

Beyond



the witch trials

Witchcraft and magic in Enlightenment Europe

edited by

OWEN DAVIES & WILLEM DE BLÉCOURT

BEYOND THE WITCH TRIALS

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Introduction: beyond the witch trials

Owen Davies and Willem de Blécourt

The so-called Enlightenment of the eighteenth century has often been portrayed as a period in which much of Europe cast off the belief in witchcraft and magic under the influence of new philosophies, and advances in science and medicine. This received wisdom has often led to the academic dismissal of the continued relevance of the belief in witchcraft and magic, not only for the poor and illiterate in society but also for the educated. This book seeks to counter this scholarly tendency, by looking at aspects of the continuation of witchcraft and magic in Europe from the last of the secular and ecclesiastical trials during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, through to the nineteenth century. It will examine the experience of and attitudes towards witchcraft from both above and below, in an age when the beliefs and 'world-view' of the 'elite' and the 'people' are often thought to have irrevocably pulled away from one another. It is too crude and misleading to portray the Enlightenment as a period of intellectual and social leaps. It should rather be seen as a period of subtler renegotiation between cultures, and a period when the relationship between private and public beliefs became more problematic and discrete, and therefore more difficult for the historian to detect. The study of witchcraft and magic provides us with an important means of exploring these broad changing patterns of social relations and mentalities, just as it has done much to help our understanding of social relations in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century society.

Yet the 'beyond' in the title of this book refers not only to the chronological emphasis of its contents, but is also indicative of the different methodological approaches that can be applied to the last of the trials, and the variety of sources that can be used to illuminate our understanding of the continued relevance of witchcraft once it was decriminalised. The contributors come from different academic disciplines, and by borrowing from literary theory, archaeology and folklore they move beyond the usual historical perspectives and sources. The emphasis is not so much on witchcraft trials but on the aftermath of trials, not so much on the persecution of witches but

on the prosecution of cunning-folk, not so much on supposed female relations with the Devil but on male satanic pacts, less on the declining belief in witchcraft and magic and more on the continuance of related beliefs across the social spectrum.

At present, no single academic discipline dominates the study of witchcraft and magic in the modern period. One might expect historians to have made the subject their own, but for several reasons they have been hesitant to give the late- and post-trial years the same attention as the period of the rise and main phase of witch prosecutions. In particular, historians' tendency to restrict their research interests within arbitrary, academically prescribed periods rather than within subject areas has meant that the interests of historians of witchcraft rarely continue beyond the early modern period. The category 'early modern' is part of the problem in a European context. It attributes a wide range of similar political, social, economic and cultural developments to the same chronological parameters, regardless of the complexities of cultural relations across social levels and geographical regions. The decriminalisation of witchcraft is one such broad development that defines the end of the early modern. Yet the majority of people across Europe undoubtedly felt exactly the same about witches, and much else besides, whether they lived in the early seventeenth century or the early nineteenth century. Academic periodisation certainly has its uses, and historians cannot be expected to develop an equal breadth and depth of knowledge about society in general over the last half millennium. But if we are fully to understand human experience and specific aspects of it such as witchcraft, we must be prepared to move beyond the received boundaries with far more confidence.

That said, the subject has attracted some interest in the last few decades, and increasingly so in the last few years. Historians of witchcraft in early modern western Europe, such as Jim Sharpe, Malcolm Gaskill, Wolfgang Behringer, Robert Muchembled and Eva Labouvie, have pushed forward the boundaries of their work to consider witchcraft in the decades of intermittent prosecution before decriminalisation, the debates that followed in the decade or so after, and to recognise the continued enactment of popular justice against suspected witches.¹ Several collections of essays with an early modern focus have conscientiously included contributions concerning the continued belief in witchcraft and magic.² Ronald Hutton, an eminent historian of early modern England has, in recent publications concerning paganism, contemporary witchcraft and shamanism, shown how skilled historians can apply their craft and range of experience to illuminate subjects in periods beyond their initial specialisation.³ The editors of this volume also work across the traditional divide between early modern and modern eras, and in numerous publications have accorded as much attention to the story of witchcraft and magic in the centuries beyond the usual focus on the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴ De Blécourt's study of the Dutch province of Drenthe is

the only study of its kind, which meticulously uncovers and analyses the historical data on witchcraft over a 500-year period.⁵ The methodologies and interests of academics like de Blécourt represent a flexible continental historiographical tradition that has less respect for orthodox chronological and disciplinary boundaries. By way of further example, consider Le Roy Ladurie's imaginative detective work into the origins of the witch poem by the mid-nineteenth-century hairdresser-poet Jacques Jasmin, and the work of Éva Pócs in Hungary who has drawn upon early modern archives and twentieth-century folklore to piece together patterns of belief.⁶

Beyond the witch trials also appears in the wake of the publication of volume five in the Athlone 'History of Witchcraft and Magic in Europe' series, under the general editorship of Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark.⁷ The volume consists of three important and lengthy essays by Brian Levack, Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and the late Roy Porter, which respectively deal with the decline of witch prosecutions, the continuance of popular witchcraft beliefs in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the place of witchcraft in intellectual thought over the same period. An appreciation of these essays has in part shaped the content of this volume. The broad surveys by Porter and Hofstra, while providing an impressive synthesis of work to date also highlight just how little work has been done, and the gaping holes that exist in the coverage of witchcraft beyond the late seventeenth century. The essays in *Beyond the trials* begin the task of filling in those lacunae geographically and contextually for an English readership.

Compared to the huge and ever increasing historiography concerning the main period of the witch trials, then, the history of witchcraft and magic in the period academia refers to as either the Enlightenment period, or the less value-laden 'long eighteenth century', is in its infancy. Yet the freshness of the subject also presents new opportunities to embrace interdisciplinary and *longue durée* approaches in the history of witchcraft and magic. Several of the contributors in this volume are scholars who are only just beginning to publish the results of their research, while others are well-established historians who are pushing their own boundaries forward. Bringing together the mix of experience proves rewarding, providing a cross-fertilisation of diverse work from different disciplines at an early stage in the field, so that future work can be informed by a variety of methodologies and sources. It is surely significant that despite the diversity of the contributions in this respect, three broad themes emerge in the chronological and conceptual context of the 'Enlightenment' period.

The first concerns the shifting intellectual interpretation of folk magic from being a very real and implicitly satanic offence to being a merely fraudulent and morally reprehensible crime. Inextricably tied up with this process was the use and changing definition of 'superstition' – a subject that is ripe for further research.⁸ The word has long been used in a derogatory

sense to describe what were perceived to be unfounded, credulous or heretical beliefs. Ancient Roman and Greek authors applied it to 'uncivilised' people outside the Classical world. The early Church used it in its campaign against the pagan religions which it ultimately vanquished. In Reformation Europe the word became a confessional swear word used by Protestants to characterise Catholic devotional practices, meanwhile the Catholic Church also used it against its own laity who dared assume clerical powers or who resorted to unsanctioned forms of piety. This confessional use of 'superstition' was still prevalent in the Enlightenment period, particularly in Protestant countries, but as several of the articles in this volume show, the term also underwent a process of secularisation. It was appropriated as an Enlightenment tool, and added to the arsenal of words used to enforce a self-conscious intellectual and cultural break with the past. It was a term of abuse that secular Catholic intellectuals threw at the theologians who clung fervently to the notion of witchcraft.⁹ It was likewise used by intellectuals in Protestant countries. It was also a label applied to the cultures of the 'lower orders' as a means of clearly demarcating the world of the 'ignorant' from the educated, the 'irrational' from the rational. In this sense 'superstition' became the antithesis of modernity.

Marie Lennersand's innovative account of the aftermath of the major witch trials in Dalarna, Sweden, demonstrates how the authorities began this awkward process of divorcing themselves from popular concerns and beliefs regarding witchcraft. This shift led, it would seem, to some considerable consternation amongst the witch-believing public as to what was and was not regarded as criminal. Yet while the criminal basis of witchcraft was increasingly undermined by legal circumspection regarding the nature of evidence, and broader intellectual scepticism concerning the reality of witchcraft, beneficial magic remained a crime even though it was rationalised according to intellectual developments. This is particularly clear in the article by Raisa Toivo. She shows how the secular and religious authorities in Finland, at the time under Swedish rule, proactively turned the focus of prosecutions under general laws for witchcraft and 'popular' magic firmly in the direction of the latter. While popular concern remained focused on harmful witchcraft, the pattern of prosecutions during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries show a determined shift towards authoritarian rather than popular preoccupations. Increasingly it was the authorities rather than the general population who brought prosecutions, albeit they were still based on information reported by 'lay' folk. Linda Oja's survey of educated Swedish attitudes further illuminates the way in which the concept of magic was secularised, and the label 'superstition' was redefined to reinforce social separation. Yet the 'problem' of magic was not only seen in terms of false religion and the attribution of credulity, but also as a matter of social disharmony. De Blécourt's detailed account of the activities of the

cunning-man 'Popish Derk' indicates that, by the late eighteenth century, Dutch authorities were as much concerned with the threat to 'ties of good harmony between neighbours' caused by witch doctors as with questions of medical impropriety and immorality. Likewise in early eighteenth-century Spain the attack on exorcists by the Benedictine monk Benito Feijoo was primarily concerned with their threat to social rather than theological order.

It is also clear with regard to witchcraft and magic that the balance between secular and religious criminal jurisdiction was highly variable across Europe. While Oja and de Blécourt suggest that in Sweden and the Netherlands, as in England, the ecclesiastical courts had all but given up on dealing with popular magic by the early eighteenth century, Ferraiuolo's contribution highlights the significant role the Italian Inquisition continued to play in policing 'superstition' during the period. But we should not jump to the conclusion that the chronological and geographical pattern of ecclesiastical judicial involvement can be conveniently divided along strict confessional lines. True, the Inquisitions continued their campaign against 'superstition' on a far more systematic basis. Yet, as Maxwell-Stuart clearly shows, the church courts or kirk sessions of the Calvinist Church of Scotland continued to be active in the prosecution of magic during the first half of the eighteenth century. Furthermore, the decline of ecclesiastical judicial involvement was not necessarily reflective of the level of clerical activity on a personal level. In Toivo's account of the various trials of Agata Pekantytär we find that the parish minister was instrumental in bringing charges against her for practising magic, and the late prosecution against supposed witches from Dalarna in 1757, mentioned by Oja, proceeded due to the wishes of the regional head of the Church. In the Bristol Lamb Inn possession case, so meticulously analysed by Jonathan Barry, ecclesiastical involvement was considerable, and the intellectual discourse regarding it was framed by the tensions both within Anglicanism and with Nonconformity. In this sense the views and activities of the Spaniard Father Benito Feijoo, as described by Maria Tausiet, should not be seen as distinctly Catholic but rather as part of a wider intellectual debate about supernatural interventionism in eighteenth-century Europe.

This leads us on to the second theme to emerge from the contributions to this volume, which concerns the considerable continued intellectual interest regarding diabolic intervention in human affairs. Educated society may have become increasingly disengaged from the concept and problem of witchcraft during the early eighteenth century, but the question of possession and satanic pacts remained a major topic of earnest debate and authoritarian perplexity.¹⁰ Feijoo's discourse on possession may seem at first to be a defining Enlightenment attack. Yet, as Tausiet shows, Feijoo's unmasking of the fraud and delusion involved did not lead him to reject completely that some people, albeit a very small number, were truly possessed. Some of the respected urban citizens who investigated the possessed girls at the Lamb

Inn in 1761–62 were comforted to find confirmation of their belief in satanic intervention. At the same time they were also anxious to distance themselves from popular interpretations of the symptoms in terms of witchcraft. Soili-Maria Olli's analysis of the trials for Devil's pact brought before the Swedish High Court demonstrates how authoritarian concern regarding male satanic relations outlived the more specific diabolic crime of witchcraft. One obvious reason for this was that men actually drew up agreements with the Devil, and so there was concrete evidence on which to base prosecutions. As the eighteenth century progressed, the High Court increasingly concluded that those who sought to make pacts were merely ignorant, stupid or ill, but they nevertheless continued to investigate rigorously such cases.

The third theme concerns the centrality of the written and printed word to the experience of witchcraft and magic. On one level, as Augusto Ferraiuolo demonstrates, the possession of literacy profoundly shaped the context and content of the criminal records used by historians. As his textual analysis of denunciations of popular magic brought before the Italian Inquisition shows, the act of transcribing the accounts of the illiterate into a written narrative reveals much about the relationship between individual and institution with regard to mentalities and social control. At another level, the eighteenth century saw an increasing popular access to and engagement with printed material. While the extent of the growth of literacy during the Enlightenment is a matter of considerable debate, there is no doubt that there was a publishing boom, and that it was partly inspired by a popular thirst for literary knowledge. The rise of such printed formats as periodicals and newspapers have been seen as instrumental in the spread of enlightened knowledge across society. Yet as the work by Sabine Doering-Manteuffel and Stephan Bachter shows, the printing presses were equally instrumental in promoting and disseminating counter-Enlightenment modes of thought. They outline the rise of a 'magic media market', characterised by the popularisation of once intellectual occult subject matter, and the publication in German of once scarce manuscript sources. These developments were to have an impact far beyond European shores.

Considering that the eighteenth century saw a significant widening of access to written sources of knowledge, it seems rather ironic that historians should be put off studying witchcraft and magic in the post witch trial period by a perceived paucity of material. As the contributions to this book show, in the absence of witch-prosecution records there are a range of alternative sources to be consulted. Significant numbers of what have been termed 'witch trials in reverse', where those assaulted for being suspected witches prosecuted their assailants, await discovery in court records.¹¹ As de Blécourt shows in his contribution slander trials also provide further valuable insights into witchcraft accusations. Across Europe, long after the laws against witchcraft were repealed, the crime of *pretended* witchcraft and magic

continued on the statute books. It was under these laws and other statutes against illegal medical practice and vagrancy that cunning-folk found themselves in court. These trial records provide further insights regarding the dynamics of witch accusations as well as the nature of magical healing and divination. There are a variety of other sources waiting to be tapped. For example, that icon of the Enlightenment, the newspaper, has yet to be properly exploited for the information it contains on the subject. As limited work on English newspapers has shown, and as Doering- Manteuffel's and Bachter's contributions indicate, it is not only newspaper court reports that the historian of witchcraft and magic needs to examine but also the public notices and advertising columns.¹² Furthermore, as Brian Hoggard's article demonstrates, historians should also raise their gaze beyond the manuscript or printed page. A consideration of archaeological as well as literary material can help fill some of the gaps in our knowledge. Literary sources offer only a selective history of the past. Archaeological artefacts provide evidence of popular magical practices, such as the widespread entombment of cats and shoes, which have left no trace in the archives. Hoggard's research further confirms that we need to show more interdisciplinary awareness.

Although the history of the main period of the witch trials is far from exhausted, it could be said that we are approaching saturation point in some respects regarding focus and methodology. The essays in this book, while applying established approaches to a later period of study, also provide signposts to new directions for further research by shifting the interpretive parameters. In this respect it is hoped that *Beyond the witch trials* will help push the boundaries of witchcraft research into new times and territories.

Notes

- 1 James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550–1750* (London, 1996); Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000); Gaskill, *Hellish Nell: Last of Britain's Witches* (London, 2001); Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997; German edition 1987); Robert Muchembled, *La sorcière au village, XVe–XVIIIe siècles* (Paris, 1979); Eva Labouvie, *Verbotene Künste. Volksmagie und ländlicher Abergalube in den Dorfgemeinschaften des Saaraumes (16–19 Jahrhundert)* (St Ingbert, 1992). For North America see John Butler, 'Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600–1760', *American Historical Review* 84 (1979) 317–46; John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford, 1982).
- 2 Marijke Gijswijt and Willem Frijhoff (eds), *Nederland betoverd. Toverij en hekserij van de veertiende tot in de twintigste eeuw* (Amsterdam, 1987) [published in a reduced English edition as *Witchcraft in the Netherlands from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Rotterdam, 1991)]; Robert Muchembled (ed.), *Magie et sorcellerie en Europe du Moyen Age à nos jours* (Paris, 1994); Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1996); Julian Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002).

- 3 Ronald Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, 1999); Hutton, *Shamans: Siberian Spirituality and the Western Imagination* (London, 2002).
- 4 See, for example, Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London, 2003); Willem de Blécourt, 'On the Continuation of Witchcraft', in Barry, Hester and Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft*, pp. 335–52.
- 5 Willem de Blécourt, *Termen van toverij. De veranderende betekenis van toverij in Noordoost-Nederland tussen de 16de en 20ste eeuw* (Nijmegen, 1990).
- 6 Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie, *Jasmin's Witch: An Investigation into Witchcraft and Magic in South-West France During the Seventeenth Century*, trans. Brian Pearce (London, [1983] 1990); Éva Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead: A Perspective on Witches and Seers in the Early Modern Age*, trans. Szilvia Rédey and Michael Webb (Budapest, 1999).
- 7 Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Brian P. Levack and Roy Porter, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1999).
- 8 For a useful overview of the interpretive problems see the introduction in Helen Parish and William G. Naphy (eds), *Religion and Superstition in Reformation Europe* (Manchester, 2002).
- 9 An excellent example of this can be found in Wolfgang Behringer's account of the 'Bavarian witchcraft war' of 1766–70: Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions*, pp. 359–87.
- 10 For an overview and references see Roy Porter, 'Witchcraft and Magic in Enlightenment, Romantic and Liberal Thought', in Gijswijt-Hofstra, Levack and Porter, *Witchcraft and Magic*, pp. 191–283.
- 11 Gustav Henningsen, 'Witch Persecution after the Era of the Witch Trials', *ARV. Scandinavian Yearbook of Folklore* 44 (1988) 103–53; Henningsen, 'Witchcraft in Denmark', *Folklore* 93 (1982) 131–7.
- 12 Owen Davies, 'Newspapers and the Popular Belief in Witchcraft and Magic in the Modern Period', *Journal of British Studies* 37 (1998) 139–66.

Marking (dis)order: witchcraft and the symbolics of hierarchy in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Finland

Raisa Maria Toivo

What do witchcraft and witch trials tell us about power and social hierarchy? Witch trials have often enough been explained in terms of social relations and schisms, particularly in local contexts. In a highly competitive world, disagreements resulted from and caused both attacks by suspected witches and accusations made against them. It has often been noted that in Sweden and Finland the social dynamics behind witch trials changed during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.¹ At this period, the authorities took a paradoxical lead both in initiating trials and in suppressing them, and as a consequence the neighbourhood's importance diminished in certain respects. Yet the benevolent magic prosecuted during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was firmly rooted in the neighbourhood community, the importance of which cannot be discounted. Witchcraft and witch beliefs were closely connected to questions of power and hierarchy in local as well as national contexts. In this discussion I will examine how the vocabulary and imagery of witchcraft and magic in the trials reflects the symbolics of social hierarchy as well as the basis and creation of hierarchies in peasant communities. First, however, a brief outline of witch trials in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century Finland is necessary.

From maleficium to benevolent magic

In the late seventeenth century, as previous research has shown, there was a change in the number and nature of witchcraft accusations in Scandinavia. At a point when the sensational Swedish trials of Aland, Northern Ostrobothnia, Dalarna and Bohuslän in the mid-1660s and early 1670s had largely exhausted interest in diabolic gatherings, the number of indictments actually began to rise.² But whereas the charges before the 1670s usually concerned neighbourly *maleficium*, afterwards their focus was increasingly on the practice of benevolent magic to uncover thieves and to cure illnesses.³

Even before the 1660s, the educated Finnish elite had expressed doubts

about the demonological theories that underpinned the concept of the witches' sabbath, but the problem of 'superstition' or *vidskepelse*, the religious error of benign magical beliefs and practices, remained something to be combated with vigour.⁴ 'Good witches' or cunning-folk continued to be prosecuted by the local authorities. Indeed, the attention of the Swedish and Finnish authorities, both secular and ecclesiastical, became increasingly centred on the suppression of *vidskepelse* rather than harmful witchcraft. *Vidskepelse* was thought to be as pernicious as witchcraft and, with its seemingly lucrative outcomes, it represented a greater threat to the authorities. In this respect it has been shown that charges initiated by the authorities rather than the public were more likely to lead to convictions, and that most such cases concerned benevolent magic rather than witchcraft.⁵ Furthermore, if the populace submitted information on *maleficium*, the authorities often converted the substance of the charges into *vidskepelse*.⁶ Trials about benevolent magic can thus be seen as an attempt by the authorities to educate the populace in the direction they wanted, for economic, political, religious and cultural reasons. In the opinion of the cultural and power elite, charms to cure illnesses and procure good luck in household tasks were sinful and reprehensible. The populace, on the other hand, found them useful aids in everyday life.⁷

Even though the trend was for the prosecution of benevolent magic and 'superstition', in the western Finnish parish of Ulvila, which the following discussion focuses on, *maleficium* trials continued into the early eighteenth century. Between 1690 and 1704, there were eight or nine cases of magic and witchcraft in Ulvila, which were heard twenty-six times altogether in court since some cases developed in a very complicated manner with counter-suits being pursued. One such case was a defamation suit brought by an alleged witch attempting to clear her name. Four of the cases, heard at eleven different sessions, primarily concerned *vidskepelse*,⁸ such as that involving Jaakko Eerikinpoika Karlö, his neighbour, and their wives, who accused each other of *vidskepelse*.⁹ Yet some cases were officially described as *vidskepelse*, but actually consisted of acts of traditional *maleficium*. One such trial from 1693 began when a peasant suspected a man of having brought forth a bear to rip up his cattle.¹⁰ Other crimes were described by the courts as *trolldom* or *förgörning*, which basically referred to acts of harmful witchcraft or *maleficium*. In 1693, for example, Heikki Yrjönpoika Janckari and his brother-in-law Risto Olavinpoika were accused of having used witchcraft to kill Heikki's brother-in-law in order to gain control of his father-in-law's inheritance. The court was unable to find any clarity in the situation as both the accused ended up denouncing each other. Heikki proclaimed his own innocence and accused his mother-in-law of the crime. Both defendants were sentenced to take an oath of purification.¹¹ Risto Olavinpoika had already been accused of magic in the previous decade and he was tried again in 1695, when he was variously accused of being able to cause crop failures, of

preventing cattle deaths, of having spoiled a burgher's beer in a nearby town, and rather curiously of failing to announce that another burgher's beer should not be sold or bought. The later charge may have been related to other acts of *vidskepelse* for which Risto was also accused. In the early 1700s Risto was once again brought to court, this time charged with bringing forth a bear that ate two horses. It was said that Risto did this because he was asked to do so in his function as some sort of cunning-man. The trials dragged on, postponed from one session to another for various reasons – to get more witnesses, because the witnesses were drunk or because they were absent. According to Erkki Lehtinen, who wrote a local history of Ulvila, at the end of his life Risto was granted a Christian burial because he had sworn on his deathbed that he was innocent.¹²

However, in the kingdom as a whole the trend was for benevolent magic trials to increasingly outnumber *maleficium* trials.¹³ As an example of the changing emphasis of the trials, the story of a widow called Agata Pekantytär is very instructive. Agata worked a sizeable farm in Ulvila. Like most of those accused of witchcraft and *vidskepelse*, but contrary to some modern popular beliefs, she was neither old nor poor.¹⁴ She was linked to some of the cases already described. She appeared as a witness in the aforementioned case of defamation, for example, and the aunt of the man supposedly killed by Heikki Yrjönpoika Janckari and Risto Olavinpoika had previously accused Agata of *vidskepelse*. The web of accusations and counter-accusations at this period obviously trapped a significant portion of the parish. Agata found herself prosecuted for 'benevolent' magic in 1675 and 1676, and on both occasions she was merely sentenced to pay fines. Ten years later she was accused of flying to Blåkulla, a famous witches' meeting place where extraordinary sabbaths occurred, and also charged once again for benevolent magic. The jury considered the accusation concerning Agata's flights to Blåkulla less than reliable, and it was remarked that the witness who made the allegation was prone to drinking too much. Some of the other accusations took a little longer to refute, but refuted they were and she was finally acquitted. At the end of the 1690s a fourth accusation about her activities was aired but never came to court, although the rumour was mentioned in a separate trial to clear the reputation of another alleged witch.¹⁵

To give a little background context to the nature of trials in the area at the time it is worth mentioning the work of Marko Nenonen. He found twelve cases in Ulvila (including Agata's) between 1674 and 1681, which involved forty-seven trial sessions in total, representing a peak period of prosecution.¹⁶ A quick look at the records suggests that most of them consisted of benevolent magic,¹⁷ several were concerned with basic *maleficium*,¹⁸ and one case involved trips to Blåkulla.¹⁹

Agata's first two court cases seem at first to fit perfectly with the picture of the 'new kind' of accusations. Both charges were brought to court by the

local clergyman, and not by neighbours. When the charges were first raised in 1675, the prosecutor used the term *vidskepelse*. Agata's alleged crimes included the employment of various magical methods to discover the person who had stolen some fish from her. The clergyman suggested Agata had tried to bury some pieces of a doorstep broken by the thief along with a human corpse, failing that she was said to have resorted to 'other unlawful means', putting something into a hole that she had drilled into a living tree to make the thief lose his mind. Responding to the latter charge Agata admitted to having stuck a twig into a living spruce to make the thief bring back his catch. The actual good or bad outcomes appear ambiguous. Agata was fined forty marks for *vidskepelse* and *förgörning*.²⁰

In the 1676 trial the clergyman used the terms *vidskepelse* and *trolldom*. This time the list of magical crimes committed by Agata included that she had taken a door lock from a woman lodging with her in order to put it in water to somehow influence the court. She was also accused of taking fodder from nine of her neighbours' barns in order to secure fodder for her own livestock for the next winter, and of driving her cattle out in winter snow at Christmas, apparently for the same reason. She was also accused of using a charm to lure fish into her nets, and of planning to attach pieces of her neighbours' nets to her own for the same purpose. Moreover, it was said that she could make her cows bear cow or bull calves as she wished and could even prevent human pregnancy if so requested. Although contraceptive magic could be understood as evil if used on unwilling persons, nothing like that was suggested in court. The main emphasis of the charges and the sentences was on *vidskepelse* throughout, and Agata was fined another forty marks.²¹ In contrast, however, her trials during the 1680s were initiated by neighbours, but never led to conviction, and the 1690s trials were aimed at punishing idle gossip, not supposed witchcraft.²²

A close reading of the court records suggests that there was a great deal of local social controversy behind the new kind of accusations just as there were behind witchcraft accusations. The dynamics of the trials can be uncovered by looking at the actors: who were they and what were their previous actions. The court records mostly identify people by name and home village only, sometimes, but not necessarily, using epithets like 'free owning peasant', 'tenant', or, in the case of women, 'wife', 'maid' or 'widow'. The relations of the witnesses to the plaintiff or defendant are not always explicitly stated, although this often emerges in the narrative of the testimony. The relationships between those concerned in Agata's trials of 1675 and 1676 are unclear in the court record. There is, however, an important hint in another trial in 1677. Agata had apparently given people to understand that she had learned some of her magic from the widow of the clergyman of a nearby parish, who sued Agata for defamation in a separate trial. During this trial testimony given in the 1676 prosecution was repeated, and Agata opposed

one of the prosecution witnesses on the grounds that they were 'in dispute over' a farmstead. This witness, named Aune, was Agata's sister-in-law.²³

With this information in mind, traces of the dispute between the sisters-in-law can be found in the court records for the previous years, and this in turn provides keys to identifying most of the other relevant witnesses. Thus the witnesses in the first two court cases were, in fact, more closely connected to Aune than to anyone else mentioned in the case, including Agata. Agata and Aune were old enemies due to a dispute over the inheritance of a considerable farm. The dispute had officially ended in Agata's favour, and, tellingly, the witchcraft and magic accusations began a year after the farm had been securely bequeathed to Agata's daughter.²⁴ It is quite obvious that Aune, using her influence and friendships in the community, was the initiator of the rumours that led to the legal action against her sister-in-law. It would seem her accusations were the result of frustrated wrath and incredulity at the unexpected outcome of the inheritance dispute. In this respect the ill will in the neighbourhood was the influencing factor behind the official actions of the vicar.

