



A witch brewing up a storm. Although women were marginalized as workers and as productive members of their communities, they were frequently accused of having caused death and economic destruction. From Olaus Magnus's *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus*, Rome, 1555. Courtesy of Dover Pictorial Archive Series.

CHAPTER FIVE



Women and Work

Economic Marginalization

No labor scorning, be it ever so mean . . .
So many hardships daily we go through,
I boldly say, the like you never knew.

—Mary Collier to Stephen Duck, London, 1739

A WOMAN could be killed for going to work. A young woman, Margaret Flower, was employed by the earl of Rutland at Belvoir Castle near Lincoln, where she served as keeper “of the poultery abroad and the washhouse within dores.” Her sister and mother also worked there, and Mother Flower, a cunning woman, occasionally gave the earl advice.¹ Sometime around 1613 fault was found with Margaret’s performance, and she was fired. When her mother protested, she in turn was sent away. As Mother Flower left “she cursed them all.”

Soon after, the earl, head of one of the wealthiest families in England, lost his eldest son, Henry Rosse; when his second son, Francis, sickened in the spring of 1618, he suspected the women he had gotten rid of. After all, wasn’t Mother Flower rumored to be a witch? And wasn’t she known as “a monstrous malicious woman, full of oathes, curses, and imprecations irreligious”? Furthermore, everyone knew that “like mother, like daughter” applied where sorcery was suspected.²

The pamphlet describing this case, written entirely from the earl’s point of view, accuses Margaret of stealing supplies from the castle and refers vaguely to “some indecencies in her life.” The younger daughter, Philippa, was said to be “lewdly transported with the love of one Thomas

Simpson" whom she had bewitched; he had no power to leave her and was "marvelously altered both in minde and body" since she had taken up with him. As for Mother Flower, she had begun to look strange, "her eyes were fiery and hollow, her speech fell and envious, her demeanor strange and exotic . . . so that the whole course of her life gave great suspicion that she was a notorious Witch"; besides, she was known as an atheist. To top it all, she "dealt with familiar spirits, and terrified them all with curses and threatening of revenge, if there was never so little cause of displeasure and unkindnesse."

In all this there is little substance, except perhaps the charge that Margaret stole from her employer. But it makes clear that someone (or a number of people) did not like the Flowers and were out to destroy them. Whether it was envy of their jobs at the castle, or fear of an aggressive old woman, or possibly that Mother Flower dabbled in magic, or a former lover's revenge, we cannot be sure. Given that the daughters were young, single women, there is the possibility that the earl's sons had seduced them, grown tired of them, and driven them away. What we do know is what happened when this gossip reached the earl. He had no need to add to the slander against the three women, having much more powerful weapons at his command.

What happened next illustrates the injustice possible when the aristocracy leveled an attack of witchcraft against commoners. The three women were arrested for witchcraft and sent to the assizes at Lincoln. Mother Flower died along the way, raising the possibility that the prisoners were maltreated. The two young women were tried before Sir Edward Bromley, who had recently judged the notorious Lancashire trials. The *inability* of these commoners to cope with the alien customs of the court is evidenced by the way they incriminated themselves: Philippa confessed that she had stolen the right-hand glove of Lord Henry Rosse and given it to her mother, who rubbed it on the back of her cat Rutterkin, her familiar. The old woman had then placed the glove in boiling water and buried it in the yard (presumably causing the young lord's death). A similar glove story was offered to explain the second son's illness. Rutterkin was alleged to "leap on [Mother Flower's] shoulder and suck her neck."

That both daughters confessed to such damning actions indicates the possibility that they were threatened with torture. That the earl of Rutland was a close adviser of King James I, author of a treatise on witchcraft that urged the use of torture, raises this speculation to the level of probability.³ In

any case, the outcome of the trial emphasized the way the elite could manipulate the courts to further oppress the poor: both daughters were hanged.⁴

A story that began by describing three working women, self-supporting (there were apparently no men in their lives) and united as a family, ultimately illustrates the destruction of that family. The Flower women were sacrificed to the grief and fear of a rich family of powerful men, well connected and thus able to provide themselves with scapegoats from the laboring class. That the earl chose women who had no male relatives to protect them was a further exploitation. We do not know who claimed their property, but it was probably the earl.

But perhaps the earl was on the right track after all. In firing the women and depriving them of their livelihood, he had reason to fear their hatred and revenge. This is a classic case of the original offender being unable to deal with his guilt, then projecting the guilt outward onto the original victims, making them into witches *so that they could be done away with*, thus ridding the original offender of the source of his guilt.

In analyzing village discontent in sixteenth-century Württemberg, David Sabean concludes that "in a village with rich and poor, the generalized envy of the poor could bring about a [rich] person's illness." When illness broke out (plague was frequent in Württemberg), everyone was to take communion with and pray with the sick, but the prosperous members of the village were told also to send food and drink to the poor.⁵ In this way the rich could atone for their largesse and hope to placate the envy of the poor, and redistribute a bit of the wealth as well. The envy of the English villagers living around the castle of Belvoir could well have been great, an envy that would turn to hatred and revenge in women who lost their livelihood at the hands of one of the wealthiest men in England. In a society that believed in evil magic, hatred could kill, and the earl's sons could be believed to have died from it. Witchcraft beliefs thus had a double effect: to interpret misfortune (the deaths of the two young aristocrats) as intended evil, and to pollute or seduce or draw certain vulnerable persons (the Flower women) into an identification as witches.

TO EXPLAIN the increasing vulnerability of working women in the sixteenth century, one must not overlook the way that two events in that century converged: the rise of witchcraft accusations, beginning about 1550, and the steep rise of inflation, charted from about that same year. At midcentury,

crisis gripped Europe, based on population growth that had reached the saturation point, exacerbated by a flood of wealth from the new colonies in the Americas. Overpopulation created a land shortage, followed by the inevitable food shortages, hunger, unemployment, and unrest.⁶ Crime, both rural and urban, increased all across Europe.⁷

This brutal combination had occurred before, notably in the early fourteenth century, but had not then triggered a witch hunt. The earlier crisis had been diverted by the massive deaths caused by the bubonic plague (the Black Death) beginning in 1348, an almost providential killing off of Europe's excess population. No such Malthusian salvation rescued Europe two hundred years later when it faced the same squeeze. This time extraneous events conspired instead to make the population crisis even worse.

The influx of silver and gold from the Americas, flooding Europe's markets through Spain, drove prices up. Although much of the merchant class that controlled this expanding wealth enjoyed prosperity throughout the century, the poor suffered. Soon people living at the poverty level could not afford many basic necessities. Begging, vagabondage, homelessness, and theft increased; a vast underclass was created. As the rich grew richer and the poor grew poorer, tension between them rose. Into this economic gap came a method for resolving social tensions, at least on the surface, namely, witchcraft accusations.⁸ For though rural Europe had long been familiar with the occasional charge of *maleficium*, the rulers of village and town had not taken such charges seriously, had not put people—especially women—to death for them on a regular basis, until after 1550. That the accused persons, mostly poor themselves, were not responsible for this economic suffering was beside the point; they were *perceived* as the cause, and that perception sufficed to justify scapegoating them.

The seventeenth century brought no relief: a crisis in industrial production ended the boom for the wealthy and only worsened the suffering of the poor.⁹ A century-long depression affected all of Europe except the Netherlands, Denmark, and Sweden. Along with economic and demographic stagnation, there was rigidity in the old industries; the only institution to increase in power was the monarchy, as monarchs continued the process of centralization, tight taxation, and militarization they had begun so auspiciously the century before.

During this one hundred fifty years of hard times, the exact period of major witch hunting in Europe, women suffered economically and socially more than men. Before we analyze the connections between that fact and

their victimization as witches, we must see what roles women played in the economy before 1560.

Though medieval women's work had always been defined by their role in the family, and though they had always worked for less pay and had less control over their earnings than men, still, their contribution to Europe's economic life was impressive and essential.¹⁰ Almost all rural women kept gardens and cared for domestic animals, preserved food, chopped and carried wood, transported water, cared for and educated children, nursed sick family members, and prepared the dead for burial. Beyond satisfying these universal expectations, they might also augment family income by serving as brewers, fortune-tellers, healers, midwives, pharmacists, milliners, seamstresses, spinners, tavern keepers, thatchers, road workers, lace makers, receivers of stolen goods, victualers (caterers), wet nurses, weavers, and sellers of their surplus at market. During harvest season they hired out as extra labor, although they received far less in wages for this work than men.

In towns and cities, as in the villages, women's work was limited to and by their family situation. The wife of a man who owned his own business routinely worked alongside her husband. Urban women might therefore become skilled at silk manufacture, weaving, tailoring, skinning leather, candle making, or other crafts, or assist their husbands in tavern-keeping. City women, both married and widowed, also worked as pawnbrokers, moneylenders, launderers. Women provided almost all the available medical services, male doctors being scarce in European towns until the nineteenth century; they also dispensed welfare for town and city councils.¹¹ Occasionally they took up arms. Like their country sisters, city women found brewing and selling ale to be a mainstay. Wives of poor men might sell handiwork, peddle bread, hire themselves out for wet nursing.

If a woman had no family, only the lowest jobs were available to her: prostitution, wool-combing, petty crime. The more enterprising poor not only served as prostitutes but also ran brothels. That women *worked*, putting in longer hours than men and accounting for a great deal of the productive labor, is no longer challenged. The questions that must be asked are, Did their efforts earn them any control over their lives, and did their working lives change during the sixteenth century?

The one time in a woman's life that she might prosper and have some say over what she produced was after her husband's death. Provided she was not placed under control of a grown son, a widow might inherit property, be allowed to continue her husband's business, even defend her interests in

court. Some women added to their wealth, especially as merchants and renters of real estate. The attractions of widowhood are proved by the low rate of remarriage: in an era when marriage rates were high and women in demand as wives, few chose to remarry.¹² But none became equal in power or prestige to the big men of village or town: forbidden to hold membership in town councils, they did not have a say in crucial communal decisions, nor did they have access to the best resources or loans, to the financial "inside track."

In studying late medieval Exeter, Maryanne Kowaleski points out five basic characteristics of female employment that apply equally to the sixteenth century.¹³ Women almost never received formal training for jobs; forbidden to be apprentices, they could not qualify for highly skilled work. In any trade, they therefore held the low-status, poorly paid jobs. In the textile industry, for example, they were pattern cutters and stitchers, not finishers or retailers. Furthermore, women usually had no visibility in the business world, their work being subsumed under that of their husbands or fathers;¹⁴ this confined them to part-time, low-investment, home-related trade, work that fit in with their responsibilities to their households, especially to their children. It follows from this that their work was intermittent and they were thus incapable of keeping up with male competitors. Finally, unlike men, most women engaged in more than one trade, apparently needing to do so in order to support themselves; thus it was harder for them to become expert at any one skill.

How society viewed women as workers is revealed in the fact that English men, by law, were forbidden to practice more than one trade. Women's work was so little respected, however, that female producers were not restricted—they were not seen as a threat to male control of the economy. Communities showed where women stood by how they addressed them: when women were named at all in municipal records, they were usually listed as "wife of so-and-so the goldsmith," or "so-and-so the tanner." And no women were allowed to hold public office, anywhere in Europe.

In the long run, what held women back most, however, was their self-image and expectations. Their work identity tended to be vague and their ambition low.¹⁵ Denied the professionalizing training of apprentices, they seldom learned to think of themselves as "weavers" or "pewterers," that is, as artisans; rather, they were jacks-of-all-trades. Neither did they learn to work together, to close ranks around their own economic needs. Always underrepresented in guilds, they were virtually forced out of them after 1500; this ex-

pulsion rendered them strangers to the very institution where most of the job-hiring rules were made, wages and prices were negotiated, and deals about resources and loans were struck.¹⁶

In discussing Lyon, Natalie Davis gives a telling summary of what women could not do, of how invisible they were: "The females did not march in their craft's parades; the few sworn guilds had no women as officers or in any significant role; the city council never selected women to be *maîtres de metier*, that is, the two persons from each craft who ratified the new consuls and attended meetings as notables. Mistresses . . . played no part in confraternity drama, and may not always have been invited to the banquets."¹⁷

I conclude that women were the marginal workers of Europe, kept on the fringes of the economy and serving as the main source of cheap labor in a society with few serfs or slaves. When times grew hard, women workers were the first to be forced out. When trade fell off in Bristol, for example, causing unemployment in 1461, local men were urged to remove their wives and daughters from the work force.¹⁸ Their work was always seen as secondary to that of men: women kept alehouses, men kept inns; men were bakers, women peddled bread; alewives could not be ale-tasters, only male brewers could be.¹⁹ Neither the laws of municipalities nor the customs of patriarchal families permitted them to compete openly with men or to keep control of what they earned. Because many women headed single-parent households, most of what they earned went to the support of children and elderly dependents, in any case. This was the economic situation of commoner women in the mid-sixteenth century, and it proceeded to get worse.

The spread of the capitalist system across western Europe during the sixteenth century markedly affected women's work and was a direct factor in the spread of witch accusations. Heidi Hartmann argues that capitalism grew on top of patriarchy and that the two became "inextricably intertwined."²⁰ Early capitalism made the poor poorer because, in seeking the large pool of cheap labor that it required, it displaced farm families from their smallholdings, forcing them to become wage laborers. But it was men who had previously been the chief occasional wage earners; though they lost their land and independence to wealthy capitalist farmers, poor men still found work for wages. But women, who had supported themselves (and often their families) from their gardens and dairies, lost their main source of income, and they could not compete with men for paid jobs.²¹ These were the conditions that plunged many single women, formerly self-supporting, into poverty in the period 1550 to 1700. The economic situation accounts for the alarming

Witchcraze

increase in female beggars in western Europe, who so discomfited their better-off neighbors that the neighbors accused them of witchcraft in order to get rid of them.²²

Economics must be considered as a motive in any account of these persecutions. Obvious examples are the effort to gain a neighbor's property by destroying her through labeling her a witch or the profit made by innkeepers when public executions drew huge crowds, but more complex motives were also at work. Boyer and Nissenbaum found in their study of the Salem outbreak that rivalry over land had caused Salem village to divide into factions, one of which backed its young girls' sorcery accusations against the women of the other faction.²³ They see the girls' attack on neighboring women as a substitute for an attack on the hated stepmother in their own family whom they dared not attack. I suggest that the substitution was wives for the powerful husbands of the rival group, whom the men dared not attack for different reasons. This projection of attack onto the more vulnerable wives rather than their powerful husbands occurred also in Norway, Poland, and Germany.

Though economic motives are important in many trials, they seem to have played an inordinate role in New England. Carol Karlsen analyzed the social and financial destruction of a well-to-do widow of Wethersfield, Katherine Harrison, who was singled out by her neighbors as a witch not only because she owned valuable land but also because she did not remarry; that is, because, in spite of having no sons and, apparently, no brothers, she chose to take charge of her lands herself. Nearby farmers showed her what they thought of this affront to Puritan patriarchy by beating her oxen, boring a hole into the side of her cow, killing her heifer, breaking the back of her steer, destroying her corn crop, and cutting down her hops. The court apparently refused to protect her, and even gave her a heavy fine. Already suspect as a fortune-teller and healer, she was driven out of Wethersfield as a witch. The final disposition of her property is not known, but it is clear that Harrison was not allowed to enjoy it.²⁴ The point had been made: land was to be inherited and controlled by males.

These New England farmers and their European counterparts were not yet capitalists, for all their greed over land, but they had ceased to be medieval peasants. They were a transitional class, living under the strain of a rapidly changing economy that challenged their religious beliefs about what one owed to one's neighbor. Thus they lived with a sometimes unbearable amount of inner conflict and guilt over their growing ambitions.²⁵ Witch ac-

cusations, with their clear-cut demarcation between who was good and who evil, and who was master and who the subordinate sex, reassured these confused souls, while at the same time enabling them to increase their wealth.

Hand in hand with the greater municipal economic regulation of the sixteenth century was the effort of Europe's monarchies to regulate the behavior of their citizens; the period 1550 to 1650 saw the maximum reform effort.²⁶ This interference, whether as taxation, market regulation, military conscription, or charges of immorality, was hotly resisted by the common people, whereas some of the wealthier members of villages and towns identified with the government and helped it to enforce the new codes.

