fact that as the condemned were carried in a cart to the place of execution, they were "accompanied by a mocking and abusive crowd yelling with hatred and derision." Even more disturbing are the bizarre entertainments and banquets for the judges and priests that often preceded the executions—all of which had to be paid for by the family of the victim. Because the victims were overwhelmingly female, these events must be considered an orgy of hatred against women. The image of woman in

Offenburg cannot have been positive during these years, and the self-image of women must have suffered as well.

We have seen remarkable differences in patterns of witch hunting in three countries, from the restraint shown in the Netherlands to the frenzy of the south German towns. In every case, however, it was women primarily who suffered. An overview of the patterns of witch hunting across Europe will shed light on attitudes toward women in different areas.

In the sixteenth century, a rise in sexual violence in European society was exacerbated by pressure from church and state to change basic sexual customs. In the next two chapters we will consider each of these causes as they affected different countries. As the centuries since have shown escalating levels of both violence, general and sexual, and of state control, the witchcraze can be considered a portent, even a model, of some aspects of what modern Europe would be like.



Witchcraze in the Central Regions

The persecution of social fringe groups is relatively easy to explain; but the persecution of a whole sex . . . calls for a more thorough attempt at explanation.

—Sylvia Bovenschen, "The Contemporary Witch, the Historical Witch, and the Witch Myth."

PURSUING THE QUESTION of why the persecution broke out when it did, not sooner, not later, we can find clues in economic history, particularly as it affected women. For a start, Richard Dunn's account is useful. Given that in about 1560 Europe began to experience population saturation, food scarcity, and runaway inflation, its ruling class "had a desperate need for scapegoats to meliorate the impact of social disasters for which they had no remedy: poverty, disease, crime, famine, plague, wartime carnage, and revolutionary upheaval, all characteristic of [this] troubled society." Taking a primarily economic approach, Dunn concludes that "it was no accident that the great witchcraft hysteria, one of the most distinctive phenomena in the age of religious wars, began in the 1560s."¹ Other historians stress as triggers for the witch hunts the pressure put on commoners by absolutist central governments and reform-minded churches.²

Some parts of Europe hunted witches longer and more vigorously than others. That persecutions developed different regional patterns reflects not only contrasting legal, political, and religious structures but also differing attitudes toward women. That most regions persecuted women more than men, however, reveals the prevalence of misogynistic attitudes, laws, and theology throughout Europe. Another variable must also be kept in mind: the willingness in the region to stage a persecution against *any* group or gender.



In *Linda Maestra* ("Pretty Teacher"), Francisco de Goya parodies the relationship between an older and a younger woman, and emphasizes the obscene nakedness and evil intent of women. This is a late example of the popular imagery that effectively fueled negative public opinion toward women throughout the witchcraze. Spanish, 18th–19th century. Etching and aquatint, 208 x 149mm. Courtesy of The Harvard University Art Museums.

The European witch hunt was not uniform. The death rate was highest by far in the German-speaking lands and their immediate neighbors, especially Poland; all experienced a pattern of mass panics. Witchcraft in France and the French-speaking lands was less intense but marked by belief in demonic possession, providing some of the most dramatic trial accounts. The British Isles must be considered separately from each other, witch hunts having occurred frequently in Scotland, seldom in England, almost never in Ireland; the brief but intense persecutions in New England were related to but not identical with the English outbreaks. Dutch witch hunts were similar to the English, moderate in number but with a few mass killings. Prosecutions in Estonia became heavy twice, in the mid- and late seventeenth century; in Scandinavia they began late, not peaking until the 1670s, but were fairly intense; in Hungary they reached their height even later, in the 1720s, involving similar numbers. In Russia, however, they apparently never became widespread. In Italy and Spain there were numerous investigations but few executions. Iceland and Portugal were scarcely touched.

Though regional variations in witch hunting reveal much about the ecclesiastical and political structures of these lands, the social implications are much more difficult to dig out, especially on the question of how each region treated women. The state of witch trial records is an obstacle; they often lack information on the class, marital status, and even gender of the accused. Still, historians could have done more gender analysis, recognizing this material as part of women's history. As it is, they have shown less interest in social than in legal or theological aspects; which is to say, less has been written about the victims (mostly female) than about their victimizers (mostly male). As I give an overview of the witch hunts, I will draw out the implications for women in each region.

Lands Influenced by German Customs

Wenn du eine Frau siehst, denke, es sei der Teufel, diese ist eine Art Hölle. (Whenever you see a woman, think, it is the Devil, this is a hellish breed.)

—Eneas Silvius

[Demons] take no account of males . . . and among a hundred witches there's scarcely a man to be seen.

—Augustin Baumann, Munich, 1600

Over half, perhaps three-fourths, of all executions for witchcraft were carried out in what Erik Midelfort called the heartland of the witchcraze: the Holy Roman Empire, centered in Germany.³ Because the death rate was also high in the surrounding lands, especially the western provinces of Poland where large numbers of Germans had settled and German merchants traded, those areas must be discussed with the German lands. Neighboring areas such as Lorraine, Luxembourg, and Franche-Comté, although culturally and linguistically different from the empire, shared certain of its legal customs and religious beliefs, a heritage that turned them toward intensive witch hunting.

The most horrifying attacks in the German lands were made in the Catholic territories. Though the new Protestant magistrates also prosecuted for witchcraft, they did not keep up with the prince-bishops and archbishop-electors of the Catholic ecclesiastical lands, executing one witch to the Catholics' three.⁴ At Trier between 1587 and 1593, for example, under the direction of the Jesuit demonologist Peter Binsfeld, 368 witches were burned from twenty-two villages, a hunt so devastating that two villages were left with only one woman apiece. The abbot of Fulda was responsible for the deaths of over 700 witches at the beginning of the seventeenth century. A particularly vicious outbreak occurred at Ellwangen, where 390 persons were burned between 1611 and 1618. The Teutonic Knights ordered the deaths of 124 in just two years, 1628 to 1630. In the conventual land of Quedlinburg, 133 witches were executed on one day in 1589. At Eichstätt, 274 persons were burned at the stake apparently in one year, 1629.⁵

The first wave of German trials victimized mainly women of the poor or middling sort, midwives like Walpurga Hausmännin, but as the supply of poor women ran low, accusers turned to women and men of the establishment. The nine hundred persons put to death by the prince-bishop of Würzburg, for example, included nineteen of his priests and his own nephew. The archbishop-elect of Cologne ordered the deaths of the wives of his chancellor and his secretary. And at Bamberg the bishop executed six hundred witches, including his own chancellor and the burgermeister. Most grotesque was the execution of forty-one young children at Würzburg, a custom that grew in Germany until most major trials included children as both victims and accusers. These later witch hunters turned to younger victims, to men, and to persons of their own class. This last apparently led to a slackening of the craze (as in Offenbourg), as the elite, fearful for their own lives, used their clout to stop the madness.⁶

The fierce religious differences revealed by the Reformation added another point of instability in this tumultuous century. Lutheran theologians and pastors stressed a demonology different from that of the Catholics. Regarding the devil's power, they taught that misfortune was caused not by the devil but by God's providence, and that the devil, and certainly his servants, did not have the enormous power with which popular belief, and especially Catholic belief, credited them. Although traditional demonology also existed in Protestant minds, enabling Protestant magistrates to send many victims to their deaths, still, the new teaching had the effect of moderating the witch hunt in most Protestant lands.⁷

The question has been raised whether, by suppressing folk magic, Protestantism forced its followers to turn to witchcraft or devil worship. Günther Lottes finds no evidence for this, indicating instead that Protestants went right on practicing the old magic but did so surreptitiously.⁸ They also produced a different, if ambivalent, doctrine of woman.⁹ Rejecting the Catholic association of witchcraft with female sexuality, Luther identified sorcery with the disobedient wife, thus freeing women to affirm their sexuality but putting them into the bind of an increasingly male-dominant family. What Protestantism gave to women by encouraging them to become literate and to share religious life at home it took away with its ideal of the submissive wife. Catholicism, by maintaining its insistence on the dangerous nature of female sexuality, kept the identification of all sexually active women with witches.¹⁰ All German women were endangered by the prevailing ideologies, but Catholic women had the most to fear.

Useful as these distinctions between the two major Christian groups may be, they do not take us far. The fact remains that, in a period when the two communions tried in every way to prove how different they were, they both believed in witches and prosecuted them. On this important point they were in basic agreement. Surprisingly, they seldom used witch accusations against each other,¹¹ turning them against their own women instead.

But even if we cannot use the Reformation as the key to why central Europe perpetrated massive witch hunts, we cannot ignore religious upheaval as one factor. The violent breakup of the unity of Christendom led not only to a creative religious ferment within both Protestantism and Catholicism but to massive religious confusion, anxiety, and suspicion as well; not all of this was focused against the other faith, part being defused through witch hunting.¹²

The mass panics for which the Catholic German lands were famous were made possible by two beliefs. The first, that Satan intended to destroy Christian civilization and required hordes of witches to do so, led to the "conspiracy theory" of witchcraft, in which sorcery was seen as treason, as an attempt to overthrow state and church; fear was concomitantly intense. The second followed from this, that therefore witchcraft was so heinous a crime that the use of torture was justified. This policy, which, we have seen, originated in the church's inquisitional courts, was greatly reinforced by the Holy Roman Emperor. He decreed in 1532 in the "Carolina" code that malevolent witchcraft could be determined by judicial torture and was punishable by death, specifically death by fire.¹³ This belief produced huge trials, for the more torture was applied, the more the victims named names. The practice of consulting university professors and prominent inquisitors also intensified the witch hunt, by adding prestige to local trials and by spreading the empire's law that witchcraft was punishable by death. All these factors produced the mass trials that made the German death rate the highest in Europe.