Social conflicts have often been detected behind and presented as the prime cause of witchcraft accusations in research. As far as a local community and its social dynamics are concerned, social conflict and competition are obviously important. Yet settling for such an explanation runs the risk of belittling the belief in witchcraft and simplifying it as a scapegoat for something supposedly more rational. To illustrate this point, we can look in more detail at the events surrounding Agata and her prosecutions.

An inverted hierarchy and the world of negation

Agata Pekantytär had lived in the village for a long time. She had been the wife and mother of the heir of Tommila farm, but in the society in which she lived she was not expected to become the head of the farm herself. Thus in the inheritance dispute and its outcome, we see a total inversion of social hierarchy. The contested farm was one of the largest in the village. Aune had lived on the farm prior to Agata and her daughter taking possession. Before the favourable resolution of the dispute, Agata had lived in a small cottage like the rest of the landless, labouring poor in the area. Now she became the head of the biggest farm in the village, a role that was usually a male preserve.

In contemporary social thought, as well as in popular thinking at the time, hierarchical relations were still coloured by medieval feudal concepts, understood in terms of mutual, polar rights and responsibilities.²⁵ Hierarchical superiority came in exchange for presumed physical, mental and spiritual protection. There were also responsibilities towards the community, which affected a person's status. A single farmer was to a great extent dependent on the other farmers in the village. Farming also included many responsibilities outside the strictly agricultural sphere, from processing and marketing

products to the responsibilities they had in the communal life of the village, such as building and maintaining roads and crown or church buildings, and holding parochial offices.²⁶ Trust or distrust in the abilities of a newcomer to fulfil these responsibilities was one of the components of social status. In rural Finland, there was room for limited social mobility. Sons and daughters of peasant farmers often spent a few years in service before marrying or taking up their father's farmsteads, although sons would often try to remain at home and take at least part of the responsibility while their parents lived. The village community's confidence in new farmers was usually ensured in the process of taking up a farm.²⁷

Newcomers might enter local farming society by taking up crown farmsteads on which there had been a tax default. If a peasant farmer left his taxes unpaid for three years, his farm would be confiscated and the crown could offer it to other peasants, in the hope that they would succeed better. This included an evaluation of the farmstead and the possible need for tax-free years to allow for repairs, clearing of fallen buildings and trees. Legally, six other farmers from the rest of the village or the parish would have to vouch for him to pay his taxes in full after a fixed number of free years.²⁸ In this process, collective trust was publicly displayed before the newcomer's arrival. Although not all persons who took up a farm needed such a ritual display of trust, the process of taking up a farm would almost always include some form of public acknowledgement: purchases were publicised and inheritances settled in court. The communal trust in Agata's abilities to perform her duties was not confirmed in this way and, in fact, the nominated heir of the farm was her daughter, not Agata herself. Her personal status seems to have remained insecure. Moreover, even as the court order settled her place in the village hierarchy by right of kin, there were other grounds for hierarchy that were not established. Could she actually work the farm satisfactorily? Together with the long dispute, this general lack of trust created a state of confusion in the village.

In the light of this inversion of social hierarchy by Agata, it is plausible to suggest that the imagery of witchcraft was employed in, and at least partly because of, the specific state of hierarchical confusion in the village. For the people who perceived something as subversive, the concept of witchcraft helped to make sense of the world again. Labelling it as an inversion simultaneously marked the subversion as evil. The act of marking disorder created order from chaos. The imagery of witchcraft served as the opposite required for every cultural symbolic meaning, defining order through negation. The comparison between polar opposites was essential for symbolic understanding and the identification of a thing (or the self) through what it was not. Such identification was more urgently required the more confused the situation. It is useful and correct, of course, to identify general grudges that resulted in more or less honest accusations of witchcraft, to see witchcraft as the scapegoat of envy, and understand witchcraft as an explanation for

Agata's strange success, but we still need to be aware of deeper meanings. What I consider of most interest about the accusations of the 1670s is that they clearly echo the theme of inversion. Now we need to move on and consider how accusations came to symbolise the confusion of social hierarchy, as a means to react and deal with it, and, perhaps for some people, actively to subdue it. There are layers of mental culture and concrete events and actions present at the same time.

Witchcraft in general and the witches' sabbath in particular were not without hierarchy, but the hierarchy was turned upside down. The inversion of proper hierarchy was confused or perverse but never absent. Witchcraft was not like Viktor Turner's and Mihail Bahtin's ritual and festive inversion, which are based on equality and promote the values of *communitas*. Witchcraft did not entertain the idea of equality, except that hidden in the general framework of Christianity and equality before God's judgement, as noted by Gábor Klaniczay.²⁹ The inversion of hierarchy symbolised in witchcraft served to define the order through negation, not only as hierarchical in general, but also as a specific kind of hierarchy. In Robin Briggs's view, the sabbath concept can be seen as an anti-fertility rite, representing the opposite of the desirable commonweal.³⁰ In learned demonology, descriptions of Satan, Hell and the activities of witches were characterised by ritual backwardness. The whole cosmic order was inverted, the Devil put in the place of God, and the servants of God on earth – the secular and religious magistrates – displaced. Stuart Clark has linked the notions of the world upside down in learned demonology to a general conception of a polar world, found in many areas of elite culture from literature and theatre to science and theology. In this understanding of the world, order is dependent on both opposite polarities.³¹

Ritual subversions of social hierarchy and power relations served in various ways to stabilise the existing hierarchy. They helped, through symbolic criticism, to remind the powerful that they had responsibilities, and they served to channel frustration and opposition. They also had a symbolic cultural meaning in themselves: they did not merely strengthen the established order, but also created and therefore influenced it. They worked to establish a popular view of how things should have been, and although carnival parades might be directed against authority, in other situations they might just as well serve as forms of popular social control, directed against inversions of the accepted social order.³² They could also perform a subversive role. Witchcraft trials could similarly operate in

two seemingly contradictory ways. The punishment of witches could, for example, on occasion promote cohesion and unity in a community, reinforcing in the process the dominant political values of the ruling group. But equally, it might serve as a vehicle for criticism and complaint, thus providing a valuable opportunity for malcontents to vent their dissatisfaction with, and opposition to, the ruling élite.³³

As Stuart Clark puts it, 'witchcraft was constituted by an act of revolt', and represented the opposite of perfect government.³⁴ In some European laws, including the Swedish Rural Law of 1442, witchcraft appeared among the statutes against treason (*högmålabalken*).³⁵

Vidskepelse was considered as inversionary as witchcraft. After all, it deprived God of His power to give and take happiness as He pleased, putting human action and – at least in the opinion of the authorities – the Devil's help before God. The shifting perception of *vidskepelse* from being a diabolic reality to an ineffective, futile and erroneous belief may have also made the symbolical inversion of witchcraft less subversive. The very same local authorities were responsible for popular education concerning superstition, among other things, and for maintaining peace and social order in the peasant community. On the level of social and ideological theory, witchcraft and *vidskepelse* thus fitted into the model of social misrule, which symbolised the opposite of world order. On a pragmatic micro level, a closer look at the charges and testimonies against Agata reveals that inversion and reversal were recurrent themes here as well. During her first trial, in 1675, she admitted to having tried magic to reverse a theft by making the thief bring back his booty, though her neighbours suspected her intention was actually to make the thief mad. The inversion is also present in her magic – forcing a dry twig into a growing tree: putting something dead in a living thing.³⁶ In the various charges of the next trial, the idea of reversal is even clearer. Agata's maid told an elaborate story describing how her mistress had accused her neighbours of having damaged her fishing nets, so that they would catch more than their natural share. She advised the maid to counter this sabotage by stealing mesh from the neighbours' nets, and tying it to Agata's own nets so that more fish would swim into hers. It was not just any fish she wanted, but the fish that would have otherwise swum into her neighbours' nets. The idea of reversal is clear; although so is the notion that having more than one's share left less for the others.³⁷ The same notion is present in Agata's alleged charms to ensure food for her cattle during the winter. The clergyman accused her of taking a little hay from her neighbours' barns to feed to her cattle at Michaelmas. He and other witnesses also described how Agata let her cattle out in the winter snow, an action made all the more strange by putting bells on their necks as she would have done in the summer, thus turning the seasons upside down. The clergyman also said that she was able to make a spoilt brew good again. The wording does not speak of making sure that the brew would succeed in the first place, but that the damage could be undone. Finally she was said to be able to block pregnancy, which could be understood as inverting the course of nature, although the wording is not as explicit as in the above examples. In all these instances Agata was clearly represented as perverting the natural course of things.³⁸

Although the formulations about fixing a brew and taking hay from her

neighbours are actually to be found only in the presentation of the charges by the clergyman, many of these events of reversal appear in the testimonies given by the neighbours and relatives. Although the whole court record is to some extent influenced by the questioning of the judge and the clerks – who in Finnish trials also translated and often summarised the testimonies – they still largely represent the views of the peasantry. The chain of events, which the populace perceived as witchcraft, usually remains unaltered, even though different meanings can be attached to it. In fact, even the formulations about fixing a brew and taking hay mentioned in the clergyman's statements appear in the section listing the deeds of *vidskepelse* as directly reported to him by his parishioners. Although they were reformulated by the clergyman, the parishioners' narratives remain clearly visible. This prompts the suggestion that the inversionary nature of witchcraft did not exist only in learned demonology and elite descriptions of witchcraft and magic, but very clearly in the reality of 'popular culture'.³⁹ Witchcraft and magic are not necessarily to be understood as real acts of rebellion but as part of the rhetoric and imagery used when the hierarchy was questioned. Unlike in the model of Clark and Elmer, it is the group's internal hierarchy – not the position or legitimacy of the ruling elite – which is questioned.

It is worth emphasising that the accusations made against Agata in the mid-1670s were primarily concerned with reversals of property ownership: fish, fodder and household produce. This may reflect the general importance of property rights as well as the swift change in Agata's economic circumstances and relationships. The magic Agata was said to perform, with which the villagers were most concerned, mirrored a turning upside down of the relationships between farmers. This is not surprising, bearing in mind the conflict-related nature of witchcraft. However, only one of the magical acts Agata was said to have performed or suggested was directly related to Aune's family, with whom the principal conflict over Tommila farmstead was concerned. Rather, Agata's actions seem to pose a threat to neighbours in general, and farmers or members of farming households in particular. Net fishing was very much a farmers' activity, and although cottagers might also own cows and pigs, cattle were primarily the business of farming households. Brewing beer and pregnancy, of course, touched all social strata, but they seemed to receive considerably less attention in the original testimonies of the villagers.

Agata's contraceptive skills received a lot of attention later in 1677 because she was said to have claimed that she learned them from the widow of the former minister of a nearby parish, who sued her for defamation. During this trial, Aune testified about a conversation with Agata, claiming that when she had complained about her crying children, Agata had said 'Had you said so when you were pregnant, I could have fixed things so that you would not have had more children', and that she had learned this from the minister's widow. The other witness in this trial, Marketta Klauntytär, had

sent a testimony about the same conversation to the court during the 1676 trial, but said nothing about it now, merely reporting that Agata had asked her to mediate a reconciliation with the widow. The theme of reversal was still present in the accusation of contraception magic although weaker than in fodder magic, but the emphasis of this trial was not on witchcraft or *vidskepelse*, but on deciding whether or not Agata had claimed she had learned her skills from the widow. Paradoxically enough, the previous trials seem to have been initiated by Aune, yet did not emphasise the threat Agata posed to her. Rather they showed Agata as potentially harmful to the whole community. Yet in the defamation case, which was initiated by an outsider, Aune played a far more visible role.⁴⁰

It is reasonable to suggest that the importance of relationships in the charges and suspicions against Agata mirrored her uncertain personal status and the untested qualities that she may or may not have brought to the community as the head of a farm. In other words, personal and communal were interdependent in both the imagery of magic and the village social hierarchy. Fishing was the only economic activity targeted by Agata that was actually described as being performed communally. Agata's maid Kaarina had seen how much the neighbours had caught, and it was the success of this collective effort which supposedly led Agata to try and alter the natural outcome in future. Yet other situations where Agata was said to have used magic involved a communal aspect. With regard to livestock it is true that several houses often pastured their cattle together, but winter fodder – the specific object of Agata's magic – was a communal matter in-so-far as its total amount was considered, as with the number of fish caught. The imagery of the fodder magic, centred on the taking of a small amount from a neighbour's barn to one's own, suggests that the total amount was considered constant, and, according to the 'law' of limited goods, if someone got more the rest were left with less.⁴¹ Much of the magic was also concerned with activities in which the individual worker represented his or her whole household, so although women conducted most of the work mentioned in the charges against Agata, the product of that work was considered common to the whole household. Work outside the household sphere, on the other hand, generated private property.⁴²

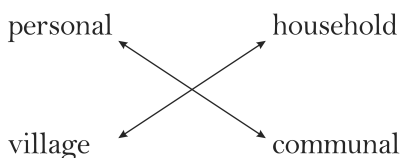


Figure 1. Personal and communal in the formation of a person's social status reflected in the imagery of Agata's magic

Anu Pylkkänen's study of women in rural households in early modern Finland, has examined the differences in social hierarchies between western and eastern parts of the country. It would seem that eastern Finnish hierarchy was significantly more male-dominated, although sometimes a woman might take the place of a man in the hierarchy. Most importantly, women appeared less in court and in public, and were instead represented by the male head of their household. Women, therefore, did not represent their households externally in the same way as men. In western Finland, however, social hierarchy was based more on work, and left more options open for women, although it also left them more vulnerable in potentially ambiguous situations.⁴³ It is presumably no coincidence that witchcraft and magic accusations also differed in western and eastern Finland. In the east, *maleficium* charges against men played a prominent role throughout the seventeenth century, although charges of benevolent magic became increasingly common. But in western Finland benevolent magic already dominated the trials by the 1670s and most of the accused were female. In Karelia, in eastern Finland, women were also less often accused of other crimes, even those of chastity. A viable point is that accusations depended on the general culture of representation in court and in public, and, to repeat, women generally did not often appear in eastern Finnish courts. However, Viipuri Karelian women acted as accusers and prosecutors in witchcraft cases relatively more often than women in Western Finland, although absolute numbers are small and women acted far less often than men.⁴⁴

Various reasons have been put forward for the predominance of males in eastern Finnish trials for witchcraft and magic. These have focused on the extent of dairying and livestock holding, and the female role in the farming household. There was considerably less dairying in eastern Finland, lessening the scope for disputes over this aspect of female responsibility, and reducing the need for women to perform and be charged with related magic.⁴⁵ However, Nenonen, emphasising the role of the local authorities, points out that in eastern Finland, especially in Viipuri Karelia, the demonological theories of early modern Europe never gained much support among the local authorities. According to Nenonen, demonological theory was what focused attention on women, and so the eastern authorities never developed a particular interest in female magic.⁴⁶ On the other hand, as far as witchcraft was connected to social and hierarchical confusion, which was not always the case, the more formal eastern model of gender relations seems to have offered fewer possibilities for communal problems over women's hierarchical status.

In the testimonies presented against her Agata was represented as turning things upside down, inverting the expected course of things, mirroring the twist she had caused in the village social hierarchy. It is illustrative of the general state of confusion that the natural course of actions often seemed unsure: should the fish go to her nets or to the neighbours? Should

the fodder last longer in her barns or in her neighbours'? It is worth considering the extent to which the polarity of this mode of thinking was due to the concepts of luck and limited goods found in various popular cultures,⁴⁷ and how these made people think along the lines of reversal: what comes *to* me comes *from* them and vice versa.

Marking (dis)order

The symbolism of inversion and reversal in Agata's trial testimonies reflected the wider rumours that were circulating in the village. Rumours are essentially only semi-public: known by many, but not everyone and often uncertain by their very nature. Bringing such matters to court, as far as it was the result of popular action, whether official accusations in court or less formal denunciations to a local authority, was partly about making the subject public. However, the court also represented lawfulness and rightfulness. It can be doubted how deep a respect the populace had for all the actions of the authorities or the decisions of the courts, but in general they were places where the people could claim their rights in various situations, and where their common disputes were pursued. Was bringing the matter to court then an attempt to set things right again?⁴⁸

It should be noted that in most instances a witchcraft lawsuit did not change the course of other matters. Most of the witchcraft and magic trials in Finland ended up in acquittals or fines. They could not be relied upon to eliminate such unpleasant persons as witches.⁴⁹ Furthermore, usually no confiscation of property occurred. Naturally, the affirmative sentence of fines for magic and witchcraft did not restore the ownership of the disputed farm from Agata to Aune or Aune's husband. The inversion of hierarchy by Agata was not undone. In most cases it could not be. However, the court trials still served to 'set things right again' in two further symbolic ways. The narratives in the rumours that circulated in the village reproduced the grounds of suspicion over and over again, whether it was the story of bewitching fish or letting the cows out in the snow. With all the imagery of inversion, they tried to create a picture identical with the important points of reality – in this case the confusion over the proper order and the suspicion that the order might be wrong. In court, the mark of an abnormal situation was made clear and definitive, the disorderly situation made known. As has been stated earlier, identifying disorder already brought some order into a chaotic situation. Moreover, disorder, as represented by witchcraft and *vidskepelse* in both gossip and prosecutions, was not synonymous with lack of order or chaos – only the wrong order. In court, not only were these stories retold, but also the ways and situations in which they were born and then circulated were described. In 1676 Agata's maid told the court that she was just coming back from fishing when Agata had asked her about her catch and then ventured

on using magic. A little later Antti Heikinpoika told the court that he had met Agata on his way to church on a certain day and she talked about hanging bells round oxen's necks.⁵⁰ Circumstantial details of this kind served to give credibility to the narrative, to highlight the reality behind the narratives. Yet such remarks also disengaged the narrative from the persons and situations present. It reminded the listeners that the events of the narrative were not happening here and now, but somewhere else, at another time, perhaps even to other people.⁵¹

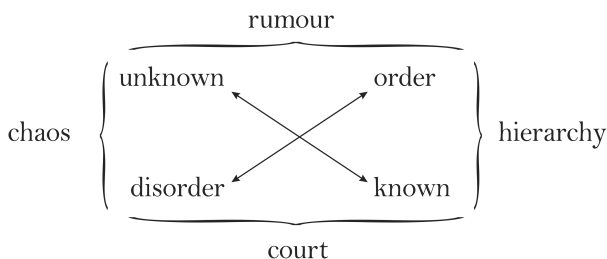


Figure 2. The reproduction of hierarchy in rumours and in court action

'Somewhere else' and 'some other time' are more uncertain than the 'here and now'. In a seemingly paradoxical way the court narratives' process of making explicit what was known also made explicit the extent of the unknown. This uncertainty was deliberately highlighted by some witnesses, who under testimony described their own conjectures regarding rumours and events. An account of a wife who had seen two calves breathing heavily on the shed floor and came to the conclusion that they must have just returned from a flight to the witches' sabbath did not convince anyone. Presumably because of the danger of a defamation counter-suit, this story also involved a lot of confusion about who said what to whom, which did not enhance its credibility.⁵² Furthermore, a lot of other testimonies were influenced by hearsay. The above-mentioned Antti Heikinpoika continued his testimony by describing a dubious conversation between Agata and two women, where he had not actually been present. He named the women involved, but they did not appear in court.⁵³ Antti's testimony was thus not only a narrative of the events, as encapsulated in the original conversation or even of the original conversation between the women, but also a narrative of a narrative of those events. The point being made concerns not only the variable credibility of the testimony, but also the process of telling and retelling multiple narratives. The ways of producing narratives thereby becomes visible, and draws the attention of both a modern reader and a contemporary listener to the fact that the narratives were narratives, different from the reality they represented. Even the much-discussed influence of the judge and the clerk on the stories told in court serve to emphasise this point. The inverted world was

no longer reality, but an image. Paradoxically, such an unwinding of the narratives made the court situation culturally even more significant.⁵⁴ One aim of the courts was to normalise abnormal situations. The court decided whether or not a wrong had been done and if it should be punished. Thus a certain mark of lawfulness was stamped on the outcome, whatever it was. Appeals to higher courts were made, but once a court judgement was final, it was usually, though not always, considered valid by the population as well as the educated elite, regardless of other differences of opinion and belief. To early modern people, lawful was not only something legal, but also something that was customarily or generally acknowledged as valid – like boundary marks. Hence the uncertainty of Agata's situation and her relations with the rest of the village was stabilised in court. The mark of lawfulness in the court sentence, even when affirming the existence of witchcraft, could actually function to unmark a situation. Thus it did not remove or undo the phenomena that caused the suspicion of magic; in this case the inversion of hierarchy by Agata, but it made it possible – even normal – to live with it.

Whereas bringing the case to court meant, for most of those present, stamping a definitive mark of disorder on the situation – making the disorderly situation known, and thereby already bringing some order into it the actual trial process sought to unmark the situation, by emphasising the narrative nature of the testimonials and by using the official court sentence to create a known order out of disorder. Thus it was possible for Agata to go on living in the village for decades and successfully run her farm, despite the magic and witchcraft trials. However, one must remember that not all trials could come to such a conclusion. Obviously, if the matter was not settled in a way that was felt just, or if one or more members of the community continuously revived suspicions, such an outcome could not be achieved. In this respect Agata certainly benefited from the fact that her most powerful enemies moved away from the village.⁵⁵

Although the trials for *vidskepelse* after the 1660s were different from those for witchcraft in that the authorities often instigated them, they often had the same kind of origins in the local community. Consequently they served similar needs and employed the same kind of symbolism as witchcraft. The long-familiar concept of polar opposites as the organising force of the universe in learned minds functioned also in a popular community to bring order into a confused situation. The charges and testimonies reflect the thematic of an individual's relation to the rest of the community and the consequences this had on local social hierarchies. The imagery of inversion was part of the rhetoric of a polar world. The symbolism brought order to chaos by defining it – even as it defined it as something unwanted. The unwanted, on the other hand, defined what was wanted. In bringing witchcraft or magic to court, the situation was publicly marked as abnormal and unwanted. However, the

trial process worked to unmark the situation in two different ways. First, the process of the hearing emphasised the nature of the narratives, including the symbols of inversion, as separate from reality. Second, the whole court procedure aimed to restore social normality, and the mark of lawfulness served to unmark the situation as normal, regardless of the actual sentence meted out.

In the eyes of the authorities, *vidskepelse*, which came to dominate trials after the 1660s, was increasingly perceived as a pernicious but essentially useless superstition. The authorities wished to instruct the populace regarding their changing perception of such beliefs. It is possible that in the process *vidskepelse* gradually lost its potential as the symbol of polar hierarchy. *Vidskepelse* was for long an ambiguous concept for the populace, with its seemingly good outcomes and its supposed futility. It is, of course, even more likely that the grounds of hierarchy changed so that they were no longer measured on the scale of good and evil, but on another scale, closer to that between reason and credulity or education and primitiveness.

Notes

- 1 Finland was part of Sweden until 1809.
- 2 Marko Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus ja noitavainot Ala-Satakunnan, Pohjois-Pohjanmaan ja Viipurin Karjalan maaseudulla 1620–1700* (Helsinki, 1992), pp. 105–8; Per Sörlin, *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden, 1635–1754* (Leiden/Boston/Köln, 1999), pp. 20, 215.
- 3 Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, pp. 139–51; Marko Nenonen, “‘Envious are All the People, Witches Watch at Every Gate’: Finnish Witches and Witch Trials in the Seventeenth Century”, *Scandinavian Journal of History* 18 (1993) 83–5.
- 4 Antero Heikkinen, *Paholaisen liittolaiset. Noita- ja magiakäsityksiä ja – oikeudenkäyntejä Suomessa 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskolla* (Helsinki, 1969).
- 5 Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, p. 150.
- 6 Linda Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur. Synen på magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige* (Stockholm, 1999), *passim*.
- 7 Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, pp. 286–90; Oja, *Varken Gud eller nature*, pp. 283–8.
- 8 Ulvila 8–10 May 1690, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 5: 170–1, National Archives of Finland (NAF); Ulvila 21 and 23 February, 1691, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 6: 29–32, NAF; Ulvila 19–21 October 1691, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 6: 542–3, NAF; Ulvila 7–9 January 1692, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7: 17–19, NAF; Ulvila 25 and 27 June 1692, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7: 260–1, NAF; Ulvila 17 and 19 June 1693, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 1: 181–2, NAF; Ulvila 25–26 October 1697, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II, KO a 9: 524–8, NAF.
- 9 Ulvila 19–21 October 1691, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 6: 530–1, NAF; Ulvila 7–9 January 1692, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7: 12–13, NAF; Ulvila 25 and 26 June 1692, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 7: 270–3, NAF; Ulvila 10–11 October 1692 Ala-Satakunta II: 471–3, NAF.
- 10 Ulvila 18–20 October 1693, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 1: 443–4, NAF.
- 11 Ulvila 17 and 19 June 1693, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II, KO a 1: 180–1, NAF; Ulvila 18–20 October 1693, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 1: 433–5, NAF; Ulvila 12–13

- March 1693, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 1: 35–7, NAF; Ulvila 16 and 18 June 1694, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 3: 251–5, NAF; Ulvila 23 and 25 January 1698, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 11: 29v–33, NAF.
- 12 Ulvila 8–10 January 1695, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 5: 30, NAF; Ulvila 4–5 November 1695, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 5: 367–8, NAF; Ulvila 27–28 June 1702, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 16: 130–2, NAF; Ulvila 13–16 February 1704, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 20: 346–52, NAF; Ulvila 27–28 June 1704, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta II KO a 20: 985–6, NAF; Erkki Lehtinen, 'Keskiajalta 1860-luvulle', in K. Virkkala, A. Kopisto and E. Lehtinen, *Suur-Ulvilan Historia* (Ulvila, 1967), p. 764.
- 13 Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, p. 247ff.
- 14 The General Register of Settlement in Finland, Ulvila, concept 1674–93, 33, NAF.
- 15 Ulvila 19–20 January 1675. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 16–17, National Archives of Sweden (NAS); Ulvila 11–12 September 1676. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 53–54v, NAS; Ulvila 11–13 July 1687, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 2: 225–9, NAF; Ulvila 3–4 and 6–7 February 1688, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 3: 58–60, NAF; Ulvila 14–15 September 1700, Ala-Satakunta ja Vehmaa II KO a 14: 757–62, NAF.
- 16 Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, pp. 105, 408–9.
- 17 All Agata's cases and also Ulvila 19–20 January 1675, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta I KO a 4: 3v–4, NAF.
- 18 Ulvila 26–27 July 1677. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 64v–65, NAS.
- 19 Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, pp. 300–1.
- 20 Ulvila 19–20 January 1675. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 16–17, NAS.
- 21 Ulvila 11–12 September 1676. *Bielkesamlingen* vol. 27: 53–55, NAS.
- 22 Ulvila 11–13 July 1687, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 1: 225–9, NAF; Ulvila 3–4, 6–7 February 1688, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 3: 56, NAF; Ulvila 13–15 September 1700, Ala-Satakunta ja Vehmaa II KO a 14: 757–62, NAF.
- 23 Ulvila 26–27 July 1677. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 69v–70v, NAS.
- 24 Ulvila 4–6 July 1674, Vehmaa ja Ala-Satakunta I KO a 4: 29–30, NAF.
- 25 Kimmo Katajala, *Suomalainen kapina. Talonpoikaislevottomuudet ja poliittinen kulttuuri Suomessa Ruotsin ajalla n. 1050–1800* (Helsinki, 2002), pp. 322–9.
- 26 For example, Peter Aronsson, *Bönder gör politik. Det lokala självstyret som social arena i tre smålandssocknar 1680–1850* (Lund, 1992), pp. 68–110.
- 27 Magnus Perlestam, *Den rofaste bonden – myt eller verklighet? Brukaransvar i Ramkvilla socken 1620–1820* (Malmö, 1998), p. 82ff.
- 28 In practice the amount of sureties could be reduced to two: Eino Jutikkala, *Suomen talonpojan historia. Suomalaisen kirjallisuuden seura* (Helsinki, 1958), pp. 115–19.
- 29 Mihail Bahtin, *Rabelais och Skrattets historia. Francois Rabelais' verk och den folkliga kulturen under medeltiden and renässansen* (Uddevalla, 1986); Viktor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (New York, [1969] 1982), p. 177ff; Gábor Klaniczay, *The Uses of Supernatural Power* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 12–16.
- 30 Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (London, 1996), pp. 40–1.
- 31 Stuart Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', *Past and Present* 87 (1980) 98–127; Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 3–147.
- 32 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Oxford, 1987), p. 104ff.
- 33 Peter Elmer, 'Towards a Politics of Witchcraft in Early Modern England', in Stuart Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft: Narrative, Ideology and Meaning in Early Modern Culture* (London, 2001), p. 104.