These governmental changes or reforms struck especially hard at women, as intervention in their sexual lives (see chapters 6 and 7) and as limitations on their economic roles. Martha Howell has shown how, through political moves and changes in municipal law, women producers in Cologne, some of whom had held high-status jobs, were effectively forced out of guilds by the early sixteenth century. In Leiden during the same century, women faced a diminishing range of high-status jobs, as "trades" were converted into "crafts"; having been banned from craft guilds, women were now confined to lower-paying jobs. Another line of attack was to impose fixed hours for work or training, or to require long journeys in order to trade, none of which women could take on in light of their domestic duties. Howell concludes that "when city governments imposed formal work rules on craft production or trade that conflicted with women's obligations to their families . . . women could no longer participate." Women were thus forced out of market production—and forced into low-paying marginal work.²⁷

Looking more broadly across the German lands, Jean Quataert has observed that by the middle of the seventeenth century, "the removal of single women from independent participation in the guilds and [their] relegation, ideally, to service and household activities" was complete.²⁸ But household production for market had just been forbidden by law! Women were confined to the household just as homes were declared out-of-bounds for producing consumer goods. Bearing in mind that the population of single women was at an all-time high and that women were much more likely to remain single than men, one can see that unbearable economic pressure was being applied to the *femme sole*.

Throughout the sixteenth century, restrictions on women's work had been increasing: London women, for example, participated less in the economy after about 1500, when there was a concerted effort to exclude single

women from guilds and livery companies, and by 1700 they were found only in the traditional female trades.²⁹ Similar pressures were being experienced by German women: widows of master craftsmen were no longer allowed to continue their husbands' work; all widows and unmarried women had to have male guardians; women healers were forced out of the informal areas of medical practice.³⁰

In the life of Anna Pappenheimer, a Bavarian wife, mother, and professional beggar, we see clearly the connection between poverty, witchcraft persecution, and the interference of the state. Anna's life was lived far below the level of most of the craftswomen we have been discussing.³¹ As the daughter of a grave digger and the wife of an itinerant privy cleaner, she was not only lower-class, she was outcast, for these two professions, involving as they did contact with bodily pollution, rendered the Pappenheimers unfit for ordinary society. And yet, Anna had been married for thirty-seven years and had borne seven children, three of whom were still living. Solid, stable elements of affection and need bound this family together.

As vagrants they had no home, wandering in the warm months from town to town to clean latrines, settling in for the winter in a poorhouse. Anna supplemented their income with begging; she had a professional license and knew the tricks of the trade. Her husband, Paulus, and the two grown sons also set up gambling tables at local fairs. That this humble family should become the victims of the most gruesome public execution in the annals of witch trials would have been inexplicable earlier, say in 1500, or as late as 1800. It was perfectly understandable in the Bavaria of 1600, however, and as such it can serve to sum up the economic and political realities that made the witch hunts flourish.

Bavaria, like all the German lands, was by 1600 suffering from alarming overpopulation, causing food shortages, unemployment, and unrest. There had been uprisings, and the young duke needed a dramatic way to show that he was in charge. He had an even more pressing need, namely, an heir. Married for five years, he and his wife had not yet conceived. Devout to a fault, Maximilian believed that the devil had cursed both his land and his marriage bed.

In 1599 he had ordered his spies, who were in every village and town of the duchy, to be especially on guard to discover the presence of witchcraft. When no witches were found, the ducal order was issued more insistently. It was now *necessary* to come up with a witch or two. Who more likely than the outcast Pappenheimers to fall into the trap? When a convicted murderer with a grudge against them named them as witches, they found themselves

bound as prisoners and carried by cart to Munich. We will discuss their fate in chapter 7.

Their story brings us full circle, back to the Flower women, mother and daughters, who died at the hands of one of the wealthiest men of England. Witchcraft did indeed have its economic and social bias: almost always, accusers were at least one notch higher in the social order than those they accused. And in the cases we have just mentioned, some of the poorest and most vulnerable people were made to serve as scapegoats for the mighty.

Given that the victims faced their accusers in a legal system now more centralized and less community-oriented than the medieval courts had been, their chance to obtain justice was slim. The gap between rich and poor of the sixteenth century had created "a rich minority who controlled the courts and a poor proletariat who came before them."³² In the expanding mercantile capitalist world of the 1500s, being poor was an increasing handicap. And women were growing poor at a faster rate than men, just at the time that they faced more intolerance toward the folk magic and folk medicine that had long been their stock-in-trade.

To summarize the factors causing women's economic condition to worsen, we have seen that, increasingly, capitalism caused a specialization in jobs, but that women were denied the apprenticeships and guild membership that would have enabled them to keep up with specialization, while wages for their traditional work declined. Women were also increasingly refused access to resources, loans, and decision-making roles in commerce. As modes of production and finance grew more sophisticated, women were shunted back into the home and to informal, marginal kinds of work. By 1700 the gap between male and female abilities to earn was wide.

But the economic crisis of 1550 to 1700, crucial as it was, did not alone cause the witch hunts. Sweden, Denmark, and the Netherlands, after all, remained prosperous yet persecuted witches. Neither was political centralization a sufficient cause, although government interference in people's lives was a factor in some areas. On the other hand, Hungary is perhaps the prime example of a country divided and torn with internal dissent that nevertheless found time to persecute witches. The search for the factor common to all the areas of Europe where witches were hunted will concern us next.



From Healers into Witches

At this day it is indifferent to say in the English tongue,
"she is a witch" or "she is a wise woman."

—Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*



Witches' Sabbath. Fear of the magical powers of village midwives and healers led to the demonization of women's curative skills. Here, active, powerful, and threatening figures are shown concocting an ointment. Hans Baldung Grien, Strassburg, 1514. Courtesy of Dover Pictorial Archive Series.

THOUGH WOMEN were not in fact riding broomsticks or having sex with the devil, what were they doing? Judging from their neighbors' reactions, the activities of at least some sixteenth-century women had a beneficent effect on their communities. Through healing, by both spells and potions, delivering babies, performing abortions, predicting the future, advising the lovelorn, cursing, removing curses, making peace between neighbors—the work of the village healer and her urban counterpart covered what we call magic as well as medicine. This work overlapped dangerously with the priest's job as well.

Much of women's power lay in their being perceived as able to manipulate magical forces. Exercising control in this way not only over the domestic world of women but when possible over men, they wielded influence through the "idiom of the supernatural."¹ Denied the ancient role of clergy or the newly emerging one of doctor, women drew on their own networks of information and skills inherited from their mothers to serve as privileged counselors and practitioners.

But power creates fear, and power based on magic can cause panic. The witch hunt records speak eloquently of the fear of the wise women that developed, especially in men. The role of healer, long respected and even seen as essential, became suspect. Believing that some women were powerful

enough even to threaten male sexuality, some segments of society began to carry out a terrible revenge on the magic-workers whom they suspected of having this control.

But before we analyze this demonizing of women healers, we must document the role of the wise woman in sixteenth-century society. The importance of this role in understanding the persecution of women for witchcraft cannot be overestimated: certain women were suspected of witchcraft, not because they were powerless, but precisely because they were seen to have a great deal of power. Because we know about folk healers mainly from court records in which they were accused of malevolent acts, we do not have accounts of healers perceived entirely as beneficent. One glimpses the positive aspects of their work, however, in their trial records.

At Nancy in Lorraine around 1580, according to the witch hunter Nicolas Remy, "a witch named Thenotte" was much in demand as a healer.² Called in by a neighboring woman who was ill, Thenotte diagnosed that the disease had been sent by Saint Fiacre, who must be appeased by gifts and a pilgrimage to his shrine. She offered to undertake this journey for a fee. As Remy told it,

When the price of her services had been settled, she first measured the sick woman cross-wise with a piece of waxed linen, and then folded the linen a certain number of times and placed it in her bosom as if for safety. For the whole of the following night she kept watch before the door of the sick woman's house, and at the break of day set out on her way without ever uttering a word. When she came to the shrine of S. Fiacre she entered and set fire to the linen, and with the wax that dropped from it traced figures in the form of a cross on the steps of the High Altar; and then went out and walked three times round the chapel, the linen meanwhile giving out spluttering and violet coloured flames. . . . And having performed all this, she returned to the town.

Thenotte thus utilized folk magic in a Christian setting in order to heal. Although Remy, who claimed to have sent eight hundred witches to the stake (and I find no reason to doubt him), referred to Thenotte as a witch, he mentions no accusations or trial connected with her. Thenotte, therefore, practiced her remunerative profession unharmed.

From Carlo Ginzburg we learn of an even more successful healer, Lucia, "the witch of Ghiai," but one whose career was already threatened.³

When in 1614 one of her clients, Franceschina, was reproved by a judge because she knew "that it was forbidden and a sin to go to such people" as Lucia, Franceschina replied, "I believe she is not a witch, but she punishes witches; and then too I went because many people go to her to have signs made over them, and they even come from beyond the mountains." Lucia was seen as one who could protect from witchcraft, performing counter-magic. Giving an orthodox coloring to her practices, she told Franceschina, "I cannot say [who bewitched you] because the bishop has given me license to make signs over rich and poor without revealing their names, but even though I cannot reveal the names I will give you a clue: you have quarreled with a woman, and she has cast a spell over you." And then Lucia made signs over her, "with two rosaries and two crucifixes which she keeps in a small box, and also with a coral that had been sent to her by the Pope." Lucia too, despite the appellation "witch," practiced as a diviner unharmed, perhaps by claiming connections in high places.

These women, both called witches, in fact functioned in their communities as healers, to which Lucia added the ability to divine who was a witch. Confusing as these professional roles seem to us, the women and men who filled them were essential to their world. Finding one term to encompass their various roles, however, is tricky. The frequent reference in current witchcraft literature to them all as "midwives" is misleading and too narrow. Just in regard to their healing function, women, in addition to serving as gynecologists, practiced also as barbers (chiefly blood-letters), surgeons (mainly bone-setters), physicians (diagnosticians),⁴ and apothecaries (herbalists). When we add to these medical roles those of diviner, necromancer, curser, and countermagician, we see the dynamic possibilities for the cunning woman: in a world where neither healing nor therapy were professionalized in our sense of the word, she had the possibility of wielding considerable power. Healer, expert on all matters pertaining to sex, and prophetess, she could be labeled "magic-worker," for the basis of her power in all these areas *was perceived to be* the power of magic.⁵ The term *healer* alone does not imply for us the magical aspect of the role, yet it is the description most often used in the literature. "Healer-diviner" perhaps best describes the broad range of most of the cunning folk.

Yet it matters what we call these village experts, because all of their roles eventually became suspect of witchery. Prophets, charmers, conjurors, wizards, treasure finders, dowsers, astrologers, exorcists, spell-casters, all who worked through supernatural, magical means were vulnerable to

charges of witchcraft and did in fact turn up in trial records. Note how Robert Burton mixed them: "Sorcerers are too common; cunning men, wizards, and white witches, as they call them, in every village, which, if they be sought unto, will help almost all infirmities."⁶ Attempts to separate out these magic-workers from, on the one hand, doctors or priests or, on the other, "witches" only forces modern distinctions onto sixteenth-century practices,⁷ because they all used magic. An example of its pervasiveness occurred in 1695 at Salem, Massachusetts Bay Colony, when a group of young girls began to show hysterical symptoms; the doctor who examined them considered at length and then pronounced, "The evil hand is upon them."⁸

Priests, although quick to condemn magic used in folk practice, were dependent on magic for much of their own ritual and remedies. Catholics observed the miracle of transubstantiation every time they attended Mass and were offered a variety of magical cures through holy water and saints' bones. It was through the ritual of exorcism, however, that the church brought them closest to the power of the village healer. A dramatic example, found in Boguet's treatise, describes how a priest, in trying to exorcise two demons out of Rolande du Vernois, forced holy water down her throat, tried to feed her consecrated bread, and burned paper with a demon's name on it over an incensed fire.⁹ In the diocese of Modena, priests performed Masses and baptisms over magical objects, such as magnets and potions, that both laity and clergy then used for love magic.¹⁰

Popes were not immune from dependency on magic: when Pope John XXII feared he was being poisoned, he procured a magic snakeskin to detect poison in his food and drink.¹¹ When Pope Urban VIII was cursed by the Spanish ambassador, he ordered an exorcism at the Vatican with bell, book, and candle, presided over by the hermeticist and priest Tommaso Campanella; the exorcism apparently succeeded, for the pope survived.¹² Urban also used Campanella to ward off the evil effects of eclipses.¹³

Many Protestant clergy carried on successful healer-diviner practices; one Anglican clergyman, Richard Napier, working as a therapist and healer, saw in his lifetime about sixty thousand patients, over five hundred of whom believed they were bewitched and twenty-seven of whom he confirmed as such.¹⁴ Some Scottish clergy, too, practiced magic, believing they could clear the devil from church by sprinkling holy water and ringing the bells.¹⁵

The churches' attitude toward folk healers was rent with ambivalence. Clergy themselves turned to diviners: the churchwardens of Thatcham in England inquired of a cunning woman to learn who had stolen their com-

munion cloth; in Modena in 1559 the Franciscan Girolamo Azzolini turned to a witch during his illness, absolved her *for healing him*, and then recommended her services to his parishioners. Azzolini was himself an exorcist and a witch-finder, but he recognized the limits of his abilities and the superior power of this witch.¹⁶

Unfazed by their own complicity in relying on magic, the churches still insisted on attacking folk healers. These latter were in fact the priests' competition. Under whatever name, these women and men were looked up to and depended on, as all healers are. But the women had a special edge over the clergy: as the authorities on matters of sex, they asserted what control was possible over fertility, conception, successful pregnancy, and safe childbirth.¹⁷ They cured male impotence and female infertility, performed abortions, provided contraceptives, and advised on problems of nursing, thus affecting the birth rate, a power that the churches were determined to wrest from them.¹⁸

A classic case of this professional jealousy was recorded in the *Malleus Maleficarum*: having described how a midwife had killed more than forty children "by sticking a needle through the crowns of their heads into their brains, as they came out from the womb," the authors then described what was to them an even worse crime: "For when they do not kill the child, they blasphemously offer it to the devil in this manner. As soon as the child is born, the midwife, if the mother is not herself a witch, carries it out of the room on the pretext of warming it, raises it up, and offers it to the Prince of Devils, that is Lucifer, and to all the devils. And this is done by the kitchen fire."¹⁹ The midwife's role was interpreted as a crime because of professional jealousy; the midwife usurped the role of the parish priest. Because of her favored position as female healer, she was able to seize the child first and "baptize" it in the name of the devil, while the priest ran from the rectory, arriving too late.

A deep male jealousy pervades this story, fed by the exclusion of all men (including fathers) from the birthing room.²⁰ Left to imagine what went on inside, they sometimes responded with wild imaginings, as the authors of the *Malleus* did. Male fear runs through the *Malleus*, culminating in descriptions of how a witch can cause a man to become impotent or to lose his genitals; a particularly lewd story describes where the village priest lost his penis.²¹

There was more of a "woman's world" in the sixteenth century than today,²² and part of the female healer's power lay in that fact. Although well-to-do urban wives consulted male physicians as well as cunning women,²³ most women turned to female healers by necessity as well as by choice. As there were few doctors in rural Europe until the nineteenth century, village

healers provided the medical care. They possessed a fund of knowledge about cures handed down from generation to generation, constantly improved by the empirical methods of observation, trial, and evaluation. Their work consisted mainly of prescribing herbal cures, practicing midwifery, and performing rituals of divination and healing.