These beliefs came from the elite, not from popular lore (see chapter 6). A further ideological injection from "above" was purely theological. We saw in the charges against Walpurga Hausmänin how Catholic churchmen had shaped devil worship to be the inversion of Christianity: for example, the sabbat feast on the flesh of an innocent child as the substitute for communion.¹⁴ Above all, they asserted that the power to perform evil is as strong as the power to create good—or perhaps even stronger. A frantic fear runs through these accounts, fear that the devil's power may be greater than God's. This fear accounts for the charges that Walpurga desecrated the Blessed Sacrament, giving the wafer to her demon, stamping it underfoot until she actually saw drops of blood on the wafer, that she denied God, Christ, the saints, "and the whole of Christendom." That behind Walpurga's power to kill her neighbors' children and animals lay the power to destroy Christianity—this was the paranoia that fueled the major German trials, that created the largest persecutions that Europe experienced.

That Germans put to death far more witches than anyone else must be connected also to the general history of persecution in German lands. Prior to the witchcraze, the two major types of European repression had been against heretics and Jews. As the penalty for heresy was death by burning (sometimes reduced to banishment), these persecutions accustomed the

populace to the sight of women and men being killed at the stake. During the fourteenth century in the German and Flemish lands and northern France, beguards and beguines, groups of lay men and women who followed a life of sacrificial poverty, were hunted down by papal inquisitors. But as these groups were tamed, the inquisitors, especially in Germany, turned on fringe groups such as witches. Free of control by local authorities, the inquisitors began to get out of hand.¹⁵

The transfer of these attitudes and practices from heretics to witches is seen clearly in the work of Kramer and Sprenger, authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, Dominican inquisitors armed with papal authorization to purge Germany of witches. Defining witchcraft as treason against God, the authors described it primarily as female rebellion. Using stereotypes of women already familiar from the centuries of heresy hunting, they set out to demonize certain types of women: witches make a pact with the devil and have ritual sex with him; they sacrifice unbaptized infants, change shapes, fly through the air, cook and eat children, render men impotent, even cause a priest's penis to disappear. The document reeks with fear and hatred of women, concluding with thanks to God "who has so far preserved the male sex from so great a crime."¹⁶ When the senile Kramer launched a witch hunt at Innsbruck in 1485 (accusing fifty-five women and two men), he acted so arbitrarily that he offended the populace and the bishop, pressing intimate sexual questions on the accused women and even holding some of them captive illegally.¹⁷

The attitudes expressed in the *Malleus* explain how Germans justified wiping out a sizable portion of their female population. Germans accused and executed women at the average European rate (82 percent and 82 percent). But because they put to death about 30,000 persons, that means that they destroyed around 24,600 women—a believable figure, given the devastations described above. In one town, Rottenburg, for example, by 1590 at least 150 women had been executed, and worse was to come.¹⁸

The German lands held an additional tradition that ultimately trapped women. Though the Germans came late to heresy hunting, they had been almost the first to carry out violent persecution of Jews, another group that, as we shall see, became identified with women.¹⁹ From the initial outbreaks in 1095, Germans maintained vicious anti-Semitic practices throughout the Middle Ages, repressing Jews more harshly than in any other European area.

The numerous German pogroms accustomed people to blaming a defenseless minority group for misfortune, to scapegoating an outsider group. The most harmful aspect of this practice was the dehumanizing of the Jews: thought of as less than human, they could be dealt any mistreatment, and it would be justified.

The Germans thus had a dangerous heritage of violent persecution to use against any group perceived as deviant. Women as a gender group suffered a special liability in that they had begun to be identified with Jews.²⁰ Both groups suffered from being associated with magical practices: making potions and poisons, wearing amulets, possessing the evil eye, sticking pins in dolls, having abnormal knowledge about dreams, fortune-telling, or the magical properties of gems.²¹ Rumors circulated about their bodies, that Jewish men menstruated (because they were circumcised), that witches bore the devil's mark, that both could turn themselves into animals, that Jewish women practiced bestiality and produced animal babies and that witches had sex with the devil and gave birth to demons. Both were believed to cause storms and plagues. An especially damaging belief held against Jews was that they celebrated a travesty of the Christian mass in which they worshiped the devil, requiring for Communion either the bodies of Christians or their own sperm.²² These allegations against Jews became the sabbat of the witches, often referred to as the witches' "synagogue," but made even more lurid by the claim that witches had sex with Satan. And the Jewish synagogue in turn was referred to as a brothel.²³

Jewish men were portrayed as Satan, with goat's beard, horns, swarthy complexion, and hooked nose. Witches were pictured as crones, wrinkled, with warts and hooked nose. Both groups were rumored to be lascivious and sexually insatiable. All these stereotypes rendered both Jews and women as less than human, thereby justifying the inhuman treatment unleashed on them. But the witches, unlike Jews, saw themselves as Christians, as insiders in the Christian realm. In order to prosecute for witchcraft, European society had to turn against its own.

Most threatening to both groups was the belief that they were servants of Satan, who committed ritual murder against Christians, mutilated crucifixes (causing Christ to suffer yet again), concocted poisons from the bodies of Christian babies, and desecrated the Communion wafer. It was a witch's power to mock Christianity that was especially feared and hated.

In order to gauge the extent of German misogyny, it is instructive to see what additional charges were laid on women that Jews were spared. Jews were never, to my knowledge, accused of inflicting miscarriage, causing a man's sex organ to disappear, or having sexual orgies with demons. These important points of demonology, applied only to women accused of witchcraft, point to a particular fear of female sexuality and a belief that women are evil by nature. For the most part, however, witches and Jews were persecuted interchangeably. In Hungary, for example, witches were sentenced for a first offense to stand all day in public, wearing a Jew's hat.²⁴ Both witches and Jews were perceived as traitors to Christian society who must be eradicated. The majority of Jews had been driven out of western Europe by the early sixteenth century.²⁵ That it was only a few years later that the witchcraze began there indicates Europe's continuing need for a scapegoat.²⁶

In addition, women became more vulnerable to persecution in Germany in the sixteenth century because of changing economic and political conditions. At the same time as a sharp population rise forced peasant incomes down, a new political order emerged: the states began to intervene in village life, devising new ways to draw off every bit of surplus income from farmers and craftsmen.²⁷ In order to pay for their new bureaucracies and wars, the princes imposed steep taxes, redistributing wealth from the private to the public sector. At the same time, inspired by the moral reforms of both Catholics and Protestants, they began to interfere in daily customs, imposing uniform village bylaws, supervising village assemblies, regulating dress codes, ruling how many guests a smallholder might invite to his wedding, how much one might drink at a festival. Reforming puritanism combined with princely greed to make the average person's life more onerous.

As incomes dropped and taxes rose, women, who worked mainly in marginal jobs, were the first to feel the economic pinch. They also found that they had less say in their communities: local power now flowed through the village assembly, where each household had a voice, but that voice was spoken by the male head. As families and community structure became more patriarchal, women found it harder to express their grievances or to protect themselves.

A final factor in German persecutions was the lack of central authority in the Holy Roman Empire. Attacking outsider groups was easier to do in Germany than elsewhere because of its fragmented political condition; there was no strong central power to restrain local zealots, as there was, for exam-

ple, in France and England. This heritage of unrestrained persecution traveled wherever the empire's jurisdiction had been planted, carrying the plague of mass panics to neighboring lands.

In the duchy of Lorraine, for example, these German customs combined with local economic changes to trigger a witchcraze. In Lorraine, the gap between rich and poor was widening, especially during 1580 to 1630, the exact period of concentrated prosecutions. Peasant landholdings were being absorbed by wealthy landowners, and communal rights disappeared, forcing many peasants into debt.²⁸ This background sharpens our understanding of the many witch charges relating to loss of wealth and property; hapless peasants, discovering that no matter how hard they worked they ended up with less, blamed their poverty on the witchery of neighbors.