- 34 Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning', 118–19; Clark, *Thinking With Demons*, p. 88.
- 35 Konung Kristoffers Lands Lag, Högmålabalken VI, XIII. Schlyter, D. C. J.: Codex Iuris Communis Sueciae Christophorianus. Konung Christoffers Landslag. Lund 1869, 297ff.
- 36 Ulvila 19–20 January 1675. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 16, NAS.
- 37 Ulvila 11–12 September 1676. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 53–5, NAS.
- 38 Ulvila 11–12 September 1676. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 53–5, NAS.
- 39 See Clark, 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning', 103; Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, p. 25. Clark is probably quite right in not attributing the characteristics of the stereotypical witches' sabbath to the thought or intentions of the 'witches', but the more freely given testimonies in Finnish trials about everyday magic shed more light on popular views too.
- 40 Ulvila 26–27 July 1677. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 69v–70v, NAS.
- 41 For further recent discussion on how the notion of limited goods could have influenced other aspects of peasants life see Peter Henningsen, 'Peasant Society and the Perception of a Moral Economy: Redistribution and Risk Aversion in Traditional Peasant Culture', *Scandinavian Journal of History* 26, 4 (2001) 271–96.
- 42 Anu Pykkänen, *Puoli vuodetta, lukot ja avaimet. Nainen ja maalaistalous 1600-luvulla oikeuskäytännön valossa. Lakimiesliiton kustannus* (Helsinki, 1990), pp. 144–52, 271–307.
- 43 Pykkänen, *Puoli vuodetta*, pp. 315, 330.
- 44 Marko Nenonen, 'Noituus ja Idän mies. Noitavainojen erityisluonne Viipurin Karjalassa', in Kimmo Katajala (ed.), *Manaajista maalaisaateliin. Tulkintoja toisesta historian, antropologian ja maantieteen välimaastossa* (Helsinki, 1995), p. 138; Anneli Mäkelä, *Suvusta Perheeseen – Satakunnan ja Karjalan naisen asema 1500-luvulla* (Helsinki, 1989), pp. 87–93, and also p. 115; Pykkänen, *Puoli vuodetta*, p. 231.
- 45 Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, pp. 366–7.
- 46 Nenonen, 'Noituus ja Idän mies', pp. 143–50.
- 47 Klaniczay, *Uses of Supernatural Power*, p. 166.
- 48 This is a common notion in explanations that connect social grudges and witchcraft. Punishing the witch is obviously the whole aim of the process, eliminating his or her power or even a person may be an important aspect of the trial. However, I am not only referring to the 'witch' or 'witchcraft', but to the whole situation of uncertainty which was labelled with the symbolics of witchcraft.
- 49 Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus*, pp. 123–36.
- 50 Ulvila 11–12 September 1676. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 53v, 54, NAS.
- 51 A. J. Greimas and J. Courtés, *Semiotics and Language: An Analytical Dictionary* (Bloomington, [1979] 1982), pp. 87–91 (disengagement), pp. 100–2 (engagement).
- 52 Ulvila 3–4 and 6–7 February 1688, Ala-Satakunta II KO a 3: 59, NAF.
- 53 Ulvila 11–12 September 1676. *Bielkesamlingen*, vol. 27: 54v, NAS.
- 54 See similar effect in art and rhetorics by Yuri M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture* (London and New York, 1990), p. 54ff.
- 55 The General Register of Settlement in Finland, Ulvila, concept 1674–93, 33, NAF.

Pro exoneratione sua propria conscientia:
 magic, witchcraft and Church in early
 eighteenth-century Capua

Augusto Ferraiuolo

The following discussion is concerned with accusations of magic, which were formalised as denunciations heard by the Inquisition of the Archdiocese of Capua, a city twelve miles north of Naples, during the first half of the eighteenth century. What the following discussion will not be doing is providing a detailed socio-cultural exploration of the magical practices and the ecclesiastical attitudes towards them, as has been done so ably by David Gentilcore.¹ Rather, it will examine the stylistic and rhetorical mechanisms that emerge from the documents. It will approach the records as texts rather than as accusations.² In this way it is possible to define a narrative that, within its own rules of creation and moulding, resulted in a specific social transaction.³ It is also possible to explore the cultural models pre-dating the narrated events, which determined the narrative lines of the formal record.⁴ Conducting a semiotic textual analysis allows us to individualise a hypothetical replicable level, and an equally hypothetical logic of possible narratives.⁵

Marc Bloch commented that documents do not just show up here and there by the will of God. Their presence or absence in an archive or a library depends on human activities which are open to analysis in different ways.⁶ Thus even the problems connected with their transmission are matters of historical interest. These issues were highlighted in all their importance by Foucault, who expressed his perplexity about the idea of the document as inert matter, through which historians reconstruct what other people have said or done.⁷ He propounded the idea of a documentary texture where it is necessary to insulate, assemble, make relevant, relate and cluster a multitude of elements. History transforms documents into monuments, suggested Le Goff.⁸ In other words, the document is not neutral.⁹ It is the result of a conscious or unconscious construction made by history. The document, from this point of view, is an attempt by those in the past to impose on the future a certain image of themselves. According to Le Goff, therefore, every document is a lie. This is why it is necessary to deconstruct the document as a cultural artefact with the purpose of analysing the nature of its production.

Writing as aporia (expression of doubt)

The Inquisitional documents used in the following discussion consist of narratives describing instances of magical practices, and the reasons why people decided to denounce others who were involved in such activities. Before examining their content, it is necessary to consider the conditions of production via which the denunciations were recorded. It is a banal statement but my analyses would not be possible if the events were not recorded in writing.¹⁰ In this context it is crucial to bear in mind that these written documents purport to replicate the words of people who were unable to write – as is clear from the fact that they signed their denunciations with a cross. Obviously, then, an author, a transcriber, acts as an intermediary between us the modern readers and the people whose narrative is recorded. The identity of the author – whether a parish priest, archbishop's secretary or a notary – is, therefore, of considerable significance. According to Ong, 'writing is imitation of speaking'.¹¹ One could add further that it is an imitation full of ideological and cultural distortions because of the transcription process from oral to literary record. The possibility of authorial interventions in these denunciations is considerable. We are dealing with copyists extraneous to the events being orally narrated. Sometimes those transcribing the denunciations were priests, the local representatives of the formal and informal power of the Church, with whom the denouncers almost certainly had a reciprocal though unequal relationship. Sometimes it was the vicar-general, whose relationship with the denouncers was probably distant and whose persona was more strongly authoritarian, or likewise maybe an inquisitor. In each case, it is somebody that occupied a more meaningful role in the social hierarchy and it is somebody motivated by a specific ideology, lacking neutrality with respect to the denounced events. Because the accusations made before the above officials were transcribed oral narrations, they were strongly influenced by standardised models of transcription. In this sense the final document was a real collective enterprise, reflecting the bonds and antagonisms between the cultures of the participants. The author of the text – and by author I do not simply mean the writer, but also the guarantor of the semiotic constitution of the text, the manufacturer and promoter of a new textual construction¹² – used the communication codes belonging to his own cultural group. It is possible, therefore, to identify a competitive negotiation between those who denounced orally and those who transcribed.

The following example will hopefully clarify what has been said so far. First, though, it is necessary to introduce another complicating factor in the semiotics of these narratives. It is almost impossible to provide a precise translation of these inquisitorial documents in English. They are written in a mixture of Latin, archaic Italian, bureaucratic slang and local dialect. I shall

present only raw translations to provide an understanding of events and an idea of the structure of the documents.

Day 10 April 1694

In front of the Reverend judge in Capua in the archbishop's building Nicolaus Mauriello son of Domenico of Capua wishes to exonerate his own conscience by reporting in writing the following things:

Magnificent Lord, you must know that because I was sick, starting from the month of September, and because I used many ways to cure myself and because they didn't work, one day, because I work as *vaticale*, I brought my horses loaded with hay to Teverola, and here unloading this hay I mentioned above, a woman, Peppo Barretta's wife, said to me, because I was so sick, that I should see some skilled women because my disease was the evil eye, coming back to Capua, I called Francesca, nicknamed Resecutta, wife of Giuseppe Cervo, and I communicated my disease to her, and what they told me, and the above mentioned Francesca said to me that she was not able to do anything, but a certain Claudiella, living in San Martino, she was able to cure fear and evil eye. I, curious to be cured, allowed in my home the above mentioned Claudiella, and as soon as she understood my disease she told me that my disease was fear and that it was her deal to cure me, and indeed the same day, that I do not remember but it was the same month of September the above mentioned Claudiella in my above mentioned home ordered me to bring a plate and she put water inside and after she put the plate over my head and she also wanted a wax candle blessed during the Candelora [2 February] and holding over head the above mentioned candle and holding the above mentioned plate with water over my head she said words that I didn't hear then she damped the above mentioned candle in the above mentioned water and she told me to watch inside that water that I could see the figure of a man and I watched and indeed I saw then she licked my belly, then she wanted blessed incense and palm and she told me that the following night I would be cured, and that is what happen, that I was sick and the day after she made the same things and she told me I was safe and I would never be sick again and indeed my fever disappeared I felt fine and I still feel fine. I didn't consider this thing as superstition but today because I went to confess myself I started to think that what Claudiella did it could be a superstitious thing and I asked the priest to order me to confess so he could absolve me. I obey because he orders me in this way and I say more that when Claudiella did to me those things I was sick, I was thinking she was a good Christian, without any blasphemy but today I knew that I was in sin that I detest and denounce to you.¹³

This example is used to highlight the 'extraordinary fact' and to declare the absolute partiality of the document. Nicolaus Mauriello is in the Archdiocesan

building in Capua, sitting in front of a *magistrus* (judge) after the confessor has demanded that he make a denunciation in order to obtain spiritual absolution. Nicolaus did not consider what he had done as something 'superstitious', but to obey orders on the day of his appearance before the authorities he suddenly recognises it as sinful and claims to detest what he did. Is Nicolaus really the author of the denunciation? Perhaps in narratological terms it is incorrect to consider it in this way. The context of the production of the story, its transformation from an oral to a literary format, and above all the cultural contexts of reference will influence or better determine its textual formalisation. The document is, I repeat, a real collective enterprise, where what emerges is cultural interrelation or at least cultural co-presence, as is clearly attested by the linguistic separation that the document displays. Thus the *deve sapere* ('you must know') pronounced by Nicolaus is preceded by a sequence in Latin, expressed in the first person by the judge.

Is it possible to individualise what can be called the stylistic-rhetorical mechanisms of the denouncer? Comparisons with other texts will give more definitive evidence, but the example above already provides us with some signs. The 'extraordinary fact' is exposed with particular formality. The iterations *detto, detta* (meaning 'above mentioned') are noticeable, as is the step-by-step progression of the narration, detaining Nicolaus on each step before he climbs on to the next:

the above mentioned Claudiella in the above mentioned my home ordered to me to bring a plate and she put water inside and after she put the plate over my head and she also wanted a wax candle blessed during the *Candelora* (2 February) and holding over head the above mentioned candle and holding the above mentioned plate with water over my head she said words that I didn't hear then she damped the above mentioned candle in the above mentioned water and she told me to watch inside that water that I could see.

These mechanisms will now be explored in greater detail using further examples.

The formal structure of the actions of denunciation: The incipit¹⁴

Day 2 February 1733, in the hamlet of Capua named S. Maria Majoris spontaneously has come before me Don Giuseppe de Rienzo, so I could listen and write down this special denunciation I am writing for the Reverend vicar in Capua. Jacobus Sparanus, living in S. Maria Majoris Capua, son of Lauretjij, 55 years old, under judgement, after touching the holy gospels, to exonerate his own conscience, reported that:

Around the middle of November, 1732, Giovanni Capodoglio, who lives in the square and Tomaso N., that is a servant of M. Costanza dello Balio, called on me saying that in my home there was a treasure. After a few days he came with somebody from Casa Nova, called Nicola Argentiano, almost 45 years old and Pietro Manzo, also from

Casanova, diocese of Capua. They came in to my home during the day and entered the cellar, where they made a Circle, they placed a little map, with paper writing I don't know what, then they ask us to leave them alone. After we entered again with a young girl, who came with them, they asked us to kneel and holding a little carafe full of water, with a candle behind, he said that the young girl was seeing inside the carafe a jar full of money. Nothing else happened. After few days, two men from Naples called, one of these was a monk, and the other a layman. They entered the above mentioned cellar and the layman threw out a string with a weight attached to it, I mean a string with a leaning weight, the weight was moving by itself over the floor and they were saying that wherever the weight stopped there we could find the treasure. Then they held an empty glass and the weight was hanging perpendicularly inside the glass, touching the glass and they said that the treasure was deeply buried in the ground as many palms as there were the touches. Then the monk started to write a spell and he read for a long time, almost 4 hours in the night then we start to dig and they said that this was the duty

INT. [*question*]: About the name, last name of the layman and monk?

RTA [*answer*]: The layman is named Januario Soreca, from S. Maria, but now he lives in Napoli, and once was a page of M- Costanza del Balzo. About the monk, I don't know.

INT.: About the habit and form of the mentioned above monk?

RTA: He was wearing the habit of Saint Catherine, I mean Zoccolate. He was very old, about 65 years. His face was ugly and villainous, very skinny, white hair and average height.

INT.: He named, in his spell, the devil?

RTA: He said some blessing and I heard some Saints names.

INT.: What were they used to doing?

RTA: They were scoundrels, with no art, even if we dug a lot we didn't find anything. They left after 4 days. We dismiss the declaration after the vow of silence and after he signed this form, with his hand.¹⁵

In this example the narration of events that constitutes the denunciation is contained within a highly formalised scheme, which is not unusual considering the specific destination of use. The presence of what Genette would define as the 'thresholds' of the narration are obvious.¹⁶ Consider the preliminary text that introduces the story:

Day 2 February 1733, in the hamlet of Capua named S. Maria Majoris

spontaneously has come before me Don Giuseppe de Rienzo, so I could listen and write special denunciation I am writing for the Reverend vicar in Capua. Jacobus Sparanus, living in S. Maria Majoris Capua, son of Lauretij, 55 years old, under judgement, after touching the holy gospels, to exonerate his own conscience, reported that ...

This constitutes a preface in that, as with any kind of liminar text, authorial or not, it is produced with regard to the text that follows or precedes it. Such a definition justifies the use of the term out of its usual contexts.¹⁷ The form of the preface is that of a highly formalised prose discourse, and its author is the official who received and/or transcribed the denunciation (*ad recipiendam et scribendam infrascripta denunciatione specialis pro R. mo Generalem Vicarium Capua*). He writes it in Latin, underlining an important formal separation from the transcript of the story, which is in Italian. This is usual for the period and the purpose. The authority, depositary of the official language, gives space to the enunciation and comprehension of those giving testimony, granting them the use of the Italian language.¹⁸ The function of the preliminary text is certainly connotative, because it contextualises the ulterior story, pronounced in a datum moment, in front to a determined recipient, with precise purposes and functions.

This real historical incipit contains precious information for the historian:

- the date of the narration (*Die 2 febr. 1733*)
- the place of the narration (*in casale S. Maria Majoris Capuae*; now S. Maria Capua Vetere)
- the identity of the receiver of the denunciation (*Don Gioseppe de Rienzo*)
- his relationship with the institution (*ad recipienda et scribendam infrascripta denunciatione specialis pro R. mo Generalem Vicarium Capua*)
- the identity of the denouncer (*Jacobus Sparano ... annora circa 55*)
- the location of the denunciation (*S. Maria Majoris Capue*)
- the procedures of validation of the denunciation (*qui delato sibi prius iuramento de veritate dicenda quod, tactis sacrosantissimis evangelis, petiit, infrascripta, ... denunciavit*)
- the motivation of the denunciation (*pro exoneratione sua conscientia*).

Some of these elements remain constant throughout the corpus of material (the motivation of the denunciation and the procedures of validation), others vary, such as the day and place, the identities of the denouncer and the receiver, and the relationship between the receiver of the denunciation and the institutional referent. Such information is useful not only for quantitative analysis, but also furnishes a preliminary definition of the denunciation

spatially and temporally, which can be defined as ritualistic. The denunciation needs to be made under the auspices of the Vicar of the Inquisition, in order to facilitate the necessary unburdening of the conscience and to receive absolution from the confessor.¹⁹ The way that the denouncer declares his motivation and swears on the Gospel is representative of acts of penitence, contrition and repentance. The act appears more like a sacramental practice than the start of a judicial procedure.²⁰

Having chosen to analyse these documents as texts it is necessary to tackle the narrative construction with the necessary analytic tools. If I think of myself as a reader, what I have called the preface can also be viewed as a tale of the first degree, whose narrative appeal is extradiegetic. The story of first degree has the purpose of framing a story according to what is thematically most important, whose narrative appeal is intradiegetic. The narrator of second degree, Jacobus Sparano, addresses his story to somebody present in the story of first degree, don Gioseppe de Rienzo, who acts as a listener, and who will then write down the whole oral narration. The problem of interpretation on a narratological level centres once again on the relations that can intervene between the different narrative appeals and, therefore, on the rules guiding the narrators, their functions and on the narrative game.

The formal structure of the actions of denunciation: The explicit (final words)

Example:

After Thomas said these things we order silence with a vow, and he subscribes the written above denunciation with his own hand.

Me, Thomas de Jordano, I testified as written above with my own hand. The above written denunciation was written for me by D. Francesco Marca, vicar curate, at the Saint Michael Archangel parish church by order of the vicar of Capua, and subscribed and signed by his own hand the above mentioned Thomas de Jordano day, month and year as above D. Francesco Marca vicar curate of Marcianijsij, by his own hand.²¹

To be completely formalised, the denunciation needed a redundant confirmation. Therefore, the roles of denouncer and receiver were fixed, as well as the affirmed truthfulness, through the signatures of both actors. We can clearly deduce this from the last two paragraphs. In the first we find ulterior information. Thomas is induced to silence through oath and command. It is another important element contributing to the clear definition of the ritual in space and time. This can have at least two explanations. The first is formal, and has to do with secret enquiry, or rather predisposing the best conditions

for pursuing an investigation without the concealment of evidence. The other, perhaps more general, interprets the secret as ulterior social control, with the purpose of avoiding the growth of denunciations, particularly those motivated by revenge. The analogy with the sacred aspect of the confession is also noticeable. Nothing of what has been said can by definition go beyond the specific place and time of the act of denunciation. In this respect the secular action of denunciation assumes the aspect of the sacramental.²²

In the above example the formalisation of the explicit reaches its maximum degree, but often it is not so elaborate. Some explicit are basically signatory. Thus the case of Anna Fratte's denunciation, made in April 1710, ends in the following simple way: I, P. father Domenico Civitella, chaplain of Saint Angel parish in Tradisco, an ordinary confessor, as above.

The second form of explicit can be defined as authorial, as the final word lies with the denouncer. The explicit seems to be absent, but only in a formal sense, as it is contained inside the narrative. Here are some examples:

Die 2 luglij 1703 – Franciscus Capobianco

ma non volendone sapere niente sono venuto a venelare quanto ho detto per disgravio della mia coscienza

[but because I do not want to know anything of those things I came here to denounce what I said to exonerate my own conscience]

20 settembre 1708 – Gabriele di Pietro Angelo

Io Gabriele di Pietro Angelo vinelo ut sopra

[I, Gabriele son of Pietro Angelo, denounce as above]

Die 20 dicembre 1708 – Gabriele de Pietro Angelo

et in fede di quanto ho inteso ho fatta la presente venela scritta e sottoscritta di mia propria mano

[and in faith of what I understood I made this written denunciation and I subscribe by my own hand]

Die 14 Aprile 1718- Gio. Baptista Nardiello

e questo e' quanto devo denunciare per scrupolo di mia coscienza

[and this is what I must denounce because of the scruple of my conscience]

Die 29 Aprilij 1718- Romualdi di Michele

Questo mi ricordo

[I remember this]

Maij 1718 – Alexander Fiammentino

e questo è quanto devo denunciare per sgravare la mia coscienza

[and this is what I must denounce to exonerate my conscience]

Die 20 settembre 1718 – Polijana di Lucia,

ne so altro di questo

[I know nothing else of that]

The formalisations in these examples are evident, though at different levels.

For instance, the final words, 'I, Gio. Batta Roccatagliata, denounced and produced the above', in which the truthfulness of the story is declared and specific responsibility assumed – is expressed in that initial 'I'. It is also evident in the common sentence '*pro exoneratione propria conscientia*', in which the motivation of the denunciation is declared with the sacramental absolution in mind, or by more fading closing formulas like 'I remember this' or 'I know nothing else of that'. But if the formalisation of the explicit (also present) is somehow procedurally infringed, the narrative always reaches its formal conclusion.

To clarify, I will speak about the distinction between story-frame (or the tale of first degree) and framed story (or the tale of second degree). The text of the denunciation describes an oral narration (that of the denouncer). The recipient then transcribes the denunciation, and in doing so turns himself into the narrator, telling his version of the story to an ulterior recipient. This could be someone *close* to the action, such as the Sant'Uffizio and his investigator, or someone geographically or temporally *far* from events, such as the historian. The description of the 'extraordinary fact,' employed by the denouncer, constitutes the framed story (second degree), while the recording of the whole denunciation by the receiver – the document that I read – constitutes the story-frame (first degree). Between the two stories there exists an anachrony, a discrepancy between the chronological order of events and their order as related in the narrative, a specific temporal order of the story.²³ Note that every story has a double temporal sequence: (a) the time of the denounced action (tale) and (b) the time of the story. This duality makes possible all the usual temporal distortions in stories; three years in the life of a character in a novel, for example, is described in three sentences. In every story, therefore, the *ordo naturalis* (that is the time of the denounced thing, unfolded according to the order of succession of the events or temporal segments of the story) and the *ordo artificialis* (that is the time of the story, unfolded according to the order of disposition of the same events or temporal segments in the narrative discourse) are comparable.

Where there is discordance between the order of the tale and the order of the story we have an anachrony. One example of this is the beginning '*in medias res*', which follows an explanatory flashback, a *topos* often frequented by the epic gender. The following is an example of this:

Day 2 April 1681

Spontaneously shows up in person in front of me Reverend Vicar of Capua Maria Mendoza daughter of Larentij from the city of Capua in the hamlet of S. Maria Majoris, 20 years old, for to exonerate her own conscience denounces what is written

Being one day in Capua, around the end of the past month of March, in a house of a woman where I sheltered myself from the rain, there

came in the above mentioned house a young man I never saw again and in fact he asked me if I wanted to get married. I said I wanted to follow the wish of God and the above mentioned young man showing me another young man beside him asked me if I wanted him as husband I answered that I knew the above mentioned young man named Ciccio D'Argenio and because he was a good man I could take him as husband, above all because he promised me, and the above mentioned first young man wanting to know my name and last name and name and last name of the above mentioned Ciccio he took a piece of white paper and he warmed it up over the fire and taking it away immediately I saw four red letters, and I was amazed, saying the above mentioned young man said, Tonno Resa of San Cipriano told me after, that the above mentioned Ciccio D'Argenio, would marry me in four days. But I didn't see anything and during the confession the confessor suggested to me to denounce as I am doing.²⁴

In this example it is possible to notice how the story of Maria Mendozza has a limited course.²⁵ In fact the temporal distance with the narrative *now*, which coincides with the date of the denunciation is maybe a few days, maybe a month. Besides this *ampleness* (or rather the duration of the anachrony) it is also contained. This makes such analexis complete, because it fills the time until the narrative *now*. But many other cases exist in which neither the allographic explicit nor the authorial explicit, as already analysed, is present. The following two cases are good examples:

Day 28 May 1708

Spontaneously shows up in front of me Constantino Argiulo, son of Semenij, from the hamlet of Casanova ...

Magnificent Lord you must know that six months ago, I was standing at the home of Cintio Tescione, a fellow villager of mine, where for my business, I took a donkey with me and in the same home was standing a woman called Maria ... from the hamlet of Falciano of Caserta and because I carried this woman on my donkey to her above mentioned hamlet, she asked me if my donkey was having colts I answered that she never had colts, even if she did her duty, and the above mentioned Maria replied that she wanted to teach me a secret to help my donkey have colts, and because I asked her what kind of secret it could be she told me. And this was that when the donkey mounted the above mentioned donkey of mine I should pick the belly of the above mentioned donkey 3 times with a nail so in this way he could be pregnant ...²⁶

Day 22 September 1708

Spontaneously show up in front of Reverend Vicar Capua in S. O. room Cassandra Paschalis, daughter of Io: Baptista from the hamlet of Grazzanisij, almost 20 years old, to exonerate her own conscience she asked to be heard

and after we gave her the faculty and under vow of truth made by touching the Holy Bible said and denounced the following things:

Magnificent Lord you must know that during the past month of August because I was sick, with a huge headache, I was told by a neighbour of mine, named Francesco Trotta, that there was a woman called Maria Gentile, living in the above mentioned hamlet, daughter of a certain woman called Bellella, but I don't know her father's name because she is a foreigner, that she knew a spell against the headache, and because my neighbour called her I brought her to my home where I was sick, she ordered to have a Faenza carafe full of water and holding this carafe over my head she took a little tow and lighting it inside the carafe she said words I didn't hear and after she did it so quick she took the carafe from my head and she left my home, and this ceremony was done just once, even if that woman said we needed to do it three times to let it work, and because the above mentioned pain grew I didn't want to do it anymore, not understanding that it was a sin.²⁷

In these cases the stories of second degree, narrated respectively by Costantino Argiulo and Cassandra Paschalis, do not reach the narrative *now* that coincides with the date of the denunciation. In such cases it is possible to talk of an authorial explicit with analexis not complete.