Many of the herbal remedies developed by woman healers still have their place in modern pharmacology.²⁴ The village wise woman used ergot to relieve labor pain and to hasten labor, and belladonna to inhibit miscarriage. Digitalis is said to have been discovered by an English witch.²⁵

In addition to empirical methods, these women depended also on rituals based on magic. Incantations, the wearing of amulets, and the repeating of charms were universal practices. In order for herbs to be efficacious, as one gathered them one must say five Lord's Prayers, five Hail Mary's, and the Creed. Faith in verbal formulae was strong; one Goodwife Veazy, expert in the cure of canker-worm, intoned this supplication three times: "In the name of God I begin and in the name of God I do end. Thou canker-worm begone from hence, in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." Afterward she applied a little honey and pepper to the afflicted part. Other magical methods included girdle-measuring (the band would shorten if the patient was bewitched) and boiling eggs in urine.²⁶

David Sabeau provides a dramatic example of magical healing in describing the drastic cure for an epidemic of foot-and-mouth disease undertaken by a German village in 1796: a group of men sacrificed the communal bull by burying it alive, while the villagers hurried to bring buckets of earth from their yards to pour on the dying animal. When criticized for their cruelty, they said explicitly that the cure would not have worked had it been done any other way (i.e., had they killed the bull with a merciful blow and then buried him). The magic, which is to say the power, lay in the precise ritual technique.²⁷

Midwives used magical techniques for childbirth, fertility, and contraception: opening doors or chests to open the womb in prolonged labor, and even arranging for a woman to conceive without the participation of a man—by drinking horse's semen.²⁸ Wearing amulets containing powders could either enhance or prevent conception; the sorceress Mary Woods gave such a charm to the countess of Essex to enable her to conceive. Pierre Clergue, priest and Don Juan of the village of Montailou, used an herb wrapped in linen as a contraceptive. When being interrogated by an inquisitor, his mistress Beatrice de Planissoles reminisced that Pierre

had a long cord which he used to put round my neck while we made love; and this thing or herb at the end of the cord used to hang down between my breasts, as far as the opening of my stomach [vagina]. When the priest wanted to get up and leave the bed, I would take the thing from around my neck and give it back to him. It might happen that he wanted to know me carnally twice or more in a single night; in that case the priest would ask me, before uniting his body with mine, "Where is the herb?"

I was easily able to find it because of the cord round my neck; I would put the "herb" in his hand and then he himself would place it at the opening of my stomach, still with the cord between my breasts.

Pierre may have procured this valuable amulet-pessary from the prostitutes he visited in the town or from a village wise woman. Or as a priest who was also a healer-diviner, perhaps he constructed it himself. Wherever he had acquired it, he knew its value. When Beatrice asked him to leave the herb with her, he refused, because then she might use it to have safe sex with another man! Whatever its power, whether as pessary or magical amulet, it worked: Beatrice, who bore four children by other men, never conceived in the years of her passionate affair with Pierre.²⁹

Often, when asked to diagnose illness, cunning women came to the conclusion that the person or animal was bewitched, and used their powers to identify the bewitcher. They were known, in fact, for their ability to be witch finders, what Africans today call witch doctors.³⁰ Consider the *benandanti* for example: they were not best known for their claim to battle with witches but rather for their ability to recognize witches and to cure those who had been bewitched.³¹ Having identified the source of the trouble, some healers worked to reconcile the spell-caster and his or her victim. In Scotland, for instance, when Magdalen Blair was asked what ailed a sick man, she divined that Issobel Bennet ("of ill fame") was the cause. She advised him to "take a grip of [Issobel's] coat tail and drink a pint of ale with her And crave his health from her thrie tymes for the Lords sake and he would be well." We cannot know the outcome of this psychosomatic remedy, because, unfortunately, "he did it not." Magdalen might have been rewarded for her efforts two centuries earlier, but this conversation took place in the mid-seventeenth century; Magdalen was put on trial as a witch, and Issobel was banished.³²

Other witch finders specialized in preventing persons from becoming witches. When midwife Caterina Domenatta of Monfalcone, Aquileia, delivered a baby feet first, she convinced the parents to let her place the child on a spit and turn it three times over the fire; only this extreme measure could protect it from becoming a witch.³³

Whether the methods were empirical or bizarre, people made no clear distinction between natural or supernatural means.³⁴ This fact gave the cunning woman her great range of power. The common people of Europe clung to their folk healers, in preference to priests and doctors, until the nineteenth century. They saw that priests could not help during birth, and that many patients of doctors died. Besides, the cunning woman, with her intimate knowledge of her neighbors, was often an effective therapist, a comforting adviser. And her rituals, placing the sick ones at the center of attention, often enlisting the entire family for support, eased their minds as well as their bodies.³⁵ When Thenotte kept watch all night outside the sick woman's house, she focused the neighborhood's attention on the patient's suffering, a process of support that might in itself cause healing.

The effect of the healer-diviners on their communities cannot be underestimated.³⁶ One English healer had forty customers a week;³⁷ it was said that people traveled twenty to forty miles to consult a witch. Elizabeth Cracklow of Oxfordshire had been "sent for to divers places for the curing of people"; Margaret Neale of Aldeburgh, who healed diseases by prayer, "hath recourse of people to her far and wide."³⁸ People came "even from beyond the mountains" to consult Lucia of Ghiai. When the need was desperate, healers were sought out even when they were in prison.³⁹

One measure of their success was the considerable wealth that some earned: Michele Soppe of the Friuli, who claimed he had healed more than forty persons, "was called to give help almost weekly" and had "earned more than a hundred ducats in this way."⁴⁰ The necromancer Anna la Rossa of Udine was said to earn more than two hundred ducats a year; "a great multitude of people" came to see her. Not only were common people loyal to these healers but kings, princes, and archbishops sought them out.⁴¹ In Protestant as well as Catholic lands, in city as well as country, the cunning people held sway.

IT WAS THE VERY nature of their power that, ultimately, did them in. Magic is a two-edged weapon, neutral by nature, capable of being focused either for good or for ill: "she who can cure, can kill" is how people put it,⁴²

and when they said this, they feared the magic-worker as much as they respected her. As the churches' campaigns against folk healing ("superstition") progressed during the Reformations, this double gift became more dangerous to possess, more likely to be identified with Satan's power and the work of his demons.

Healers had always been vulnerable to this reverse charge. Muchembled has provided us with an early account, in the story of the widow Perrée Pingret.⁴³ In 1446 in France's Département du Nord people came from afar to consult Perrée, who could provide an ointment to bring back a lover or a ritual to improve a marriage or get rid of a husband. Many consulted her for mental as well as physical healing. Thirty-eight-year-old Catherine Jolie traveled from a neighboring village ostensibly for healing, but her true purpose may have been to get help with her marriage to sixty-year-old Mahieu Crepin. Perrée prepared for her a bath of herbs, a magical remedy still relied on today in various parts of the world.⁴⁴ After the bath, Catherine's condition improved, but her husband turned black; now Perrée was suspected of sorcery. She was also accused of killing a married woman in her village and her own daughter-in-law. This successful healer was tried on charges of witchcraft; the outcome is not known.

Muchembled observes that the healer was more likely to be perceived as a witch by her neighbors, whereas people from outside the community would see her gifts as beneficent: "One always goes to a stranger to have a spell lifted"—at least in the Nord. This information reinforces Thomas's and Macfarlane's theory that most witchcraft outbreaks were caused by village tensions, that people accused their neighbors of sorcery while seeking the advice of the magic-worker who lived a few villages away.

Not only the healer-diviners, but also their followers, believed that what they were doing was good and necessary. When women named Sibillia and Pierina were interrogated by the Milanese Inquisition between 1384 and 1390, having already been tried by the secular court, they told them that they went every Thursday night to a meeting presided over by a Signora Oriente, to whom they paid homage. There they feasted on every sort of animal except the ass, because it was associated with Jesus, and afterward Oriente resurrected all the animals, bringing them back to life with her magic wand. She led her followers at night to break into the houses of the rich, where they stole food and drink, taking care to spare the homes of the poor, whom they blessed. She taught her followers to divine the future⁴⁵ and promised to receive them in paradise.⁴⁶

In trying these women, the Inquisition had stumbled across, not the usual heretics, but members of an old fertility cult (hence the reverence for animals) who rode out at night on the "wild ride," dedicated elsewhere to the goddess Diana but centered here on a living woman, "Oriente." This particular group also had a touch of Robin Hood about it, robbing the rich while respecting the poor, an influence that Jeffrey Burton Russell speculates may have come from the Fraticelli or other fringe religious groups who practiced holy poverty. I suggest still another derivation: when Pierina witnessed that Oriente ruled the society as Christ ruled the world, she revealed a cult centered around a female leader seen as divine. Her claim was reminiscent of the Guglielmites, an earlier Milanese cult whose members believed that their female leader was a Christ figure.⁴⁷

What matters most here, however, is Sibillia and Pierina's claim that what they did at Oriente's meetings was not a sin. The Inquisition disagreed, and sentenced them to wear two red crosses as penance. Brought to court again six years later, Sibillia again maintained that she had not confessed her actions because they were not sinful. This time the Inquisition condemned her of diabolism, and she was burned to death.⁴⁸ That this cult, remnant of a folk fertility rite and expression of the growing autonomy of Milanese women in matters of religion, did not conflict in Sibillia's mind with her Christian faith is suggestive of how little orthodox teachings had affected the laity of the late Middle Ages, even those living in a city with a powerful Catholic structure.

The case of Chiara Signorini, taken from Italian inquisitional records, illustrates well that people both feared yet depended on the magic-workers.⁴⁹ Chiara and her husband, tenant farmers near Modena, already enjoyed "a poor reputation as far as magical arts and witchcraft were concerned," when they were thrown off a plot of land belonging to the estate of Lady Margherita Pazzani. They had in fact been evicted before, by other masters, out of fear of the spells they cast, and were sinking deeper into poverty.

Yet when Lady Margherita became seriously ill, her relatives turned to Chiara to cure her, that is, to lift the spell. They, and later Margherita herself, asked the very person who they believed had caused Margherita's paralysis to heal her and promised the magic-worker land and goods if she succeeded. Chiara did indeed pray for and heal the lady, but when the promised goods were not delivered, she cursed Margherita again, and the paralysis returned.

Arrested in 1519 by order of the inquisitional vicar, she straightaway admitted that she had the power to place or take away spells, but that this gift came from God, through prayer. Chiara then grabbed the offensive by telling

the court that she was visited often by the Virgin Mary, who promised to carry out vengeance on Chiara's enemies.⁵⁰ She gave her soul and body to this beautiful lady in white, whom she worshiped by "kissing her outstretched arms all the way to the neck with great reverence and happiness, and felt her to be as soft as silk and very warm."

The inquisitor seized on this all too materialistic, unangelic vision and tried to twist it into an admission of demon worship. Subtly his questions set a trap that Chiara slipped into, even describing how she offered her firstborn baby, "raising her child up in her arms and offering it to Our Lady, surrendering its soul and body"⁵¹—exactly as witch-midwives were reported to offer the babies they delivered to the devil.

Already by 1519 this was seen by the courts as devil talk, as dangerous, heretical doctrine. Why would Chiara risk using the very language of witchcraft in such a setting? She probably had no other religious vocabulary to call on. Everyone knew that she never attended mass; Chiara's religion was folk religion, in which one bargained with God or the saints or, in this case, with the Virgin, promising to worship them if they would do favors, take revenge on enemies, make amends for injustices suffered. Her only religious instruction had come from an old woman who had taught her spells to cure sick livestock. She insisted (rashly) that the Virgin always did all that she asked. Clearly, Chiara did not know the language of her ecclesiastical judges, did not know how her words sounded to them. She could not hope to exonerate herself with such talk.

Because Chiara's drama was played out in an inquisitional court, there was another, final act: the use of torture, in this case, the strappado. Chiara was hoisted up by a rope, probably with weights attached to her feet, then dropped so suddenly that her joints might be dislocated. This method usually brought results, and Chiara was no exception. Soon she confessed to worshiping, not the Virgin, but the devil and being aided in *maleficium* by him. But as soon as she was released from the strappado, she took it all back.⁵² With repeated torture they wore her down; although she denied to the end that she had attended the sabbat, still, her admission that the devil appeared to her in prison was enough to condemn her. In penitence she agreed never to call on the devil again.

Had Chiara been in a German court she would surely have been sentenced to death. Given the leniency of the Italian Inquisition in regard to punishment, however, she was sentenced to life imprisonment, prison being the Modena hospital for the poor.

It is believable that this passionate, outspoken, desperate woman might have called on not only the beautiful lady in white but also the devil. Hounded by poverty and repeatedly tricked by the wealthy families she worked for, she may have done as she finally admitted, "called upon the Devil in her despair." Had Chiara had the guidance of a priest, she might have used her magical gifts (seeing visions, hearing voices) to establish herself as an orthodox mystic. But the curses and cures that she dealt in were going out of style.

Throughout the account one senses a proud, imaginative soul, but one unable to deal with the inquisitor's subtleties—or with his demonology. Attend the sabbat, indeed! Chiara's devil was no Prince of Darkness presiding over a great orgy but came to her in the form of a twelve-year-old boy. In light of the newly emerging theology of devil worship, Chiara's folk religion of cures and countercurses looked like heresy and idolatry.

Other sixteenth-century witch trials document the growing suspicion of magic-workers. We saw that many persons whom Walpurga Hausmännin had befriended or attended as midwife turned on her later as the cause of their misfortune. Marguerite Peigne had cured some of her neighbors in Correnol, Switzerland, with herbs from her garden; it was *for this fact* (and the suspicion of hail-making) that she was convicted of witchcraft and banished within her home.⁵³ Isobel Young's magic had cured some of her Scottish neighbors, but this did not prevent nineteen of them from crying her out a witch; Isobel was hanged and burned. The Bavarian shepherd Chonradt Stocklin had cured men and animals who had been stricken by witches, yet his neighbors turned on him, burning him as a witch in 1586.⁵⁴ That such cases were rare before 1550 indicates a worsening in attitude toward healers, a new willingness of communities to turn against their magic-workers.

But one need not have been a healer or a witch finder to draw either the expectation of harming or, then, of curing. One quarrelsome Scottish woman, Elspeth Thomson, apparently built a fearsome reputation just by cursing.⁵⁵ Elspeth had a troubled relation with her husband's large family, and it is clear that they were afraid of her. When her sister-in-law's breast milk failed, she suspected Elspeth and therefore asked her to pray for her (that is, to lift the spell); Elspeth finally agreed, and all went well. When her brother-in-law Donald refused to cut peats for her, she retaliated by "getting the sight she desired of him" (putting a curse or possibly the evil eye on him); Donald was reported to say "that as ever before he was still feared for her and that they still discorded and he blamed her for all evil that befell him." When

Donald soon sickened and died, Elspeth's guilt was tested: she was made to touch the corpse, and "immediate . . . the blood rushed forth at his nose, navel and ears and his corpse bled all the way to the burial place." Dire evidence was fast closing in around her.

Elspeth tried to be neighborly to other family members, offering her daughter as servant to one. But this gesture was refused, and the family in fear tried to shut her out; she was not invited to the birth or baptism of a niece (for fear she would hex the infant), and her own husband claimed that she was on friendly terms with the devil. Ultimately in 1671, when neighbors joined her affinal relatives (relatives by marriage) in accusing her of witchcraft, Elspeth was condemned and hanged.

Elspeth's position as an in-law in a large family was precarious to begin with—she seems to have had no blood relatives to stand up for her, and Lerner speculates that she may have been an outsider to the village as well. The loneliness behind her anger over not being invited to the niece's birth and baptism is almost palpable. Yet loneliness and isolation do not necessarily lead to cursing. Somewhere Elspeth had learned the power of particular angry words and used them to lash back when she was hurt. For a woman to be outspoken and aggressive was not acceptable in Scotland's patriarchal society.

The record does not specify at just what point this lamentable state of affairs slipped over into a charge of witchcraft, but the situation was ripe for it: her very existence threatened the family. Yet not all the power lay with the accusers and the courts. Elspeth herself had power; her in-laws lived with a fear so strong that it might have caused the illnesses that they then blamed on her. When witch beliefs became strong enough, they locked a community into a self-fulfilling syndrome; one feared a person, one became sick with fear, thus one knew that that person was indeed a witch.

As for Elspeth's image of herself, whether she saw herself as a witch, Keith Thomas's observation is apropos: "some at least of the witches felt genuine hatred for those around them. Although their resort to cursing and banning was a substitute for real action, they may well have persuaded themselves that an access [to] supernatural power was helping their curses to take effect."⁵⁶ Like Chiara, Elspeth had no access to "real action"—legal counsel, protection by her natal family, or the support of the church. Again like Chiara, she protected herself with the only weapons she knew.