A particular concern about the sabbat and sexual crimes fueled the Lorraine trials, most of which took place in local secular courts under semi-literate judges who showed no mercy; the conviction rate was nearly 90 percent. The chief judge, Nicolas Remy, who boasted that he sent eight or nine hundred to their deaths and tortured as many more, sentenced the children of convicted witches to be beaten with rods as they watched their parents being burned alive (and then wondered if he had been too lenient) and stressed women's sexual crimes such as abortion, infanticide, castration, and attempts to murder their husbands. About women, Remy believed that mothers passed the power of sorcery to their children, that women changed themselves into rabid dogs or wolves and killed babies before or after birth to make magic powders. He was especially suspicious of old women and female healers. Remy concluded that witches were usually female "because the rabble of witches is chiefly composed of that sex which, owing to its feebleness of understanding, is least able to resist and withstand the wiles of the Devil."²⁹ Believing in witchcraft and practicing countermagic himself, Remy recorded some of the most realistic accounts of the sabbat, complete with orgiastic circle dances and cannibal feasts (see chapter 5).³⁰

In Franche-Comté, mass panics took place on only a slightly smaller scale than in the German-speaking lands. During years of crop failure and famine, especially 1628 to 1630, the province condemned forty witches at Lugeuil. In the wake of a case of demonic possession, the judge Boguet condemned twenty-eight (St. Cloud, 1598-1609). An inquisitor who ordered every parish to hunt out its witches sent "more than a hundred" to their deaths in 1657 to 1659 before his excesses were stopped by papal authorities.³¹

Boguet's treatise remains our chief document for witch hunting in Franche-Comté. Stressing the sexual element, including male homosexuality, he quoted the maxim that the devil is interested only in those past puberty. Still, he condemned young children, believing that, once possessed, no one could struggle free of the devil's hold.³² Boguet is best known for his extreme cruelty, insisting on burning some victims alive (that is, rather than strangling them first) and lashing and burning children. One frantic woman, Claude Janguillaume, tore herself free from the stake three times, only to be dragged back each time by the executioner.³³

Though Boguet included men as well as women among the twenty-eight persons he condemned (four more died in prison), he thought of witches as female, believing that mothers passed the craft down to their daughters. Connecting witchcraft with female sexuality, he maintained that the devil seduced women more easily because of their inordinate love of carnal pleasures, that Satan spoke through a female's "shameful parts," and that all witches were abortionists.³⁴ He even identified werewolves as female. Because of the detailed instructions he gave for witch hunting, Boguet's treatise was one of the most influential in France. Had it not been that Franche-Comté's parliament began accepting appeals in witchcraft cases the year after Boguet began witch hunting (1599), thereby reducing the number of deaths by over half,³⁵ Boguet might well have launched a craze the equal of those in the German lands.

The history of witch hunting in Luxembourg is especially instructive, a beginning having been made there on gender analysis. Bilingual, as was Lorraine, Luxembourg illustrates further the power of German influence: its witch hunt began in the German-speaking part (c. 1580), peaked there upon receipt of the Jesuit Binsfeld's treatise, produced more arrests than its French persecution (316 to 231), and executed a far higher percentage (76 percent of the men and 84 percent of the women to 38 percent and 42 percent).³⁶ Nevertheless, the French persecution too was sizable (1615-30), also benefiting from the arrival of a Jesuit treatise, that of the Spaniard Martin Del Rio.³⁷ The energy of Jesuit inquisitors was everywhere evident as they began enforcing the reforms of the Council of Trent. Aided by Franciscan friars and Capuchin monks, backed by the archduke, and in close cooperation with municipal authorities, the Jesuits preached against the "superstitions" of the folk religion and utilized lay courts to enforce their reforms.³⁸

Thanks to the work of Dupont-Bouchat, we can see the effects of these reforms on Luxembourg women. The newly enforced strictures against adultery, abortion, and infanticide were especially dangerous for women, who were punished for sexual transgressions more severely than men. Women were condemned for doing away with their newborn children, for example, were buried alive, whereas the fathers, if known, were either fined or let go free. Charges for sexual crimes and for sorcery often went together; for example, the daughter of a poor manual worker at Sanweiler was executed for sorcery and for killing her child. The word *witch* in Luxembourg was associated with *putain* and *ribaude*, meaning "whore." It is not surprising that prosecutions for witchcraft peaked during the same period as those for abortion and infanticide.³⁹

Poland offers further proof of German influence,⁴⁰ its persecutions beginning in western Poland, long heavily settled by Germans, and spreading eastward into lands where Germans had immigrated, such as the Ukraine and Transylvania. Especially heavy in strongly Catholic provinces, they seldom took place in lands controlled by the Orthodox church. Although the Polish craze began late (1676-1725), peaking only after the witch hunt was ending in western Europe, it was especially severe, accounting for as many as ten thousand deaths.⁴¹

Polish witch accusations often had a political twist, burgers aiming charges at political rivals or, more often, at their wives and daughters. The main force in the Polish persecutions, however, appears to have been a militant Catholicism that finally, after a remarkable period of tolerance, asserted itself, a militancy instigated by priests but in fact carried out by laymen.⁴² But as for gender, not even the barest statistical breakdown has been made. Until the records are studied more closely and more is known about early modern Polish attitudes to women, the issue of gender in the Polish trials cannot be evaluated.

Switzerland, trilingual and in process of becoming politically independent of the Holy Roman Empire, shared a number of witchcraft characteristics with both the empire and France and was full of internal contradictions. The Calvinist Republic of Geneva, for example, executed only 21 percent of its accused witches (excepting those accused of spreading plague, who were killed at a rate of over 40 percent), whereas the neighboring area, the Pays de Vaud, also Protestant, put to death 90 percent of those indicted. Basel and

Lucerne, both Catholic and German-speaking, each executed just over 50 percent.⁴³

The Genevan leniency is misleading, as authorities there permanently banished many accused witches. Nonetheless, the lack of bloodshed in Genevan witch hunts is remarkable; Monter attributed it to the Calvinist view that witchcraft was a theological fault rather than criminal activity, was heresy more than sorcery. The *maleficium* of the standard accusation could thus be separated out and punished simply as a misdemeanor, not as an offense against the Almighty. But elsewhere in Protestant Switzerland such sanity did not prevail. In Vaud, guilt was assumed in advance and torture applied.⁴⁴ In the Catholic bishopric of Basel, the greatest number of trials and executions occurred in its small Protestant areas. Thus in Switzerland Protestants pursued witches as zealously as Catholics, in contrast to the record in most of the German lands.⁴⁵

Finally, the question of why the Swiss persecuted women in such large numbers, 80 percent of those executed overall, 95 percent of those executed in the bishopric of Basel, points again to increasing hostility toward female sexuality. Prosecution for sexual crimes rose here in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, just as it did in Luxembourg and elsewhere in Europe, and had the same deleterious effect on the female population. For example, in the century from 1595 to 1695, of the thirty-one women tried in Genevan courts for infanticide, twenty-two were condemned to death, a very high execution rate. Prosecution for sodomy, previously largely ignored, also increased, augmenting witchcraft charges because both were seen as unnatural.⁴⁶

As Monter observed, like abortion and infanticide, witchcraft was a woman's crime. He notes further that, in addition to these sex-related crimes, sixteenth-century Swiss women suffered from being socially and legally powerless, having only the magic of folk religion to protect themselves. He stresses that during these centuries they became the victims of an unusually hostile patriarchy, a male-dominant society that, previously having shown little interest in executing women, now turned on them. More broadly, one can apply Monter's statement about Jura witchcraft to the entire Swiss context: "misogyny was a basic force underlying these trials."⁴⁷

The question of why the German-speaking lands and their neighbors under the imperial Carolina code carried out a veritable witchcraze is thus a complex mystery, one that I believe belies a "single-factor" solution. Religious upheaval, the precedent of persecutions of heretics and Jews, centraliz-

ing of power within many duchies without the restraint of an effective overlord, the weakening of women's economic and social position—each of these explains part of the puzzle but not the whole. To better understand this sixteenth- and seventeenth-century gender-based holocaust is especially important, however, for it may shed light on the dynamics of the twentieth-century holocaust based on anti-Semitism.

The French Lands

Mais quoi, on dit que toute femme sont sorcière! (What now, they say that every woman is a sorcerer!)

—Aldegonde de Rue,⁴⁸ Cambrai, 1601

The second heaviest concentration of European witch trials was in the French-speaking lands, especially on their margins. Where royal control was firm, the panics were kept in hand, but the outlying provinces, resistant in every way to central control, at first hunted down witches with little restraint.⁴⁹

The northern province of Flanders (Département du Nord), under Spanish control during much of the witch hunt era, persecuted four women for every man, plus numbers of young children. Robert Muchembled concludes that women were targeted because of both theological and societal biases against them. The Catholic Reformation's drive to control the sexuality of its members fell heaviest, of course, on the female sex. Heavy penalties for illegitimate births and irregular marriages, and the death penalty for abortion and infanticide, placed new limits on women's control over their bodies and their lives. It required a century or more after the Council of Trent for French society to fall into line, but by the end of the seventeenth century French women were producing only one-third as many illegitimate births as their English (Protestant) sisters.⁵⁰

The church also cut deeply into women's traditional roles at this time. By ruling (in France) that baptisms must take place within twenty-four hours of birth, it prevented women from gathering their extended families to celebrate the arrival of the new child; by forbidding wakes to be held in churches, it cut women out from their chief quasi-liturgical role, that of public mourner. Along with this went a major attack on midwives and female healers. The church thus undermined women's mastery of folk healing, adding to the parish priest's control over the laity's lives at every point possi-

ble. Add to this ecclesiastical attack the traditional societal disgust for old women and envy of the power of folk healers, and one finds a potent wave of antifeminism growing in rural sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France. Muchembled believes that basic to these customs was "*une méfiance fondamentale*" (a fundamental distrust) of women.⁵¹ To this summary must be added the deterioration in women's economic possibilities.