The narrative outskirts

Related to the *incipit* and the *explicit* is another formalised element in these documents: the interrogations that follow the narrative action of the denouncer, and which immediately precede the explicit. In this section of the text the receiver of the denunciation asks for further explanations from the denouncer, such as: if the denounced person called or invoked a demon, or if he let someone else invoke it; if the denouncer knew other magic practices completed by the denounced on behalf of others; if the denouncer knew others that could depose against the denounced; and if the denouncer deposed out of a love for the truth or if he or she was motivated by envy or hate. Besides these recurrent questions, we sometimes also find queries concerning the habits of both the denouncer and the denounced, in particular how frequently they went to confession and communion, or if the magic practised by the denounced inflicted physical suffering on people.

These narrative outskirts, being less rigid in structure but nevertheless highly formalised, allow an intermediary place for analysis. They also constitute an important moment that I would define as validation. The invocation of the Devil and other magical practices performed by the denounced, which serve to confirm their fame, can increase or decrease the scope of the accusation through the production of confirmations. Such validation contributes

above all to confirm the narrated reality. But if these validations seem to have quantitative characteristics, the relative question regarding the 'love of truth' is moved instead on to a motivational and qualitative level. Here we find out what has pushed the denouncer to produce the accusation. The denouncer evidently needed to make a formal declaration about the motivation of the denounced even if it was redundant, being already contained in the specific formulation *pro exoneratione sua conscientia* in the *incipit*. The denouncer had little option but to declare that he or she bore no animosity towards the denounced. The responses of the denouncers in this respect were highly formalised. All the denouncers, as well as declaring their own love for the truth, individualised the central role of the confessor, who denied the absolution until after the denunciation. The *exoneratione sua conscientia* reveals the formalities of social control employed by the Church through the tool of the confession. Only formal notification allowed the denouncers to receive the spiritual absolution of their own sins, without which their position was similar to that of the excommunicated. It seems to confirm, again, the bond, both real and symbolic, of the denunciations – thanks to their sacramental lines – with the sacrament of the confession.

What it is possible to see here, in my opinion, is an opposition between the written word (that of the investigator) and the dictated word (that aroused by the questions and only subsequently transcribed), and, through this, the cultural comparisons and the use of power intimately connected with them. In other words, the writing shows a discrepancy between the depositaries of a technology and those people that are not familiar with such technology. The use of this procedure inevitably evokes the asymmetrical relationship between those whose role is to induce people to speak, *ex officio*, and those who only have the possibility to talk: the dominant mechanism of the Saint Inquisition on the one hand, and the carrier of a broadly subordinate culture on the other.

The text of the denunciations

Between the pre- and post-liminals or thresholds already discussed we obviously find the narrations of the 'extraordinary fact' that determined the denunciation in the first place. They consist of a persuasive story corresponding to Cicero's definition of *narratio* as *rerum geestarum aut gestarum expositio*. To be effective the narrations had to respect the requisite qualities of brevity, clarity and above all likelihood. If brevity was infringed (it is not unusual to find very long depositions as a support of the denunciations), if clarity was not always reached, then the authors looked for likelihood. Essential in this respect was the concordance of the *ordo naturalis* with the *ordo artificialis*: the facts are narrated according to their chronological development, their linear progression. For example:

Day 28 September 1710

Sent by Magnificent Vicar of Capua Julius Parente being at the monastery of Capua to accept the written denunciation of Rosana Mattia, daughter of Gaetano, guest of this monastery said she wants to denounce to exonerate her own conscience and after we gave permission she started to denounce the following things.²⁸

Then follows:

Sappia V. S. come have circa un mese Agnese d'Angelo vidua di Giacomo Antonio Pisano similmente commorante nel Conservatorio al fine di maritarsi, mi diede un poco di sale, e mi disse che facesse un fosso dentro del fuoco del focolaro et ivi lo buttasse a nome del diavolo et a nome del futuro sposo, ma io non volli farlo, et lo buttai alla Mondezza, viddi poi suddetta Agnese piglio' il sale e lo butto' nel fuoco, nel modo ho detto che e' quanto devo venelare.

[Magnificent Lord you must know that almost one month ago Agnese D'Angelo widow of Giacomo Antonio Pisano also living in the monastery waiting to be married she gave me a little salt and she told me to dig inside the fire in the fireplace and there I could throw it naming the devil and naming the future spouse but I didn't want to do it and I threw it in the garbage I saw the mentioned above Agnese take the salt and she threw it in the fire in this manner I have said that which I must denounce.]

In this instance the chronology unfolds in absolute respect of the linear relationship between the *ordo naturalis* and *ordo artificialis*, between the time of the story and the time of the tale.

Velocity was another aspect of time, which along with linear progression, was a common expedient in the denunciations. By velocity I mean the relationship that intervenes between diegetic or narrative time, which concerns the events of the story, and the time of the tale. In the narration it is in fact possible to compress or to dilate the events that narrate each other. Events can be told that cover the arc of a month in a few lines, or the author can go on for pages describing seconds. These narrative movements constitute the rhythm of the story. They can be categorised as follows:²⁹

a) *Summary*. If the time of the story is shorter than the time of the history:

I remember that five years ago I went to Marzano, my country, where I had some discussion with a woman (she died after) and I also asked her to teach me a certain spell that the above mentioned woman used to say.

The tale relates events that have a far greater duration than the few seconds it takes to read it.

b) *Pause*. Where the advancement of the story does not correspond to a chronological advancement, as is the case below (in italics):

She also taught me that writing the subscribed words over the left arm

and sleeping on top she could fall in love with you. The writing was: *Iafeut, Iufael, Astarot, belzebue, Santanas princes of the demons, I call and I invoke to let her – you need to say the name – fall in love with me to follow my wish.*

- c) *Scene*. The dialogue generally constitutes this. Here convention assumes the equality between the time of the tale and time of the history, as in:

The above mentioned soldier Santillo replied to me: *Of course they are superstitious things because you find names of devils and words belonging to the prayer during the consecration of the host.*

- d) *Ellipsis*. The tale omits a part of the story, as in the case of the italicised words:

After a few days the same people called two men from Naples, one of these was a monk, and the other a layman.

In the corpus of documents examined the summary and the pause are used all the time, while the scene and the ellipsis are used less frequently. In particular the alternation of the summary with the pause constitutes the distinctive lines of these narrations. It is necessary to add that the summary is usually situated at the beginning of the story while the pause is usually contained within the account of the extraordinary fact.

The events of the narration, ordered according to the chronological order of their enactment, the velocity of the narration with its rhythms based on the alternation between summary and pause, and other rhetorical mechanisms, could be called confirmatory devices of reality. They can be defined as the repetition, adjunction and climax.

The repetition:

22 October 1714

Another time when I was in the above mentioned monastery I recited the above mentioned Crown [charm], praying to the Holy Ghost that he would let me see the above mentioned young man, after one month he came to the above mentioned monastery to meet me. In another situation I recited the above mentioned Crown with the hope that my mother would come to meet me in the above mentioned monastery.³⁰

The adjunction:

26 May 1718

Spontaneously appears Alexander Fiammentino, son of Pasqualij from Capua, almost 22 years old that for to exonerate his own conscience denounced:

Almost four or five months ago I lost a stiletto, Rosa Ianniello told me that she was able to do the secret of the sieve and she took a sieve putting scissors inside a pillow saying words I didn't understand and I saw she was moving the sieve whispering as she put it down and after

I don't know what I said to the above mentioned Rosa and this is what I must denounce to exonerate my conscience.³¹

Finally the climax, progressing step by step:

Day 16 September 1737

Anna Spinelli, wife of Paolijs Falaga, almost 70 years old, from Napoli ...

At the beginning of May of this year 1737 I was standing at the window and I saw Agata Giaquinto walking by, who now lives in Capua with another man. Said hello to her, she came in to my home for a while because she was a friend of mine for 20 years. It was while chatting that she asked me when I intended to marry off my niece who was living in my home. I answered her: it is arranged she is to marry mister Todesco, but one day he says to me he wants her, another he says he wants her not. At this she said I am able to do a spell but I need four *carlini*. This is what I gave her.³²

Everything contributes, with the use of a specific poetic, to the purpose of the denunciation: to convince that what is being told is true. The persuasive story of the *rerums gestarum*, based on likelihood, reaches its primary objective: the construction of a version of reality acceptable to both parties – the believer and the ecclesiastical authority – through highly formalised and consolidated rhetoric practices. Within this structure the co-narrators, the denouncer and receiver of the denunciation, practise the formal rhetorical games in a perfectly synchronic way.

The denunciations in this corpus, therefore, signify the strength of the relationship between those who made the accusations and the receiving institution. The *pro exoneratione sua propria conscientia* seems to delineate deep penitential lines of contrition and of repentance, which are approached as a sacramental practice, and demonstrates the depth and capillary social control of the Church in eighteenth-century Italy.

Notes

- 1 David Gentilcore, *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester, 1992).
- 2 It is important to note that I am using the term text in a narratologic meaning and not at all following the historic-positivistic approach. In general and generic terms, a text is a procedure of awarding sense to an event, which in the narration is organised following rules of contextual production.
- 3 B. Herrstein-Smith, 'Narrative Versus, Narrative Theories', *Critical Inquiry* 7 (1980) 213–36.
- 4 Natalie Zemon Davis, *Fiction in Archives: Pardon Tales and Their Tellers in Sixteenth Century France* (Stanford, 1987), p. 7.
- 5 See Claude Bremond, *Logique du récit* (Paris, 1973).
- 6 Marc Bloch, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien* (Paris, 1941–42), p. 74.
- 7 Michel Foucault, *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris, 1969).

- 8 For the definition of 'monument' see the approach of Jacques Le Goff, 'Documento/Monumento', in *Enciclopedia Einaudi* (Turin, 1978), vol. 5, pp. 13–14, 38. It is, generally, a sign of the past, everything that perpetuates a memory. It is different from the document (apparently chosen by the historian and for this reason characterised by an imagined objectivity) because it is intentional.
- 9 Le Goff, 'Documento/Monumento', p. 46.
- 10 Writing should be viewed as a technology requiring tools. It reduces sound to space and it separates the word from the immediate alive present. The writing is entirely artificial.
- 11 Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York, 1982), p. 14.
- 12 See Cesare Segre, *Avviamento all'analisi del testo letterario* (Turin, 1985), p. 9. This is the medieval idea of the author as expressed by Dante in *Convivio*, IV, VI, 3–5.
- 13 [Die 10 Aprilis 1694: Comparuit coram Rev. mo magistrus Capuani in Pal. Archiepti Nicolaus Mauriello filius Dominici de Capua, qui sponte pro exoneratione eius conscientia denunciavit infrascripta. Deve sapere V. S. Ill. ma che stando io ammalato dal mese di settembre et havendo io usato molti remedij per guarirmi e poichè mai mi portino buono, un giorno, essendo l'arte mia di Vaticale caricai i miei cavalli e li portai carichi di fieno a Teverola, ivi scaricando detto fieno una donna moglie di Peppo Barretta mi disse vedendomi di male cura, che mi fusse fatto vedere a qualche donna pratica perchè il mio male era di occhiatriccio, ritornato in Capua, mi chiamai Francesca per supranome Resecutta moglie di Giuseppe Cervo, alla quale comunicai il mio male, e ciò che mi era stato detto, e detta Francesca mi disse che essa non sapeva fare niente, ma che una tale Claudiella che habitava a San Martino era pratica di fare a paura, et occhiatriccio. Io curioso di guarirmi mi feci venire in casa detta Claudiella la quale saputa la mia infermità, mi disse che era paura e che era peso suo guarirmi, e con effetto nel medesimo giorno quale non mi ricordo ma fu del medesimo mese di settembre detta Claudiella in detta mia casa mi fece pigliare un piatto e dentro vi pose acqua e poi me lo pose in testa, et volle di più una candela di cera della Candelora, e tenendo in capa detta candela e tenendo detto piatto con acqua supra la mia testa disse certe parole che non intesi, e poi smorzò detta candela in detta acqua, e mi disse che avesse guardato dentro detta acqua che ci era una figura d'huomo, ed io mirai e con effetti la viddi e poi leccò con la sua lingua sopra la mia panza, e poi volze incenso e palma benedetta, e postele sul fuoco in mezzo mia casa mi fece saltare tre volte per sopra il foco dove vi era l'incenso e palma benedetti, e mi disse che la notte seguente a questo sarai passato tutto, come con effetto fu, che mi sentii male, il giorno seguente mi fece l'istesso, e mi disse che ero sano, nè sarei stato più infermo, e con effetto mi passò la febbre, stiedi bene e non sono stato più infermo. Io tal cosa non stimai superstizione, ma hoggi essendomi confessato mi è venuto domanda che tal operato di detta Claudiella fosse cosa superstiziosa, e l'ho detta al confessore il quale mi ha obligato a venelarlo che poi mi haveva assoluto. Io per tale incarico ho ubbedito e dico di più che per all'hora che detta Claudiella mi fece tal cosa io era malato, credei però che l'operasse una Christiana, e senza offesa di Dio ma hoggi che ho saputo che sono stato posto in malafede io la detesto et denuncio a V. S. Ill. ma.]
- 14 'Incipit' means the beginning or first words or lines of a treatise or poem.
- 15 [Die 2 febr. 1733 in casale S. Maria Majoris Capuae sponte comparuit coram me Don Giuseppe de Rienzo ad recipiendam, et scribendam infrascriptam denunciatione specialis per Rev. mus Vicarium Capua Jacobus Sparano S. Maria Majoris Capue, filius Lauretj, annora circa 55, ut dixit, qui delato sibi prius iuramento diventate dicenda, quod tactis sacrosantissimis evangelijs, petitit, infrascripta per exoneratione sua conscientia denunciavit: Verso la metà di Novembre del 1732 fui chiamato da Giovanni Capodoglio che è nella piazza e Tomaso N. che sta per servitore presso M. C. Ostanza dello Balio, e mi dissero che nella mia Casa ci era il tesoro. Dopo alcuni giorni mi portarono uno di Casa Nova che si chiama Nicola Argentiano,

di età 45 anni circa e Pietro Manzo pure di Casanova diocesi di Capua. Vennero in mia casa di giorno et entrarono in una mia cantina, dove fecero un Circolo, ci posero una piccola mapa, co una cartella scriva no' so che: poi ci fecero uscire e restarono essi soli. Noi entrati di nuovo co' una figliola portata da essi medesimi, ci fecero inginocchiare e tenendo in mano una carafina piena d'acqua, co' una candela dietro, diceva che la figliola vedeva nella carafina una giara piena di denaro. Nè ci fu altro. Dopo alcuni giorni questi medesimi fecero venire due da Napoli, uno di questi era Monaco, et un altro secolare. Questi vennero nella predetta cantina, et il secolare cavò fuori una cordella co' un peso attaccato, entesa la cordella col peso pendente, il peso da se si muoveva sopra l'astrico e dicevano che dove si fermarebbe ivi era il tesoro. Poi pigliarono uno bicchiara vacuo et a perpendicolo stava pendente dentro il bicchiere quel peso, il quale da se batteva dentro il bicchiere come fossero alcuni tocchi, et dicevano che quanti tocchi dava tanti palmi era abbasso il tesoro. Poi il Monaco cominciò con una scrittura a scongiurare e lesse molto tempo, su le 4 ore di notte e che si cominciò a cavare e dicevano che questo era il comando.

INT. de nomine, cognomine homo Secularis, seu laici et Monachi?

RTA Il Secolare si chiama Januario Soreca di S. Maria, ma ora in Napoli, et era paggio tempo fa di M. Costanza del Balzo. Il Monaco no lo so.

INT. de habitu et forma pred. ti Monachi?

RTA Portava l'abito di Santa Caterina, cioè Zoccolate. Era molto vecchio, cioè da 65 anni. Era di faccia brutta e rustica, molto secco, di capelli bianchi e statura giusta. Esso però diceva che era secolare ma s'avea fatto prestare quell'abito.

INT. Ac in illis verbis coniurationis ordinavit nomina demonis?

RTA Dava alcune benedizioni e sentiva nominare santi.

INT. Ac aliquid invenierat et ubi et quomodo?

RTA Quelli erano birbanti, credo che non sapessero d'arte: hanche si fosse molto cavato, non si trovò niente. E questi dopo 4 giorni se ne andarono.

Quibus habitis iuratus de silentio dimissus est post qua sua mano subscriptit.]

16 Gerard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris, 1987).

17 Genette, *Seuils*, p. 158.

18 It is necessary to say that the use (concession) of the Italian language is a compulsory operation. Presumably the dialect is the usual communicative tool.

19 The *curia capuana* successfully used the confession as an instrument of notification and denunciation to gather information on heretics and later practitioners of magic in the diocese. See also Pierroberto Scaramella, *Con la Croce al core* (Naples, 1995), p. 19.

20 Alessandro Prosperi, *Il tribunale della coscienza* (Turin, 1996), p. 270. As Prosperi observes, the practice of confession evolved rapidly during the early seventeenth century as the bishops and their vicars exerted increasing control over it. The obligation of the confession and annual communion became not an abstract norm but a diffused social practice, properly recorded and checked.

21 [*Quibus habitis fuit detto Thomas iniunctum silentium cum iuramento er mandatu, ut superscripta denunciationem propria manu subscribat et confirmat, per propria manu subscribit et confirmavit.*

Io Thomas de Jordano ho deposto ut sopra di manu propria. Superscripta denunciatio fecit per me D. Francesco Marca, Vicario Curati, Collegiata et Parochialis Eccellentissimis Santi Michaelis Archangeli recepta et scripta ex commissione Vicariis Capua et subscripta et firmata propria manu detto Thomas de Jordano die, mense et anno quibus sopra.

D. Francesco Marca Vicario Curato Marcianijsij, manu propria.]

22 Please note the difference between *sacrament* and *sacramental* in the Roman Catholic Church. The former was founded by Christ, the latter by the Church, and while the former produces its effect in virtue of a divine disposition (*ex opere operato*), the latter

acts by virtue of the prayers or other actions of the Church, and by its uses (*ex opere operantis*).

- 23 Gerard Genette, *Discours du récit* (Paris, 1972), p. 83.
- 24 [Die 2 Aprilis 1681: Comparuit sponte personaliter coram Rev. mo Vicario Capua Maria Mendoza filia Laurentij civitatis Capua incola [?] in Casali S. Maria Maioris etatis sua annora 20 que pro exoneratione eius conscientia infrascripta deposuit et denunziavit Ritrovandomi un giorno in Capua verso la fine del passato mese di marzo, in casa di una donna dove per la pioggia mi ricoverai, venne in suddetta casa un giovane mai piu' da me visto et di fatto mi disse se io mi volevo maritare. Io disse che ero per fare il volere di Dio e detto giovine dimostrandomi a lato un altro giovine mi disse se voleva quello per mio marito, io li replicai che detto giovine chiamato Ciccio D'Argenio lo conoscevo, et perche' era un buon giovine mel'haveria pigliato, tanto piu', che me l'haveva promesso, et suddetto primo giovine volendo sapere il mio nome e cognome, et nome e cognome di detto Ciccio piglio' un pezzo di carta bianca, et la riscaldo' sopra il foco, et levatela subito viddi che vi erano formati quattro versi di lettere rosse, del che io mi meravigliai, dicendomi detto giovine chiamato per quanto mi disse poi Tonno Resa di S. Cipriano, che detto Ciccio D'Argenio di la a quattro giorni mi haverebbe pigliata per moglie. Al che io non vedei et essendome confessata sono stata astretta dal confessore a venelarlo come fo.]
- 25 Genette, *Discours du récit*, p. 96.
- 26 [Die 28 Maij 1708: Comparuit sponte coram me Constantino Argiulo filius Simeonij de Casali Casanova ... Deve sapere V. S. come haverà sei mesi stando io nella casa di Cintio Tescione mio paesano, dove per miei affari, mi portai una bestia e nella medesima casa vi stava una donna per nome Maria ... del Casale di Falciano di Caserta e perché me la portai a cavallo di detta mia bestia nel detto suo casale, mi dimandò se detta mia bestia faceva figli e li risposi che mai in vero have fatto figli non ostante che haveva fatto la diligenza, e detta Maria mi rispose che mi voleva imparare uno segreto per farli fare figli, et havendoli dimandato che segreto fusse me l'imparò. E fu questo, che quando il ciuccio li staria sopra alla detta bestia havessi punto alla panza seu trippa di detta bestia tre volte con un chiodo perché l'haverebbe ingravidata et havendolo fatto e riuscito nel mio desiderio senza dire parole alcune.]
- 27 [Die 22 Septembrij 1708: Comparuit sponte coram Rev. mo et Ill. mo Vicario Capua in aula S. O. Cassandra Paschalis filia Io: Baptista Casalis Grazzanisij etatis annora 20 circiter que pro exoneratione sua propria conscientia petiit audiri et data ei facultate ad iuramento de veritate dicenda tactis Sacris Scripturis venelavit et denunciavit ut sequitur Deve sapere V.S.Ill. ma come nel prossimo passato mese di agosto ritrovandomi poco bene di salute, con dolore di testa fiero, mi disse un mio vicino per nome Francesco Trotta, che vi era una donna per nome Maria Gentile habitante in detto Casale figlia una tal donna chiamata Bellella, atteso non so come si chiama suo padre per esser forastiera, che sapeva un remedio contro il mal di testa, et havendola chiamata detto mio vicino la portai in mia casa dove stavo inferma, questa ordino' che si fusse pigliato uno teano et uno arciolillo di Faenza pieno d'acqua e posto detto teano sopra la mia testa con detto arciolillo dentro piglio' un poco di stoppa, et appicciatola ad una candela la quale la pose li' appiccata dentro lo arciolillo, e diceva alcune parole quali non intesi, e fatto cio' a capo di un pater mi levo' di testa detto tiano et arciolillo, e se ne andò, e questa funzione fu fatta una volta, benchè diceva detta donna che doveva farla tre volte per giovare, e poiche' detto dolore piu' mi aggravò non volli farlo piu', non sapendo che cio' fusse peccato.
- 28 [Die 28 mensis settembrij 1710: De mandato Ill. mi Vicarij Gentilij Capuani Julius Parente accetti ad conservatorium Convertitar a Capua ad affectum infrascriptis Rosana Mattia filia Gaetani commemorantem in esto Conservatorio que dixit habere denunciationis pro exoneratione sua conscientia, et data facultate incipit venelare modo quo sequitur.]
- 29 There is another narrative movement, the extension, where the time of the tale is

longer that the time of the story. The rhythmic effect is a deceleration. I did not find any examples of this in the corpus.

- 30 [22 ottobre 1714: *Un'altra volta mentre stavo in detto Monasterio recitai detta Corona, pregando lo Spirito Santo che mi avesse fatto vedere detto giovane, questo doppo un mese venne in detto Monasterio a trovarmi. In altra congiuntura recitai detta corona accio' fusse venuta mia madre a ritrovarmi in detto monasterio*]
- 31 [26 Maij 1718: *Comparuit sua sponte Alexander Fiammentino filius Pasqualii de Capua, 22 annora circiter qui pro exoneratione sua propria conscientia denunciavit: Havera' da quattro in cinque mesi che havendo io perduto uno stile, mi disse Rosa Ianniello che essa sapeva fare un segreto del setaccio e pigliava lo setaccio e vi ficco' una forbice allo coscino e diceva certe parole che io non intesi, e viddi moveva lo setaccio e mormorava e lo posava, e poi non so come dessi detta Rosa, e questo e' quanto devo denunciare per sgravare la mia coscienza.*]
- 32 [Die 16 settembre 1737: *Anna Spinelli uxor Paolijs Falaga, annora 70 circa, civitatis Neapolij ... Sul principio di maggio di questo anno 1737 mi trovai affacciata alla finestra e viddi passare Agata Giaquinto hora dimorante in Capua assieme con un altro huomo. Salutatala sali' un poco in mia casa, per haverci havuto amicizia di 20 anni a dietro. Ci forono su di noi certi discorsi, o sia l'altri mi domando' quando havessi maritata mia nipote che io haveva meso in mia casa. Li risposi: sta in atto di maritarsi e piglia un Sig. Todesco, pero' hora mi dice cha la vuole, hora che no. A questo essa Agata soggiunse io so fare una danazione per la quale ci vogliono carlini quattro. Questa io ce li diedi.*]

From illusion to disenchantment: Feijoo versus the ‘falsely possessed’ in eighteenth-century Spain¹

María Tausiet

I conclude from the findings that there were no witches nor bedevilled people in those places until they began to write about them. (Alonso de Salazar y Frías)²

I prove the matter through the constant experience that on very rare occasions does there appear to be any possessed person in places where no one starts exorcizing. (Benito Jerónimo Feijoo)³

Among the many attacks that the Benedictine Father Benito Feijoo (1676–1764) launched against the so-called *vulgo* (the ‘common herd’), one of the most impassioned was undoubtedly that dedicated to those possessed by the Devil. Presenting himself as an exposé of false beliefs, for whom Spanish society at the time was crying out, Feijoo warned his contemporaries about the great number of falsely possessed wandering around the country. From his perspective, the proliferation of fake possessed people constituted one of the most serious deceptions, and also one of the most widely accepted by the masses. For this reason in his general encyclopaedic work, written ‘to correct general misconceptions’, the essay ‘Demoniacos’ was a key work that historians have identified as representative of the beginning of the Spanish Enlightenment movement.⁴

Before embarking fully on the main discussion, we find ourselves facing two significant lines of thought as much about the author himself as the public at whom the discourse was aimed. Feijoo considered himself a misunderstood benefactor: ‘experience and discourse have taught me that the person who reveals truth not only falls out with the deceiver but also with the deceived’.⁵ He took for granted that the majority of those who read his writings, in other words the *vulgo*, among whom he includes ‘a great many indiscreet priests’, would be against his thesis. Not for nothing are the so-called *vulgo* depicted by the Benedictine as comprising a class of people mentally rather than socially defined, who did not use their intelligence, who rejected reflection, and guided by emotion ended up behaving like madmen.⁶ In spite of this, the author quixotically presented his revelations to

these very people.⁷ In this way, from the very outset of his discourse, he considered the battle as being between two conflicting forces: the light of reason versus the twilight of superstition, or rather the common good against the personal interests of certain individuals who capitalised on the excessive gullibility of the majority.