In some cases the fear of witchcraft became so great that it required neither cursers nor quarrelsome in-laws to galvanize a community. Thirteen-year-old Anna Catherina Weissenbuhler, an abandoned servant girl,

seems an unlikely person to turn three Württemberg villages upside down, but she did so in 1683, simply by claiming that she associated with witches.⁵⁷ She blamed a housewife in Gerlingen, one Madalena, who "had taken her often to the witches' dance by day and by night"; there she saw the devil, who "had a goat's foot, was completely black, and was not like a human." Like so many young girls, from Sweden to Salem, she accused an older woman. Madalena was known to be "an old nasty wife with a bad reputation."

Anna Catherina spoke freely about these contacts, perhaps even boasted of them to other children, thereby causing "a great scandal in the town and its territory." What people feared most was that she would contaminate others, would convert them to a belief in or even the practice of demon worship.

People soon rallied to defend their families against her. Turned out of the home where she worked, she was taken under the care of the municipal judge, who sent her to live with and be instructed by the schoolmaster. He soon wanted to be rid of her (parents threatened to remove their children from the school because of her), forbade her to speak to other children, ordered her to sit at a table alone. Soon his wife moved Anna Catherina's bed out of her parlor and into the infirmary, where she was the solitary occupant. The wife said she would get rid of her, even if they sent her to jail for doing so. Anna's own relatives in other villages refused to care for her. She had harmed no one (they said that she had stroked a cat that then became lame, and five hens on which she spat dropped dead, but she had caused no human injury), but she had frightened everyone just by talking about witches, by indicating a familiarity with them.⁵⁸

Anna Catherina's isolation was even sharper than Elspeth Thomson's, for she was rejected by entire communities and was only a young teenager. Unlike the authorities elsewhere, who believed young girls' accusations against older women, the pastors of Gerlingen did not buy Anna's story about being taken to the sabbat; instead they had her searched for the devil's mark, which was found, thus proving that she, not the older woman, was the witch. Anna fell silent, refusing to answer her interrogator's questions any longer (her fate is not known). Sabeau commented on her case, "It is not that weak, marginal people are witches but only that in a contest in which magic plays a role, the powerful win."⁵⁹ Anna was strong in her ability to panic others, but the very belief in magic that the village elders held gave them the power finally to silence her.

Increasingly, the healer could not win: when an herbalist in Lorraine doctored a man with a potion and his genitals disappeared, the lord of the

land ordered her to restore them. She obliged with another, successful herb, but this act of healing was taken as proof positive of her witchery and she was put to death.⁶⁰

Remy provided a classic story of this kind of betrayal of healers in the complex case of Nicolaea Stephana, which also shows how entire families of healers were destroyed.⁶¹

Nicolaea, a plague-ridden, claimed that she had learned that art from one Matthieu Amants, who had raped her and made her pregnant as payment for his instruction. Matthieu had recently been convicted as a witch (August 1587), when Nicolaea was hired to rid the castle of Dommartin of plague. Working efficiently, she quickly purged the buildings and was paid and dismissed. But Nicolaea hung around, a fatal mistake as it turned out. When the castellan's wife became ill, suspicion fell, of course, on the magic-worker and healer Nicolaea, who was threatened with beatings unless she healed the woman. She was faced with a quandary: if she succeeded, she proved that she had the power of a witch, for "such sicknesses can hardly be cured or assuaged except by the witch who caused them"; if the woman died, she would be blamed for her death. Given this no-win situation, Nicolaea vacillated.

Meanwhile her son, being held with her, realizing the danger they were in, tried to escape but was caught. He then turned on his mother, calling her a fraud and advising the castellan's men to beat her. As Remy retold it, "two brawny peasants did not cease to hammer and kick and pound and shake her, and finally to drag her to the fire, until she gave her promise to heal the woman at that very hour."⁶²

The authorities were not finished with Nicolaea or her son. Allowing her to leave, they seized her at the castle gate and imprisoned her. Interrogated by a judge (Remy?) who had already "inquired into her life and behavior," she confessed to having made the woman ill. And although she had healed her victim, still she was put to death; she and her son were burned together at the stake.

This case illustrates the cat-and-mouse game played by a judge with a peasant woman; probably from the time she was associated with Matthieu Amants, she was under suspicion. From then on, no matter how well she served her community, ridding it of plague and curing the castellan's wife, she was doomed, no matter what she did. It also shows the sexual bind of a woman who had been raped: although she was victim in that act, still it was she who bore the onus of the illegitimate birth that resulted from it, in a time that was beginning to punish out-of-wedlock births.

Often when the healer herself was named as the bewitcher it was up to her to lift the spell. The extreme danger of this process is illustrated in the case of Reyne Percheval. When the entire household of alderman Jean Parmentier was bewitched, they suspected their neighboring healer Reyne, who gave them a potion to drink that would lift the spell, with strict instructions not to imbibe it in their own home. They complied, but as Jean began to drink it he fell in a faint; his wife screamed, and Reyne came running. Struggling to help, Reyne was now taken for a witch for sure. Coming to, Jean forbade Reyne to come nearer and threw a burning ember in her face. His wife joined in, beating Reyne with the embers, but the healer made no attempt to defend herself. Reyne was brought to trial for witchcraft.

The life of the Scottish midwife Margaret Lang demonstrates the way in which medical skill and spiritual gifts mixed in one woman's life, and what a dangerous mix it was. Margaret lived in the Scottish village of Erskine near Paisley, was married, and had a grown daughter.⁶³ Known for her piety, she would walk miles to attend communion services in the neighboring villages, not satisfied with the annual eucharist offered in each parish. But Margaret was more than pious, she was an ecstatic. After she had been at prayer, she would throw stools about the house in a frenzy and "raged as if she were possessed," and when she gave witness to her faith, she was said to speak "like an angel."⁶⁴ She had offered to enable a neighbor to see the woman's dead mother and sister, showing that she practiced necromancy, and she was clairvoyant, correctly prophesying her own violent death.

Margaret earned her living as a midwife who was seen as "esteemed" and "sagacious and exact in her business," and who might have managed safely to continue her double role as healer and charismatic had not the young daughter of the local laird begun to have fits. While possessed, Christian Shaw accused Margaret and two dozen others of bewitching her and of conspiring with the devil to kill her. The year was 1697; by that time witch accusations in Scotland had a very long history and were, in fact, diminishing, but this story shows that they could still cause panic in a community. Eleven-year-old Christian could have modeled her accusations on a number of already famous bewitchings of children by older women: the Fairfax children in Yorkshire, Grace Sowerbutts in Lancastershire, the Pacy girls at Bury St. Edmunds, the demented girls of Salem in New England, Loyse Maillat a century before in Franche-Comté.⁶⁵ Christian did not require originality to send seven adults to the gallows, for her society was ready to believe children against adults, especially against mature women.

Once Christian had named Margaret—"Pinched Maggie," she called her—others came forward to accuse her. They claimed that she had been present at witch gatherings at Kilmalcolm and in the orchard of Christian Shaw's manor house. Because of similar testimony given independently by witnesses, it seems clear that *something* was going on at the Shaws' and that most of the accused (all working-class folk) had met at nocturnal gatherings. Whether they met to plot against persons representing the gentry like Christian Shaw or for their own entertainment, mainly sexual, is impossible to say, but Margaret and the other accused persons were a fellowship. They practiced magic, using talents that the church not only denied recognition but condemned.

But there were even more damaging charges against Margaret, that she had spoken to James Millar's child on the day the child died and had caused the death of a young servant woman. In court, Margaret gave eloquent speeches in self-defense, "which neither divine, nor lawyer, could reasonably mend"; her very eloquence, however, was looked upon as one of the strongest proofs of her guilt.⁶⁶ Despite a full denial of dealings with the devil, Margaret was condemned to be hanged, then burned. The tragedy did not end there, however: Margaret's daughter was soon implicated and arrested. Several years later she still languished in prison; her fate is not known.

On her way to the gallows Margaret made an unexpected confession: that long ago she had committed the sin of "unnatural lust."⁶⁷ We are left to imagine what this transgression was: fornication, lesbianism, masturbation? In any case, Margaret admitted that out of guilt over it she had accepted a pact with the devil. After the executions, she was singled out from the other victims to be called "that great impostor . . . a great masterpiece of the Devil."⁶⁸ Perhaps because she had been respected as a midwife and churchwoman, her apostasy cut deeper than most.

It is clear from these accounts that the healers thought of themselves as doing good, but this point needs to be made more fully. In showing how Remy and other witch hunters forced the label of black magic onto the practitioners of white magic, Delcambre explained that the witches "really thought they were endowed with divine gifts, and those who consulted them shared this opinion."⁶⁹ Many, such as Maria Medica of Brescia and Lucia of Ghiai, healed with holy oil, orthodox prayers, rosaries, and crucifixes; remember, Lucia even used a piece of coral sent her by the pope. Joan Tyrry of Somerset protested that "her doings in healing of man and beast, by the power of God taught to her by the . . . fairies, be both godly and good." Joan Warden of Cambridgeshire, when charged with being a cunning woman,

protested that "she doth not use any charms, but that she doth use ointments and herbs to cure many diseases."⁷⁰

The *benandante* and necromancer Florida Basili affirmed, "If it wasn't for us *benandanti*, witches would devour children even in their cradles." Many of her neighbors admired her for being able to talk with the dead, but eventually they reported her to their confessors and even accused her of having the evil eye—that is, of being a witch who dries up mothers' milk and *who eats little children*. Here we see the reversal, from one who saves to one who destroys. Other *benandanti* too had boasted of how they protected their communities and the crops. But *benandanti* were compromised from the start: their society believed both that children born with a caul were condemned to become witches *and* that these same children were destined to be *benandanti*, that is, to fight against witches.⁷¹ Given this dichotomy, the *benandante* walked a fine line, increasingly forced to protest his or her innocence and good intentions.

Perhaps Margery Skelton of Essex summed it up: when accused of witchcraft she maintained that what she had in fact done "with praying of her prayers" was that she had healed six persons.⁷²

The frequent mention of the cunning women's prayers points up how closely these women pressed into the priests' territory. No doubt some of these women had spiritual gifts that would have led them into the priesthood—if they had been allowed in. We must see in many of these careers of women healers and prophets the frustration of women who could have accomplished more if they had had institutional backing.⁷³

A further proof of this point is found in the number of visionary women who gave sermons, although preaching was strictly forbidden to women except in a few of the radical Protestant sects.⁷⁴ Our examples are all from bewitched women, those who engaged in the reverse side of magic, claiming that they were its victims, but who nonetheless used the experience of magical possession to gain attention and authority in their society. Young Christian Shaw is an example, preaching to crowds in her living room while claiming to be bewitched by Margaret Lang. The nun Louise Capeau, at Aix-en-Provence in 1611, while possessed by the devil Verrine, preached every day in the grotto of Saint Baume; her sermons on the Virgin Mary and the imminence of the Day of Judgment were so effective that one hearer claimed God was converting "soules by the Divell!" The teenaged French demoniac Nicole Obry was the conduit through whom the demon Beelzebub spoke, attacking Protestants at the cathedral of Laon.⁷⁵

It was a terrible irony for the healers when, instead of being supported, they began to be attacked. The noted Puritan divine William Perkins of Cambridge was convinced that *all* the works of wise men or wise women were of the devil. Whether the patient was healed or cursed, it mattered not; they must be punished, "because they deny God, and are confederates with Satan." It was the element of magic that Perkins condemned: "all Diviners, Charmers, Juglers, all Wizards, commonly called wise men and wise women; yea, whosoever doe any thing (knowing what they doe) which cannot be effected by nature or art." And it was the successful healer whom he feared most, because people would be persuaded by her: "but it were a thousand times better for the land, if all Witches, *but especially the blessing Witch* might suffer death."⁷⁶

Though both the public and the church were uneasy about these cases of possession, the work of wise women was mostly seen as good and as essential to their world. Lacking doctors or therapists, villagers and the urban poor depended on them in a crisis of life and death. Many women had taken up the practice of magic because it supported them and gave them standing and power in their communities. As the church's and the state's power to intervene in daily life grew, however, the role of *sage-femme* became riskier; always suspect because of the double-edged nature of magical power and the general suspicion of women, cunning women were now hounded by the authorities. Reginald Scot told about a male juggler at Brandon who performed transferred magic and won fame for it. Scot observed that if an old woman had done it, she would have been burned for a witch.⁷⁷ It is this change from sought-after healer to hunted witch that is important to our story.



Controlling Women's Bodies

Violence and Sadism

We find . . . on her secret parts, growing within the lip of the same, a loose piece of skin and when pulled it is near an inch long [and] somewhat in form of the finger of a glove flattened.

—Committee searching the body of Mercy Disborough¹

THE MARK in the form of a teat, from which animal familiars or demons would suck, might be found anywhere on a woman's body. The English, whether in Old or New England, were especially adept at finding it. Though men also were accused of having suspicious teats, the very concept of the devil's teat is based on the female function of providing breast milk; it is an inversion of a natural female function, a parody turned into a deadly jest. One woman had seven imps but only five teats and complained that they fought over her like a litter of pups when they fed.

When Margaret Jones, a Boston midwife, healer and cunning woman, was accused in 1648 of having "an apparent teat in her secret parts," her friend explained that it was a tear left over from a difficult childbirth.² No doubt this cause, or a swollen clitoris, explained these cases. But Matthew Hopkins, the fanatical witch hunter of Essex, England, would not take child-bearing or hemorrhoids as an excuse, pointing out that the marks "are in the contrary part."³ Hopkins knew his female anatomy and may have witnessed a number of examinations.

In Scotland the searcher, called the witch pricker, was always male. When two Scottish women wanted to join this lucrative profession they had to disguise themselves as men, "Mr. Dickson" and "Mr. Peterson." The



The torture of Christine Böffgen at Rheinbach, 1631. A well-to-do widow, she was tortured until she died; her property went to the court. From Hermann Löher's *Hochnötige Klage*. Courtesy of the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Carl A. Kroch Library, Cornell University.

pricker would know a witch because a true devil's mark would have no feeling or blood when stabbed. A contemporary observed that many innocent women were so overcome with shame and fear at having their bodies probed by a strange man that they became numb and could feel nothing, thus appearing guilty.⁴ Women's genitals were routinely searched.

These widespread practices terrorized women. When in 1649 the people of Newcastle-upon-Tyne hired a well-known Scottish pricker to rid their town of witches, promising him twenty shillings for every woman he condemned, they set a potential trap for all the women of the town: "the magistrates sent their bellman through the town, ringing the bell, and crying, all people that would bring in any complaint against any woman for a witch, they should be sent for and tried by the person appointed. Thirty women were brought into the Town Hall and stript, and then openly had pins thrust into their bodies."⁵

Most of them were found guilty.

When "a personable and good-like woman" was defended by one of the local gentry, the pricker argued that, having been accused, she must be tried anyway:

... and presently in sight of all the people, [he] laid her body naked to the waste, with her cloaths over her head, by which fright and shame, all her blood contracted into one part of her body, and then he ran a pin into her thigh, and then suddenly let her coats [petticoats?] fall, and then demanded whether she had nothing of his in her body but [yet] did not bleed, but she being amazed replied little, then he put his hand up her coats, and pulled out the pin and set her aside as a guilty person, and child of the Devil, and fell to try others whom he made guilty.⁶

Public events such as this, in which male magistrates watched a male searcher strip a "good-like" woman, frightening her speechless while feeling her body and applying an unrational "test" as to her innocence or guilt as a witch, established an important point about how women were viewed in early modern society: that women by nature, through their bodies, were susceptible to seduction by the devil, and that they must be controlled and if necessary punished by men.⁷ Scenes like this took place also in the German, Swiss, and French lands and were brought by English colonists to New England. The searcher's obscene question, "whether she had nothing of his in

her body," expresses the rapelike atmosphere. But the possible outcome (the penalty for a conviction of witchcraft was death) was more dire even than rape, and flaunted the power of these men over the very lives of the women whom they abused.

Though it is essential to pursue, as we have, what power women exercised in early modern Europe, as workers, healers, even as witches, a study of women's power will not take us to the heart of the witchcraze. In matters involving violence, there is no complementarity, there is only "power over." Women were indeed active contributors to European society, but once labeled as witches, they became victims, vulnerable to severe persecution.