As for what triggered witch hunting in this area, belief in demonism seems not to have been the cause, such matters appearing in trial records only on the prompting of the judges. Here it was a case of prolonged disruption of daily life, the almost continuous wars and frequent plagues⁵² and increasing poverty. Because of this long period of turmoil, the economic conditions of the peasants steadily worsened throughout the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The number of paupers increased as rural taxes became heavier; wealth became concentrated in the hands of a few rich peasant families, those eligible to attend the communal assembly, those few who had recently learned to read and write and could thus cooperate with the new religious reformers. As the gap between rich and poor increased, social tensions rose and were dealt with by the powerful families via witchcraft charges against the indigent. Always the accusers were better off, even if only slightly, than the persons whom they accused.⁵³

A further cause of change in rural France was the vigor of the Counter-Reformation in punishing the old, accepted moral laxities, as noted also in Luxembourg. Yet again the blame cannot be placed entirely on the zeal of reforming priests, for it was not until the French secular courts began to prosecute for sorcery that a true epidemic began.⁵⁴

The southwestern French area of Labourd had its first witch hunt in 1576, but it was in 1609, when the king and the Parlement of Bordeaux commissioned judge Pierre de Lancre to investigate sorcery there that the Basque lands made their main contribution to demonological history. Relying mainly on the testimony of young girls and confessions obtained under torture, de Lancre described elaborate sabbats where witches danced naked in circles back to back and a cock's crow announcing the dawn ended the orgy.⁵⁵ So convinced was de Lancre of the reality of these reports that he believed a sabbat had been celebrated in his hotel room.⁵⁶ De Lancre was especially suspicious of assertive women, criticizing the Basque women who assisted priests during church services.

The other major French witchcrazes were very different from either the northern or the Basque, being urban and centered in convents, where nuns were afflicted with demonic possession. Occurring in many cultures in every part of the world, possession is experienced chiefly by women, especially those who are oppressed and lack legal means to redress wrongs.⁵⁷ During possession, the individual goes into trance, that is, loses normal consciousness. She loses memory and may hallucinate, experiencing an alternative form of consciousness; she may speak in tongues. Easily observed physical changes occur: the eyes become glazed and possibly bulge, limbs may stiffen, the body may lose sensitivity to heat or cold. Some persons are able to endure fire—for example, handle, walk on, or roll in hot coals without being blistered, indicating that an actual chemical change in their bodies has occurred. Some even experience levitation.

Trance can happen without being accompanied by possession. In the cases we are concerned with, however, possession did occur, causing a further transformation: the person's body and mind were entered and possessed by a foreign spirit, perceived as evil by Christians, although experienced as good in many cultures. The bewitched person then speaks in a different voice, moving and acting in a way characteristic of that spirit. I have witnessed striking examples of benevolent (that is, desired) spirit possession, for example, in contemporary American spiritualism, Haitian vodoun, Hindu popular culture, and Korean shamanism; the phenomenon is also well documented in African religions, Cuban Santería, and Native American religion.⁵⁸ These good spirits bring powers of wisdom, prophecy, and healing, and honor the devotee by their presence. But a spirit perceived as evil indicates the presence of the demonic, or as specified in European culture, of the demons of Satan himself. These spirits torment their victims and force them to speak and act in shameful ways, blasphemous or obscene. The tension that runs through all possession-practicing cultures concerns *who* speaks: the gods or the demons?⁵⁹

When possessed, the French nuns accused priests, or in one case, a mother superior, of bewitching and seducing them. The outbreaks at Aix-en-Provence, Loudun, Louviers, and Lille are well known and much written about.⁶⁰

These earlier convent cases, which had scandalized France and drawn international crowds to witness the nun's exorcisms and the priests' public

burnings, had shown striking similarities to one another; both the possessed and the exorcist must have heard accounts of the previous outbreaks. The Ursuline sisters at Auxonne, however, produced a different version of the story; they accused their mother superior, Barbara Buvée, of bewitching them (1660).⁶¹ Blame for these possessions had been passed around in a confusing way. First, eight nuns accused their father confessor of stimulating them sexually, but he claimed that he was not responsible, because he had been bewitched by two peasants. The peasants were ordered banished but were lynched by a mob. The confessor then tried to exorcise the disturbed women, both publicly and by lying in bed with them. Because Barbara Buvée had opposed the exorcisms, she was seen as guilty of the nuns' continuing possession. Charged with witchcraft, she was tried by the Parlement of Dijon.

Before the judges, the sisters accused Buvée of kissing them, of lying down on them wearing a false phallus, of putting her fingers in their vaginas. Because charges of lesbianism almost never reached seventeenth-century courts, the Parlement did not know how to deal with the case and finally dropped it. Buvée moved to another convent, and the trances ceased.⁶²

At any rate, by 1662, many French judges and doctors had become skeptical of demonic possession. Several declared that the women were frauds. The case of Elisabeth de Ranfaing occurred earlier, however, in 1620, at the height of public fascination with spirit possession, and Elisabeth earned years of attention from leading priests because of her affliction.⁶³

Leading to the execution of an innocent man and woman, the case of Elisabeth de Ranfaing illustrates amply the extent of French popular hysteria about witchcraft in the 1620s, among judges and clerics as well as the populace. Yet even given this store of common belief and fear, backed by a wealth of demonological treatises, the French witch hunts did not come near the level of the German, perhaps ten thousand trials compared with the empire's one hundred thousand, and around five thousand executions to about thirty thousand.

Alfred Soman has argued that the French had an early skepticism about witchcraft to thank for this, particularly a skepticism about proving witchcraft charges in court. Added to this was the reluctance of the high court, the Parlement of Paris, to approve convictions on appeal. Soman shows that from the beginning of major witch hunting in France in the 1560s, the Parlement had rejected a high percentage of convictions. Furthermore, a royal edict of 1624, decreeing that all witchcraft sentences prescribing capital or

corporal punishment be automatically appealed to Paris, was in fact a reflection of restraints already being applied locally.⁶⁴ The extremism of French demonologists such as Jean Bodin, far from indicating a *national* mania over witches, was in fact the product of their frustration with the Parlement's leniency!⁶⁵

That French culture evidenced no lack of misogyny, no less than in the German lands, explains the basis for the French persecution of women. That repression in France did not equal German repression must be understood by France's more centralized government and different legal system.



Witch Hunts on the Periphery

The British Isles and New England

EVERYWHERE ON the periphery of Europe the witch hunts were milder—in the British Isles, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Russia, Hungary, the Mediterranean lands. The Balkans, under Muslim (Ottoman Turk) control, scarcely experienced the persecutions at all.

In general, where demonological beliefs were weaker, creating less talk of the sabbat, sex with the devil, and so on, and where torture was forbidden, there the persecutions were smaller. England is a case in point; although the devil's pact was sometimes mentioned in English records, the sabbat played little part, and a conspiracy theory even less. There are few references to women having sex with the devil, to eating babies, or to the rest of the usual diabolical lore. Without these beliefs about the devil, witchcraft was seen, not as heresy, but as straightforward criminality, and was therefore punished not by burning but by the less cruel method of hanging.

As for the legal background, England was governed by common law, not Roman law, and had no experience of inquisitional courts. Because torture was forbidden by law, only a few witch hunters, like Matthew Hopkins, managed to get away with it. Without torture and belief in the sabbat, there



A witch and her demon riding the phallic broomstick to a Sabbath. This image underlines the blatantly sexual aspect of most witchcraft accusations. From Ulrich Molitor's *Hexen Meysterey*, 1545. Courtesy of Dover Pictorial Archive Series.

was little likelihood of mass panics, and in fact English trials concentrated typically on one, or perhaps a handful, of witches.

The English prosecuted on the basis of causing harm to one's neighbors; therefore, English trials tell us more about social conditions, especially among villagers, and a great deal less about the demonic fantasies of priests and judges. Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane have argued that witch accusations served a social purpose, to end an intolerable relationship among neighbors or to put an inferior in her place. In a typical instance, John Woddle and his wife accused "Goody Hall of Crawly that cometh and beggeth and hath it." Irked at the woman's nerve, Woddle forbade his wife to give the beggar any more alms. Falling ill and seeking for an explanation of his misfortune, he feared that Goody Hall was taking revenge on him. In his guilt over having refused her, *he* accused *her* of sorcery.¹ Accusations were functional in other ways as well, providing the aggrieved party with redress and, by identifying the evildoer, providing the possibility of defense by counter-magic.²

Everyday incidents such as this began to be prosecuted as witchcraft in England during the 1580s, and before it was over, a thousand or more persons had been put to death.³ The one uniquely English contribution to witchlore was belief in the imp or familiar, a demon who took the shape of a cat, dog, or toad, assisting the witch with her *maleficium*, and being allowed to suck from her special teat in return. In England there were also a large number of accusations by children, mostly by young girls against older women.⁴

All in all, however, English witch persecutions were restrained and remained localized. Some have argued that they were mild because the position of English women was improving.⁵ As I will discuss in chapters 4 and 5, the condition of women Europe-wide was in fact worsening, reaching its nadir in the early nineteenth century. Nor was English society lacking in misogyny, a quality that was growing in the early modern period,⁶ so that the percentage of women prosecuted was high, and their treatment in court was harsher than that received by men.⁷ Explanations for the relative restraint of England's witch hunt must therefore rest in its lack of Roman law and an inquisition, thereby permitting a prohibition on torture, and the absence of belief in the sabbat and the conspiracy theory of witchcraft, not in an alleged privileged position of women.