Much has been written about the attitude of Feijoo towards the things that he so vehemently complained about.⁸ On the one hand his freedom to criticise scholastic dogmatism, together with his experimental methods, placed him at the heart of the enlightenment sweeping Europe at that time. On the other hand, his unshakeable orthodox Catholicism, which led him to accept Revelations as an essential part of knowledge, roots him deeply in the very world he attempted to dismantle.⁹ In this regard, what is significant right at the beginning of his essay on possession is the curious statistical estimate he puts forward concerning the number of possessed people who might be considered genuine. In a characteristic resort to a compromise solution, which places him constantly between two eras,¹⁰ Feijoo affirmed:

The Vulgo ... nearly always believe to be truly possessed whoever appears so. Men of greater wisdom recognise that many are false but remain convinced that the genuine ones are not few in number. My feeling is that the number of the latter is so limited that, generally speaking, out of 500 who claim to be possessed 20 or 30 really are so.¹¹

So the Benedictine thought that approximately 96 per cent of those who claimed they were possessed either feigned possession, or were ignorant and mistaken (imagined possession). Yet before spending time decrying the former and dealing with the latter, Feijoo felt obliged to justify the other 4 per cent, which constituted his concession to the concept of authority which he so often brought into question.¹² Despite confessing that he personally had never known a true case of possession, he put forward three reasons in favour of the existence of genuinely possessed people: their presence in the gospels and in the lives of some saints, the exorcisms approved by the Church, and the testimony of some trustworthy individuals. Having established these premises, and wishing to forestall any potential objection, Feijoo pondered on why there were so many genuinely possessed in the time of Jesus Christ and so few in his time. 'It could', he said, 'be argued to the contrary that in the time when Christ ... was on the earth, there were many (possessed), as can be seen from the four gospel writers ... so it needs some thought as to whether there are now too.'¹³ His response was to refer to the will of God, a naive, facile answer on the surface. However, if anything is striking in the Benedictine's attitude, it is his lack of innocence, his extraordinary erudition, reading and reflection,¹⁴ and in spite of everything, his dogged insistence on defending the most refined orthodoxy. Feijoo was no stranger to those who advocated a new biblical exegesis. It had developed in Europe by the end of

the seventeenth century under the influence of the Cartesian methodological doubt and the discoveries of explorers and missionaries. In an age in which the notion of the diversity of the world started to spread, essays favouring the acceptance of alternative interpretations of Scripture multiplied daily.¹⁵ Among these it is worth mentioning two that Feijoo knew at first hand. One was the *Dictionnaire historique et critique* by Robert Bayle,¹⁶ and the other was the monumental *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament* by the Benedictine Augustin Calmet.¹⁷ These kinds of critical works, with their arsenal of reasoned objection to facts contained in the Bible were borne in mind by Feijoo, to the extent of making him wonder whether the possessed quoted in the gospels, 'were not really possessed, if they were not merely suffering from varying illnesses; [although] the evangelists called them possessed, in accordance with the common parlance of the day'.¹⁸ However, despite the progressiveness of his lexicological approach, Feijoo took a step back and, as on so many other occasions, he opted for a completely literal interpretation, arguing only on the basis of the repeated mentions in the gospels of 'expressions about the Devil speaking; the Devil coming back in; the devils said such and such a thing etc.'.¹⁹ His final proposal, in the propagandist style so favoured by the Counter-Reformation, is that perhaps God allowed there to be more possessed people at the beginning of our times in order to highlight the role of Christ as the Saviour and Redeemer of humanity. He applies the same reasoning to the saints needing spectacular miracles in order to prove their sainthood:

It was extremely important that God should allow unearthly spirits to enter human bodies. It was necessary to repeat the miracle of exorcising them, characteristic work of the Redeemer, more than other types of miracles ... The same argument can be levelled at those opposing the saints whose virtue God wished to demonstrate in this way.²⁰

Having acknowledged the slight possibility of real possession by the Devil, Feijoo threw himself wholeheartedly into his real objective: to expose the falseness of the majority of the possessed. His Manichaestic zeal in separating true from false was not at all new. Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries many essayists struggled to differentiate true from false astrologers,²¹ authentic alchemists from impostors,²² and even the genuinely poor from the pretenders and the vagabonds,²³ to name just some examples. When Feijoo wrote his treatise on the falsely possessed, a significant work was being disseminated with the express approval of the Benedictine: *El mundo engañado por los falsos médicos* *The world deceived by false doctors*. It was a 1729 Spanish version of a work by Giuseppe Gazola, a doctor from Verona.²⁴ The author of the translation was none other than the very learned Gregorio Mayans y Siscar with whom Feijoo had started a correspondence in 1728.²⁵ In one of his letters, Mayans encouraged the cleric to carry on his work of

'telling the truth to the world, above all in Spain ... without interrupting his most enlightened works, however much the crowds of inopportune idiots may protest'.²⁶ Feijoo himself wrote to Mayans some months after the publication of *El mundo engañado*: 'I think it is wonderful and the translation is superb'.²⁷

This book, praised by Feijoo so enthusiastically, emphasised over and over the need for reason and experience in the search for truth, and likewise the rejection of any principle of authority. The thoughts proclaimed by the Benedictine in his personal struggle were the same. Nonetheless, without detracting from his critical ability, one can say that as a staunch believer, Feijoo applied reason in a limited way and somewhat arbitrarily. Consequently, his unceasing endeavours against what he considered to be superstition lack logical congruity in the strict sense. Conversely, his way of tackling the concept of experience (with that militant empiricism which led him to involve himself personally in several cases of possession) adds a first-class anthropological interest to his work. Both aspects – reason and experience – appear inextricably linked throughout his exposé. Within the complex of impassioned writing the Devil plays a major role as one might expect. Taking as his guide 'both the caution necessary to proceed in this area, and the importance of examining everything with the most attentive reflection',²⁸ Feijoo decided to centre his discourse around 'the chapters indicated by the Roman ritual'.²⁹ The so-called *Rituale Romanum* published in 1614 by Pope Paul V to do away with the enormous variety of criteria which had been used for exorcism throughout the Middle Ages, was considered by the Church as the only recognised authority on all matters relating to possession by the Devil.³⁰ The manual contained three fundamental norms for the recognition of possession by the Devil: speaking or understanding a hitherto unknown tongue; revelation of hidden or remote facts; and finally, demonstrating supernatural powers, although other indications could be taken into consideration at any time.³¹

The signs of possession examined in the *Rituale Romanum* allowed Feijoo to parade his powers of detection regarding the many impostors who passed themselves off as possessed in his own time. Without in any way attacking the doctrinal premises which admitted the possibility of the signs, Feijoo strives to knock down, one by one, each one of the characteristic signs of possession. The best known and most controversial of all of them was the speaking in Latin,³² or the discussion of philosophy without ever having studied it. This belief, well known since the Middle Ages, was associated directly with the melancholic temperament and frenetic states induced by black bile. In 1575, Doctor Juan Huarte de San Juan not only acknowledged the link of such extraordinary capabilities with melancholic illness, but he even went so far as to say that 'speaking frenetically in Latin, without having learnt it in health, demonstrates the harmony induced by Latin to the rational soul'.³³ This possibility was contested, however, by

other doctors, such as the Andalusian doctor, Andrés Velásquez, who in 1585 adamantly declared:

I hold it impossible in good philosophy (although in his *Examen de Ingenuos*, Doctor San Juan uses more paper to prove cases in order to prove his opinion) that any melancholic person can speak Latin, without knowing it, nor philosophise having never learnt how to do so. Because leaving aside authorities which we could bring in from both sides, reason tells us and confirms as true what I am saying.³⁴

Outside of sickness, however, demonic intervention continued to be used to justify any exception: 'And if the frenzied or maniacs start speaking Latin, and philosophise without having hitherto learned how, it is the work of the Devil. And this is the cause to which it is attributable. For God allows this, and upon entering the body of these people, they begin to say the things that others marvel at.'³⁵

Following the line of this tradition of thought, Feijoo did not deny that there were people possessed by the Devil who could speak Latin or hold forth learnedly without having previously studied. Indeed, he stated pragmatically that to be genuinely possessed they ought to express themselves in correct, fluent Latin. This fact, he said, was one which 'exorcists continually lose sight of, for when they hear one word or two by someone who has not studied Latin, they confidently pronounce the person to be possessed'.³⁶ According to Feijoo, one of the excuses which many exorcists invented was that the tongue of the rustic was an inadequate organ for the Devil to articulate Latin perfectly. For the Benedictine this explanation was utter nonsense: 'how stupid! The tongue of the rustic is in every way the same as Cicero's, Virgil's, or Tito Livio's'.³⁷ Nonetheless, his next argument, purportedly rational and sensible, turns out to be even more astonishing:

The Devil can speak perfect Latin, not only with the tongue of any man, but even with one belonging to a beast, just as he used to speak in the days of our forefathers, with a serpent's tongue. And what is more, not just with a beast's tongue. With the leaves of a tree, with the twigs of a tree trunk when he engages with them so that the movements and undulations they make fall upon the ear and seem like Latin clauses; he can produce the same sensation with the very air, moving it as he knows how, without any other instrument.³⁸

The acceptance that the Devil could speak in Latin through the medium of animals, vegetation or the ether itself, was no more than an acknowledgement of the official ecclesiastic doctrine, according to which Satan's powers were practically limitless. With the exception of his inability to create something from nothing, it was supposed that with God's permission, anything, however astonishing, was accessible to the knowledge and cunning of the Devil.³⁹ Yet only in the Benedictine's reasoning did that wise and near omnipotent Devil

appear. In his personal experience, through dealing with those claiming to be possessed, Satan was completely absent and supposedly satanic signs were deliberate falsehoods.

One of the most paradigmatic types of investigation carried out by the monk was his experimentation with a certain woman from Oviedo who was supposedly bedevilled. Convinced of the trickery behind this, he used the comparative example of the sixteenth-century French case of Marthe Brossier. Brossier was a weaver's daughter from Romorantin, who in 1598 exhibited signs of possession and was taken to Paris by her father in the hope of obtaining a cure. She became a sensation in those towns, like Angers and Orléans, where they stopped on their way. On several occasions she was caught out in her deception when lines from Virgil were read to her as if it were a real exorcism. She was fooled by other such tests. She responded wildly when she was doused with what she was told was holy water, and responded similarly when they made her drink ordinary water saying it had been blessed.⁴⁰ Feijoo decided to expose the Oviedo woman in a similar fashion:

In this town of Oviedo there was a poor woman who took on the role of the possessed. They said she spoke Latin when she wanted to, that she knew what was happening throughout the world, that she flew over the tallest treetops. I, comparing cases, reached the conclusion that she was one of the many liars who feign possession by the Devil and once ... I made the priest who was exorcising her bring her to me.⁴¹

It is then that Feijoo responded by countering a deception with another deception:

Under the guise of consoling and inspiring in her the strong hope of a cure, I let her know at the outset that I ... knew much better ways of exorcising than the other priests were using, which the woman believed readily ... I began then my own rituals which were made up of lines from Virgil, Ovid, Claudiano and other poets, just as the Bishop of Angers had done with Marthe Brossier. All these were delivered with ponderous gestures and a strong voice in order to make an impression, which, in fact they did, for my spellbound lady exceeded herself, imitating with increased strength her fury with wild and extravagant gestures.⁴²

As proof that the woman was faking, Feijoo singled out her blatant ignorance of Latin: 'She obeyed all that I said to her, since I did so in Spanish, but when I commanded her in Latin (in which I avoided formulae and common words that the falsely possessed know) the Devil turned deaf.'⁴³ Finally, to establish the falsity beyond all shadow of doubt, the Benedictine availed himself of the trick of the false relic: 'I applied to her a desk key wrapped in paper, as if it were a real relic', before which the supposedly possessed woman shivered and desperately beat against the walls and floor. Feijoo noticed that she did all

this without hurting herself, and being 'entirely convinced of the fraud', he dismissed her.⁴⁴

This was not the only case where Feijoo took an active part in his findings on the controversial object of his discourse. Having focused on the first sign in the *Rituale*, the ability to speak an unknown language, the Benedictine continued to pour forth his warnings concerning other supposedly genuine signs. He warned his readers, using examples from first-hand experience, about the many nonsensical things that passed for miracles. His experimental, open attitude led him to deal, for example, with 'a mad nun' who claimed to know what was happening in distant lands.⁴⁵ He even practised the art of the ventriloquist, giving his voice distant intonations and changing it so that it appeared to come from different speakers – symptoms that were often interpreted as dialogues with devils:

But already some astute physicians have discovered the artifice which consists of articulating words while inhaling; that is at the same time as air is drawn into the lungs ... I tried to see if I could copy it and with great control and effort I managed it not very well; but it meant a troublesome pain in my chest which lasted some hours.⁴⁶

Without actually denying any of the portents attributed to the possessed, Feijoo restated over and over his incredulity based on his own experience:

That business of flying from the street or the pavement to the vault, of placing oneself on tree tops, walking on corn without bending the stalks is said about many bedevilled people when they are spoken of in distant lands. I have seen nothing of the kind to date.⁴⁷

In his meticulous revision of certain supposedly extraordinary gifts which were commonly claimed to be symptoms of diabolic possession, Feijoo included a wide variety of examples, from the case of some blind people who were said to be able to behave as if they were sighted, to those gifted in imitating birdsong to perfection.⁴⁸ This last skill was recognised as a sign of genuine possession by Father Benito Remigio Noydens, the author of the most widespread book of exorcisms in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spain.⁴⁹ However, it was an easy task for Feijoo to expose such impersonators, and he outlined his findings for the benefit of those exorcists who encountered those 'who know how and with what instrument to do so':⁵⁰

Let the exorcist when he comes across one of these people, make him clean out his mouth and spit out all its contents, and he will see, unless it is the devil he spits out, no longer can he imitate birdsong. It is true there are exorcists who are so fanciful that seeing them spit out a bit of leek or cabbage leaf, or some herb or other ... will swear that it is the Devil transformed into what came out of the mouth.⁵¹

These and other investigations confirmed the monk in his scepticism

regarding the vast majority of supposed diabolical interventions. From the tone of his work, the reader is tempted to think that Feijoo, sooner or later, is going to deny the existence of the Devil. After dismissing the supposedly possessed woman from Oviedo, for example, and attacking the persistent credulity of those who continued to defend her as possessed by Satan, Feijoo proclaimed: 'Why should the Devil be interested in tricking me? He knows only too well, *if there is such a Devil*, that I don't need to pursue him ... *since I am convinced that there is no Devil save that of the lies of that woman*, I would kick her out *and leave the Devil alone*.'⁵²

The Devil, who, the Benedictine referred to sarcastically on numerous occasions,⁵³ was used more as a metaphor than a threat. In fact, Feijoo manages to dispense with him in each and every one of his arguments against devils, who, in his opinion, are merely tall stories. In this regard, his flat denial of the association between devils and stinking smokes is significant: 'such smokes are said to be effective in curiously disturbing the devils and during that disturbance reveal them and chase them away'.⁵⁴ Feijoo tells how in his day it was still common practice among many exorcists to burn substances like rue, St John's wort, goat's horn, and even human excrement, to torment and expel evil spirits with the stench: 'this effect happens, they claim, as a result of the vile and stinking smoke; for the Devil, who is extremely proud, suffers the cruellest torture seeing himself ruined and scorned by such incense shakers'.⁵⁵ However, no Devil is necessary, according to Feijoo, to explain the effects of such experiments: 'Any man or woman, if they get disgusting and fetid smoke up their nostrils will be moved, will worry, will struggle and do all they can to move away. Why should it be necessary to resort to the possessive Devil?'⁵⁶ That is the question, which in terms of pure logic, Feijoo himself might ask. But to doubt the real existence of the Devil would mean doubting the basic tenets of a faith, which in the monk's case, allowed no cracks whatsoever. Feijoo resolved his contradictions by defending a Devil so powerful and so negatively shaped by nature that he has no need even to appear:

The Devil, being pure spirit, has no need of any mechanism in the body in order to enter and work within it, nor is there any way which may facilitate or hinder his entrance ... therefore, if he wishes to be there, he will, even if he were incensed by eight hundred carts of St John's wort and rue. He could also get rid of the smoke of the plants and the goat's horn etc. from the nostrils of the patient and direct them to those of the exorcists.⁵⁷

What we must not forget is that despite his incursions into the field of demonology,⁵⁸ what Feijoo maintained throughout his discourse was not a theological question, but a social problem that worried him greatly. From his point of view, all those falsely possessed people, whose ruses he was trying to expose, represented a grave danger to the common good. This was, in the

first instance, because of their very parasitical and passive indolence. He described them as 'lazy, vagabond types who waste some priests' time, usurp alms and abuse them and terrorise householders and neighbours'.⁵⁹ But even more so, he was critical of the excessive liberty and vengeful behaviour that such impostors enjoyed with impunity due to their possessed state. In a sense, they were protected by the spirits that controlled them, and were therefore not responsible for their acts:

The deception in this matter is very serious ... Just consider that a falsely possessed person ... is a person who, with no risk to himself, enjoys total freedom to commit as many crimes as he feels like. He can kill, take away honour, steal, burn down villages and cornfields; in fact launch himself into whatever violence he fancies. He knows no one can touch a hair of his head because all is cloaked with the imagination that the Devil did it all ... Could there be a more pernicious kind of person in the world?⁶⁰

In fact, Feijoo implicitly answers this question himself. Despite his heavy tirades against those who paraded as possessed, Feijoo reserved his most ferocious attacks for those he called 'vulgar exorcists', whom he considers to be those truly responsible for the abuses he reported. It was those same priests, he stated, who encouraged the belief in possession by the Devil. They were guided by vanity and greed, for during the middle of the eighteenth century the spectacle of exorcism still pulled in the crowds:

The exorcists themselves ... are often the perpetrators of these and other tricks. Some minor clerics who have nothing else to boast of save their exorcising skills ... Nearly all those who are involved in exorcism are mainly interested in convincing others that they are exorcising the truly possessed. This makes their office seem extremely important to the public. It also renders it more respectable and possibly more lucrative. Should it be the case that greed is not a motive, then vanity surely is.⁶¹

Once again, we are dealing with a differentiation between the good and the bad, in this case among the ministers of the Church, since according to the Benedictine, such exorcists were merely those who lacked the gifts that would make them loved and respected by the people.⁶² It was noteworthy, he observed, 'that very rarely indeed (I never saw it myself) is it the case that among anyone, either priest or layman, respected in the villages for his virtue and knowledge should dedicate himself to exorcism'.⁶³ Nevertheless, alongside these clerics who in his eyes were despicable, Feijoo also addressed himself to all those ignorant doctors who, when faced with illnesses they could not diagnose, hid their incompetence behind the easy alternative of possession by the Devil:

Unusual illnesses scarcely ever get taken for anything other than witchcraft or possession. The biggest blame for this lies generally with ignorant doctors, who, when they come across symptoms they have not met in the few books

they have read, and failing to find the cause or the cure, blame the Devil, and call upon the Church to assist them.⁶⁴

As was indicated at the beginning of the chapter, Feijoo acknowledged three kinds of possession: genuine, feigned and imaginary. Despite the fact that the bulk of his essay was aimed at combating the second kind – ‘to tell the truth about common misconceptions’, as the title of the general work that contained the essay was called, the part which dealt with what he described as ‘imaginary’ possession is particularly interesting. Here we find what can be considered as the existing medical interpretation concerning the phenomenon of possession at that time. According to the Benedictine, whether out of ignorance or by mistake, certain illnesses were often mistaken for possession. Among them, there were three in particular: hysteria, melancholy and epilepsy. In fact the root of the connection of these ailments with diabolic possession dates back to classical antiquity, though the link was maintained right up to the ‘Age of Reason’.⁶⁵

One of the myths associated with this pathological vision of possession was the higher incidence of these illnesses in women. According to Feijoo, ‘in the uterus of woman there is undoubtedly hidden the core of illnesses’.⁶⁶ However, once again, the Benedictine tries to take a step beyond tradition, and in an effort to rationalise the fact that in the gospels there are more male possessed, he queried:

I shall set you a problem which will tax you greatly. In the gospels there are more male than female possessed persons. I have studied this in depth. How then is it that nowadays everywhere there are more female possessed persons than male, so much so that for every possessed of our gender there are a hundred of the opposite sex?⁶⁷

In answering it, he adopted a stance as ingenious as it was original. His response was obviously directed towards a primarily male readership, and had to exclude any diabolical intervention. For the Benedictine there was no basis in the consistent belief that the Devil penetrated women more easily because of their nature. This was not because there was no Devil though, but because, ‘For the Devil there is no . . . temperament or physical disposition which may or may not allow his entry. If he finds not the slightest difficulty in penetrating marble and bronze, why should he not do so with the flesh, bones, nerves, membranes and hearts of the most robust man?’⁶⁸ The solution to the problem, then, was rooted not in a misogyny based on the female physiology, but rather on a psychology which attributed to them all sorts of weaknesses. For a while Feijoo seems to deny this accusation in a gesture of modernity,⁶⁹ but a little further on we see how he embraces it entirely, even taking it for granted that women were, ‘weaker-brained and of more vivid imagination, attributes which make it easier for them to believe they are possessed. This was seen already in two convents . . . What could that be

blamed on if not the weakness of the brain, fertility of imagination and a lesser spirit?'⁷⁰

Despite these findings, however, Feijoo, in a pseudo-sociological consideration of the reasons for the predominance of women amongst the possessed, concluded triumphantly that if there were more male possessed than females in Christ's time, it is because they were genuinely possessed. On the other hand, in his day, where the majority of the possessed were fakes, the predominance of women was due to the advantages to be gained from feigning possession, given their dependent state and lack of freedom:

The real solution to the problem is that the possessed whom Christ cured were really just that ... Women, usually, are more interested in fiction than men because their freedom to wander is so much more limited. This they greatly yearn for and the only recourse they have to achieve it is through feigning possession. Indeed, the falsely possessed women achieve this well, not only because with the excuse of seeking cures at different shrines and from different exorcists do they roam the land, but much more than that, because they can leave their house at any time and go anywhere. They are immune because the Devil leads them against their will.⁷¹

Although completely removed from our present-day sensibilities, it could be said that these findings contained some of the keys to the complex phenomenon of possession by the Devil, which rather than a deliberate deceit, as Feijoo appeared to maintain throughout his work, carried on being an effective mechanism for liberation, whether on an individual basis or collectively. Still in the midst of the eighteenth century, possession, which can be understood as a special language,⁷² allowed an escape from an unbearable set of responsibilities and frustrations that built up in women who found themselves in an oppressive milieu. Calling themselves possessed by the Devil meant a unique opportunity for them to escape their many responsibilities, cut loose and allow themselves otherwise unavailable freedoms.⁷³

To be effective the language of possession had to imply certain communal agreements, more so than individually preconceived arguments aimed at serving specific interests. Only in this way could the attitudes of the family and neighbours of the possessed, who continued to accept the imaginary struggle with invading demons, be understood.⁷⁴ The easy contagion between various bedevilled persons to which Feijoo alluded in his discourse, along with the characteristic gestures of possession, were only signs of this shared language:

A woman ... without being spellbound or having any Devil in her body, and also without wishing to pretend, will start to make the same gestures, emit the same shouts, show the same terror, move with the same twists and turns as she has witnessed in other possessed people. Why? Because her rough and ready way of conceiving things make her think that being possessed and

being exorcised she ought to do the same things as the others do in those circumstances.⁷⁵

The understanding of possession as a language or cultural expression typical of popular culture would take many years to appear.⁷⁶ In the middle of the eighteenth century, Feijoo's worth did not stem from his scientific knowledge or his cogent arguments, nor even his unstinting fight against what he considered to be superstition, but in his open and experimental approach to new kinds of understanding. His stance as a believer who allowed himself to doubt and call into question the myths of his time, his 'moderate scepticism'⁷⁷ as he termed it, situates his work in a line of humanist thinking deeply rooted in Spanish culture. Just as the scepticism of the Grand Inquisitor, Alonso de Salazar y Frías had led him to believe in 1612 that there were no witches in Navarre or the Basque Country until people began dealing with them,⁷⁸ almost a century and a half later Feijoo would state with total conviction: 'There do not appear to be any possessed people except where there are gullible people who say there are.'⁷⁹

Notes

- 1 Translated by Mary O'Sullivan. The cost of translation was kindly funded by the Department of Humanities, University of Hertfordshire.
- 2 Report from the Inquisitor of the Logroño tribunal, Alonso de Salazar y Frías, to the Supreme Council of the Inquisition relating to the witches of Zugarramurdi who appeared in the Auto de Fe in Logroño in 1610, entitled 'Letter about the outcome of the Visit and the Edict of Grace' (24 March 1612). Archivo Histórico Nacional de Madrid, Book 797, fol. 16r. See Gustav Henningsen, *The Witches' Advocate: Basque Witchcraft and the Spanish Inquisition* (Reno, 1980).
- 3 Benito Jerónimo Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', in *Teatro Crítico Universal or Discursos varios en todo género de materia, para desengaño de errores comunes*, vol. 8, Discurso Sexto (Madrid, 1739).
- 4 See Gaspard Delpy, *L'Espagne et l'esprit européen. L'Oeuvre de Feijoo (1725–60)* (Paris, 1936); Richard Herr, *The Eighteenth-Century Revolution in Spain* (Princeton, 1969); Jean Sarrailh, *L'Espagne éclairée de la seconde moitié du XVIII^e siècle* (Paris, 1954) and Cirilo Flórez Miguel, *La Filosofía en la Europa de La Ilustración* (Madrid, 1998).
- 5 See 'Demoniacos', in Agustín Millares Carlo (ed.), *Obras escogidas del P. Fray Benito Jerónimo Feijoo y Montenegro* (Madrid, 1961), p. 7.
- 6 On the concept of the *vulgo* in Feijoo see Ivy L. MacClelland, *Benito Jerónimo Feijoo* (New York, 1969), pp. 19–22 and Andrés Martínez Lois, *El Padre Feijoo. Naturaleza, hombre y conocimiento* (A Coruña, 1989), pp. 91–3.
- 7 See Juan Marichal, 'Feijoo y su papel desengañador de las Españas', in idem, *La voluntad de estilo* (Madrid, 1971), pp. 145–8.
- 8 See Eduardo Subirats, *La Ilustración insuficiente* (Madrid, 1981), pp. 41–9.
- 9 About the need of revelation for the fullness of knowledge, Feijoo had shown himself to be adamant in another of his discourses: 'There are two constants in the sphere of understanding: Revelation and Demonstration. The rest is full of twisting opinions, occurring at will from inferior minds. Whomsoever neglects to

- follow those two points, or one of them, according to the hemisphere he sails through ... will never reach the haven of Truth' (*Teatro Crítico Universal*, vol. 1, discourse 1, 5).
- 10 As Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark maintain, 'we should not be misled by the language used by the Enlightenment crusaders against witchcraft and magic ... To believe too much in witchcraft might have some credulous superstition; but to believe too little in it could still carry the risk of atheism.' See Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (eds), *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London, 1999), p. x.
- 11 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 8.
- 12 'Those who in this way are for Authority against Reason, do so out of religious respect, towards that or those doctors who support their opinion ... In those centuries of decadence in learning men studied the little they did study through the Pythagorus method. They did not examine Reason; they only heeded Authority ... Any ruling, opinion or maxim found in a famous author was embraced as an irrefutable truth.' *Cartas Eruditas*, vol. 11 (Madrid, 1745), p. 225.
- 13 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 38.
- 14 As well as his many readings on Theology and Church History, Feijoo was familiar with authors as significant as Bacon, Boerhaave, Bossuet, Boyle, Corneille, Descartes, Erasmus, Fénelon, Fontenelle, Gassendi, Kircher, LaBruyère, Leibnitz, Molière, Montaigne, Montesquieu, Muratori, Newton, Pascal, Racine, Rousseau, or Voltaire. See MacClelland, *Benito Jerónimo Feijoo*, pp. 31–40.
- 15 See Marie-Hélène Cotoni, *L'exégèse du Nouveau Testament dans la philosophie du dix-huitième siècle* (Oxford, 1984), and Marie-Hélène Froeschlé-Chopard, 'Religion', in Vincenzo Ferrone and Daniel Roche (eds), *Diccionario histórico de la Ilustración* (Madrid, 1998), pp. 197–205.
- 16 Robert Bayle, *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Rotterdam, 1997).
- 17 Augustin Calmet, *Commentaire littéral sur tous les livres de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Testament*, 23 vols (Paris, 1707–16).
- 18 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 38.
- 19 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 39.
- 20 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 39.
- 21 'De la falsa astrología' was the title of chapter 111 of the Second Part of the *Reprovação de supersticiones y hechizerías* [*Condemnation of superstition and witchcraft*] written by Pedro Ciruelo around 1530. This famous theologian and mathematician from the University of Salamanca had stood out in Spain for his defence of what he considered to be real astrology, within the great argument of the topic that took place in Spain from the end of the fifteenth until the middle of the sixteenth century.
- 22 In *El toque de alquimia* [*The touch of alchemy*], a brief treatise composed in the Escorial in 1593, the Irishman Richard Stanyhurst offered some 'signs' with which to tell the real alchemist from the 'sophisticated prankster'. See María Tausiet, 'El toque de alquimia: un método casi infalible dedicado a Felipe II by Richard Stanyhurst', in Javier Campos (ed.), *La ciencia en el monasterio del Escorial* (San Lorenzo del Escorial, 1994), pp. 527–58.
- 23 See Cristóbal Pérez de Herrera, *Discurso del amparo de legítimos pobres y reducción de los fingidos* (Madrid, 1608).
- 24 Giussepe Gazola, *El mundo engañado por los falsos médicos ... Obra póstuma traducida fielmente del toscano* (Valencia, 1978).
- 25 See Antonio Mestre Sánchis, *Ilustración y reforma de la Iglesia. Pensamiento político y religioso de Don Gregorio Mayans y Siscar, 1699–1781* (Valencia, 1968); Mestre Sánchis, *El mundo intelectual de Mayans* (Valencia, 1978).