Not wanting to restrict women to the role of victim, yet acknowledging the imbalance of power in a male-dominant society, Lois Banner asks how "does one then analyze the witchcraft persecutions of the seventeenth century, the greatest explosion of patriarchal power in the European experience?"⁸ How else than by accepting that in this instance women were victimized and by accusing those who were in power? To be more specific, I would say that it is only by learning what happened to the bodies of the accused and naming the agents of their torment, by "acknowledging the imbalance of power in a male-dominant society," that we can move ahead in analyzing this particular "explosion of patriarchal power."

BECAUSE SEARCHING and pricking were carried out on jailed prisoners, that is, on helpless victims, they must be considered a form of torture. Regular judicial torture, as we have seen, was used everywhere except England and was taken to ferocious limits. In the Pas-de-Calais in 1573, for example, one "Nisette," married to her fourth husband and convicted of witchcraft, was ordered to be flogged and banished, *after* having her head flamed with a *chapeau d'étoupe* (a burning circle of flax or hemp).⁹

Torture very often had its sexual angles. Performed on women by men, legal torture permitted sadistic experimentation and gratuitous sexual advances. When the executioner Jehan Minart of Cambrai prepared the already condemned Aldegonde de Rue for the stake, he examined her interior parts, mouth, and "*parties honteuses*" (shameful parts). When a woman was whipped, she had to be stripped to the waist (as Eunice Cole was), her breasts bared to the public. To try to force a confession, a priest applied hot fat repeatedly to Catherine Boyraionne's eyes and her armpits, the pit of her stomach, her thighs, her elbows, and "*dans sa nature*"—in her vagina. She died in prison, no doubt from injuries.¹⁰

While a female was imprisoned, she might be raped—the young Lorrainer, Catharina Latomia, not yet pubescent, was raped twice in her cell, and nearly died from it. At Ellwangen, Magdalena Weixler gave the jailer sexual favors in return for a promise to be spared torture but was tortured and executed anyway.¹¹ When one woman was raped and murdered in jail, blame was placed on the devil. Women, sex, and the devil were constantly mixed in with witch lore. Judges in northern France, for example, forced the accused to admit giving the devil “*un poil de ses parties honteuse*” (a pubic hair).¹² Parallels between laws on witchcraft and rape have been pointed out by G. Geis, who notes that both work against women. In rape cases, the accuser (the woman) finds it difficult to prove her allegations, because the very law suspects her of having invited the assault; in witchcraft, the defendant (the woman) must prove that there is no causal connection between her action (cursing, attempted healing, etc.) and the misfortune she is charged with—but the court is operating on a belief in that causality.¹³ In either case, rape or witchcraft, the law puts women on the defensive.

It appears that jailers, prickers, executioners, and judges, all could take their sadistic pleasure with female prisoners. And so could respectable ministers and judges. At a public session in New England, Cotton Mather, while working to control a seventeen-year-old girl possessed of demons, uncovered her breasts and fondled them.¹⁴ Women's thoughts, even the most intimate, were made public. The prurient interest priests took in possessed women's bodies and sexual fantasies while exorcising these women was demonstrated clearly at the public exorcisms of Sister Jeanne of the Angels at Loudun and of Elisabeth de Ranfaing at Nancy. Judges at Sugny, Luxembourg, asked female suspects not only about their sexual activity with the devil but about their sexual activity with their husbands and lovers as well.¹⁵

These men took advantage of positions of authority to indulge in pornography sessions, thus revealing that they wanted more from witch hunting than the conviction of witches: namely, unchallengeable sexual power over women. In reflecting on the sexual abuse of female prisoners in the twentieth century, Susan Brownmiller asks “whether sadistic torture leads by its own logic to the infliction of sexual pain, or whether the motive of eliciting . . . information is merely a pretext for the commission of hostile sexual acts.”¹⁶ In the witch hunts, the policy of forcing a witch's confession may have been a cover for making a socially approved assault on her body. Moreover, the basic fact of having total juridical power over women may have fanned the propensity for violence. Because women had never before

been prisoners in large numbers, men for the first time now had unrestricted access to them; given the low opinion of women in European society, there was little social pressure to restrain the court officials from taking their pleasure with the victims.

The popular appeal of sexually related torture went beyond the courtroom and jail house. All executions for witchcraft were public events and often drew huge crowds. The general sadism that this engendered will be discussed in chapter 8; here I want to look at the sexual aspects of torture, trials, and executions.

THE HEAVY sexual content of witchcraft prosecution in the sixteenth century parallels the well-documented rise in laws restraining sexual conduct. Among the legal charges on which a person could be brought up, sex-connected crimes—that is, adultery, bearing illegitimate children, abortion, infanticide, and incest—figured large, increasingly so as the two Reformations progressed. Women were more often and more severely punished than men for these crimes. The only sexual crime for which men were punished more often than women was sodomy, sometimes combined with a charge of witchcraft as well.¹⁷ Witchcraft, too, was often sex-related, and charges for all these crimes rose and fell together; the seventeenth century saw a peak of prosecution for abortion, infanticide, and witchcraft.

Consider what this meant for the unwed mother in Nuremberg.¹⁸ If suspected of killing her newborn, she was arrested, brought to the prison in chains, her breasts examined for milk. Then the midwife was dispatched to find the baby's body, which was brought back to the mother, no matter how long it may have been dead, to shock her into confessing. Between 1576 and 1617, nineteen women were subjected to this brutal routine, then drowned or beheaded. Women's punishment became more severe in Nuremberg as the sixteenth century progressed: formerly, pregnant prisoners had not been tortured, but now they were no longer spared. Nuremberg was remarkable for a south German city in that it had no executions for witchcraft. This fact did not mean, however, that it tolerated deviant sexual behavior in women or treated them humanely when they were desperate.

In other areas of Europe as well, charges of sex crimes and witchcraft often overlapped: Elizabeth Codwell of Essex, for example, guilty of murdering her bastard child, suspect as a witch, and pregnant with her second bastard, was reprieved from hanging until one month after the child's birth and was then put to death. In Luxembourg, the daughter of a poor manual

worker at Santweiler was executed for sorcery and for killing her child. As we have seen, the word *witch* in Luxembourg was associated with *putain* and *ribaude*, meaning "whore." In New England at Salem, George Jacobs called his servant Sarah Churchill (one of the young accusers) a "bitch witch,"¹⁹ combining sexual and demonic sins in one succinct phrase.

When suspicion of abortion or fornication lay in her background, the accused witch stood little chance.²⁰ When brought to trial in New England, Alice Lake utterly denied that she had practiced witchcraft but confessed that as a single woman she had sinned, become pregnant, and tried to abort the fetus. Although she failed, "yet she was a murderer in the sight of God [and herself] for her endeavors." This admission of attempted abortion was sufficient to condemn her of witchcraft, and Alice was executed, leaving four small children. Like Margaret Lang, she was no witch—but under the extreme pressure of conviction for witchcraft, she broke down and confessed an old sexual sin.

The greatest sexual sin apparently was birth control, whether as contraception or abortion. The sorcery that one woman was accused of was teaching two young women how not to get pregnant. In Hamburg a woman was burned to death because she taught young women how to use abortifacients, and at Zwickau, another female was burned with her books and instruments because she aborted the fruit of the womb "*durch ihre falsche Art*" (through her treacherous method). Midwives were taunted, "How many children have you destroyed? How many pregnant women? How many mothers lying-in?" At Würzburg, where several hundred people were put to death in two years (1627–29), a midwife was blamed for the entire disorder.²¹

This attack on birth control and abortion might be seen as a protection of the fetus, if the authorities had shown a corresponding respect for pregnancy, birth, or infancy. They did not. When Alison Legrand was arrested for witchcraft, although she protested that she was pregnant, she was twice submitted to the ordeal of water ("ducking"). Although proven innocent, she miscarried. Though courts sometimes let a pregnant prisoner go, often they did not, forcing the gravid woman to give birth under harsh conditions. Sometimes the infant died, as did Sarah Goode's newborn in Salem jail; in other cases, the new mother was tortured and executed anyway (Jehanne de Monchecourt in northern France, 1610); in a few cases the pregnant woman, denied a stay, was executed with the fetus (for example, Elizabeth Lowys, England).²² Children were pressured to give evidence against their parents and to witness their parents' executions. Children as young as three were im-

prisoned and as young as eight were executed as witches. The society that hunted witches could not claim to be pro-fetus or pro-child.²³

So concerned were the French about abortion and infanticide that in 1556 the Parlement passed an extraordinary edict: every expectant mother must register her pregnancy and have a witness to the birth. If she did not, and the infant died, she was liable for the death sentence on a murder charge. This unprecedented intrusion by the state into the act of childbirth made infanticide into a *crimen exceptum*,²⁴ in the words of Edward Peters "the crime so dangerous to the civil community that the very accusation acted to suspend traditional procedural protection to the defendant, and opened the way for the most ruthless and thorough kind of prosecution, undertaken to protect the state from its most dangerous enemies."²⁵ Not even witchcraft was a *crimen exceptum* in France, but infanticide was.

All these charges were based on the actual activities of women. They were distortions, a dangerous twisting of the truth, but they were reactions to what women did in order to control their fertility. An even more dangerous projection onto women, however, came from fantasy, not fact, from the sexual fantasies of inquisitors and secular judges about what went on at the "sabbat." In trial records from everywhere in Europe (except England and Russia) we learn that women were believed to have an erotic propensity for devil worship.

Consider the case of a healer named Matteuccia of Todi, Italy, who was brought before the Inquisition for prescribing a contraceptive for the concubine of a local priest and for dispensing love potions. Admitting at first only to using herbal remedies, by the time the inquisitor finished with her she had confessed to anointing herself with an unguent made with the fat of babies in order to invoke demons and be transported to the sabbat.²⁶

Moving further into the realm of judicial fantasy, we find women accused of flying to the sabbat on phallic broomsticks, being seduced by demon lovers, joining in orgiastic dances, kissing the devil's ass, copulating indiscriminately with men, other women, relatives, demons, or the devil himself, and giving birth to demon children.²⁷ Women were believed capable of these acts because of three qualities: being hypersexed, weak-willed, and given to melancholy. The devil could seduce a woman to his service when she was horny, or melancholy (because she was broke or had been deserted by her man), or simply because she lacked character. The classic statement from the *Malleus Maleficarum*, "all witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable," summed up the widespread belief that women were by

nature oversexed, wicked, and therefore dangerous to men. It is not surprising that many demonologists stressed the witch's ability to render a man impotent, even to cause his genitals to disappear,²⁸ for the witchcraze took place during a period when women were perceived as sexually omnivorous.

In these proscriptions we find that the most disgusting part of women's disgusting bodies was their menstrual blood. When Stevenote de Audebert showed the witch hunter Pierre de Lancre her pact with Satan written in menstrual blood, he was horrified to look at it. But not too horrified; his fascination overcame his disgust. One must ask why she showed it to the man who boasted he had tortured some six hundred persons, and who put to death eighty, in a brief four-month tour of southwestern France. It is likely that Stevenote was proud of this document. At any rate, showing it to de Lancre was her undoing, for she was burned at the stake.²⁹

Early modern people were not casual about menstrual blood.³⁰ Calling menstruation a "sickness," a "monthly disease or infirmity," or using the poetic term "the flowers," they referred to the flow as excrement, a "Monthly flux of Excrementitious and Unprofitable Blood,"³¹ an impurity with a loathsome smell. They understood the flow to be proof of the inferiority of women's bodies compared to men's: men used all their blood, whereas women had a superfluity. If her period was blocked, this impure excess would trouble her brain, causing melancholy and even suicide. The foulest object that a seventeenth-century person could name was "a menstous rag." Beyond this disgust over a natural function of the female body, however, lay a fear of its power. Menstrual blood was believed to have magical effects, bewitching a lover, serving as an aphrodisiac, assisting in conception; an extreme fear was that intercourse during menstruation would kill the man. Here we see a clear example of the no-win position of women in that society: they were inferior and yet dangerous, disgusting and yet powerful, and it was their bodies that chiefly made them so.

Larner suggested that it was in the era of the witch hunts that "the evil effects of the menstrual fluid [were shifted] from the menstrual blood to the woman herself." From this shift it was only one step to perceiving a woman as having by nature the characteristics of a witch. Larner believed that "this shift reflects an intensified misogyny in this period."³²

Women were seen as overassertive sexually, even to the point of wanting to be raped, a belief widely held in the medieval period. The later idea that women wanted the devil to seduce them was based on the medieval literary formula in which women seek and enjoy rape.³³ From the Pays Basque came

the saying, "*Un coq suffit a dix poules, mais dix hommes ne suffisent pas a une femme*" (One cock is enough for ten hens, but ten men are not enough for one woman). About French beliefs in general, Martine Segalen concluded, "Of all the maleficent powers which a man is led to fear in his wife, the most redoubtable are her sexual appetites, which threaten to subjugate him to her power."³⁴

Old women especially were seen as oversexed. Much of the basis for legends of demon lovers stemmed from the belief that women were sexually insatiable and could not be satisfied by mere mortal men; widows were, of course, seen as all the needier. In his study of myths about widows, Charles Carlton concluded that "in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries [men] felt that widows, once their husbands had whetted their sexual appetites, were all potential nymphomaniacs, rather like Chaucer's Wife of Bath." Carlton quoted Nathaniel Smith in 1669, "He that would woo a maid must flegn, lie, or flatter, but he that woos a widow must down his breeches and at her."³⁵ Noting the fear that men expressed of these oversexed women, Carlton asked if these anxieties might help explain why widows were frequently accused of witchcraft. Surely he is correct in deciding that "men were afraid of widows because they did not fit into the age's concept of a hierarchical cosmic order. Being without a man to guide them they were, so to speak, a weak link in the great chain of being."³⁶

Yet this projection of a supersexuality onto older women conflicted with the church's teaching that sex was only for purposes of procreation. Postmenopausal sexual activity was, in that light, inappropriate and illicit in any case.³⁷ There were thus many reasons for objecting to an older woman who was sexually active.

Old people, and old women especially, were hated for the way they looked. In an age that worshiped outward beauty and equated it with inward virtue, an ugly old woman was seen as evil, and therefore as a witch. An observer of the witch hunt in Essex wrote that suspicion fell on "every old woman with a wrinkled face, a furred brow, a hairy lip, a squint eye, a squeaking voice, or a scolding tongue . . . a Dog or Cat by her side."³⁸ Bizarre sexuality was attributed to these women, such as Temperance Lloyd, who when searched was found to have two teats in her "secret parts." Poor, addled old Temperance confessed that a Black Man had sucked on them. She was hanged.³⁹

Having begun this discussion of the connection between women's sexuality and witchcraft with comments on the victimization of women, it is

important also to take a broader view of early modern women's sexual lives. Putting aside the myths about their sexual insatiability and their demon lovers, what *were* women doing sexually? One thing seems clear: they were asserting themselves more and taking more responsibility for their sex lives than women have since, until very recently.⁴⁰ Because premarital sex was the norm and premarital pregnancy not condemned until the seventeenth century, young women and men were freer to learn about themselves sexually, to experiment sexually, and to try out partners than they would be again until the 1960s.

I can find no evidence of how premodern women felt during intercourse except Chaucer's exquisite description of the Wife of Bath, who so loved "the tickle in her root"—and this observation was written by a man. But given the witch hunters' obsession with sex, it is not surprising to find detailed descriptions of what it was like to have sex with the devil. There was an almost universal assertion by women on trial for witchcraft that the devil's touch was cold and disagreeable. Boguet, for example, quoted a suspected witch as saying that the devil's "semen was very cold," and "that she had several times taken in her hand the member of the Demon [which] was as cold as ice."⁴¹ Given the frequency with which witness like this turns up in the records, one might conclude that sexual attraction was not the channel through which the devil won women over. But by contrast there is the testimony of fifty-seven-year-old Suzanne Gaudry that she "took contentment and nothing else" when having sex with her demon familiar, Petit Grinnou. That Susanne enjoyed sex with her demon cannot have helped her case; she was burned at the stake in 1652.⁴² At any rate, it is possible that women did enjoy sex more⁴³ before the Reformations regulated sex and nineteenth-century bourgeois attitudes imposed more passive views of women's sexuality.