The witch hunt in Scotland was far different, however, approaching the ferocity of the Continental trials: 1,337 executions, plus or minus perhaps 300, and additional deaths from suicides and from torture and neglect, all

from a small population less than half that of England. The analyst of Scottish witchcraft, Christina Lerner, concluded, "The Scottish witch-hunt was arguably one of the major witch-hunts of Europe," and named its use of inquisitorial procedures and its belief in sabbats and a diabolical conspiracy as the causes. Church and state appear to have competed to see who could be the most Godly, that is, the most anti-Satan. Each time the royal courts would act to restrain the hunt, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian church (the state church) would order its ministers to seek out witches in every parish; when the church relaxed, the Privy Council would issue decrees for a new hunt. Between them they kept southern and eastern Scotland in an uproar over much of the period 1590 to 1700.⁸

As for the victimizing of females, Lerner maintained that Calvinism set a trap for women, making them adults newly responsible for their souls while at the same time blaming them for using their free will to choose to practice witchcraft: "As witches [women] became adult criminals acting in a manner for which their husbands could not be deemed responsible. The pursuit of witches could therefore be seen as a rearguard action against the emergence of women as independent adults."⁹ Noting signs of intensified misogyny at this time, Lerner blamed it on the increasingly patriarchal nature of Scottish society. Observing that "women are feared as a source of disorder in patriarchal society," and that "the women who were accused were those who challenged the patriarchal view of the ideal woman," she believed that Scottish men, as husbands, judges, and ministers, were placing a tighter reign on the women whom they feared. She concluded that in early modern Scotland, "all women were potential witches."¹⁰

Although Ireland was the scene of one of the earliest and most influential witch trials, it has received little attention from witchcraft scholars. The trial of Dame Alice Kyteler in 1324-25 was typical of fourteenth-century trials in that the accused was wealthy, in this case from a prominent merchant and banking family, and that the charge was in part politically motivated.¹¹ Dame Alice was accused of causing her husband's death. Once the case heated up, the women involved were accused of having sex with demons and were vilified as evil by nature. In the end Dame Alice escaped, but her maid was burned at the stake.

Several important European precedents were established by this trial: that women were associated with demonic sex, man-hating and man-harming, and harming of dead infants, and that wives hostile to husbands were witches; that sorcery was heresy and that sorcerers would receive the same

punishments as heretics, especially torture and death by fire; that the poor would be made scapegoats for the rich. It would be useful to know the future of these beliefs in further Irish witch accusations, but court records reveal only sporadic, isolated cases.¹²

The New England witch hunt, where "only" thirty-five persons were put to death, came like a coda to the European craze, reaching its peak in the 1690s as the persecutions were being repudiated in Britain and western Europe. (Americans today, unaware of the European persecutions, tend to think of the New England outbreak as *the* witch hunt, but it was, of course, only an echo of the parent phenomenon.) Still, 334 persons were accused in the new, sparsely settled colonies, so the hunt was fairly intense. A study of its beliefs and practices, however, makes it clear the New England hunt was part of the main persecutions that we are discussing.¹³

We find that the witches were predominantly women (78 percent of the accused, 80 percent of those executed), mostly poor, mostly married or widowed, between the ages of forty and sixty. At Salem, where 20 were condemned and 165 were accused, most of the accusers (defined as those who experienced fits at the trials) were young girls between the age of eleven and twenty; three-fourths of the witnesses were men. Like many British witches, several of the accused had reputations for eccentricity, outspokenness, petty crime, or dubious religious practices.¹⁴ Most of the accusers were neighbors of the accused, so it is not surprising that the trial reveals many village tensions, economic,¹⁵ sexual,¹⁶ ecclesiastical.¹⁷

Women's economic status explains much about the New England persecution. Carol Karlsen's research shows that women who were inheritors were at high risk for accusation.¹⁸ Anxieties about inheritance, in fact, lay at the heart of most accusations. This was a society designed to keep property in the hands of men; when a woman had no husband, brother, or son and therefore inherited in their stead, she was liable to harassments of various kinds, including arraignment for witchcraft.¹⁹ And once arrested, she was more likely than other suspects to be condemned and executed. Women who were successful at business were also at high risk, as were those who acted on behalf of sick or absent husbands. Single women and postmenopausal women without sons were especially vulnerable. That in Salem widows were allowed to own property outright may have been the reason that the witch hunt there was especially intense.

That a woman might gain financial independence was one kind of threat, but aggressive action of any kind was dangerous. Any woman whose

actions were seen as sexually unrestrained, or any wife who refused obedience to her husband, was likely to be punished.²⁰ Puritans, in emphasizing the sacred nature of the family even more than other Protestants, defined women's roles narrowly: they were to be faithful wives, and they were punished more severely than men for infidelity. This combination of religious and economic control created an exceptionally patriarchal society. As Karlsen concludes, in Puritan New England, gender issues *were* religious issues.

Though the roots clearly lie in the English trials, such as at Warboys, complete with demonic possession and the generation gap between young accuser and mature victim, and though much of the Puritan theology invoked against the devil was English too, there was a greater harshness in the New England hunt. The Massachusetts Bay Colony legal code of 1648, mandating the death penalty not only for homicide but also for witchcraft, blasphemy, bestiality, sodomy, adultery, rape, and stubbornness or rebelliousness of son against parents, went beyond English law, which exempted blasphemers and insubordinate children; the New England code, furthermore, claimed the Bible as its authority for these stern measures.²¹ It was this religious zeal, so prominent in theocratic Massachusetts, that accounts for much of the intensity of the Salem panic. Knowledge of Continental diabolism beliefs also influenced the prosecutors; I have found that Increase Mather's library included a translation of a portion of the *Malleus* and other Continental demonologists as well.²² This material may account for the ferocity with which some Puritan preachers and magistrates hunted down the suspects.

Russia and Scandinavia

There were witch hunts on the eastern edge of Europe, but far less has been published on them, only one article in a western European language, Russell Zguta's work on trials appealed to Moscow from 1622 to 1700.²³ Although this report, based on the ninety-nine persons tried on appeal to Moscow courts, can represent only the tip of the iceberg, it offers useful parallels with the West. Here too more powerful people punished those who were more vulnerable: over half of the victims were peasants, a significant number of whom were transients or foreigners, and their accusers were nobility or military men. The Russian witch hunt began after the mid-1550s. Until 1552 witchcraft was in the hands of the Russian Orthodox church, which seldom prosecuted for it,²⁴ but when the czar transferred jurisdiction

over witch cases to the civil courts, both church and state began to show greater concern about witchcraft. Though they may have been responding to news of witch hunts from the West, it was only the unrestrained methods of their secular courts that permitted a hunt to begin.

The courts applied tortures known in the West, such as lashing, the rack, the strappado, and ducking, as well as methods unique to Russia: burning wedges placed between hands or feet, pincers tightened around the scrotum, cold water poured continuously on the head. Believing in a conspiracy theory, they tortured prisoners to force them to name others. Officials could initiate trials, and physical objects (supposedly used by witches) were considered damning evidence. Death was by burning.

Russians also experienced demonic possession. Zguta mentions the *klikushi*, women "who ranted and raved hysterically during church services, calling out the names of those who they said had bewitched them." On this basis so many innocent people were tortured that local authorities appealed to the czar for help; at Shuia, for example, seventy *klikushi* were reported in 1670. Were they like the possessed girls of Warboys and Salem, or like the French nuns? Were their victims old women, or handsome clergy? Unfortunately the record does not give their ages or describe whom they accused.

But other features were remarkably different from Western witch hunts. The secular court that tried these cases was a military court, which may account for the extraordinarily harsh use of torture. No children were involved, either as accusers or as victims. Aside from the conspiracy theory, Russian judges did not subscribe to satanist theories; there was little use of spectral evidence or charges of weird behavior such as baby-snatching. Witchcraft was viewed as straight malefice.

Zguta believes that most cases reached the Moscow appeals court. If so, ninety-nine cases in almost eighty years is a small yield indeed. He argues that the defendants' right to call witnesses, added to the absence of theories of diabolism, kept the hunt small. There were, for example, no multiple burnings.

One remaining factor in the Russian material claims our attention: the ratio between men and women is unlike that of most of the West, fifty-nine men tried on appeal to forty women, 60 percent male to 40 percent female. Did Russians persecute women less severely than western Europeans? One must be warned by considering the gender ratio of appeals to the Parlement of Paris: although French women were accused in local courts at a rate of four to one over men, they *appealed* far less often than men. Men, even poor

peasants, moved more easily in the public world than women and were more aggressive about demanding their rights. This may well have been the case in Russia also; if so, the high percentage of men making appeals may not indicate a low percentage of women accused.

Zguta gives us glimpses of Russian witches: the Tatar (foreign, Mongol) woman of Lebedianskoe, whose reputation for fortune-telling and healing was so widespread that a crowd followed her wherever she went, who was tried as a witch in 1630; the grandmother of Ivan IV, accused by his advisers of setting fire to Moscow in 1547, attacked by a mob; Dar'ia, Jewish wife of a village cantor, arrested for causing a bridegroom's impotence by placing a blazing splinter under his staircase and urinating on it; the old women who in earlier times (twelfth century) were rounded up during famine on charges of sorcery, their hands and feet tied together, and thrown into the river at Kiev.²⁵ These cases are types familiar enough to Western persecutions: the successful healer, the woman from a different ethnic group or different religion, the noblewoman caught in a male political struggle, the old women ritually sacrificed to purge the land of evil or to break a plague or famine. Because these Russian stories connect with Western stereotypes, we can surmise that Russian women were subjected to a type of gender persecution similar to that practiced on western European women.