- 26 Letter from Mayans to Feijoo dated 18 August 1728. Quoted in Vicente Peset Llorca, *Gregori Mayans i la cultura de la il. Lustració* (Barcelona, 1975), p. 397.
- 27 See Peset Llorca, *Gregori Mayans*, p. 398. For subsequent differences of opinion between Mayans and Feijoo, see Agustín Millares Carlo, 'Feijoo y Mayans', *Revista de Filología Española* 10 (1923), 57–62.
- 28 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 17.
- 29 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 17.
- 30 The *Rituale Romanum*, which still operates today, believed to be the definitive authority in questions of diabolic possession, was edited in four books of ritual from the sixteenth century: the *Castellani Liber Sacerdotalis* (1523), the *Sacerdotale Romanum* (1554), the *Rituale of Cardinal Julio Antonio Sanctorio* (1575) and the *Ordo Baptizandi* (1575). See Herbert Haag, *El Diablo. Su existencia como problema* (Barcelona, 1978), p. 330.
- 31 'In primis, ne facile credat aliquem a daemónio obsessum esse; sed nota habeat ea signa, quibus obsessus dignoscitur ab iss, qui vel atra bile, vel morbo aliquo laborant. Signa obsidentis Daemonis sunt, ignota lingua loqui pluribus verbis, vel loquentum intelligere: distantia et oculata patafacere; vires supra aetatis, seu conditions naturam ostendere, & id genus alia, quae, cum plurima concurrunt, majora sunt indicia', in *Rituale Romanum Pauli V Pont. Maximi jussu editum cum cantu Toletano et appendice ex Manuali Itidem Toletano* (Madrid, 1831), pp. 387–8.
- 32 In spite of the fact that the *Rituale Romanum* did not specify 'the unknown language' in which the truly possessed should speak, sources generally referred to Latin, the language of culture, which supposedly was inaccessible to the illiterate majority through ordinary means.
- 33 Juan Huarte de San Juan, *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias, donde se muestra la diferencia de habilidades que ay en los hombres* (Baeza, 1575). See Guillermo Serés (ed.), *Juan Huarte de San Juan. Examen de ingenios* (Madrid, 1989), p. 314.
- 34 Andrés Velásquez, *Libro de la melancolía, en el cual se trata de la naturaleza de esta enfermedad . . . y de sus causas y síntomas. Y el rústico puede hablar latín o filosofar, estando frenético o maniaco, sin primer lo haber aprendido* (Seville, 1585), p. 357. See Roger Bartra, *El siglo de Oro de la melancolía. Textos españoles y novohispanos sobre las enfermedades del alma* (Mexico City, 1998).
- 35 Velásquez, *Libro de la melancolía*, p. 360.
- 36 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 17.
- 37 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 17.
- 38 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 17.
- 39 See Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons. The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 161–78.
- 40 In spite of this the girl and her father carried on their way to Paris where she was examined by five doctors at the insistence of the Bishop. The matter even reached the Paris Parliament, which ordered her to go back to her village and not to leave it again. However, 'among those deceived by Marthe Brossier there was an unwise and fearful abbot' who brought the matter to Rome: 'But eventually she was discovered and the comedy rapidly turned to tragedy, and the duped abbot died of grief and Marthe and her father, abandoned and scorned by everybody, remained in the poorhouse.' See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', pp. 11–12, and also M. Marescot, *Discours véritable sur le fait de Marthe Brossier de Romorantin, pretendue demoniaque* (Paris, 1599). A second famous case of possession to which Feijoo also refers in his seventh discourse of vol. IV in his *Teatro Crítico Universal*, relates in graphic detail the events surrounding the famous possession of the convent in Loudun in 1634. See also Michel de Certeau, *La Possession du Loudun* (Paris, 1990); Gabriel Legué and Georges de la

- Tourette (eds), *Jeanne des Anges. Autobiographie d'une hystérique possédée* (Grenoble, 1990); D. P. Walker, *Unclean Spirits: Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the Late Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1981).
- 41 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 18.
- 42 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 18.
- 43 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 18.
- 44 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 18.
- 45 Feijoo alludes to a nun in the Benedictine convent of Santa María de la Vega, to whom he had referred in his second discourse of the sixth volume of his *Teatro Crítico Universal*, and who he himself decided to expose to prove that her supposed visions were pure coincidences with nothing remarkable about them.
- 46 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 25.
- 47 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 21.
- 48 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', pp. 21–3.
- 49 Benito Remigio Noydens, *Practica de exorcistas, ministros de La Iglesia en que con mucha erudicion, y singular claridad, se trata de la instruccion de los exorcismos para lançar y ahuyentar los demonios y curar espiritualmente todo genero de maleficios y hechizos* (Barcelona, 1675). Noyden's phrase, in which he refers to Feijoo, actually stated: 'Algunos hay que remedan con tal arte y artificio las voces de los animales, que parecen paxaros enjaulados' ['there are those who imitate so skilfully animal noises that they seem like caged birds']. p. 15.
- 50 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 23.
- 51 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 23.
- 52 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 19. The italics are mine.
- 53 'Surely this Devil (to borrow Quevedo's wit) does not know what devilry he is making', 'I am convinced that that Devil is very stupid' (see 'Demoniacos').
- 54 See 'Demoniacos', p. 31.
- 55 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 32.
- 56 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 32.
- 57 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 33.
- 58 At one point, Feijoo even gets to talk about preternatural causes, as a possible way of interpreting certain claimed symptoms of possession: 'If one were to see a possessed person jump up from the street to the roof of a fairly tall building; if a slight woman were to effortlessly manage a weight of thirty or forty loads, or were to do similar things to these, no doubt we would attribute this to preternatural causes.' See 'Demoniacos', p. 21. For distinctions between the concepts of natural, preternatural and supernatural, see Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 259–80.
- 59 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 8. For ideas on the poor and vagabonds see Jean-Pierre Gutton, *La société et les pauvres en Europe (XVIe et XVIIIe siècles)* (Paris, 1974), and Ole Peter Grell, Andrew Cunningham and Jon Arrizabalaga (eds), *Health Care and Poor Relief in Counter-Reformation Europe* (London and New York, 1999).
- 60 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 8.
- 61 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 10.
- 62 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 10.
- 63 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 10.
- 64 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', pp. 24–5.
- 65 See Raymond Klibansky, Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl, *Saturno y la melancolia estudios de historia de la filosofía de la naturaleza, la religión y el arte* (Madrid, 1991); Jean Céard (ed.), *La folie et le corps* (Paris, 1985); Jean Céard, 'Folie et démonologie au XVIe siècle', in *Folie et déraison à la Renaissance*, Colloque International (Brussels, 1976); Matthew Ramsey, 'Magical Healing, Witchcraft and Elite Discourse

- in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century France', in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, Hilary Marland and Hans de Waardt (eds), *Illness and Healing Alternatives in Western Europe* (London and New York, 1997), pp. 14–37; Mary Lindemann, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1999), and Erik Midelfort, *A History of Madness in Sixteenth Century Germany* (Stanford, 1999).
- 66 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 35.
- 67 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', pp. 39–40.
- 68 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 40.
- 69 'Women, they say, are more inclined to fury, to terror, to sadness, to despair and the evil spirit finds a certain allure or seduction in these passions. All this is so much hot air, and the things they relate about this one and that one, when she had a terrible fright that the devil was in her, is all rubbish.' (Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 40). We must remember that Feijoo had written an essay entitled 'Defensa de las mujeres' ('In Defence of Women'), in *Teatro Crítico Universal*, vol. 1, 16. However, in this, the female traits that are highlighted, in contrast to the masculine strength, constancy and wisdom are beauty, subservience and simplicity.
- 70 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 40.
- 71 Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 40.
- 72 See Michel de Certeau, 'Le langage alteré. Le parole de la possédée', in idem, *L'écriture de l'histoire* (Paris, 1978), pp. 249–73.
- 73 See Midelfort, *History of Madness*, pp. 49–79, and Clark, *Thinking with Demons*, pp. 389–422.
- 74 See Judith Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind. French Peasants and the Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1987), pp. 120–39 and María Tausiet, *Los posesos de Tosos. Brujería y justicia popular en tiempos de revolución* (Zaragoza, 2002).
- 75 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 37.
- 76 See Ankarloo and Clark, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, p. xii. In Spain, the backlash against Feijonian criticism appeared by the end of the eighteenth century. For example, José Cadalso asserted, in an ironic paragraph dedicated to the Benedictine, regarding fairies and other characters of popular mythology, 'I have ... a treatise just nearing completion against the archcritic Feijoo, with which I prove to the contrary of his most holy and enlightened that cases of fairies, witches, vampires, goblins and phantoms, all of which are genuine, having been claimed by people of good faith, like child nurses, grandmothers, old people and other such authorities, are very common.' José Cadalso, *Cartas Marruecas* (Barcelona, 2000), pp. 163–4.
- 77 Feijoo defended a 'moderate' or 'mitigated' scepticism, as opposed to what he called 'rigid' or 'absolute' scepticism. ('Rigid scepticism is an extravagant madness; moderate scepticism is wise caution'), *Teatro Crítico Universal*, vol. III, discourse 13, 1. In 1725, a year before starting *Teatro Crítico*, the Benedictine had publicised his first public work about scepticism (*Apología del escepticismo medico, en defensa de la Medicina escéptica* by Martín Martínez), returning to the theme later in discourse 13 of vol. III of the *Teatro Crítico*, dedicated to *Escepticismo filosófico (Philosophical Scepticism)*. See Arturo Ardao, *La filosofía polémica de Feijoo* (Buenos Aires, 1962), pp. 106–227.
- 78 See Alonso de Salazar y Frías, *Carta sobre las cosas que han resultado de la visita y el edicto de gracia*, Archivo Histórico Nacional de Madrid, Libro 795, fol. 16r.
- 79 See Feijoo, 'Demoniacos', p. 42.

Responses to witchcraft in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sweden

The aftermath of the witch-hunt in Dalarna

Marie Lennerstrand

The witch-hunts of the early modern period must have left a profound mark on many local communities. The intense trials and executions which took place during the second half of the seventeenth century were dreadful events that touched many people. All those involved, from the accused and the witnesses to the judges and the clergy, had to make decisions that changed and even ended people's lives. Other people too must have remembered the accusations, and felt the fear and hatred for a long time afterwards. Those involved had families, neighbours and friends who were, at the very least, emotionally affected by the proceedings. Moreover, such events were difficult not only for individuals but also for local societies as a unit. In a time when unity, neighbourliness and harmony were meant to characterise a good Christian society, the disorder that a large-scale witch-hunt created was especially threatening.

So what happened in a community following a witch-hunt? In the years that followed people had to go on living together. But what became of them? Were the accused witches who had not been executed reintegrated into the local society, or were they forever witches in the eyes of their neighbours? What relationship did the accusers have to the people they had accused, or the families of those who had been executed? Did the witch accusations go on in some other form? Were new conflicts created instead? The issue of the aftermath is important because witch-hunts did not begin or end with the trial proceedings. There was usually a long history of related events following a trial as well as leading up to it. In this context it is important to question both the ways in which local society affected a witch-hunt and how the witch-hunt altered the lives of everybody involved.

In the historiography of witchcraft it has been recognised that the background and the relationships between the involved parties in a witch-hunt were determining factors for how things would turn out. Even if accuser and accused had not been involved in face-to-face conflicts before the accusations were made, certain patterns can be detected in how the witch-hunt

developed. Of course, there is no way of exactly predicting who would be accused, when or by whom, and different researchers have different opinions about which determining factors were the most important. Yet the evidence shows that accusations were not made completely at random. Instead they were deeply embedded in the everyday relations between people in local societies.¹ Another factor revealed by previous research is the importance of continuity. Witch-accusations were not isolated events. When supposed witches were brought to trial it sometimes became evident that there had been suspicions and rumours about them for several years, in some cases decades, before the accusations reached the court.² In this context, historians' neglect of the aftermath of a witch-hunt is surprising. The events following a witch-hunt are of no less importance in terms of understanding the social significance of witchcraft than what came before or during it. In fact, in many cases the aftermath can probably shed light on events that took place earlier, and help explain why or how the witch-hunt itself came about.

One reason why post-trial aftermath has not received much attention is the difficulty of finding relevant source material. Quite often what we know about a witch-hunt is limited to the records of the courts that handled the case, and they naturally do not include events that took place after the trials. Information about the accused witches and their families is not always available, and in some unfortunate but not too rare instances not even the full name of an accused witch is known. But in some cases the conditions are better, and as some researchers have shown, it is sometimes possible to map out the lives of the persons involved in considerable detail. This has been done for instance in a number of studies of the Salem trials of 1692, in which the aftermath of the witch-hunt has actually received some attention even if it has not been thoroughly researched.³ When it comes to Sweden the conditions for studying post-trial histories are quite good. Even though some archives have been lost, there is plenty of information about both the accused witches and their accusers, particularly in parish population registers and local court records. These make it possible to gather enough information to build a quite detailed picture of the lives of the relevant individuals.

This article is part of an ongoing research project directed by the author and Linda Oja,⁴ focusing on the major Swedish witch-hunt that took place in the county of Dalarna 1668–71.⁵ The first trials and also the first executions were held in 1669, followed by two more years of frequent and intense accusations and prosecutions resulting in no less than forty-seven executions. We are concentrating on the process of social and communal normalisation after such a big witch-hunt, or rather whether communities were able to settle back to their pre-trial pattern. What kind of relationships did those tried but not executed, their families, those of the executed, and their accusers have in the years after the trials? Another important aspect of the aftermath is how local society, as a unit, dealt with this severe disturbance

to social relationships. What measures was it necessary to take before order was restored again? To examine these questions I shall deal mainly with one part of Dalarna, the parish of Rättvik, one of five parishes where trials were held at the time.

Witch trials were hardly unknown in this part of Sweden, but the previous trials differed significantly from what happened in 1669–71. To begin with, the scale of the witch-hunt was previously unheard of. In the parish of Rättvik around sixty people were put on trial accused of witchcraft, and more than 500 children testified against them. The involvement of such large numbers of people is extraordinary considering that the population of the parish numbered less than 3000. Likewise, in the neighbouring parish of Leksand with just over 4000 inhabitants, around 130 men and women were accused as witches, and there were around 500 witnesses.⁶ Other differences compared to earlier cases concern the witnesses and the accusations. Central to this witch-hunt was that children, or at least young persons, were the main accusers. Some of them were very active as witch-finders and proclaimed themselves to be witch apprentices, while others took on the role of the innocent bewitched. Almost all the witch accusations started in the same way: children who said they were abducted during the night and brought to the witches' sabbath accused their abductors of being witches. Some of them also gave details about the sabbath, including the identity of witches and children they had seen there.⁷ The alleged witches were older than their accusers, but not all of them were elderly. Instead they varied in age from the late teens up to over sixty years old.⁸ The main accusation made during the trials was that the accused had brought local children with them to Blåkulla, a notorious fictional place where it was widely believed witches held their sabbath with the devil. This kind of accusation was not entirely new in Dalarna. In a few trials before the main 'hunt', such as in Älvdalen (1664) and Lima (1665–66), the sabbath had also been mentioned in court. Never before, however, had the accusation been so frequent or spread in such epidemic proportions.

After almost three years of accusations, trials and executions the Dalarna trials died out, though in the years that followed the witch-hunts spread to several other counties in the northern half of Sweden, before finally coming to end in Stockholm in 1676. They finished in dramatic fashion, with some of the children who had acted as semi-professional witch-finders being exposed as liars and frauds, and subsequently punished. This unravelling of events did not, however, benefit those already convicted and executed for witchcraft. In the years between 1669 and 1676 somewhere between 275 and 300 persons were executed, forty-seven of them in Dalarna.⁹

Compared to most other parts of Europe, this witch-hunt occurred quite late in time. Maybe because of this, even before the witch-finders were exposed in Stockholm in 1676, many people expressed doubts that there was any validity in the witch accusations. This was especially true in Rättvik, when

the witch-hunt reached the parish in 1670. Gustaf Duwall, who was the governor of Dalarna, claimed that it was impossible to know who was guilty and who was not, while the bishop suggested that people had imagined or dreamed up some of the amazing activities attributed to the accused. At the parish level in Rättvik the local clergy, civil servants and also some ordinary people had a hard time deciding what to believe. Even if they admitted that witches were a dangerous reality they were not certain that the women of their own parish really were witches. When the bishop asked the vicar of Rättvik if there was any truth in the accusations about children being brought to the witches' sabbath, or if the whole thing was just some satanic trickery, the vicar responded that he could not give a good answer about 'these dark matters'. He said that some people really believed themselves to be taken away at night, but that the truth was very difficult to find out.¹⁰ Another conundrum for the authorities concerned the action to be taken against those accused. It was suggested both by the clergy and the secular authorities that the solution to the problem lay with prayer and education, especially for the children. Trials and executions were to be a last resort. This circumspection of the secular authorities made them reluctant to deal with the accusations, so they left the clergy in charge of the initial hearings and postponed the trials for almost a year. But pressure from the parents of the afflicted children and the wider public made it impossible to delay things for too long.¹¹

The outcome of these trials was, however, not one that most people expected. In previous trials in the area numerous people had been decapitated and burned, and so people would have confidently assumed that the same result would occur once again. Yet in Rättvik nobody was executed. Of the sixty or so people who were accused of witchcraft the court sentenced only three elderly women to death. Even then there was little risk of these three being executed, because the death sentence was only to be carried out if they confessed. Over the course of a year the three women were questioned repeatedly, and on each occasion they denied having any dealings with the devil, and refuted the accusations made against them. These three women were among the most heavily accused, but equally significant, perhaps, was that all three women had had a long-lasting bad reputation. At least two of them, the sisters Håll Karin and Håll Ingel, were also known as cunning-women. They confessed that they had knowledge about healing, and it was reported by persons from their home villages that they at times had tried to heal men as well as horses and other animals. Both of the sisters seemed to be disliked and feared by other people, and five years earlier Håll Karin had in spite of her own denial been convicted for having used magic to harm one of her neighbours' cows.¹² Twelve other women escaped the death penalty, but received other punishments instead. Some of them had to pay fines, while others were to be put in the stocks in front of the church on two Sundays. These women were, however, not convicted of witchcraft but for other minor

offences such as being quarrelsome or having sought the aid of cunning-folk. Of the remaining forty people accused the court ruled that they were to be sentenced by God. In practice, this meant that they were free to go, but if any other evidence ever came up against them, their case could be reopened and they could then be punished by death. Although no legal proof had been found that these people were witches, they were not entirely acquitted either. They headed back to their communities without their names being properly cleared.¹³

Besides the sentences passed over the accused witches, some of the witnesses were also punished for making false accusations. Five years before the defining exposure of witch-finders and false-accusers in Stockholm, something similar happened in Rättvik. About twenty young men and boys who had acted as witch-finders or who had told stories that the court had found too fanciful, were flogged in public or received other similar punishments.¹⁴ This exposing of mendacious witnesses did not, however, make the judges doubt all of the given testimonies, at least not openly. But perhaps the knowledge that not all of the witnesses had been telling the truth made the judges careful enough not to pass out death sentences that would actually be carried out. In Rättvik, then, more people were punished for lying about witch-accusations than were actually punished as witches. This must have created some confusion among the inhabitants of the parish. The crucial question of the existence of witches in Rättvik had not been given a satisfying answer. Instead the normal order had been turned upside down. The outcome of the trials posed even more questions for the people of Rättvik. Was it the accusers and not the witches who were most responsible for all the pain and suffering? Were any of the accused persons really a witch? Or had the witches somehow deluded the judges and been set free so that they now could go on with their evil doings and continue to torment innocent children?

Many people in Rättvik obviously did not share the sceptical attitude of the authorities towards the witch-accusations. It was reported that many of the parents of the afflicted children were adamant about what had happened and who was to blame. For them the outcome of the trials must have been something of a nightmare scenario. If the witches had been executed they would have been rid of their enemies, but as this did not happen, the witches remained in the local society where everybody had to deal with the fear and anger that had built up in the previous years. To this another hostility must be added – that of the previously accused persons and their families towards the witnesses. The pranks and stories of the testifying youngsters could have cost several persons their lives, and the fear and anxiety experienced by the accused in the months running up to the trial must not have been easily forgotten.

Rättvik, like most of seventeenth-century Sweden, was an agricultural community. There were no cities or large towns in this quite poor part of

Dalarna, and most of the population lived in villages scattered around Lake Siljan. During the second half of the century the area was quite densely populated, though, and the farms often did not produce enough to support all its inhabitants. The conditions for agriculture were rather poor compared to other regions of Sweden, and there were many years when the harvest failed and people starved. It became common, therefore, for people to leave Rättvik and work somewhere else for part of the year.¹⁵ If we see the aftermath of the trials against this background, it becomes clear that in some ways it seems that the lives of those involved did not change very much despite what had happened. Very few of them matched the stereotypical poor beggar-woman before the trials, and they did not descend to that state through ostracism afterwards either. Instead they seem to have been quite average people who paid their taxes as they should, and even if they were not the richest in their village, they definitely were not poor outcasts either.¹⁶ Most of the young women who had been accused of witchcraft subsequently married and had children. One of them, Brita Jonsdotter, married only a few months after the trials, while the others did the same just one or a few years later.¹⁷ Almost all of them belonged to solid households and remained firmly rooted in their home village. They did not try to start a new life elsewhere, where the accusations made against them were unknown. Even when, some years later, quite a large number of families from the parish migrated to Swedish Pommerania, in what is now northern Germany, hardly any of the accused were amongst their number.¹⁸

The lives of the accused women and men ostensibly continued very much the same as those around them. But at a more subtle level they were stigmatised by what they had been through. They could work hard for social acceptance through being good wives and mothers who kept a decent household, but to be accepted as good Christians was another matter. So even if village life went on as if nothing had happened, social relations did not get back to normal when it came to the very important religious side of community life. This was evident directly after the trials had ended, as it took some months before the previously accused witches were allowed to go to church again. Before they could do that and, most importantly, take communion, they first had to take part in a special ceremony in the church. They also had to go to hearings with the clergy where they had to demonstrate their knowledge of the scripture and that they knew their prayers.¹⁹ These two occasions very effectively singled out those who had to participate. That some had to take part in these ceremonies proved that there was something wrong with them, even if many of them had not actually been convicted of anything. It clearly indicated that even if they were not witches, they definitely were not good Christians.

In late seventeenth-century Sweden there were several mechanisms for the reintegration of convicted criminals into both the religious and secular

community, with the church playing a key role. It was common for offenders to appear in church before his or her parishioners to express regret for having committed an offence, and thereby assure the community that they were reformed characters. That this was done in public was of importance, because it served both as a punishment and as a warning to others.²⁰ With the accused witches of Rättvik the situation was unusual, as most of them were not convicted criminals, but due to the nature of the accusations made against them, it was still deemed necessary to treat them as if they were. That those found not guilty should have to undergo such an ordeal seems unfair, but it was important. After it was done nobody could formally question their presence in church or at communion. To prove further their deep Christian faith, it seems that many of those tried for witchcraft also donated money to the church and to the poor in the months after the trials. Among them were several of the most heavily accused women and men, including Håll Ingel, who had been one of the three women sentenced to death. It was of course nothing extraordinary for people to do so, but the church records shows that they were much more frequent givers than other parishioners during this period.²¹

There is evidence that these efforts were not enough for others to trust persons who had once been accused as witches as good Christians. It is obvious that the reputation of being a witch was something that stuck with them for many years. Annotations made by the parish clergy in their journal show that several women were accused of witchcraft again. Only a few weeks after the trials in Rättvik there are further complaints about children being brought to Blåkulla by witches. In the months afterwards more accusations followed, aimed at some of the women who had been accused the year before. One such woman was Feel Malin, a soldier's wife from the village of Altsarbyn. In January of 1672, a year after the trials, she was once again accused of being a witch by the parents of two children in her home village. The substance of the accusations levelled at her and other alleged witches was the same as it had been before, that they took children out of their beds at night and forced them to go to the witches' sabbath at Blåkulla.²² One thing was strikingly different, though: this time the accusations were not received in the same manner by the authorities as they had been a year or two earlier. If the local civil servants had been doubtful about what to do with the accusations during the witch-hunt, they now acted with more certainty and subsequently none of these cases were ever tried in court. It was very clear that the era of the witch-hunts was most definitely something of the past in Rättvik. This meant that even if the accusations continued, none of the accused women were prosecuted for witchcraft again. But the fact that people reported their suspicions and accusations to the vicar shows, however, that even if there were no more trials, things were not forgiven and forgotten.

That other people had doubts about the faith of those acquitted is also evident if we look at one important commission of trust for the good Christian, that of being a godparent. During the baptism it was the godparent who renounced the Devil in the place of the child, and in case anything happened to the real parents, it was the duty of the godparents to make sure that the child received a proper Christian upbringing. Quite naturally, these things were hardly seen as suitable for somebody who had been suspected of being a witch, no matter what the verdict of the court. Consequently none of those tried for witchcraft in Rättvik were chosen to act as godparents for at least several years after the trials. But their bad reputations did not rub off on kin relations in this respect. Their husbands and other household members were asked on several occasions to act as godparents.²³ This shows that the existence of a previously accused witch did not exclude the whole household from the community in religious matters.