Furthermore, women were encouraging their young daughters to take lovers, were arranging this for them, and not, apparently, with marriage yet in mind; the intention must have been to supervise their sexual initiation. Stories that recur in court confessions, from Scotland, England, and France, indicate that children's first sexual experiences were arranged for them, as is still done in some non-Western societies. Elizabeth Anderson may have been a bit precocious at thirteen, but she was expected to go out with the "little dark man" whom her grandmother introduced her to and urged her to hold hands with. In Lorraine, Dominique Fallvasa testified that "although she was not yet of an age to do after the kind of women, she was sent by her mother into a thick wood where she would find a handsome young man whom she would easily be able to love." The story continued:

She was gathering rushes for binding up the vines with her mother, and they lay down on the ground to rest themselves. . . . Her mother began to warn her not to be afraid if she saw something unusual, for there would be no danger in it; and. . . . There suddenly appeared one in human form who seemed like a shoemaker . . . [who] made her swear an oath to him, and marked her upon the brow with his nail in sign of her new allegiance, and finally defiled her before the eyes of her mother. And the mother in her turn gave herself to him in sight of her daughter. They then joined hands and danced for awhile.

Boys might receive the same treatment: Erik Hennezel's parents gave him a woman whom he madly loved and "at once and greedily wallowed in carnal bestiality with her."⁴⁴ At his trial he identified her as a succuba. That all of these stories when told in court end in disappointment, as the lover vanishes into the air or turns into a demon, does not invalidate the glimpse they give us of sexual initiation among peasants. Whether the parents arranged this in order for the child to have a "proper" (i.e., nontraumatic) first encounter with sex, or in order to make money, or to lure a lover for themselves (as in Dominique's mother's case), we cannot know. But the stories indicate that among peasants virginity held no value for marriage, and that initiation took place very young.

And women were loving women; evidence is scant but suggestive. Aside from the myth about the sabbat, that its devotees had sex indiscriminately, males with males, females with females, I can find only four cases of lesbianism, two clear, the other two uncertain, in witch trial records.⁴⁵ One of the former is one of the celebrated cases of demonic possession that seized French nuns. In the earlier convent cases at Marseilles, Loudun, and Louviers, when nuns became bewitched they blamed priests, usually their confessors, for seducing and bewitching them, claiming the priests were really servants of the devil. Several prominent priests were burned at the stake on these charges.⁴⁶ At Auxonne, however, the nuns accused not their priest but their mother superior. This public charge of lesbianism in a convent created an even greater scandal than the notorious cases mentioned above. The Parlement of Dijon took up the charges, could not handle them, and dismissed the case.⁴⁷ But these dramatic convent cases, fueled as they were by sexual repression, do not make an adequate basis for understanding either heterosexual or homosexual sex of the period.

A second case comes from ecclesiastical court records in Pescia, Tuscany, 1619 to 1623.⁴⁸ Benedetta Carlini, the young and gifted abbess of the Théatine convent there, experienced trances in which Jesus praised her, gave her the stigmata, and exchanged his heart for hers. Benedetta put on a public marriage between her and Jesus, and led a public processional to ensure that Pescia would be spared the plague. After a careful investigation, the authorities gave their approval to her ecstasies.

A second investigation, however, provoked by the papal nuncio, revealed another side to Benedetta's spiritual life: the nun who was her companion reported that Benedetta, while possessed by a male angel named Splenditello, had forced her to have sex with her, a relationship that lasted for several years. This astonishing revelation raised more questions than the investigators could handle. Was Benedetta responsible for her actions? She was, after all, in trance each time she seduced the nun. Was she committing heterosexual or homosexual acts? The two bodies involved were both female, but Benedetta spoke and even looked like a young male while she was possessed. To further confuse the picture, Benedetta was known to flirt with priests at the gate where the life of the nuns touched that of the outside world, and she had entered a mystical marriage with Jesus. Was she a witch with a demon lover (her "Jesus"), or was she bewitched, the innocent victim of someone else's sorcery? Not knowing what to make of the charges, the commission eventually concluded that her "voices" were demonic but passed no sentence on the charge of lesbianism. Benedetta was sentenced to life imprisonment within the convent. After all, because she had a following in the town, she was a potential threat to law and order there. As for her lesbianism, Benedetta could have been burned at the stake as a sodomite. There were a few precedents in Europe—five, to be exact, in the criminal records—of the death sentence for female sodomites.⁴⁹

Another case, less clear, is found in the trial of Elizabeth Bennet of Essex. Accused by William Bonner of being "lovers and familiar friendes" with his wife, whom Elizabeth had made very ill (or possibly had killed), Elizabeth was hanged as a witch. Granted that she was accused of many other crimes, including being an "olde trot, old whore, and other lewde speeches," still it seems likely that sexual deviance was a basic charge.⁵⁰

The final case, harder still to define, is that of Margaret Lang, the Scottish midwife and ecstatic discussed in chapter 6. Accused by an eleven-year-old girl of bewitching her, Lang was tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged. At the gallows she confessed that when she was young she had com-

mitted the "unnatural sin," a fact she felt so guilty about that she made a pact with the devil over it. The only other time I have come across this phrase is in the trial of Marguerite Douyn, a French servant girl accused of "having unnatural sex with her master." Because this was heterosexual sex, the charge apparently related to the physical positions.⁵¹ So the nature of Margaret Lang's sin, called by a contemporary her "unnatural lust, which is known to some of your number," remains uncertain. Her case shows how difficult it is to write about sexual history.

Beyond the possibility that early modern women did enjoy and were more assertive about sex than women in a later period, there is one more sexual factor that must be raised: in the early modern period, married women were almost continuously pregnant or nursing—and it was hard on them. Furthermore, almost half their children died before they were five. When the Scotswoman Bessie Dunlop surrendered herself to Satan, she was just up from an excruciating childbirth and hurrying across the moor seeking help for what she feared was her husband's fatal illness; in short, the devil got her while she was down. As the instruments of torture were being prepared at Barbe Gilet's trial in Lorraine in 1587, she calmly told her jailers to stop; she would confess, not in order to spare herself torture (which she claimed she could have endured) but in order to seize her opportunity for death—so that "the four young children which still survive of the many that I have borne" would not be raised by her, in the service of the devil. Her death would free them; she would sacrifice herself for them.⁵² Barbe had borne and lost many children and been hounded by the devil all the while. No wonder that she was ready to quit this life.

IT IS IMPORTANT to review the many ways that having a woman's body made a difference during the witch hunt. First, the distinctively female external parts of the body—breasts and labia—were the model for the devil's teat, a sure sign of guilt, and the female function of nursing was the basis for the myth of imps and familiars, who sucked on witches. Some of the most basic and negative imagery of witch lore was thus taken from female anatomy.

Birth control, abortion, and infanticide, all seen as heinous crimes and all the almost exclusive practice of women, were connected with witchcraft and thus compounded its offensiveness. Homosexuality was being increasingly persecuted, and lesbianism may have been connected with demonism, although it is impossible to say on the basis of a few cases.

That women were seen as more strongly sexed and of weaker character than men were crucial points, becoming the basis for the interpretation of the sabbat as a sexual orgy and for the belief that it was inevitable, hence "natural," for women to be seduced by Satan. This view of female sexuality both expressed and intensified men's sexual fright of women. Applied to old women, it made them grotesque and physically repellent. All women without men were seen as especially vulnerable to the devil.

Mother-daughter pairs were especially suspect, and many were burned or hanged together. A mother-daughter pair was buried alive for sorcery in Cologne, and a number of three-generation groups of female victims are known, as well as mother-son pairs. These accusations confirm a belief both in the hereditary nature of witchcraft through the mother and contamination through nurture. They underline the tension already evident in the huge number of accusations made by girls against older women, a tension exposing the desire of females as well as males to "kill the mother."

Finally, the authority figures in witch trials were entirely male. The majority of accusers,⁵³ the ministers, priests, constables, jailers, judges, doctors, prickers, torturers, jurors, and executioners, and the courts of appeal as well, were 100 percent male. This all-male establishment paid off: as we have seen, 80 percent of those accused and 85 percent of those executed by it were female. As for the appeal process, few women attempted it: in France, 50 percent of the appeals to Parlement were by men, although only 20 percent of the accused were male.⁵⁴ The power of the courts trying witches, operating as they were under an extraordinary dispensation from normal legal procedure, gave these men exceptional power over women, and many of them used it to carry out sadistic sexual practices on the victims. Therefore when women asserted themselves, challenging this patriarchal system in any way, they were punished. It was apt that the Scotswoman Margaret Lister was described in her indictment as "a witch, a charmer, and a libber," "libber" meaning then what it means today.⁵⁵ That historians in the past could have ignored the blatant gender oppression of the witch persecutions and that some in the present continue to blame the victims, is as extraordinary as the historical facts themselves.

We have seen that by the witch hunt European women as a group were criminalized for the first time.⁵⁶ Their vulnerability to mass persecution was proven, their alleged propensity for evil dramatized. Although the oppression of European women had a long history before the sixteenth century, it

"came into its own" then. The lengths to which men in power would go in order to control women became more violent, more public, and more organized.

THE ULTIMATE form of torture was to be burned alive, and the most horrifying symbol of some men's power over all women and over some other men was public execution at the stake. That this ferocious type of punishment was commonly carried out on witches added to the sadistic nature of their treatment, compounding the sexual torture that many had already been subjected to.

That this torture was carried out in the presence of large crowds often numbering in the thousands gave it a ritual meaning beyond that of simple punishment. As a public purging of evil, it declared that the land was rid of demonic enemies and that not a trace of their hated presence remained. Once the condemned had been reduced to ashes, those very ashes would be thrown to the wind or scattered over moving water. But public witch executions were more even than a purging: they affirmed that the ruler who ordered them was godly, and even more important, that his power was greater than the forces of evil.⁵⁷ The fate of a poor German family illustrates this point.

Anna Pappenheimer, who was fifty-nine in 1600, was, as we have seen, the daughter of a grave digger, an outcast group in Germany at that time.⁵⁸ Marriage opportunities for outcast women being few, Anna had seized the chance to marry Paulus Pappenheimer, an itinerant privy cleaner, also a member of the underclass. In addition to being suspect as outcasts and as wanderers, the Pappenheimers were Lutherans in a Catholic land, the duchy of Bavaria.

But Anna had several things going for her. By the time she emerged into the historical record in 1600 she had been married for thirty-seven years, had borne seven children of whom three sons survived, and had despite constant poverty kept the family together. A respectable woman, one might think.

The Bavarian government thought otherwise. Its young duke, Maximilian, after an intensive Jesuit education, had become concerned about witchcraft in his duchy. As a teenager he had witnessed the trial of several women for witchcraft. Now, worried about unrest among his barons and city oligarchs and a rise in highway robbery and vandalism, he searched for a way to demonstrate his power. Already concerned that witches might have put a curse on him (his wife had not been able to conceive), he called for a

witch hunt. His theological advisers, threatened by the new Protestant movement, were eager to cooperate with him in every way. It was not enough that the Bavarian Council of State was already legislating about almost every aspect of its citizens' lives: "against the marriage of young Catholics into Protestant communities, against the sale of non-Catholic books, against mixed bathing, against dancing in the evenings, against extravagant weddings, against fortune-telling and superstition, against vagrancy and highway robbery."⁵⁹ Even though Bavaria was filled with ducal spies, still people did not obey these rules. What was needed, the duke decided, was a show trial, a public spectacle that would make it clear to all his subjects, high and low, who was in charge in Bavaria.

When the Pappenheimers, already seen as polluters of society, were named as witches by a condemned criminal, they were duly arrested and brought to Munich. Held in separate cells, they were questioned repeatedly but would not admit to sorcery. Tortured with the strappado, however, they began to break. Anna finally confessed to flying on a piece of wood to meet the devil, having sex with her demon lover, murdering children in order to make an ointment from their bodies, making a demonic powder from dead children's hands. The ointment and powder, she admitted, were used to carry out murder. After a long, well-publicized trial, the entire Pappenheimer family was convicted of witchcraft.

The execution of the four adult Pappenheimers drew a crowd of thousands from the surrounding countryside. First, they were stripped so that their flesh could be torn off by red-hot pincers. Then Anna's breasts were cut off. The bloody breasts were forced into her mouth and then into the mouths of her two grown sons. (This had not been the custom until Duke Maximilian's time.) A contemporary torture manual recorded that "the female breasts are extremely sensitive, on account of the refinement of the veins."⁶⁰ This fiendish punishment was thus used as a particular torment to women. But it was more than physical torture: by rubbing the severed breasts around her sons' lips, the executioner made a hideous parody of her role as mother and nurse, imposing an extreme humiliation on her.

Now a procession formed, over half a mile long, led by a municipal official carrying a large crucifix. Legal officers wearing red and blue tunics, the four Kings of the Night representing the four quarters of the city, the ducal chief justice, and a crowd of clergy helped to fill the ranks. Church bells pealed to celebrate this triumph of Christianity over Satan; the crowd sang hymns; vendors hawked pamphlets describing the sins of the victims.

Meanwhile, Anna's chest cavity bled. As the carts lurched along, the injured prisoners were in agony. Nonetheless, they were forced at one point to get down from the carts and kneel before a cross, to confess their sins. Then they were offered wine to drink, a strangely humane act in the midst of this barbaric ritual.

One can hope that between the wine and loss of blood, the Pappenheimers were losing consciousness. They had not been granted the "privilege" of being strangled before being burned, but in keeping with the extreme brutality of these proceedings, they would be forced to endure the very flames.

Further torments awaited Paulus. A heavy iron wheel was dropped on his arms until the bones snapped. Despite the fact that it was Anna who was the witch, not he, she was spared the wheel, because it was never used on women. Then Paulus was impaled on a stick driven up through his anus. By this brutish parody of anal intercourse, he received not only intense physical torture but also was branded a sodomite; again, as with Anna, he was subjected to a humiliation that canceled out what his life had really been.

The four Pappenheimers were then tied to the stakes, the brushwood pyres were set aflame, and they were burned to death. Their eleven-year-old son was forced to watch the dying agonies of his parents and brothers. We know that Anna was still alive when the flames leapt up around her, for Hansel cried out, "My mother is squirming!" The boy was executed three months later.⁶¹

After the Pappenheimers' show trial, there was less unrest in Duke Maximilian's lands. But even this fact did not ease the pressure on suspects: as late as 1631 there were still large numbers of accused witches in his prisons.⁶²

The Pappenheimer case can serve as an introduction to how the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century state intervened in the lives of individuals, women especially, using sexual references to underline the state's absolute rejection of certain persons. How the growing power of the state also changed gender relations within European society fundamentally will be examined next.



Keeping Women in Their Place

IN THEIR ground-breaking reperiodization of European history as women's history, Bonnie Anderson and Judith Zinsler conclude that "the unequal relationship between women and men, present at the beginnings of history in Europe, intensified as time went on. The early nineteenth century marked the nadir of European women's options and possibilities." Noting, as we also have done, that centralizing of government and religion lessened women's opportunities, Anderson and Zinsler sum up the problem for women as follows:

The centuries from the Renaissance through the Enlightenment broadened the possibilities for men, giving more men access to education and choices in occupation. They did the opposite for women. New national law codes denied women control of their property and earnings, gave primary authority within the family to the husband alone, outlawed any efforts by women to control their fertility, and barred women from higher education and professional training.¹

Though all these factors are important, they still do not fully explain why women's lives were more restricted in the early 1800s than ever before or

Ein erschreckliche geschichte / so zu Derneburg in der Graff.
schafft Kempten am Harz gelegen von diepen Hauberin vmb zw apen
Hafen / Herten ragen des Monats Octobris Im 1 5 5 5. Jare ergange.



The burning of three witches at Derneburg, Harz, in October 1555, as documented in a broadside newsletter. Public tortures and executions of witches officially conveyed strong messages about the expectations and limits of women in society. Courtesy of Dover Pictorial Archive Series.

since. Elsewhere the authors observed, "The witchcraft persecutions remain the most hideous example of misogyny in European history,"² but they did not factor in the hunting of women as witches when explaining why the early modern centuries were good for men but disastrous for women. I will argue that the witch hunts played a key role in this decline of women's status.³

Anderson and Zinsser also overlooked a second cause of women's extraordinary subordination, namely, the increasing power that European men were claiming over the world. I will posit that as their control over other peoples spread through imperialism, European men exerted more control over their own women.