These women, both humble and royal, could be found in Western trial records. What is different about the Russian material is the high number of male witches and the number of trials involving the imperial court—the two warlocks, for example, accused of softening the heart of Czar Peter I to prevent his sending an elderly officer to a distant post; the warlocks were burned, the old man beheaded, and his wife incarcerated in a convent. As in the earliest days in the West, witch hunting in Russia involved high-level politics, and, therefore, men.

I have three reasons for suspecting that witch accusations were more numerous and more often directed at women than Zguta found. First, attitudes of the Orthodox church toward wise women and indeed toward any practice smacking in the least of "paganism" were even more hostile than in the Western churches. Second, sexual customs were strictly enforced by the church, in even greater detail than by the seventeenth-century Western churches, and sexuality was viewed in a strongly negative way. And finally, the low status of women throughout the Slavic world was similar to that in the West.²⁶ These are three of the main conditions for witch hunts, as we have seen. The only social factor lacking in Russia was strong interference by

the government in sex life; apparently the czars' bureaucracies left those matters entirely to the church.

As Eve Levin has shown, the Russian family was patriarchal, husbands being responsible for wives, women being physically subject to husbands. In a culture lacking a concept of romantic love, marriages were arranged and were not expected to be passionate; the strongest emotional bond developed between mothers and sons. The church taught that women must be obedient to fathers and husbands, who were allowed, even expected, to beat their women for "great offenses" such as disobedience or inattention. Bridegrooms were presented with whips at their weddings!

Sex was considered of the devil, and women were thought to be more sexual by nature, thus more susceptible to the devil. If a man could not resist a woman, it was, by nature, her fault. Women were frequently condemned for being "evil-tongued" and openly sexual. Though these derogatory views sound identical to those of the misogyny of the West, they carried an extra force in Russia. There was a "blame the victim" twist to antiwoman sentiments there: if a woman had a spontaneous miscarriage, she must do penance because her sins had caused her to lose her pregnancy; if her infant died, it was because she had sinned.

The church ceaselessly opposed wise women and female healers. Curing infertility with herbs was condemned as witchcraft, as was dispensing aphrodisiacs or bringing on an abortion. Women were forbidden to seek the help of wise women to conceive or to patronize the *baby bogomerzskija* (God-insulting grannies) for any reason. Thus attacking the female-centered world of healing, the church cut at the root of female power.

All women, healers or not, suffered from being controlled by violence. Although laws, both ecclesiastical and secular, protected women from rape, little was in fact done to carry them out. If a woman got out of line (insulted a man, for example), she was considered deserving of being raped. Levin concludes that "medieval Slavic society had a high level of tolerance for violence against women"²⁷—which makes fertile ground for a witch hunt.

As for why this beginning did not evolve into a witchcraze, Zguta notes that the scene was ripe, given the Russians' belief in a witch's ability to effect harm and the intense period of disasters that Russia underwent in the seventeenth century, including a major schism in the Orthodox church. He points to religious differences as the saving factor, the original Russian belief, not in a pantheon of gods as in the West, but in nature herself: "Among the Eastern Slavs, consequently, the intellectual rationale for witchcraft was predicated on

a pantheistic concept of the universe rather than a demonological one, as was true in the West. Without Satan and without the Sabbat, Russian witches bore little—and sometimes no—resemblance to their Continental counterparts."²⁸

I would add that in the West, where pagans had venerated the great gods and lost them to Christianity, *there was Satan*. So Satan is the Westerners' lost God(s). This speculation comes close to the oft-disputed theory of Margaret Murray that Western witchcraft was a continuation of the ancient European pagan religion.²⁹ It illuminates that part of her argument that I have never been able to dismiss, namely, the evidence for ancient "folk religious" practices throughout the Western witchcraft material. Murray erred by forcing her evidence too far, by re-creating late medieval witchcraft as an "alternative church" instead of a loose collection of magical practices, a decision that pushed her into many anachronisms. Still, her attention to *what people were doing*, to folk ritual and belief, was on the right track (see chapter 6), and Zguta's material from Russia reinforces her approach.

The moderation of the witch hunt in Russia, and in all the lands ruled by the Orthodox church, needs further study. In addition to the fortunate lack of demonological obsession among Orthodox priests, we need to know more about how they related to the Russian government's attacks on witchcraft, and, especially, we need to know more about the attitudes of priests and people to women.

THE SCANDINAVIAN witch hunts produced one notable anomaly, the fact that in Finland and Estonia the typical witch was male. To see what this can tell us about the issue of gender in these accounts, we first need to trace the history of the witch hunt in the other northern countries.

Though witch trials never reached panic level anywhere in Scandinavia, each country went through a period when the witch hunt might have turned into a craze. Norway's two peak periods, the 1620s and 1660s, seem to have been caused by economic pressure—or to be exact, by population pressure on land, causing the emergence of a new underclass. By around 1600 a poor class of crofters who lived on small plots of marginal land made up about 10 percent of the population; with the even poorer beggars, they became a criminal class. The historian of Norwegian witchcraft, H. E. Naess, found "a connection between the circumstances leading to indictments for witchcraft and the social standing of the suspects. In 160 of the 196 trials containing documentation on the economic situation of those accused, they were characterized as extremely poor. . . . Several witches owned nothing but their old, torn

clothes, which barely hid their naked bodies."³⁰ Differing from people in most countries, where the middling poor accused those only slightly less well-off than they, Norwegians in most cases went after those who lived below the poverty line.

An exception was the famous trial of the widow of a distinguished humanist scholar and Lutheran pastor, Anna Pedersdotter Absalon.³¹ Attacked by traditionalists who wanted to keep the old pre-Reformation statues in the churches, she was accused of familiar *maleficium*, of making ill a man who had refused her wine, beer, and vinegar, of killing a young boy with a bewitched biscuit. Adding a charge of diabolism, her servant claimed that Anna had transformed her into a horse and ridden her to a sabbat; there a group of witches plotted a storm that would wreck all ships arriving at Bergen and then burn the town and cause it to be flooded. This demonological testimony sealed Anna's fate, and she was burned as a witch. Her case, similar to many in Germany and Poland, showed that enemies would attack a man's wife when he was too powerful to be disposed of, or would take revenge on him posthumously through his more vulnerable spouse.

Naess, who records but does not comment on the fact that 80 percent of the accused were female, concludes that economics is the explanation for the hunts, that "it is difficult to see how the trials could have started off in communities where the economic as well as the social and cultural conditions were progressing." I would add that one must then ask, What was the economic condition of women? How was it changing in those decades when Norwegians carried out those "ruthless trials against burdensome members of society"?

Denmark had all the usual conditions for a witchcraze, including widespread belief in sorcery and an important set of ordinances in 1617 declaring that the power of witchcraft indicated a pact with the devil. These decrees also attempted to reform the sexual mores, ruling harshly against adultery and fornication and ordering what types of clothing different classes might wear. In short, as Jens Johansen comments, "The laws of 1617 were an attempt to tighten the [government's] hold on Danish society."³² As had happened in northern France, the interference of central government in daily life had a deeply unsettling effect on the Danes. Immediately, in that same year, the number of witch trials began to rise, and in the next eight years, Denmark had 297 trials, the greatest concentration in European annals. Church and state apparently worked hand in hand, as the most powerful bishop at that time was a strictly orthodox Lutheran.

Evidence from elsewhere shows that moral crusades such as this, combined with demonological witchcraft beliefs, were devastating to women. But Johansen neither comments on the gender issue nor informs us how many victims of the witch trials were female. Establishing that poverty was probably not a factor (Denmark was prosperous at the time), he concludes that the key to the course of the Danish trials was judicial: the Danish statute of 1576 requiring appeal in witchcraft cases (the earliest such law in Europe) saved the country from a holocaust.

From Sweden comes an example of how secular courts interfered in women's sexual lives—and of how women might close ranks when that happened. In Ribe in 1548, a poor girl faced the death sentence for having killed her baby. Because she had been seduced and abandoned by the child's father, the wife of the Protestant superintendent of pastors took her side and led the leading women of the town into civic court to protest the sentence. The girl was convicted but let off with public penance and banishment.³³

But, more often, moral crusades triggered witch trials. This time the impetus came from the church, in the form of ordinances in 1664 challenging sexual customs and community traditions. The church ruled that sexual offenses, formerly punished with a fine, would now receive corporal or even capital punishment. Premarital sex, communal feasts and processions, public singing and dancing, maypoles and wedding processions, all were proscribed. This attack on cherished customs produced an immediate effect—in 1668 witch accusations that approached panic level broke out among children and young women in the provinces. Twenty-three persons, mostly women, were sentenced to death. Although testimony of minors younger than fifteen was not acceptable, judges cheated by adding several minors together to make "one witness." Ankarloo has evidence that the children collaborated on accusations, concocting stories of being bewitched and taken to "Blakulla" to attend the devil's sabbat. Encouraged by men from the new middle class, priests, small bureaucrats, judges, and officers who approved of the conservative trends, thousands of children took part in the hysteria. Some were even paid by priests to continue with their testimony. Their targets were 86 percent female, mostly older women, married or widowed. Ankarloo surmises that they had it in for older women either as a group of "mother-figures, of sexual rivals, of old hags, or of demanding employers, whatever it may be. We shall probably never know."³⁴ I believe that we must know, that the deaths by beheading and burning of 640 or so women can tell us something about the Sweden of the 1660s and 1670s.