The study of the aftermath of a witch-trial can provide new insights into the dynamics of accusations and shifting authoritarian responses to accusations. If we only look at the trials in Rättvik in 1671, it appears as if the seemingly enlightened and benevolent attitude of the clergy, and other persons in authority, enabled the accused witches to get off with just a fright. The witch trials in January 1671 had not ended in the same horror in Rättvik as previous trials had in other places, including the neighbouring parishes where a large number of persons had been executed. But a study of the aftermath of this witch-hunt shows it was not really that simple. For the persons who were accused as witches, the witch-hunt did not really end with the trials. After the trials the persons who had been accused as witches went on with their lives, which in many ways probably did not turn out to be very much different from what it would have been if they never had been involved in the witch-hunt. But in some ways it is clear that the witch-hunt had seriously disturbed the relations among the people in the community. Special arrangements were made in order to reintegrate the accused men and women into the religious community. This could restore the peace and harmony of the local society, but at the same time it singled out these people even further. Furthermore, the accusations and the fear and the hatred lingered on for a long time afterwards. Even if there were no more trials, the men and women who had not been convicted by the court did not lose their reputation as witches. They therefore had to live in fear that one day their case would get reopened and then the ongoing accusations could lead to a death sentence. Their status as untrustworthy persons was even further confirmed by the fact that they were singled out as being not good Christians. They were simply people who were not trusted to have the right faith.

The superstitious other

Linda Oja

In 1780, the Swedish merchant Abraham Hülphers (1734–98), wrote in a description of the province of Ångermanland: 'In the past, visions and superstitions caused much confusion in this province and elsewhere. In our enlightened time such things are regarded with contempt and even the famous journeys to Blåkulla and witchcraft are now mentioned without fear, showing the misbelief and confusion of the past.'²⁴ This way of describing witchcraft and magical beliefs was typical of the male 'enlightened' elite of eighteenth-century Sweden. Among many scientists, clergymen, civil servants and other men with a university education, there was a sceptical jargon concerning witchcraft and magic which came under the label of 'superstition',²⁵ and in the following discussion this term will be used in the pejorative sense that it was used at the time. This terminology shows a clear tendency to keep what was identified as superstition at a safe distance, placed within contrasting contexts both temporally and socially. The writers located 'superstition' in past times of dark paganism, shady Catholicism or the 'witch-crazy' seventeenth century. In the learned circles of eighteenth-century Sweden, history was generally understood as a story about improvement,²⁶ and progress was often described by using the common metaphor of light versus darkness.²⁷ Man had moved from the darkness of the heathen times and medieval papism to the light of evangelical faith and the natural sciences. In this division of time into dark and light ages, so-called superstition was of course assigned to the former.

Some 'enlightened' writers talked of an unspecified, superstitious era – of 'ancient times', 'the old days' or 'bygone days'. Even the expression the 'superstitious times' was used.²⁸ However, others were often more exact, with the Reformation frequently being cited as the defining moment when society moved out of the dark ages. This meant crudely contrasting their own Protestant era of enlightenment and reason with a chaotic time when greedy priests and monks deceived people with all sorts of superstitions, and tyrannical popes burned masses of innocent people as witches. The Catholic Church was accused of having suppressed reason in Sweden, and of having pursued a deliberate policy of increasing ignorance and false religion.²⁹ In 1742, for example, the reverend Magnus Sahlstedt wrote of 'the fog of popery' and of 'popish delusion and prejudice'.³⁰ There were also writers who located the temporal boundary between superstition and enlightenment in more recent times, for instance in their own childhood. It was not so important to point

out the exact period as long as superstition was safely deported to a past clearly separated from the present. The crucial point was that superstition ceased to exist; at least it was *almost* gone. The country was largely cleansed of 'pernicious' Catholic influences, and even if some superstition lingered on, it did not really belong to the present but was a relic, a remnant of the past. Furthermore, the superstitious character of the superstition was sometimes questioned. Certainly people maintained some superstitious traditions, it was thought, but they did not take them seriously and they had no real meaning. Overall the prognosis was good; although superstition had not yet completely disappeared, it was definitely on the wane.³¹

The pockets of surviving superstition were sometimes located within specific social groups, namely peasants, sailors, Finns, Saamis, gypsies and vagrants. But again vague blanket descriptions were also used to define who was superstitious, such as the 'ordinary people,' the 'simple-minded crowd' or the 'mob'. This notion of superstition as connected to the lower social strata fits in well with the general seventeenth- and eighteenth-century elite image of peasants and 'common people' as stupid, childish and credulous.³² Women were also often identified as extraordinarily superstitious – an apprehension which was in harmony with the view, common among the male Swedish eighteenth-century elite, of women as being unenlightened, irrational, emotional and busy with thoughtless chatter. Yet there also existed women of high social status who were regarded as intelligent and sensible. A notable example is the Countess Charlotta Taube who was made the very symbol of the Enlightenment struggle against superstitious witch-hunts. The Countess gave judicial and economic help to a group of women from the province of Dalarna who were accused of witchcraft, imprisoned and tortured in 1757. This was the last large witch trial in Sweden, initiated from below and pursued by lower officials, with the support of a conservative bishop. Soon, however, the process was reversed and the torturers were prosecuted instead. Before the trials had even ended, the political and intellectual elite praised Charlotta Taube for her intervention, and several decades later she was still being held up as a beacon of reason and humanity.³³ The example of Taube highlights that the stereotype of the superstitious woman had an important class dimension. The significance of this is also reflected in the use of formulations connecting superstition to 'hags' or 'crones', leading to such terminology as 'hag-fancies', 'the testimony of a superstitious and confused old woman' or 'old wives' tales'. These expressions conveyed an image, not of any female person, but of an old and ugly woman – often but not always socially inferior.³⁴

All these groups mocked, scorned and depicted as stupid and credulous became the 'superstitious other', forming a suitable contrast to the positive self-image of the men who considered themselves enlightened, reasonable and progressive. Members of the elite used their traditions and beliefs as a source of amusement. They were cited as nuggets of entertainment in literature

describing Swedish natural history and popular culture and even in official church records. An attitude of irony and ridicule – sometimes combined with a distanced scholarly interest – was common. Beliefs and customs were variously referred to as trifles, lies, fancies, nonsense and fairy-tales.³⁵ They were collected and studied within a proto-folkloristic tradition, but when such collections were published it was essential to emphasise how they were meant to be regarded.³⁶ One example is the following passage from a book of travels written in the 1740s by the scientist Pehr Kalm: ‘I have not included the views of the common man for the purpose of accepting them but only to amuse the reader and to thus show the darkness of the past. I hope that the reader will attach the same value to them as I do and agree with me that superstition is superstition.’³⁷ This marking of a cultural and social distance towards witchcraft and superstition can be viewed as a part of shaping and strengthening an enlightened identity among parts of the elite. Martin Pott who has analysed the early German and Dutch Enlightenment has previously described this process.³⁸ Witchcraft and superstition were used as components in a negative image, forming an essential opposite to enlightenment. Other important elements of this image were ignorance regarding God and nature, fear, emotionality, belief in authority (as opposed to critical, independent thought), tyranny and despotism.³⁹

However, to be fair one must point out that stereotypical apprehensions of witchcraft and magic also existed among other social groups besides the ‘enlightened’ elite. At the popular level, among peasants, artisans and soldiers, knowledge of witchcraft and magic was often ascribed to people considered different and strange, like Saamis, Finns and vagrants. Actually, it could suffice to name a person a Saami, a Finn or someone coming from the North to indicate that that person was skilled in witchcraft and magic. Whether people labelled thus really were Saami, Finnish or from the North is difficult to elucidate but at least in some events it is obvious that they were not. In a legal case from the small town of Enköping in 1728–29, an itinerant woman named Maria Persdotter Lind was tried for magical healing and other similar services. During the trial Maria revealed that she told people she was a Saami woman to get more customers, a strategy that clearly alluded to the common connection between magical skills and certain social or ethnic groups. The difference between these popular conceptions and those of the elite is that while the latter associated the ‘other’ with superstitious belief in magic, the peasantry made an image of the strangers as having real knowledge of magic.⁴⁰

The secularisation of magical beliefs

An important prerequisite for the essential role of superstition as a ‘counter-concept’ to enlightenment was a certain degree of secularisation. I do not

mean secularisation in the sense of the decreasing influence of the church and the individualisation of religion. The kind of secularisation I have in mind was rather a forerunner to these processes and involved what is sometimes called the 'disenchantment of the world'. More specifically, it meant stressing the difference between natural and supernatural phenomena and redefining the previously supernatural as natural or as purely imaginary. In other words, witchcraft and superstition were disqualified from reality and deported to the marginal regions of delusion and fearful fantasy. One example of this process is found in legislative developments. Towards the end of the seventeenth century legal commentaries on past and present laws began distinguishing between poisoning on the one hand and malevolent magic (witchcraft) on the other. Prior to this period these crimes had been lumped together under the same name (*förgörning*), but now the two were separated and placed in different chapters of the legal code. Magic was specifically labelled as a supernatural phenomenon and poisoning as a specifically natural one. In court both the authorities and ordinary people used these revised definitions in their arguments.⁴¹ This contrast between magic and the natural was often also made clear in other contexts.

There was a trend to examine phenomena and causal connections, which had previously been interpreted supernaturally, with the purpose of revealing them as resulting from natural processes, whether medical, mental or chemical. In other words, what seemed to break the laws of nature was shown really to follow natural laws. Through true knowledge of nature all old misunderstandings would be cleared up.⁴² Journeys to the witches' sabbath were increasingly redefined as fantasies caused by mental or physical illness. In 1746 a young girl in the province of Dalarna accused her master and his family of having had the Devil over for a visit. According to the girl, they had also taken her for a nightly ride through the air. After thorough investigations and interrogations, the local court came to the conclusion that the girl must have dreamed the whole thing 'as she must very well understand that it is impossible for her and other people to fly a mile through the air and then back again'. The court surmised that the heat of the stove had affected the blood in the girl's head, and that this had caused the bad dream. This conclusion was based on the testimony of the girl and others, that the night before the alleged visit and flight, she and her master's son had stayed up late talking by the warmth of the stove.⁴³ Witchcraft as the reason for good fortune was also replaced by an explanation focusing on natural skilfulness. This redefinition was explained by among others the clergyman Jöns Hornaeus (1715–78). He thought that accusations of witchcraft often originated from the fact that some women were extraordinary housekeepers. They were envied and regarded as witches when they really were just good at tending animals, churning, baking and the like. Correspondingly, Hornaeus also reinterpreted suspicions of witchcraft as an explanation for ill fortune.

Untalented housekeepers readily blamed alleged witches for their misfortunes when they really should have blamed their own incompetence.⁴⁴

Knowledge about nature could also be used to examine critically stories about pacts with the Devil. In 1753, a young man called Erik Olsson Ernberg confessed that one night he had met with the Devil and made a pact with him. He was cross-examined extensively about every detail concerning his meeting with Satan and his testimony enabled the court to find inaccuracies in his story. Erik said that he could see what the Devil looked like because the moon was out. However, the court officials consulted a calendar and established that the moon had not been out on that particular night. Thus this voluntary confession was rejected and regarded as based upon an illusion or a dream. The young man protested but could not persuade his judges.⁴⁵ In the courts, this sceptical line of argument was also used to justify and explain acquittals of people accused of witchcraft. This shows that the secularisation tendencies were not just something rhetorical but that they also affected the actual treatment of magic by Swedish authorities.

The above developments did not mean, however, that the Swedish courts became uninterested in taking measures against the use of magic in general. The most common accusations dealt with what was legally termed 'superstition', in other words magic put to benign use, such as for curing diseases, fortune-telling and the recovery of lost property. Prosecutions involving these crimes actually became increasingly common during the eighteenth century, and in most cases the defendant was convicted and punished, usually with a fine or shorter imprisonment.⁴⁶ Charges of superstition were much easier to prove legally than accusations of witchcraft and diabolism, because superstition did not have to produce an effect to be punishable. It was sufficient to have merely performed a magical act. The defendants were also much more willing to confess to superstition than the more serious crimes of witchcraft and diabolism.⁴⁷ A certain degree of secularisation is also discernable in the legal treatment of superstition. Particularly from the end of the seventeenth century onwards, representatives of the courts expressed scepticism regarding the effectiveness of magical ceremonies and the activities of cunning-folk. In several cases from the eighteenth century harmless magic was actually redefined as fraud. This of course implied a sceptical attitude, but it also meant that the crime of superstition changed character from a religious offence against God to a crime directed against the people.⁴⁸

Stereotype versus reality

According to the stereotype, then, the country was finally free – or at least nearly free – from superstition. Yet at the same time, as already mentioned, there was an increase of court cases against superstition in Swedish secular courts. It should be noted, though, that the Church seems to have stopped

dealing with similar cases during the early eighteenth century, probably as a result of changes regarding the areas of responsibility of secular and Church courts.⁴⁹ The peak of the trials concerning popular magic came in the middle of the eighteenth century, and although little research has been done they probably continued a while into the nineteenth century.⁵⁰

In terms of legislation little substantial legal change regarding the crimes of witchcraft and magic took place until the late eighteenth century. A new law of 1734 retained the crimes of witchcraft and magic, while pacts with the Devil continued to be legislated for in an older royal ordinance. It was only in 1779 that the crime of witchcraft was abolished altogether, with reference to its obsolete and unenlightened character. King Gustav III, who formally initiated the legal reform, argued that witchcraft was 'an absurd crime, invented by papist imaginations'. The same year, pacts with the Devil were legally redefined as 'superstition', in other words it was a pernicious but false belief. Subsequent attempts to reach agreements with Satan were to be judged according to the law concerning fortune-telling, magical healing and the like, which remained in legislation until 1864. Not even then was the crime of superstition removed from the law books. Instead, it was reformulated as an economic crime, in other words fraud, and placed in the statute dealing with deception and dishonesty. This paragraph was not removed until 1942.⁵¹

If further evidence were needed for the continuance of magical beliefs and practices, it can be found in the numerous 'collections of superstitions' made by members of the eighteenth-century elite. Amongst clergymen and other local officials, as well as travelling scientists of the Linnaean tradition, it became fashionable to record the manners and customs of 'the people', which in practice meant country folk rather than urbanites. Among descriptions of peasant weddings, folk costumes and Christmas traditions, one often also finds accounts of so-called superstition – sometimes quite extensive and detailed.⁵²

Among these allegedly superstitious people were, as has already been made evident, women. This understanding, too, is contradicted by the legal archive. During the eighteenth century the share of male defendants in court cases concerning magic increased. This can be explained by the fact that the rise in magic trials resulted from an increase in two specific categories: 'superstition' and pacts with the Devil.⁵³ The vast majority of those accused of making pacts with the Devil were men,⁵⁴ while women made up a small majority of those accused of 'superstition'. In southern Sweden, between 1635 and 1754, 43 per cent of defendants in cases of superstition (in other words popular magic and divination) were male, and in a similar sample of 234 legal cases from central Swedish secular and ecclesiastical courts between 1599 and 1779, approximately 42 per cent of the defendants were male. Furthermore, in the latter survey more than 50 per cent of the people accused of being

professional *kloka* or cunning-folk were men.⁵⁵ This category of defendant was treated much more severely than those who were accused of trying magic for their own use, or those prosecuted for merely consulting cunning-folk. The *kloka* were regarded as the serious criminals responsible for promoting superstition and spreading false beliefs across the country.⁵⁶ Contemporary writers commented on this apparent gender distinction. The clergyman Jöns Hornaeus expressed worries about the increasing number of cunning-men in Sweden. In his childhood there had been a cunning-man in every province but now, he thought, there was one in every parish, and soon there would be one in each village. Hornaeus saw the male dominance among the cunning-folk as Satan's way of deceiving new groups of people. Earlier women had been deluded but now men were the targets.⁵⁷ Hornaeus's perception of the increase in male superstition was an exception though, and most of his contemporaries kept referring to superstition as something primarily female.

A third element of the stereotype was the routine-like ascription of superstition to the lower classes or 'the mob'. This connection may seem to be confirmed by the fact that the majority of the defendants in cases of superstition (as well as other kinds of magic) were from the households of peasants, artisans and soldiers.⁵⁸ Yet, at the same time, representatives of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie gladly devoted themselves to animal magnetism, spiritualism, fortune-telling and other similar activities. Especially in the late eighteenth century there was a strong interest for different kinds of mysticism in the higher social strata. This interest was channelled both within the framework of various orders, such as the Masons, and in other forms. The purpose of these activities was often of the same kind as the purpose of the benevolent magic or superstition tried in the courts, in other words the healing of sickness and the acquirement of knowledge about the future.⁵⁹ This elite mysticism was severely criticised by 'enlightened' groups, and the criticism was formulated very much in the same way as that against popular 'superstition'.⁶⁰ Furthermore, it does not seem to have been unusual that the very 'superstitious' ceremonies, for which farmers' wives and fishermen were prosecuted for, such as divination and love magic, were well known and even used by clergymen, the bourgeoisie and noblemen.⁶¹ In conclusion, the heavily emphasised connection between superstition and the common people in the writings of the eighteenth-century Swedish elite did not reflect reality. Nevertheless, the folklorist-romantics of the late eighteenth century reinforced the stereotypical image of superstition as a 'popular' phenomenon. It is the stereotypes formed in this period that still influence our understanding of magic in pre-industrial society today. Often we take for granted that witchcraft and superstition are connected to 'the people', or more specifically 'the country folk', when, actually, witchcraft and superstition seems to have been relatively common in the towns – or so it appears from late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Swedish court cases.⁶²

The purpose of the stereotype

Why was this stereotype so widespread and popular among the 'enlightened' elite? I think it served many purposes. As already mentioned, the stereotyped image of the 'superstitious other' constituted a negative opposite of enlightened goals and ideals. The point was not solely to put the Enlightenment movement and its advocates in a favourable light but also to establish what Enlightenment actually was. The philosophical current was certainly popular but also severely criticised and questioned. By repeatedly and emphatically demonstrating what Enlightenment definitely was not, Enlightenment was defined and described and the enlightened identity of its upholders strengthened. The continuous connection between superstition and certain social groups could also be used to discourage people from devoting themselves to superstition. The aim was hardly to influence the peasant women, old Finns and other groups stereotypically described. The image of the 'superstitious other' was conveyed in writings not often read by such people – writings such as books of travel, autobiographies, descriptions of certain districts and similar texts. Instead, the message was probably intended for the members of the elite, in other words the writers' own social class. According to the 'enlightened' elite, the 'superstitious other' were their inferiors in rank, education and intellect. Thus the threat of being associated with the simple mob, the silly country women or the barbaric Laplanders was presumably thought quite an effective instrument for keeping the elite from trying anything even vaguely superstitious. As different kinds of magic were actually used among the elite, the 'enlightened' writers no doubt felt the need for such a threat. In conclusion, the stereotype was meant to function as 'self-education' or even 'self-disciplining'.

A similar idea has previously been presented by Sigrid Brauner considering the development of the image of the evil witch in Germany during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and by Sofia Ling regarding the understanding of quackery in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Sweden. Both Brauner and Ling have concentrated on the gender aspect. Brauner argues that the image of the witch worked as a symbol of female unruliness, disorder and irrationality and that it was used to discipline both women and men. Men were also considered to harbour the negative, female 'witch characteristics' and thus it was essential to discipline not only the women but also the 'witch' within the men.⁶³ Ling discusses the fact that medical doctors often used expressions like 'the art of old women' or such like when describing so-called quackery. In other words, they depicted the activities of their competitors in the medical field as negatively feminine. This criticism was used against male as well as female 'quacks', and it seems that the attack on quackery was actually aimed more at male than female practitioners. Therefore, Ling regards the tight connection between old women and quackery as

mainly a message to male quacks. Furthermore, she stresses that the stereotype also functioned as a manifestation of the positive qualities of official male medical science.⁶⁴ I find the reasoning of Brauner and Ling most useful but, at least in the case of the 'superstitious other', gender must be combined with other social dimensions to produce an understanding for the role of the stereotype. The 'superstitious old hags' were part of a broader picture where not just female gender but also inferior social class and certain kinds of ethnicity were used as negative elements.

Finally, despite many confident declarations about how the world functioned and many bantering comments about the stupid magical beliefs of the common people, eighteenth-century Sweden was characterised as least as much by hesitation and insecurity as by confidence and certainty regarding natural and superhuman powers. Uncertainty was widespread not least within the elite.⁶⁵ A quotation by a dean, Olof Broman, well exemplifies this: 'It is best to strike the golden mean and neither be too credulous nor too certain but to submit all of it to the Almighty Father in heaven.'⁶⁶ Considering this uncertainty the triumphant exclamations about all superstition being rooted out, or at least marginalised, may also be seen as hopeful self-encouragement. By expressing confidence in the ability of science to constantly increase knowledge and solve problems, and at the same time making fun of 'superstitious' traditions and beliefs, the 'enlightened' elite may have tried to counteract the profound uncertainty, which prevailed. The image of the almost extinct superstitions may even be seen as an optimistic incantation, trying to shape the world according to enlightened ideals.

Notes

- 1 See for instance Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed: The Social Origins of Witchcraft* (Cambridge and London, 1974) and Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York and London, 1987).
- 2 John Putnam Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (Oxford, 1982); Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours: The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft* (New York and London, 1996).
- 3 See for instance Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*; Demos, *Entertaining Satan*; Richard Weisman, *Witchcraft, Magic, and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* (Amherst, 1984).
- 4 The project is funded by the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation.
- 5 For a general overview of Swedish trials in this period see Bengt Ankarloo, 'Sweden: The Mass Burnings (1668–1676)', in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds), *Early Modern European Witchcraft: Centres and Peripheries* (Oxford, 1993), pp. 285–317; P. Sörlin, *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden, 1635–1754* (Brill, 1999).
- 6 Sentences 4/2 1671, Leksand, in C. G. Kröningssvärd (ed.), *Blåkulle-Färderna eller Handlingar om Trolldoms-Väsendet i Dalarne åren 1668–1673* (Stockholm, 1849), part 3, pp. 3–10; Birgitta Lagerlöf-Génetay, *De svenska häxprocessernas utbrottskede 1668–*

1671. *Bakgrund i Övre Dalarna. Social och ecklesiastik kontext* (Stockholm, 1990), p. 98; Lennart Andersson Palm, *Folkmängden i Sveriges socknar och kommuner 1571–1997, med särskild hänsyn till perioden 1571–1751* (Göteborg, 2000), p. 272. The population numbers are for the year 1699, but it can be estimated that they were approximately the same in 1671.
- 7 Lagerlöf-Génétay, *De svenska häxprocessernas utbrottskede*, pp. 121–5.
 - 8 Lagerlöf-Génétay, *De svenska häxprocessernas utbrottskede*, p. 100.
 - 9 Letter from Gustaf Duwall to the government 15 April 1671, *Blåkulle-Färderna*, part 3, pp. 11–14; Emanuel Linderholm, 'De stora trolldomsprocessernas upplösning i Sverige', *Historisk Tidskrift* (Stockholm, 1913), p. 169; Bengt Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, (Stockholm, 1984), pp. 194–214.
 - 10 Letter from Gustav Elvius to bishop Rudbeckius 30 August 1670, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library; Lars Rudenmark, 'Trolldoms – och häxväsendet 1670–1671', in Gunnar Ekström (ed.), *Rättvik, 1:2. Socknen och kommunen* (Västerås, 1967), pp. 153, 156–7. This sceptical attitude was also voiced by the members of the council and the regency for king Charles XI; Bengt Ankarloo, 'Sverige: det stora oväsendet', in Bengt Ankarloo and Gustav Henningsen (eds), *Häxornas Europa 1400–1700* (Lund, 1987), p. 256 (this is the original edition of Ankarloo and Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft*).
 - 11 Ankarloo, *Trolldomsprocesserna i Sverige*, pp. 128–9.
 - 12 Sentences 11–12/1 1671, Rättvik, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 13 Sentences 11–12/1 1671, Rättvik, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 14 Sentences 11–12/1 1671, Rättvik, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 15 Göran Rosander, *Dalska arbetsvandringar före nya tidens genombrott* (Stockholm, 1976), pp. 18–20.
 - 16 Tiondelängder and avkortningslängder, Kammararkivet, Riksarkivet, Stockholm.
 - 17 Vigsellängder and doplängder C:3, Rättviks kyrkoarkiv, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
 - 18 'Hushåll förreste till Pommern och annorstädes ifrån socknen skingrade', Husförhörslängder, AI:1, Rättviks kyrkoarkiv, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
 - 19 Annotations by the clergy in Rättvik 2 February 1671, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 20 Marie Lindstedt Cronberg, *Synd och skam. Ogifta mödrar på svensk landsbygd 1680–1880* (Lund, 1997), p. 268.
 - 21 Räkningar över kyrkans och de fattigas inkomster och utgifter 1670–1671, Räkenskaper för kyrka och fattigvård 1676–96 Lib:2, Rättviks kyrkoarkiv, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
 - 22 Annotations by the clergy in Rättvik 21 April 1671, 24 October 1671, 2 November 1671, 3 November 1671, 12 January 1672, Linderholm 82, Uppsala University Library.
 - 23 Doplängder C:3, Rättviks kyrkoarkiv, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
 - 24 Abraham Abrahamsson Hülphers, *Samlingar til en beskrifning öfver Norrland. Första samlingen om Medelpad 1771 samt fjerde samlingen om Ångermanland 1780* (Umeå, [1780] 1985), p. 43.
 - 25 Linda Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur. Synen på magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige* [Neither God nor Nature. Attitudes towards magic in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sweden] (Stockholm/Stehag, 1999), pp. 93, 259ff.
 - 26 Sten Lindroth, *Svensk lärdomshistoria. Frihetstiden* (Stockholm, 1975), p. 611.
 - 27 About this metaphor see for example Harry Payne, *The Philosophes and the People* (New Haven and London, 1976), p. 3; Margaret Iversen, 'Imagining the Republic: The Sign and Sexual Politics in France', in P. Hulme and L. Jordanova (eds), *The Enlightenment and its Shadows* (London and New York, 1990).