Before we look at the way imperialism, colonialism, and misogyny reinforced one another, however, we must turn back to the witch hunts and examine their effect on the era that produced them. What difference did it make to women that they were for the first time criminalized as a group? Or that they were hunted out primarily *because they were women*? And as for men, what effect did having this power exert on them?

IN MUCH of western Europe in the peak years of the craze, any woman might have felt like a hunted animal. When we narrow the focus from the national level to that of village or town, we see the real horror of this period for women. In an attack that ultimately cut across lines of age, class, and income, women found themselves alone. With few exceptions, their families did not speak up for them out of fear and, in some cases, turned against them. Accused by their neighbors or named under duress by their friends, usually they faced the court without any support. Faced with legal procedures they did not understand and threatened with torture, they struggled to say what they thought the judges wanted to hear. But many were not let go,⁴ and the hopelessness of the voices that speak through the trial records from prison underlines the fact that they realized there was no way out for them.

Women thus learned to live with a fear far greater even than our current dread of rape and assault.⁵ If a woman could be cried out a witch for telling someone's fortune or speaking back to a neighbor, well then, one had better stay to oneself, mind one's business—and obey one's husband. Women learned especially not to trust other women, for what woman might not be called up before the judge and start blabbing?

The sociologist Carole Sheffield maintains, "Sexual terrorism is the system by which males frighten, and by frightening, dominate and control females."⁶ We have dealt with a variety of ways this was done: by rape, body

searches, verbal smears, torture. The chief sixteenth-century device for teaching both sexes about men's ultimate control over women, however, was the public execution of witches. Strangely, little can be found in the trial records or eyewitness accounts about the culmination of the trials: the carrying out of the death sentence is seldom described, and almost never in detail.⁷ The most complete execution accounts we have are of the Renfrewshire executions in Scotland, the burning of the Pappenheimers, the hangings at Salem, the executions of several well-known priests in France, and the *auto-da-fé* at Logroño, Spain—and even this last falls silent over the actual deaths. Even more strange is the silence on this subject of some of the major witch hunters—Remy, Boguet, de Lancre, Kramer, and Sprenger. Had they no stomach for seeing their projects through to the end?

The near silence of the records about this crucial element (crucial certainly for the victim, but also for the crowd) requires us to reconstruct. What did a woman standing in the crowd outside Munich see, think, feel, as she watched Anna Pappenheimer's arms burned with hot tongs, her breasts cut off, her body burned alive? What were the messages of this savage scene, one that the onlookers knew occurred thousands of times, in one version or another? For all of the onlookers a major message was that the power of the devil, for that moment and in that place, was overcome, and that the Catholic church and the government of Duke Maximilian were safely in charge of Bavaria. But for the female onlookers there were other messages, for everyone knew that, even though men also might be condemned, witchcraft was quintessentially the crime of women. To examine this public rite, I will use Tom Driver's categories of ritual in order to analyze what that particular message was for women.⁸

Ritual is display. This execution, through the elaborate procession of ecclesiastical and secular officials, displayed the absolute power of the state over the individual, of the church over Satan *and* the individual, of public law over the private realm of the family. But because the torture that preceded the killing was gratuitous, the prisoners having already confessed and been convicted, it signaled that this ritual displayed something more. Some of the torture was customary, such as gouging the Pappenheimers' flesh with hot tongs; this would sear some of the evil out of them, thereby winning them some small hope of salvation. It would also give the crowd a thrill of horror and warn them not to play around with the law as the Pappenheimers had allegedly done. As for breaking the criminals' bodies on the wheel, that was frequently done in Germany. But mastectomy and being impaled—these

were ferocious punishments, which signaled to the crowd that these prisoners were singular; they were wild beasts whose very existence threatened the state of Bavaria.⁹

These were the messages to all. To a woman, however, there was more: cutting off Anna's breasts dewomanized her, said that the most dangerous thing about this evil woman was her sexuality, that her only hope of salvation lay in becoming not a woman. The message to the females in the crowd was, Be not-a-woman yourself; be as invisible about your sexuality and your motherhood as you possibly can. In a century in which men wore codpieces to emphasize and flaunt their genitals, women were being told, It is dangerous to show your breasts; don't even nurse your babies in public.

Ritual needs limits. Being a structure, its form must be limited to be recognizable. By 1600 in south Germany, witch burnings were a familiar event whose components spoke a language that all could understand. At Munich, however, the form of witch execution was pushed to the extreme. Just as ritual requires order, it also tends to push beyond its limits, and when it does so it can become deadly. The Pappenheimer family's execution did not occur late in the witchcraze; people were not yet bored or jaded by the tortures and burnings—if indeed they ever became so. Yet here the planners (the municipal council and Jesuit advisers) broke the boundary of what was required. The "language" of ordinary executions was deemed not sufficient to communicate their message. Thirteen years before in nearby Württemberg, searing her breasts with hot tongs and cutting off her hand had been sufficient to prepare Walpurga Hausmänin for the stake. Except in southern Germany, mastectomy was never before or again used in witch executions, to my knowledge. What fear (of the devil), what hatred (of women), what mad drive for power could have motivated these planners to push their ritual to this extreme?

The woman in the crowd would see Anna being stripped and would know that men had planned this as a pornographic moment, and, no matter how much she feared a witch, she would share Anna's shame. The woman would know that pornography breeds violence and would shiver in fear of what the executioner would do next to the half-naked woman. When he reached for his knife, took one of Anna's breasts in his hand, cut off the flesh, plunged the bloody nipple between her lips, the woman would have felt the knife in her own flesh, would have gagged, wanted to vomit, as much from shame as from horror. She would feel faint from the question pounding in her head: Can our bodies be this evil? Is there no limit to men's hatred of us?

At this point I am tempted to say that the planners were demonic people, deranged by their evil, and to leave it at that. But given the depths of evil in our own century, I have learned that one dare not dismiss evil by calling it madness. The "madman" who has enough sanity to gain power is not insane. The planners of the witch hunts were perfectly sane, yet they planned a ritual that went to an "insane" length. There is also the question of where to lay guilt: between the planners (elite Bavarians) and the torturers (commoners), who is guilty of the Pappenheimers' deaths? Duke Maximilian did not torture Anna, nor did he witness her execution, as far as we know, yet he and the other planners, as well as the executors, are complicit in her death. We can pursue these questions further through the remarkable parallels that exist between this seventeenth-century state interference in civilians' lives and recent state-sponsored lessons in violence from Argentina. According to the analysis of Frank Graziano,¹⁰ the disappearance, torture, and death of over twelve thousand Argentines, mostly students and workers, between 1976 and 1982 was carried out in order to purge that society of internal, invisible enemies, indeed, of enemies manufactured by the government. I observe that, like sixteenth-century witches, the Argentine victims were seen chiefly as ideological opponents of law and order, persons who "spread ideas which are contrary to Western and Christian civilization," who were seen as opponents of God. They too were accused of imaginary crimes, fantasies bred by the Argentine military leaders. Typical victims were described as "disoriented and gloomy students" who played guitars and scribbled graffiti, in other words, marginal types afflicted with "grave moral sickness." Immigrants were also suspect, declared to be "debris," like witches, "not assimilable to our sociability."

Graziano maintained further that the Junta's type of attack marked a change in focus for state oppression: from jailing political groups to torturing individual human bodies, ostensibly to gain information about a communist conspiracy against Argentina. But torturing prisoners did not produce substantive information about threats to Argentine society, for in fact the accused had none. Instead, they were tortured until they accepted a mythological construct in which they became the enemy of the state. The approach was highly ideological. Graziano comments that "like medieval inquisitors, [the torturers] altered the very fabric of reality by scripting roles and making those summoned before them play these preassigned and largely prewritten parts." Parents were tortured in front of children and vice versa; women were raped. The twentieth-century version of the most extreme torture was to throw live

prisoners out of airplanes into the sea. More routinely, victims were shot and their bodies incinerated, so that all trace of them was erased.

Throughout, the torturers maintained that they were doing God's will. One *desaparecido* was told, "You are the Antichrist. . . . I'm not a torturer, I'm an inquisitor." Just as Duke Maximilian and his priestly advisers believed that they were saving Bavaria from the devil, so the Junta claimed that it was purging Argentina of godless communism. And like the Bavarians, in order to heighten the punishment for so heinous a crime (and the pleasure, for the guards), the Junta eroticized the violence. Gang rape, necrophilia, castration, and cannibalism were "rated" for their potency to turn the guards on sexually. Always, there was gratuitous violence, the victim being kept alive as long as possible so that the torturer might experience maximum pleasure. And always, the Junta identified itself with Christ (as the savior of Argentina), declaring itself a martyr when it was finally voted out of office.

Throughout both the seventeenth-century material and the Argentine account runs the same connection between reactionary Christian ideology and excessive abuse of prisoners. Graziano concludes that they are not a contradiction but mutually interdependent. By justifying the attack on innocent civilians *in religious terms*, the Junta had already broken with the restraints of law and convention; it had therefore given itself license to go to any extreme of punishment. By declaring a form of "holy war" against these imaginary subversives, the Argentine dictatorship believed that the Argentine people, and indeed the world, would accept whatever it did. Planners and torturers therefore became one force, and it is not possible to declare one guilty without the other. In seventeenth-century terms, this translates as follows: the theoreticians of the witch hunt (rulers, priests, jurists, judges) and the torturers (guards, searchers, executioners) were one force, totally interdependent and therefore both guilty; the argument fits both cases. But though Graziano states that in Argentina the payoff for each group was different (politicoreligious for the former, psychosexual for the latter), I do not find this distinction in the records of witch hunting: here the judge searching for the "truth" about the devil's hold on Christian society appeared to have been as fascinated by the erotic element as the common jail worker.¹¹

But the question of the extreme violence of the witch hunt's rituals is not entirely answered by these insights into "divine violence," for these events were deliberately made as public as possible, whereas much of the Junta's work was carried out in secret. We may find further help by considering the nature of sacrifice. Returning to Driver's categories, we find that rit-

ual requires sacrifice. Because rituals are transactions, exchanges between a source of power and persons lacking sufficient power, a propitiation must pass from the weaker to the stronger. In that sense, Anna Pappenheimer, and the one hundred thousand or so other victims of the witch hunt, was an offering. Not an ordinary gift, as a tithe of one's money or crops would be, but a sacrificial offering; that is to say, a gift that was irrevocable, that could not be taken back or replaced. Therefore, Anna had to be killed, not just to rid the earth of her polluting presence, but to establish that the authorities had made an ultimate sacrifice, a human sacrifice, to the Christian god. The woman in the crowd would understand that being female had a perverse value in that society, that women were the preferred sacrifice, that because women symbolized evil more than men, they thus served as its preferred scapegoats when the rulers needed one.

The term *scapegoat* fits condemned witches in some ways, not in others. When a community faced a crisis, as after a hailstorm or during a plague, its leaders *created* a scapegoat(s) to be sacrificed. By condemning women to a ritual violence, the leaders escaped the Christ-role that would dictate that *they* sacrifice themselves in order to remedy the problem. As imaginary culprits, witches were surrogate victims, hence scapegoats.¹²

But the sacrifice is more than an offering: it consists of two actions, the propitiation just described and a transaction whereby the object or the person sacrificed becomes sacred.¹³ Here is where the witch persecutions fail as rituals of sacrifice. In death the women are not transformed into saints; they do not qualify as scapegoats, who, no matter how unworthy or even hated they are, gain power through being sacrificed.

By looking at René Girard's definition of a scapegoat we see other ways in which these women did not qualify.¹⁴ On Girard's first count, that of marginality, they do qualify: as women, all were marginal by gender, and many were marginal in other ways, so marginal that no one would avenge them. Further, the fiction of their guilt must be maintained, at no matter what effort. But beyond that, the witches were not treated as traditional scapegoats. Everyone did not take part in the killing of witches (unless being part of the crowd at the executions counts, but that was a passive role). Unlike the bull at Beutelsbach, whom everyone hurried to throw dirt on, the witches were seldom stoned to death or buried alive by crowds. The important next step seldom occurred either; usually there was no celebration following the killings. The banquets and entertainments that followed the numerous executions at Offenburg in southwest Germany stand out in the records as

an aberration. Unlike the ritualistic dancing, singing, feasting, and drinking that Girard describes as customarily following a sacrificial death, these executions produced no festivity, no release of tension, no exulting.

In addition, these ritual killings did not bring peace. They did not resolve community hatreds, except at a temporary, superficial level. These deaths were not meant to bring communal peace, but rather to settle scores with the devil. Perhaps they could not bring peace because the victims were not granted a sacred value. Girard's final definition, after all, is that the scapegoat must be deified. But this one lasting "plus" that might come from ritual killing was missing in witch executions. Therefore these burnings and hangings were sheer brutality. These are rituals of nullity, dead ends. Perhaps the extreme forms of torture and suffering they exhibited were required to make up for that lack.

But the way witches were executed can tell us about the peculiar value of certain women to European society, a value strangely mixed between their power and their danger. Let us return to the bull that was sacrificed by the people of Beutelsbach. The villagers claimed that the bull had to be buried alive, had to be killed in that gruesome manner or else its death would not be efficacious. Because the bull was being killed in order to propitiate disease (disease being horrible), its death too must be cruel and agonizing. The majority of executions for witchcraft, too, involved gratuitous suffering—torture, mutilation, or slow death by fire. Some convicted witches were "humanely" strangled, but most suffered needless pain. I conclude that these witches' deaths would not have been efficacious, would not have served their intended purpose, would not have been a true sacrifice like that of the bull, unless they too were preceded by gratuitous pain and mutilation. Because the execution of witches routinely involved torture of some kind, these killings must have been seen as efficacious and as a true sacrifice, and the crime for which they died seen as horrible.

The bull, however, was a very valuable piece of property. As the only bull in Beutelsbach, owned by the community, it was a worthy sacrifice indeed. The same cannot be said for accused witches, the majority of whom were not important members of their communities. Once again, I conclude that the lack of importance of the victims had to be made up for by the severity of their punishment.

Now we come to a harder analogy. The bull, Sabeau informs us, was the mediator between the village and the disease. What did Anna mediate? She stood between Bavaria and the devil. But how could she, the polluting

one, be the mediator? Only by serving as the carrier of all of Bavaria's sins, by symbolizing all that was unacceptable to that society. Anna the beggar, daughter of a grave digger, wife of a privy cleaner, and now alleged witch, was the perfect candidate to mediate between good and evil. For one matter, by standing for all that was unclean and depraved, Anna was able to make perfectly clear the difference between good and evil. Having done so, had she gained the power to mediate between Bavaria and the devil, to expiate, through being killed, the shortcomings of Bavaria so that the people would not be punished? The record does not claim this. I can only point out the similar dynamic in other sacrifices.

The bull, Sabeau continues, stood for the whole collectivity of the village. How could Anna be that for all of Bavaria? Exactly as above, she was "elevated" from her former humble status to the formidable role of state symbol, a convenient representation of Bavaria's transgressions.

But that is about a bull. Why did witch hunters require human sacrifice? A set of beliefs about evil animals could have been worked out instead; the concept of the harmful "familiar" was already a step in that direction. The work of the anthropologist Peggy Sanday may take us further.¹⁵ In describing the treatment of prisoners by a group of Native Americans, involving every conceivable kind of torture, including the slow burning of every inch of the victim's body and cannibalism as well, Sanday records that the Iroquois knew "that the gods preferred human flesh." On this subject, Europeans were more like Native Americans than the Europeans might have suspected. What we would immediately call "savage cruelty" when done by Indians, we have hidden under rubrics of "legal change" or "religious turmoil" when perpetrated by Europeans during the witch hunts.¹⁶ At any rate, acts such as tearing the flesh of the living victim gave an almost sacramental quality to these executions. The fact that it was human flesh made it the ultimate sacrifice, one surely pleasing to the savage God of the sixteenth century.