The trials in Finland and Estonia (along with Iceland, which did not have a true witch hunt)³⁵ offer a rare phenomenon, the typical witch as male. Finland's trials were concentrated heavily on its west coast, where most people were from Sweden, spoke Swedish, traded with Sweden, and therefore were acquainted with the Swedish outbreak of 1668 to 1675. Accusations flourished among moderately well-off peasants and burgers, successful from their export trade with Sweden. Inland, where people were mostly subsistence farmers, there were few outbreaks.

Finns had always associated sorcery with males, and as the trials began with sorcery accusations, they focused on men. But as the trials increased, the number and percentage of women accused also increased. The longer an outbreak of witch fever lasted, and the more that people resorted to charges of diabolism, the more women were targeted.

In Estonia 60 percent of victims were males, who were middle-aged or elderly, married, peasants, and known as healers or sorcerers.³⁶ They were accused mainly of poisoning, their main weapons being hexed beer, fish, strawberries, or bread. When women were accused, it was mainly for laying a curse on someone. An exception emerges in the first major trial, a case of class bias in which an estate owner accused his wife of poisoning his father and almost killing him. The wife escaped, but not before denouncing her maid and an old woman. These peasants and three accomplices were burned at the stake, whereas the lady was only ordered into exile. As in the Alice Kyteler case in Ireland, servants were made to serve as scapegoats for the upper class.

Torture was commonly used, and death was by burning. Diabolism was not taken up by the common people, even though judges did inject it into proceedings. Estonian witchcraft remained mainly a matter of the power of magic to inflict harm; its connections with the ancient European beliefs about magic were shown through widespread concern over werewolves, who figure more often in trials of women than of men. These creatures were believed to be humans who changed themselves into wolves (or bears) using animal skins. At Meremoisa, for instance, a peasant named Ann admitted that she had been a werewolf for four years and had killed a number of animals; she had hidden her wolf skin under a stone in a field. Another woman confessed that she had become a werewolf when an old woman had led her into the forest and fed her sweet roots. People believed that werewolves roamed in packs.

Another prominent Estonian belief, widely held across Europe, was that witches rode at night through the air. Some believed that they did so only in order to commit destruction; others held, as did the peasants of Friuli whom we will consider in a moment, that they were good witches who rode out in spirit to protect the crops.

This survey of Scandinavian and Baltic witchcraft shows that it was deeply rooted in European folk customs and that the common people never did adopt much of the demonological lore of the judges and theologians, thereby probably sparing themselves a major witchcraze. But whenever beliefs about the devil did spread at the grass roots, as in Sweden in the children's myths about "Blakulla," the numbers of accused women soared.

Hungary and the Balkan Lands

Hungary, including Transylvania, engaged in heavy prosecutions of almost panic intensity, over sixteen hundred trials and over eight hundred deaths, most of which occurred in a 140-year period. The peak came in 1710 to 1760, during and following a major, failed war for independence. Hungary found itself dominated from the north by Hapsburg Austria and from the south by the Ottoman Turks and badly divided internally. Its struggle for national autonomy, stretching throughout the eighteenth century, kept the country in turmoil.

Hungary qualifies without question as a laboratory for gender bias: 90 percent of accusations and 91.8 percent of death sentences were against women. Many accusers were female also, children and teenaged girls. Gabor Klaniczay, compiler of these statistics, offers one explanation for them: women gained so much power in the late Middle Ages as mystics and saints that men diabolized women in self-defense.³⁷ Considering that acceptance of a mystic's power, and the concomitant accolade of sainthood, were dependent on the approval of the male ecclesiastical hierarchy, Klaniczay's theory does seem sound. Yet when we consider how many women with spiritual gifts were not accepted but were condemned as heretics or witches (mystics like Joan of Arc and Marguerite Porete), we must consider the possibility that they were, as a sex, consciously demonized.³⁸ But there is surely more to the deaths of so many women than this one motivation. As Klaniczay and his colleagues continue to analyze twenty thousand Hungarian narratives pertaining to magic, one can hope that a broader gender analysis will be forthcoming.

Most interesting about the Hungarian material is the considerable amount of archaic folk magic it contains. In addition to the infiltration of demonic lore from German lands, there was already a broad base of folk religion to build on. Hungarian society included shamanic figures called *taltosok*, more often female than male, created wise in their mother's wombs, born with teeth, whose souls could travel out of their bodies (the shamanic "soul-journey") in order to fight with other *taltosok* or to visit God, where they would receive the gift of healing. They served Hungarian society by finding hidden treasure, warning of fires, preventing hailstorms, and healing. These magical activities brought them into the territory of witch lore, of course, and many traces of shamanism have been found in Hungarian witch trials. They could heal the bewitched and identify witches, and they sometimes met in spirit at gatherings. They became bulls that witches rode up the chimney and to their sabbats.

The Hungarian material also contains many references to the "healer who also kills." We will return to this theme in chapter 6. All these folk customs link Hungary with the Italian *benandanti* (see the section on Italy and Spain, p. 89) and the shamans of Slovenia, Croatia, and Estonia. We are here at the edge of a vast stratum of folk religion, ancient and possibly Europe-wide, that underlies the trials of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They are only the signal to alert us to what had been going on for centuries.

The Netherlands

An anomaly among northern European lands in terms of witch hunting was the Netherlands. Although under control of the Hapsburg emperor of the Holy Roman Empire until 1579 and thus ruled by laws that encouraged the witchcraze, the northern Netherlandish provinces that became the Dutch Republic endured only a mild witchcraft persecution.³⁹ Fewer than 150 were executed, and there were virtually no mass panics, raising the question of how much influence one should give to legal and political factors. The Dutch Republic is known for its tolerance in many matters; its enlightened response to tensions over witchcraft may be part of a general pattern of restraint. In any case, the death penalty for witchcraft was not permitted after 1600, and the number of accusations dropped dramatically after that. Agitation about witchcraft returned to what it had traditionally been, namely, local charges of slander, cursing, and so on.

During the brief period of active persecution (c. 1540–1600) both folk magic and injurious sorcery were prosecuted as witchcraft.⁴⁰ Though the devil's pact was a factor, mention of the sabbat and sex with the devil, and of a conspiracy of witches, was rare. The new Reformed church was concerned about its parishioners consulting cunning people but did not panic over the devil's power; church councils in fact encouraged legal authorities to give mild sentences in dealing with witchcraft.⁴¹ The church saw itself as responsible for reconciling quarrels among its members, not exacerbating them. Reformed theologians also worked to lessen the belief in magic; church councils therefore punished those who consulted witch doctors and practiced counter-magic but treated accused witches leniently, not panicking over their offense.

Evidence from the Netherlands questions other generalizations about European witchcraft. Consider the well-known connection between witch hunts and rising poverty: the Netherlands was prosperous during this period, but still produced a witch hunt. As for the observation that political turmoil increased witch hunting, although the chief decades of Dutch witch hunting coincided with the tumultuous years of the struggle for independence from Hapsburg Spain and the founding of the Republic, the attacks on witches were brought under control—just as the rest of Europe was entering its heaviest years of persecution.

That 90 percent of the accused in the Netherlands were women has not been sufficiently addressed.

Italy and Spain

Signora Oriente rules the society as Christ rules the world.

—Pierina de Bugatis, Milan, 1390

The society to which Pierina referred met every Thursday night in Milan to pay homage to the woman Oriente, who taught them magic and divination, let them feast on animals, and led them in stealing food and drink from rich folks' houses. This example of folk religion in the form of a fertility cult flourished for years until the *podesta* (the secular court) took notice.⁴²

Because some early, fourteenth-century trials against "superstition" took place in Italy,⁴³ and the basis for demonological theory was laid by Italian and Spanish inquisitors, one would expect that these Mediterranean

lands suffered a witchcraze, but in fact they did not. Though they prosecuted many, they executed few. The reformed, "modern" Inquisitions of Spain and Italy, strictly regulated, inquired into thousands of cases of harmful magic, but seldom turned over their prisoners to the secular arm. Secular courts, shocked at this leniency, contested the church's right to adjudicate in these matters, but never gained control of them. Especially in Italy, exhibiting an intense interest in the activities of female fortune-tellers and male magicians, inquisitors perceived these activities as wrong belief rather than diabolic magic and sought to convert the practitioners to a papally approved form of Catholicism. Punishments therefore consisted of penances and, in extreme cases, whippings and banishment, but not death.⁴⁴

Research on witch persecutions in these lands, embedded as it is in the records of their Inquisitions, is in its beginning stage. With forty-four thousand cases in the Spanish archives alone (covering heresy as well as all kinds of magic) to be dealt with, it will be years before we have the kinds of social and gender analysis we need.⁴⁵ Some preliminary speculations can be made, however.

The only Mediterranean examples of typical witch hunts occurred in northern Spain and Italy, influenced by the more savage French and German hunts across their borders, but both were aborted. Around 1500 in the diocese of Como, a Dominican inquisitor claimed that he tried a thousand and burned a hundred witches a year, mostly poor peasants. When the peasants took up arms and appealed to the bishop, an episcopal commission condemned the hunt.⁴⁶

Likewise in Spain, when the witch mania stirred up by Pierre de Lancre spilled across the Pyrenees into the Spanish Basque provinces, a thorough investigation by the inquisitor Salazar caused most of the cases to be dismissed. True, harm was done and reputations were ruined: one accused woman (Mariquita de Atauri) committed suicide, and five others died in prison. But Salazar's skepticism, especially of tales told by children, saved thousands of persons from the stake (over five thousand had been accused).⁴⁷ In the end, only six persons suffered death in the *auto-da-fé*.⁴⁸

In the Italian lands, Carlo Ginzburg has discovered that in 1575 the Inquisition uncovered at Udine, northeast of Venice, one of the more remarkable examples of folk religion in its annals, a sect of Friulian men and women called *benandanti*, the "do-gooders."⁴⁹ Born with a caul, which they still wore around their necks, they went out at night (although still sleeping in their

beds) to *do battle with witches*. These specially chosen persons fought in military order, brandishing sticks of sorghum and fennel stalks against sorcerers who would destroy the crops. Four times a year, at each seasonal equinox, they fought to protect the livelihood of their community, and on the way home, they broke into houses and drank wine in the cellars.