Because rituals by their nature demand an ultimate act, partial punishments like whipping or banishment do not qualify as ritual sacrifice. The sacrifice must be irreversible—that is, it must kill—and it must offer an irreplaceable gift—that is, a human being—to achieve maximum efficacy. Theoretically in ritual it does not matter so much who is killed, or how, provided that the ultimate act of murder takes place. But in the witch killings the victim had to be a certain sort of person, one perceived as a servant of Satan. This limitation weakened the ritual in the eyes of the community; it opened a gap for doubting, room for arguing that this or that victim may not really

have qualified. I believe that this is another reason why witch hunters resorted to gratuitous (in addition to juridical) torture: to make the evil nature of the victims absolutely clear to the crowd. Women, already thought to be evil by nature, were the best choice. What mattered, what made the ritual "work," was simply that they suffered and died.

For the ritual of witch killing demanded that they suffer. Torture has been described as the product of the need to socialize and regulate violence,¹⁷ and no doubt the public torture of witches channeled some of the community's destructiveness. But because each witch killing led to more, I assume that, in the long run, the public torture and killing exacerbated communal brutality rather than lessening it. What exactly did the crowd gain from witnessing such extreme suffering? Though the crowds who flocked to witch executions are never reported to have expressed sympathy for the victims, neither did they send up cheers. They seem to have been silent observers, perhaps assuring themselves that dangerous persons were indeed out of the way. Mainly, they seem to have drunk in the horror. One thing is sure: their large numbers prove that they did not shrink from brutality but rather sought it. They "lived off of" the dying agonies of others, drinking in violence, leaving us no doubt about the capacity of early modern Europeans for brutality and their attachment to it.

Yet there was one extreme that they were not asked to go to: they did not eat the humans whom they sacrificed. Cannibalism was not a part of their ethic and was resorted to by Europeans only in times of extreme famine. Although they were fascinated by cannibalistic practices when they encountered them in the New World, they did not adopt them.¹⁸ Instead, they wanted to see the absolute eradication of the witches' bodies, even down to the scattering of the ashes. Aside from imbibing violence, they did not ingest their enemies the witches, as the Iroquois and Hurons did to one another. Anna's body was a human sacrifice to the Christian God. But in offering her up, the Bavarian authorities acknowledged the potential power of the devil, who had been, in this case, defeated. Society did not invest her flesh with any saving power, nor her ashes, even after they had been purified in the flames. For that reason, this was not a ritual with the power of atonement; it was instead a ritual of revenge. Its power over contemporaries lay in the amount of suffering it caused, in the amount of fear it generated; it did not heal. In fact it was entirely destructive, unless, that is, one considers its teaching function to be a positive one. As a didactic device, the ritual execution of witches succeeded superbly.

To return once more to Driver's categories of ritual, I note that ritual effects transformations, changes that cannot otherwise be brought about. What was the lesson of Anna's death, and what change did it bring about? The woman in the crowd would vow never to go near a magic-worker again, no matter how badly she needed her advice; she would never again trust a midwife, would neither tell nor ask her anything, no matter how urgently she needed her help. Come to think of it, she would guard her lips with her neighbors—because any woman could be a witch, she must not be associated with any of them. The women's subculture of the Middle Ages, which has been much studied, began to dissolve under the terror of witch hunting. The new cult of individualism that cultural historians write about in connection with the sixteenth century was based not only on capitalistic competition or Renaissance idealism; it was, in the case of women, based on fear. In the lands of the witch hunts, women came to fear one another, for their lives.

Another transformation effected by the witch hunts altered community life. Alan Macfarlane and Robert Muchembled have argued that witch accusations developed in order to resolve village tensions.¹⁹ Looked at from the other end of the story, not that of accusation but of public execution, one must question their conclusion. As Erik Midelfort wrote, "If this was social catharsis, it nearly killed the patient."²⁰ To do Macfarlane justice, he acknowledges that English village life was undergoing change and that the relief that witch accusations brought merely masked those deeper tensions. But surely the reign of terror that was unleashed by the witch hunt *added to* the level of violence in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe. Just as we know that we are brutalized by the violence on television, in the same way that earlier society's tolerance for violence was raised by the public nature of witch executions, and specifically their violence against women. These rituals taught people that "the woman's crime" deserved the most severe punishment possible, that women, who up to that time had seldom been marked publicly as criminals, were capable of doing the ultimate evil.

Finally, ritual seeks conversion. The obvious conversion here was demanded of the victim—that she confess, and thus save her soul while losing her life. But a more far-reaching conversion was being preached: as the woman in the crowd watched Anna's ashes being scattered, she knew that she too was evil. The saying went that "there is something of the witch in every woman." In the moment that Anna stepped up into the cart, she became The Witch, and thereby she became every woman. For the woman watching her, what was changed and transformed by the ritual was her belief

about herself. In this highly instructive rite, anyone might learn to fear and obey the rulers of Bavaria; what a woman might additionally learn was that her very nature was demonic. And if someday the authorities came for her, she would at first protest her innocence, but finally she would admit what she had learned to be the truth at Anna's burning: that she too belonged to the devil. She had internalized the message.

We are beginning to trace the dehumanizing effects of this campaign on women. For one matter, women began to fear to speak up for themselves. In England, for example, the seventeenth century saw a decrease in the number of rape accusations brought to court (*not* necessarily in the number of rapes committed), and most of the few men brought to court on the charge were acquitted; rape, then as now, was difficult to prove. The lower accusation and conviction rates began to appear between 1558 and 1599, just after the major witch hunts got under way. The compiler of these statistics, Nazife Bashar, concludes, "Male judges and juries were loath to punish in any way other males for any sexual offense against females. . . . [although they] were quite prepared to send to their deaths members of their own sex for crimes other than rape."²¹ No doubt the low conviction rate discouraged women from turning to the courts, because evidence about rape is painful to give even when the court is sympathetic. But we must emphasize the fact (as Bashar does not) that this trend occurred just as women themselves were being indicted for witchcraft. It was no time for women to stir the waters.

Women began to protest less in general. From having, at the end of the Middle Ages, a reputation for being scolds and shrews, bawdy and aggressive, women began to change into the passive, submissive type that symbolized them by the mid-nineteenth century. True, *some* women still dared to act up. Some rioted for bread and took matters into their own hands in the markets. In 1766 at Ashby-de-la-zouch, for example, an old Englishwoman, enraged that a farmer asked two pence too much for his butter, clapped "one hand in the nape of his neck, [and] with the other rubbed a pound of butter all over his face"—an act worthy of any spirited medieval market woman. At Hereford market in 1757 "a female mob," incensed that a badger (a buyer) had tried to buy grain above market price, seized him, "and beating him in a very severe manner, they broke all the windows in his house." But food for their families was not the only need that drove eighteenth-century Englishwomen to riot. On the crucial question of the enclosure of land (farmland being taken over by entrepreneurs for more profitable sheep grazing), women in Stafford-

shire in 1771 destroyed the fences that enclosed the common near their homes. Arrested and jailed, they were rescued by local citizenry who attacked the jail with stones.²² Frenchwomen were active in their Revolution,²³ and in both countries a handful of women saw that they must demand their rights.²⁴ But the times were against them. Throughout the nineteenth century middle- and upper-class women were increasingly forced to be ladies, and female sexuality was perceived as passive. As Judith Walkowitz commented of this period, "There seemed to be no social space or social narrative for independent female desire."²⁵ Even as the first women's movement was being organized in England and the United States, women elsewhere in Europe were still seen as the potentially dangerous sex that must be controlled—and "control" was what European men had gained a lot of experience at doing.

IF THE SIXTEENTH and seventeenth centuries were a time of declining status for women, they were a brilliant period for some Western men. Never before had they had such an opportunity to exert their power over others. Despite the number of factors that they could *not* change, such as plagues, inflation, and famines, they nonetheless gained control over much of the world's natural resources and wealth, not the least part of which came in the form of human beings. David Brion Davis reports that this "resulted in the enslavement of captives on a scale unmatched in previous human history." The Atlantic slave trade was different not only in magnitude but in the basic attitude of owners toward slaves: the Iberian slave masters, for example, "never looked upon certain classes of slaves as carriers of culture and refinement" or gave some slaves positions of public importance, as other slave-owning societies had done.²⁶ To Europeans, slaves were exploitable cheap labor and nothing more. Sixteenth-century parallels between the growth of the African slave trade and the violent misogyny of the witch hunts need to be examined.

We need to see the similarities between all women in a patriarchal system and all persons in an unfree status. But first, consider a difference: a free woman would appear to have every advantage, being able to own slaves herself and to benefit from whatever forms of racism and classism her society used to rationalize slavery. A closer look reveals that, in fact, free women and slaves of both sexes fell into many of the same categories in the eyes of early modern European men. Neither had control over what they produced, other than in exceptional circumstances, and their labor could be coerced. Both

were seen by the law as children, as fictive minors who could be represented in court only by their masters/husbands. Both could legally be beaten, debased, and humiliated. When mistreated, both were impotent to gain help from others within their group, nor usually could their families help them. Both were caught in a hereditary system. Both were needed as well as rejected. Both could be sold.²⁷ Under certain conditions defined by their masters/husbands, both could be put to death for being what they were—female, or black. These are ample grounds for considering the two groups together.

Orlando Patterson's definition of slavery can serve for sexism as well: a relationship of power and dominion originating in and sustained by violence.²⁸ Patterson points out the tremendous symbolic value of the slave for the rest of society: "Without slavery there would have been no freedmen." As for women, I have argued that, without the female witch as the symbol of evil, other Europeans could not have believed themselves to be good or just, that without the conspiracy theory about the devil, neither state nor church could have made as absolute a claim to power.

Patterson observes that a new historical stage of progress always causes an identity confusion, a point especially relevant for this discussion. The sixteenth-century leaders of Western expansion were caught up in unprecedented new challenges, moral as well as economic and political; this produced what Lynn White has called their "Age of Anxiety," one of "the most psychically disturbed periods in human history."²⁹ To ease their identity crisis, they needed the slave and the witch as never before. It is thus not surprising that, although Europeans had always practiced slavery and the subordination of women, in the sixteenth century they greatly increased their focus on both.

Both slaves and witches are human beings who are no longer treated as such; they are humans whose full humanity is sacrificed, and in that process they become guideposts for a confused society. As subhumans, they are useful beyond their economic role, for only they live on the boundary between good and evil, only they can "cross the boundaries with social and supernatural impunity." Because women were believed capable of serving the devil, they were the humans who could be seen as totally demonic creatures, the evil Other. Because slaves were by definition the most marginalized and alienated of persons, they were seen as "almost beasts in human form."³⁰ While Western men were carrying out their extraordinary conquest of much of the world, they were foisting off onto other groups the characteristics of

evil. Thus most Western men were not forced to ask themselves, Is slavery immoral? Is it wrong to put women to death for witchcraft?

European men were able to assert the absolute power of enslavement over somewhere between eleven million and fifteen million Africans in the three centuries of the Atlantic slave trade.³¹ This control was a small matter, however, compared to the opportunity they found in the New World itself (both North and South America), where they encountered a population of about eighty million indigenous people, whom they proceeded to enslave, overwork, and infect until 90 percent of them had died. The Indian population suffered a startling drop from eighty million to about ten million in less than a century, primarily from exposure to European diseases but also from war, forced labor, and overtaxation leading to malnutrition. These seventy million deaths represent the greatest massacre in history.³² Looking at how "civilized Christian" nations carried out this genocide will tell us much about sixteenth-century Europeans.

Ronald Sanders has argued that Europeans thought of Amerindians and African slaves in the same light as Jews and Moors and treated them accordingly.³³ The Spanish, having expelled their Moors and forcibly converted their Jews in the very year in which they dispatched Columbus on his first voyage, had thus a vivid, active tradition of intolerance and racism to call on in shaping their attitudes toward blacks and Indians. Having long held a relatively humane theory of color differences (that race was explained by climate), in the fifteenth century, Spaniards had begun to change their theory of race. Arguing now that darkness of skin indicated a defect in nature, they developed a new insistence on "purity of blood."³⁴ Added to that was their extreme intolerance over religion, an absolute insistence on a homogeneous Christian population, on a "purity of faith."

Seeing Indians as "the other" just as they had Jews and Moors, Spanish conquerors labeled the Indians pagans. Cortés called the great Aztec temples *mezquitas* (mosques). Bernal Díaz even thought he saw traces of Jewish influence in Aztec statues and temples and speculated that they had been brought by Jews during the first-century diaspora!³⁵

Having persecuted the Moslem and Jewish Other back home, the Spanish did not hesitate to do the same to the Americans. One Spaniard observed that they enslaved so many that the Indians "no longer approach their wives, in order not to beget slaves." Another claimed that "the Spanish treat them worse than slaves." The Spanish philosopher Sepulveda called the Mexicans

"uncivilized, barbarians, wild beasts." He lumped together Indians, women, and animals, all creatures without a soul of their own. Considered unable to govern themselves, they were identified with savagery and evil. Sepulveda argued that because Indians were vastly inferior to the Spanish, it was just to wage war on them. By the same argument he could have justified the witch hunts, a war on women. Speaking of Indians as cattle, Columbus said, "They have brought me back seven head of women, girls and adults." Tzvetan Todorov concludes that the Spanish saw Indians as "inferior beings, halfway between men and beasts."³⁶

Having seen what followed when women accused of witchcraft were declared to be less than human, we can be prepared for the way some of the Spanish went about subjecting these "inferior beings."³⁷ They cut off the hands, noses, tongues, penises of captives; they cut off women's breasts. They branded slaves' faces with the initials of their owners. They tore children from their mothers' arms to feed them to dogs. They tested the sharpness of their swords by randomly cutting off heads or disemboweling the nearest Indians. They beat female captives to force them to submit sexually. To make a show of their power they burned captives alive at public executions. When Cortés put down the uprising at Panuco, he burned alive all the chiefs, while forcing their sons to watch. Even the most outspoken critic of this fury, Bishop de Las Casas, ordered a disobedient Indian to be burned to death.³⁸

Because these strategies were in the spirit of contemporary attacks on witches, one must ask if the *conquistadores* made a connection between evilness in European women and Indian women. A scene recorded by Amerigo Vespucci in 1499 sheds some light.³⁹ While sailing down the coast of Brazil, his group encountered Indians; these people seemed shy. In order to win them over, the Europeans sent to them a young man, one "who was very brave and agile":

This young man went among the women, and they all began to touch and feel him, marveling at him extraordinarily. But meanwhile a woman with a great stick in her hand was coming down the hill, and when she arrived where the boy was standing, she gave him such a blow on the back with her stick that he fell dead immediately. In an instant, the other women grabbed him and brought him up the hill, dragging him by the feet. . . . There the

women still were, tearing the murdered young man to pieces before our eyes. And, holding up the pieces one by one for us to see, they roasted them in a great fire they had made, and ate them.

Adding this story to accounts of Amazon warriors (Columbus believed in them), one gets a picture of fierce females who were bloodthirsty cannibals. Fact and legend combined to create a frightening image. Europeans had long accused heretics and witches of anthropophagy; encountering a culture that actually practiced it must have terrified them. Encountering *women* who practiced it can only have increased the colonists' fear of their own women, already suspect as witches.

Of witches, Sanders observed, "It is not hard to discern connections between the emerging racism of the epoch and the new outburst of antagonism against these shadowed creatures of the night."⁴⁰ Witches and Indians were ill fated in sharing a number of characteristics in the eyes of European men: both were thought to worship "demons" and to be cannibalistic and should therefore have a war of extermination fought against them—in the name of Christianity. Both were condescended to as children, yet were feared. Both stood for the Other, for all that Western men believed they were not.

Todorov argues that in 1492 Spain "repudiates its interior Other by triumphing over the Moors in the final battle of Granada and by forcing the Jews to leave its territory; and it discovers the exterior Other, that whole America which will become Latin [because of Spain]."⁴¹ He is right enough that the Spanish believed they had vanquished all internal contradictions from their society by the great expulsions, but he overlooks the fundamental contradiction, the potential impurity that remained: the possibility that their own women might betray them. Until we see the fear that this potentiality bred, we do not fully understand these conquerors.

Pointing out that they were caught between medieval religiosity and modern materialism, Todorov senses the way in which this made them vulnerable and confused. Everywhere they drove the Indians unmercifully in their greed for gold, all the while dreaming of converting them into model Christians. In their confusion (and greed) they became more violent: "Everything occurs as if the Spaniards were finding an intrinsic pleasure in cruelty, in the fact of exerting their power over others, in the demonstration of their capacity to inflict death." Acknowledging that sheer economic greed cannot