This cosmic struggle, reminiscent of fertility rites across the world, is a version of the salvation journey motif.⁵⁰ And that is exactly how the *benandanti* saw themselves when they first explained their activities to the inquisitors; they were proud to be protectors of their neighbors. The Inquisition, understandably, suspected them of devil worship, that is, of *being witches*, and began imprisoning them. Perhaps because the court did not use torture, it took a very long time to break down the group's self-image, several generations in fact, but by 1650 *benandanti* were confessing that they *were* witches, and the ritual came to an end.

Benandanti (mostly men) opposed witches (mostly female) not only in night battles but on the streets of villages in broad daylight. These "do-gooders" played the role of shaman for their communities, sometimes working as healers but mainly policing the boundaries between the ordinary world and the supernatural.

Ginzburg has been able to connect the Friulian magicians with the werewolves of Livland (Estonia), good men who took animal form and walked down into Hell on three special days each year to fight witches who had stolen seed needed for crops. The Estonian testimony avers that German and Russian werewolves performed the same beneficent deed and insists that werewolves are "the hounds of God," not servants of Satan. Ginzburg has also tied in his extraordinary material with the cult of the goddess Diana (also known as Abundia, Holda, Satia, Perchta), in which during Ember Days women travel at night with the goddess, surrounded by the souls of the dead, demanding food and drink at the houses they visit. This legend turns up all over Europe. Ginzburg also found a parallel between the *benandanti*'s military formation and the claim of Hungarian witches that they went to their nocturnal meetings at the sound of trumpets, led by captains and corporals carrying black banners.⁵¹

After an initial preoccupation with Protestant heretics, the majority of Italian inquisitional cases were directed against folk healers and diviners,⁵² the church insisting that its own methods of healing by blessing, applying holy water, and exorcising were to be used exclusively. Many of the healers were

priests who mixed folk and Christian magical methods in their exorcisms, thus incurring the wrath of the church.⁵³

A specialty of Italian folk culture was the love potion. As with the *benandanti*, the women who administered such potions thought of themselves as doing good, but the Inquisition offered its most severe penalties, whipping and banishment, for this type of magic, hoping to destroy people's belief in it and the business that prostitutes enjoyed from it.

These magicians and folk healers, were they predominantly men or women? One fragmentary piece of statistical evidence gives some idea. Between 1596 and 1785 in the Friuli, 777 accusations were made of performing magical arts: divination, necromancy, love magic, healing, making spells for acquiring wealth or avoiding bullets, causing storms, witchcraft (*maleficium*), and of course, being *benandanti*. Of these 777, exactly half were women, who prevailed in healing, witchcraft, and causing storms, but not in any other category. After 1670, in fact, the defendants were overwhelmingly male.⁵⁴ But these are bare statistics and give us no glimpse of why men were particularly suspect as magicians at this time in this part of Italy, or what the attitudes toward women were.

One speculation can be made: that the Roman Inquisition treated magic workers more leniently than many courts north of the Alps because it doubted the power of the devil. Believing that these practices stemmed from ignorance, that is, from a mistaken belief in satanic power, the church wanted to correct, not destroy, the practitioners. Its intellectual skepticism places it with Reginald Scot and some of the English magistrates who also denied the power of Satan. Thus, moderation was found in Protestant England and Catholic Italy, but seldom in between.

The same common sense ruled the Spanish Inquisition.⁵⁵ Reformed and controlled by the monarchy after its excesses against Jews, its leaders declared in 1526 that witchcraft was a delusion, a matter more of madness than of heresy, and thereafter, with the exception of the Basque outbreak, no one was killed for witchcraft in Spain except by secular courts.⁵⁶ The Inquisition turned its energies instead to spreading the moral reforms of the Counter-Reformation, insisting, for example, that one must have religious instruction before procuring a marriage license, teaching that, contrary to popular belief, fornication was a sin, and prosecuting for concubinage, bigamy, and having sex with prostitutes.⁵⁷ Sodomy was punished by castration and the stake, bestiality by being burned alive or sent to the galleys. For witchcraft, by contrast, the most severe sentence was two hundred lashes and exile.⁵⁸

The Inquisition was in many ways a negative force in Spanish life. Utilizing thousands of agents known as *familiares*, it acted as a secret police force, accountable to no one. Spreading fear and suspicion, it increased Spanish anti-Semitism, institutionalized bigotry, and by strict censorship narrowed intellectual life. Furthermore, it attacked the scapegoats of Spanish society: Marranos, foreigners, deviants, heretics, Jews. Yet there was not a mass murder of women in Spain. Although it interrogated several thousand women for "superstition," it punished only a few and killed but a handful. The usual misogynistic attitudes were present in Spanish society: for example, Martin de Castanega, the priest who carried out a small, early witch hunt in Navarre in 1529, claimed that women were more likely to be witches. He gave a number of reasons, including that they are more talkative and could not keep secrets, want to know about secret matters, are more angry and vengeful, and being powerless, have no way other than witchcraft to get what they want.⁵⁹ Still, women as a gender group were not attacked.

I believe that Trevor-Roper was on the right track when he argued that the Spanish Inquisition did not instigate a witchcraze because it was already sated with victims, chiefly Jews and Muslims.⁶⁰ I would like to combine his idea with Kamen's observations about the power of the Spanish family, however, and suggest that it was not simply crude satiation but a more subtle combination of forces based on gender roles. Given the power of family, especially of clans, in Spanish social and political life, and the fervor of its Christianity, I can believe that the Spanish, whether lay or clerical, would not attack their own women. Spanish men guaranteed their honor and their identity as Spaniards through the purity of their race and religion, a purity they traced through family blood ties and religious orthodoxy. Heretics, Jews, and Moors were therefore suspect on grounds of religion, and the latter two on grounds of race as well. But Christian Spanish women were seen by Spanish men as part of their group, not as outsiders. As mothers they were in fact the guarantors of group purity. I conclude that before they can become the targets of a mass persecution, women *as a group* must be perceived as outsiders, as capable of turning against those who see themselves as insiders in a society. And this is precisely what did not occur in Spain.

FROM THIS COMPARATIVE survey emerge several important preconditions for intense witch persecutions. First, the secular courts must have gained jurisdiction over witchcraft cases from the church and must have adopted the procedures of inquisitional courts, especially the right to torture prisoners

until they accuse others. That these legal conditions existed by the mid-sixteenth century explains why municipal judges were the chief persecutors of alleged witches. Second, where a weak or distant central government enabled these local officials to pursue witches without restraint, as in the Holy Roman Empire, it was more likely that mob rule might take over. Third, as for belief, there were major witch hunts almost everywhere that judges and theologians believed in diabolism, that is, in the devil's ability to work evil through human beings. When this belief developed into a conspiracy theory, as it did in Lorraine, Franche-Comté, the German lands, and elsewhere, it produced a holocaust for witches. One can trace a rise in persecutions as this belief spread. Where witchcraft was conceived of only as *maleficium*, as sorcery, a witchcraze did not develop.

Furthermore, this elite persecution of witches was part of a much larger elite attack on folk culture, a reform movement carried out by both state and church that *in itself* sometimes triggered witch hunts, importing a strong class bias into the proceedings. And because these prosecutions grew out of religious reforms, both Catholic and Protestant, we must consider the role of the two Reformations in the witch hunts, not only as direct attack on witchcraft but more broadly as an attack on basic customs and values of the people.

This survey raises several issues for a gender analysis of the persecutions. The first and most important is that where prosecution for sexual crimes rose, there charges of witchcraft were likely to rise also (Spain and Italy were exceptions). We must look also at differences in family patterns. Where women were protected by their families, especially by extended kinship networks, they were less likely to become targets for accusations or, if charged, to be brought to trial. Where the medieval clan system was breaking down, women were more vulnerable. These factors will be discussed in the next chapter.

Further, we have seen that worsening economic conditions produced tensions that led to witchcraft charges. As marginal workers, women figured prominently in the groups who were first to suffer from the late sixteenth-century inflation, unemployment, and higher taxation. Because very little has been written about women's economic roles in relation to the witch persecutions, a separate chapter will be devoted to it.

Finally, misogyny, a tradition of antifeminism, turns out to be pervasive and dynamic, appearing in both the folk customs and the learned literature of every area. Though it tells us much about men and how they asserted control, it also indicates an important point about women: that they were

powerful enough to be feared. This factor does not surface in a survey such as I have just made, yet it explains better than any other why women were victimized. Chapters 5 and 6, which concentrate on what women were doing, is therefore fundamental to this study: the interplay between the very real power of women in the minds of men and their vulnerability when caught up in the institutional world is what the witch hunts were about. It is to the question of what women were actually doing, where their power lay, that we must now turn.