- 28 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 237ff.
- 29 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 238ff.
- 30 Magnus Abraham Sahlstedt, *Stora Tuna i Dahlom och Bergom minnes-döme. Thet är: Utförlig beskrifning och underrettelse om then ort och christlige församling som har namn af Stora Tuna och är belägen i Öster-Dahls Bergslagen* (Falun, [1742] 1955), p. 121.
- 31 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 239ff.
- 32 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 243ff.
- 33 See Marianne Särman, *Charlotta Taube och den sista häxprocessen. Ett 1700-tals drama i flera akter* (Stockholm, 1996).
- 34 *Svenska Akademiens ordbok över svenska språket*, vol. 15, Lund 1939 columns 3708, 3710.
- 35 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 243ff, 259ff.
- 36 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 261, 273ff.
- 37 Pehr Kalm, *Västgöta och bohusländska resa 1742*, ed. C. Krantz (Stockholm, [1746] 1977), p. 8.
- 38 Martin Pott, *Aufklärung und Aberglaube. Die deutsche Frühaufklärung im Spiegel ihrer Aberglaubenskritik*, Studien zur deutschen Literatur, vol. 119 (Tübingen, 1992), p. 1ff.
- 39 See Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 36ff and the references used there.
- 40 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 171ff, 293.
- 41 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 56ff.
- 42 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 84, 262ff.
- 43 Ordinary session at Folkare tingsrätt (district court) 28 April 1746, § 5, Kopparbergs läns häradsrättsarkiv V AI:15, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala.
- 44 Jöns Hornaeus, *Berättelse om vidskepelse och häxprocesser i Ångermanland, Ångermanland-Medelpad. Årsbok för Västernorrlands läns hembygdsförbund* (Uppsala, 1935), p. 149; Manuscript A 1031 (transcript of 'Sannfärdig berättelse om det för 100 år sedan förelupna grufveliga trulldoms-oväsendet i Sverige ... författad af Jöns Hornaeus, comminister i Thorsåker'), Kungliga Biblioteket, Stockholm, pp. 63, 71, 75.
- 45 Ordinary session at Söderbärke tingsrätt (district court) 30 March 1753, § 53, Kopparbergs läns häradsrättsarkiv 36 AI:13, Uppsala landsarkiv, Uppsala. See also Soili-Maria Olli, 'The Devil's pact', in this volume.
- 46 Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, p. 40ff; Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 148ff, 153ff.
- 47 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 199, 201.
- 48 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 204ff, 225.
- 49 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 149.
- 50 Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, pp. 21, 40ff; Fredrik Skott, 'Trulldomsprocessen i Södra Ny', *Svenska landsmål och svenskt folkliv* 325 (1999) 111–42. Such accusations also occurred much later. Kristina Tegler, historian at Uppsala University, is currently working on a doctoral thesis about witchcraft, magic and popular culture in nineteenth-century rural Scandinavia. The focal point of the thesis is an in-depth case study of the actors in an unexpected recurrence of witchcraft tensions in Gagnef, Dalarna, in 1858.
- 51 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 66, 97ff (quote on p. 66).
- 52 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 273ff. See also K. Rob and V. Wikman (eds), *Johan J. Törners samling af vidskeppelser med inledning och anmärkningar* (Uppsala, 1946).
- 53 Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, pp. 39ff, 119. See also Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 148ff.
- 54 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 144; Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, p. 120; Soili-Maria Olli, 'The Devil's pact', in this volume.
- 55 Figures for southern Sweden from Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, p. 120; figures for central Sweden extrapolated from Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 121ff, 125ff, 139, 309ff.
- 56 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 165.
- 57 Hornaeus, *Berättelse om vidskepelse*, p. 174ff.
- 58 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 134ff, 139ff, 144ff.

- 59 Carl Forsstrand, *Spåkvinnor och trollkarlar. Minnen och anteckningar från Gustaf III:s Stockholm* (Stockholm, 1913); Martin Lamm, *Upplysningens romantik. Den mystiskt sentimentala strömningen i svensk litteratur* (Enskede, 1920), part 2, ch. 1; Karin Johannisson, *Magnetisörernas tid. Den animala magnetismen i Sverige* (Uppsala, 1974), pp. 39ff, 102ff; Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 280.
- 60 Lamm 1920 ch. 2; Johannisson, *Magnetisörernas tid*, pp. 46, 93ff; Tore Frängsmyr, *Sökandet efter upplysningen. En essä om 1700-talets svenska kulturdebatt* (Höganäs, 1993), ch. 7; Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 280.
- 61 Sofia Svensson, *Vidskepelse under upplysningstid. En analys av Johan J. Törners Samling af vidskeppelser*, unpublished paper at the Department of History at Uppsala University 1997; Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, p. 247.
- 62 Sörlin, *Wicked Arts*, p. 133.
- 63 Sigrid Brauner, *Fearless Wives and Frightened Shrews: The Construction of the Witch in Early Modern Germany* (Amherst, 1995), particularly pp. 95, 108, 118.
- 64 Sofia Ling, 'Kvinnlig och manlig läkekonst. Om "kvacksalveri" och genus som analytisk kategori', in G. Andersson (ed.), *Bedrägliga begrepp. Kön och genus i humanistisk forskning* (Uppsala, 2000), p. 108ff.
- 65 Oja, *Varken Gud eller natur*, pp. 86ff, 210ff, 265ff.
- 66 Olof Broman, *Olof Joh. Bromans Glysisvallur och öfriga skrifter rörande Helsingland*, ed. K. A. Haegermarck and A. Grape (Uppsala, 1911–49), vol. 1, p. 768ff.

Witchcraft and magic in eighteenth-century Scotland

Peter Maxwell-Stuart

On 20 October 1711 Defoe published in the periodical *Review* his well-known and unambiguous opinion on the subject of witches:

There are, and ever have been such People in the World, who converse Familiarly with the Devil, enter into Compact with him, and receive Power from him, both to hurt and deceive, and these have been in all Ages call'd *Witches*, and it is these, that our Law and God's Law Condemn's as such; and I think there can be no more debate of the Matter.

He was not alone in this opinion, but it may be significant that it was written only a few months after one of his extended stays in Scotland; for Defoe was a man who knew the Scottish Lowlands well and had even been on an extended trip via the east coast, the north, and the west coast of the *Gaidhealtachd*. Can we suggest, then, that his attitude was, or at least may have been, influenced by the popular beliefs and judicial practices he saw or heard there? If we were to judge from one Scottish reaction to the repeal of the Witchcraft Acts in 1736, we might be tempted to do so. 'The *Law of God* hath been despised, and a *Toleration* upon the Matter, given to *Diabolical Arts* and *Practices*, by the *Act* repealing the penal *Statutes* against *Witches*', was a stern rebuke delivered to the Associate Presbytery at Edinburgh on 3 February 1743.¹ But it was given by Seceders, that is to say by clergymen who thought the official Presbyterian establishment had compromised with rationalism on the one hand and 'enthusiasm' on the other, thereby betraying fundamental doctrines and diluting the Calvinist confession.

The Scotland with which Defoe had acquaintance was, in fact, no unified or monolithic state, but a concatenation of cultural and religious systems existing uneasily with each other – the *Gaidhealtachd* and the islands (still largely Gaelic speaking), the Lowlands and the Borders, much more open to English influences, each harbouring and cherishing its own differences, each ill at ease with the others, each diverse, indeed, within itself. A description of Scotland, therefore – or perhaps one should more accurately say, a

description of the various activities of witches – must take these divergences, rivalries and suspicions into account.

The geography of Scotland, for example, matters. Beyond the southern Lowlands there were no big roads to speak of, which meant that communications were extremely awkward. Roads were, in fact, the tracks left by generations of feet both animal and human, and for obvious practical reasons skirted any difficulties, such as peat bogs, which lay in their path. After the 1745 rebellion, however, these drove roads were supplemented by nearly a thousand miles of military highways, built first by General Wade and then by William Caulfield, which opened up certain parts of the Highlands (but by no means all) to influences from further south, the Lowlands and England.² As far as the Highlands were concerned, the most obvious changes were social and cultural. As Allan MacInnes has put it, ‘The immediate aftermath of the Forty-Five was marked by systematic state terrorism, characterised by a genocidal intent that verged on ethnic cleansing ... chiefs and leading gentry abandoned their traditional obligations as protectors and patrons in pursuit of their commercial aspirations as proprietors’.³ A flavour of the official tone can be gathered from a sermon preached in St Giles Kirk, Edinburgh on Monday, 6 January 1746: ‘This Rebellion owes its Rise and Progress to Ignorance and Superstition; it began in the most ignorant, wild, and barbarous Part of our Country; it has been chiefly supported by the most ignorant and superstitious of our Countrymen, the most savage of the Highland Clans.’⁴ State-sponsored terror, then, gave way, to some extent, in the later part of the century to what both Lowlanders and English saw as a ‘civilising’ process, based on the long-standing perception of the Gael as a cattle-thieving, superstitious savage.⁵

This colonisation was accompanied by deliberate attacks upon Gaelic as a medium of instruction in religion and education, which led to an erosion in its general use; and with its slow decline there began to vanish the culture which it expressed, a decline scarcely halted by the establishment of Gaelic Societies among middle-class town-dwellers in the early nineteenth century. The language employed by Patrick Sellar, factor of the notorious Sutherlands, in regard to Gaelic was no less violent than that of James Yorke in relation to the Gael:

Their obstinate adherence to the barbarous jargon of the times when Europe *was possessed by Savages*, their *rejection* of any of the several languages now used in Europe ... places them, with relation to the enlightened nations of Europe, in a position not very different from that betwixt the American Colonists and the Aborigines of that Country.⁶

Widespread dispossession, too, hastened the dispersal abroad, if not the death, of Gaelic culture – not for nothing was 1792 known as *am bliadhna nan caoraich*, ‘the year of the sheep’ – while at home the pain and anger attendant

upon these changes was channelled, at least in part during the 1790s and early 1800s, into a short-lived wave of religious enthusiasm which swept through much of the Highlands.⁷

The attack upon Gaelic was both encouraged and led by the Churches. The eighteenth century did not look kindly upon either the Episcopal Church, which found itself in disgrace after 1745 because of its alleged support for the Stuart cause or the Presbyterian Kirk, which was more and more plagued by controversy. For it, as well as secular society, suffered from the increasingly alienating pretensions of Scotland's landowning classes, the right to appoint ministers, for example, being removed from congregations in 1712 and given to local landlords, a move bound to exacerbate the fissiparous tendency within Scottish Presbyterian theology, and create the impression that the Kirk was little more than a mouthpiece of the lairds.⁸

One also needs to take note of the way people grouped themselves into diverse communities. Most people still lived in very small dispersed groupings known as 'touns'. Some, such as *ferm touns*, consisted of about six or twelve households jointly working a farm; whereas a *kirk toun*, as the name suggests, clustered about a church whose local significance could enhance both the size and standing of its *toun* (although in the *Gaidhealtachd* churches and chapels often stood apart in slightly mysterious isolation). Fisher *touns* stretched out in rows beside the seashore, their way of life quite distinct from other communities. Smaller than these were individual dwellings scattered within the landscape; larger were the burghs and a few important cities such as Glasgow or Edinburgh.⁹ But settlement patterns were changing, especially in the Lowlands, throughout the eighteenth century as, despite large-scale emigration, the population rose, agricultural improvements took hold or were enforced, and then industrial development – such as the making of jute in Dundee or the building of ships on the Clyde – began to make a difference to rural as well as to urban social structures.¹⁰

Finally, it is also worth bearing in mind that Scottish women were not in the least passive or docile members of their communities. They actively participated in riots during the early eighteenth century, for example, and were noted as being more violent than the men. Nor were they few in number. In Dumfries and Galloway there were four major riots between 1711 and 1718, and the crowds consisted almost entirely of women. In mid-century, too, they were prominent in religious affairs, combining to resist, again with violence, the imposition of new ministers of whom they disapproved.¹¹ Scottish society during the eighteenth century, therefore, presents several features which are highly unusual: military occupation; ethnic cleansing of part of the population; immense social and economic changes in a small society widely dispersed over an extensive geographic area, much of which had been and continued to be very difficult of access; the deliberately attempted destruction of half the country's language and

culture in favour of others imported from an alien state; more than one 'national' church, with the principal Kirk riven by disputatiousness; and a female population which often showed itself to be forthright, aggressive and not easily amenable to attempted official control.

Now the relevance of all this to witchcraft is obvious but deserves emphasis. For the instruments of any attempt to unify Scotland's remarkable diversity were the Law and the Kirk, and it is a remarkable fact that, London government and commercialising landlord apart, neither appears to have exerted itself overmuch in relation to crimes of magic (or, after 1736, the pretended 'use or exercise [of] any kind of Witchcraft, Sorcery, Inchantment, or Conjurat[i]on').¹² To put it bluntly, the criminal records after 1700 when 22 witchcraft cases were deserted (abandoned) in a single session contain few references to witches, and these rapidly fade to nothing after the 1720s. Within this period, to be sure, we can find examples of stern dealing, but these are often explained by the presence of one individual who, for reasons of private conviction or public pressure, decides to take the initiative. Let us take a single example. On 24 May 1704 the kirk session records of Pittenweem, a small fishing community in Fife, note that Jean Durkie appeared before the session where,

the Minister laid before her some scandalous language that she had used to Nickolas Lowson, to wit, 'O Nickolas! Learn me to be a witch, that I may be avenged on the magistrates for sending my husband to fflanders'; and that she did use horrible imprecations and curses against them in the streets, all which she confessed: which was referred to the presbytery for advice.¹³

The presbytery took nearly a month to reply, almost certainly because further problems relating to witchcraft had come to the brethren's notice. These were recorded by Pittenweem on 29 May. Isobel Adam, Beatrix Laing, Nicholas Lowson and Janet Coreset confessed to a compact with the Devil, gave a detailed account of their several meetings with him (although these details do not appear in the kirk session record), and delated others the session does not name.¹⁴ Not surprisingly, perhaps, St Andrews presbytery decided to hold two sessions on 19 and 28 June in Pittenweem where, at the first session, it examined the principal confessing witches, and on the second looked into Jean Durkie's case.¹⁵

As far as the kirk and presbytery session records are concerned, that is now the end of the matter. The presbytery delayed any decision over Jean Durkie so often that nothing was done, while Isobel Adam and another confessing witch, Janet Cornfoot, were placed under their minister's tutelage with the recommendation that he 'bring them to a better sense of the case'. Investigation of other sources, however, reveals that the whole incident had been caused by the vivid imagination of a sixteen-year-old boy who had listened eagerly to the local minister's readings from Lord Cullen's

Sadducismus Debellatus, an account of Christian Shaw, the so-called 'Bargarran Imposter', who had manufactured a serious witchcraft scare in Glasgow in 1697.¹⁶ This same minister, persuaded by the boy's imitative fits and hallucinations, pursued those he accused with a determined, indeed ruthless vigour, Janet Cornfoot being subjected to a brutal flogging by the minister himself. She was later lynched by a mob from Pittenweem, after which the minister refused to give her a Christian burial. Moreover, on 13 June, only a week before the presbytery came to Pittenweem to examine Nicholas Lawson and the others, the kirk had applied to the Privy Council to appoint a commission to try the case in a criminal court. Lack of detail in the official records, therefore, may be misleading and one must be careful not to make sweeping assumptions about the officially perceived importance or unimportance of witchcraft, based only upon these documents.

Nevertheless, extensive acquaintance with them does enable one to notice when a kirk or presbytery session, for example, is taking a particular interest in a case; and the lack of enthusiasm to pursue witchcraft accusations as far as criminal prosecution is by no means confined to the eighteenth century. Compared with the Kirk's intense scrutiny of adulterers and fornicators and her eagerness to punish their sins, the pursuit of witches can sometimes seem almost desultory. After the 1704 incident in Pittenweem, for example, the next notice of a witch occurs on 11 November 1708 when Isobel Adam, who had played a part in the 1704 scandal, was referred back to her local kirk by the presbytery of Edinburgh so that she might receive local censure, and was promptly shuffled off to the presbytery of St Andrews, who proceeded (apparently) to ignore her.¹⁷ Thereafter, Pittenweem has nothing to say about witchcraft until 5 July 1719 when Barbara Westwood appealed to the session to accuse Janet Logan of calling her father a warlock.¹⁸ What was the cause of these lengthy interstices? Are we to understand that the practice of magic ceased within the parish; or, as seems much more likely, given our knowledge of the early modern period, did the congregation, its minister and elders simply turn their attention elsewhere once the immediate and peculiar reason for the accusation of witchcraft in a particular case had run its course and been resolved to local satisfaction, while the usual magical operations attendant upon daily life continued as before?

If this latter appears to fit the known facts somewhat better anent kirk and presbytery, it may also apply equally well to the criminal courts which were also more preoccupied with adultery and fornication than witchcraft, as any porteous roll (list of cases coming up for trial) will demonstrate. The circuit court meeting in Dumfries in 1709, for example, heard witchcraft cases against Janet Hairstanes (who was acquitted) and Elspeth Rule (who was found guilty, branded on the cheek and banished), but spent most of its time on cases of adultery.¹⁹ Indeed, throughout the initial decades of the eighteenth century, the courts heard more cases of bestiality than they did of witchcraft,

and the crime of bestiality, as opposed to that of witchcraft, was not even on the statute book in Scotland.

But was this apparent relaxation of interest the result of a diminution of magical belief and practice in the country at large, as so many clergy in particular liked to imagine? These gentlemen were very much mistaken. Lachlan Shaw noted in 1760 with some distaste that 'in their sentiments the people are extremely wedded to prejudice and in their manners to old custom', and proceeded to give examples. 'They made the *Deas-Soil* [clockwise movement] about their fields of corn, with burning torches of wood in their hands, to obtain a blessing on their corns. This I have often seen, more indeed in the Lowlands than in the Highlands.'²⁰ In 1776 the minister of Deskford had to warn his congregation against what he called the superstitious and heathenish practices he had observed of bonfires and other idolatrous customs. Beltane fires, however, continued to be lit. On Coll, Samuel Johnson asked about local superstitions and was told that the people there would not cut peat while the moon was waxing. The minister protested. 'It's not a superstition', he said, 'it's a whim.' But the minister was merely being ingenuous in the face of visitors from England. Clearly he did not wish them to suppose either that his parishioners were backward and primitive, or that he himself had been unable to withdraw them from undesirable beliefs and practices.²¹

Sithean (fairies) also continued to play an important role in the lives of country folk, as they had always done. As late as 1770, dairymaids on Skye used to pour out some milk every day as an offering to the *gruagach* (brownie); in Suddie parish, not far from Inverness, children who suffered from a wasting illness were said to be having their substance removed by the *sithean* and were taken to a particular well in the hope of a cure; Adam Donald, the so-called 'Prophet of Bethelnie' (1703–80), was said to have been a changeling left by the fairies, a status which clearly enhanced the magical and divinatory powers with which he was credited, and because of which he was consulted by large numbers of people from as far away as thirty miles beyond his dwelling-place.²² Thomas Pennant observed in 1772 that 'a Highlander, in order to protect himself from any harms apprehended from the Fairy tribe, will draw round himself a circle with a sapling of an oak'; and Alexander MacGregor was acquainted with an old man in Skye, born in the last decade of the eighteenth century, who 'so firmly believed in fairies and other superstitions that in his grace before meat he prayed thus –O Blessed One ... preserve the aged and the young, our wives and our children, our sheep and our cattle, from the power and dominion of the fairies (*sithichean*), and from the malicious effects of every evil eye'.²³

The use of charms and amulets was common. During his travels in Scotland, Pennant was given two amulets, one of which was to cure pains in the joints; MacNeill of Carskey recorded in his estate journal that one should

'take the skine of a serpent and bind it to the thigh of the woman that is in labour and she will be delivered presently'. William Shaw, compiler of a Gaelic dictionary, defined *leice* as 'a large crystal, of a figure somewhat oval, which priests kept to work charms by. Water poured upon it, at this day, is given to cattle against diseases. These stones are now preserved for the same purposes by the oldest and most superstitious in the country'; and as late as 1795 knives were being enclosed in the walls of houses of Orkney to ward off the attacks of witches.²⁴ People also resorted to wells, often those standing near or in the churchyards of former Catholic chapels. Saint Walloch's well in Aberdeenshire was 'much frequented by sick folk', according to a report of 1724; the well at Keith in Banff was visited until at least the mid-eighteenth century; in 1729 the kirk session of Speymouth published a warning from the Synod 'anent the superstitious going to the well of Spey'; and near a ruined Catholic chapel in Muthill in central Perthshire was a well 'which the ignorant and superstitious people pay a great respect unto and from which they expect cures to be wrought upon themselves and their beasts'.²⁵

The gift of second sight – 'two sights' in Gaelic – was universally held to belong to Highlanders and the people of the Western Isles in particular. As MacCulloch remarked, 'to have navigated the Western Isles without even mentioning the second sight, would be unpardonable'. Martin Martin defined it thus: 'a singular Faculty of Seeing an otherwise invisible Object, without any previous Means us'd by the Person that sees it for that end; the Vision makes such a lively impression upon the Seer, that they neither see nor think of any thing else, except the Vision, as long as it continues'. The seeing most often referred to a vision of the recently dead or of someone whose death was imminent, and examples of both abound throughout both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. 'Second sight is firmly believed at this time', said Pennant, and the accuracy of his observation can be seen several times in the account given by James Boswell of the visit he and Samuel Johnson made to the islands in 1773. Even Boswell himself thought he might have had a touch of the gift at one point (although he questioned the possibility of the idea since he was not a Highlander), and continued to discuss the ability in spite of his being snubbed by the Duchess of Argyll. 'I said something of my belief in the second sight. The Duchess said, "I fancy ... you will be a Methodist".' Of particular interest is his recounting that

Mrs. MacKinnon ... told us her father was one day riding in Skye, and some women who were at work in a field on the side of the road told him they heard two *taisks* [ghosts], that is, two voices of persons about to die; 'and what', said they, 'is extraordinary, one of them is an English *taisk*, which we never heard before'.

This aural aspect to the second sight is confirmed by modern experience which explains that, as well as seeing an image, one may hear, too.²⁶

Divination of various kinds was also common. The kirk session of Speymouth instructed its minister on 10 April 1737 to have a word with Robert Innes who had gone to consult a man who claimed to find stolen goods with the help of a prophetic spirit. The advice or censure clearly made little impression, for in June the following year Innes had to be censured again for what looks like a second offence, together with John Allan who had also consulted a seer for a similar purpose.²⁷ In Stirlingshire, several people from Kilsyth found themselves in trouble in 1723 for enquiring about stolen goods, and on 9 August 1724, 'John Elgin in Wester Alves [near Elgin] is accused before the session to one that had converse with the Devil, called John Fraser, mason at Balveny, to get information of a web belonging to the Lady Kirton, stolen as he said out of his house'. Likewise, Isobel Crawford was summoned before the kirk session of Old Aberdeen on 15 January 1727,

as being a woman guiltie of charmes and a teller of fortunes, such as telling what a man any woman will be married with, and what a woman a man will be married with: as also that she could give ane account that if any person had any thing stolen from them, she could tell them if it could be got back againe; and that if any persons who went abroad, she would give ane account if they were dead or alive, and the lyke.²⁸

The evil eye, too, was still feared. Thomas Pennant, for example, observed its consequences on Islay in 1772:

If the good housewife perceives the effect of the malicious on any of her kine, she takes as much milk as she can drain from the enchanted herd, for the witch generally leaves very little. She then boils it with certain herbs, and adds to them flints and tempered steel: after that she secures the door, and invokes the three sacred persons [of the Trinity]. This puts the witch into such an agony, that she comes nilling-willing to the house, begs to be admitted, to obtain relief by touching the powerful pot.²⁹

But equally feared were a magical operator's words. In 1725 the kirk session of Rathven heard that Katharine Symson had prayed that Janet Forbes might get a cold armful of her husband, and in 1727 that Marjorie Wilson had turned her face to the sun upon a Sabbath day and cursed her son, Patrick, wishing him a sudden death which, sure enough, ensued.³⁰ There was a fine line between cursing and magical imprecation. In August 1708, for example, James Leslie deposed to the authorities in Aberdeen that Elizabeth Fraser 'went to the house of William Donald, shoemaker, ther in his presence, at his own fyre syde, sett doune on her knees, blasphemed the name of God, and prayed Gods curse and her upon him and family, and severall uther imprecations'.³¹ It is the combination of kneeling and blasphemy, ritual action and hostile words, which suggests that in this case the cursing was more than a simple loss of temper. The authorities in Dumfries remarked the difference when, in May 1709, it was noted of Elspeth Rule that she was 'knoun to have

used imprecations and cursings which have actualie succeeded against severall persons';³² and Sir Walter Scott recounts an incident, the circumstances of which he says were well known to him, in which an old woman asked a neighbour for a favour and, upon being refused, ill-wished him. An accident to five or six sacks of his corn followed and the neighbour immediately went to the sheriff of the county to have the woman charged as a witch, only to find, much to his consternation, that the relevant law had been repealed. It is perhaps significant that the neighbour's reaction should have been to have recourse to the law rather than complain to the kirk; but even more significant is the old woman's reaction to the sheriff when he told her to mind her language lest it irritate her neighbours. 'I would be laith to wish ony ill either to you or yours, sir', she said, 'for I kenna how it is, but something aye comes after my words when I am ill-guided and speak ower fast.'³³ In short, she was convinced that her words had genuine power to harm and that her magic was real enough. Equally convinced, it seems, was her neighbour; and this is an incident that dates to about the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Mutual belief such as this could and did lead to violence. In July 1750 the Presbytery of Tain heard a long case relating to the parish of Rosskeen, a coastal parish of north-east Ross and Cromarty. One family, the Frasers, was attacked by the men of another, the Munros. John and Hugh Munro, along with another John Munro from a different *toun*, broke into John Fraser's house at about midnight with drawn swords and proceeded to terrorise him, his wife, and his daughter, 'using most horrid cursings and imprecations, calling them Witches and Divils'. They scored the Frasers' foreheads with an iron tool 'to the Effusion of their blood, calling them Witches', and then forcibly exacted from their victims an oath that they would not reveal who had attacked them. After this, the Munros went on to the house of Isobel MacKenzie and her daughter, whom they maltreated in like fashion, and then to the house of a William Munro where they cut the forehead of his servant, Christian MacKenzie.³⁴

News of serious assault such as this was almost bound to reach the local authorities sooner or later, of course, and the choice of complaining to the local kirk or the local sheriff may have been guided, at least in part, by very particular considerations. For example, the minister himself might be suspected of practising magic, as was John Brown of Haddington who, in 1745, was accused of being in league with witches, apparently because he was very learned and possessed a Greek New Testament; or Donald Fraser, minister of Killearnan in Ross and Cromarty during the 1740s, who may have suffered from mild narcolepsy or advanced boredom, for he tended to fall asleep at frequent intervals. Donald Sage wrote of him,

In what this singular ailment originated is not known; the country people attributed it to witchcraft, and he himself thought so too. The tradition is

that, in the public exercise of ministerial duty, he had given offence to two women in the parish who were dread as witches, and that they had, according to their diabolical art, made a clay effigy of him, laid it in the dung-hill, and stuck it round with pins. On this Mr. Fraser got ill, and felt pains in his body which terminated in somnolency.³⁵

Perhaps the most interesting part of this anecdote is the admission that the minister himself accepted he had been bewitched. This may or may not have been unusual among the clergy. Until a full account has been made of both kirk and presbytery session records, the extent of ministers' willing or unwilling involvement in or association with magic cannot be ascertained.³⁶ We do know of one kirk elder, however, who seems to have engaged directly in magical operations. In July 1703 Robert Bailyie, an elder of Oyne, was summoned to answer charges of 'hanging a dog within the house, taking out his crook at the lamb, extinguishing the fyre with piss, burying a cat under the hearth, etc.' on the occasion of his moving from one residence to another. It is the 'etc.' which catches one's attention, although the further details are not given in the record. Bailyie denied all the allegations except the one relating to the crook. This refers to the large hook from which pots were hung over the fire, and obviously he would have wanted to take it with him to his new house. He was obliged to climb on to the roof to get it loose, he said, from 'besyde the lamb', that is, from beside the chimney (*lum*). William Elphing, the man who took over the tenancy from him, however, maintained that Bailyie did piss on the fire and remove the hook, although he would not vouch for the truth of the details about the dog or the cat; and it turned out that William Davidson and Geillis Anderson who had told Elphing about the dog had merely seen Bailyie carry a dead dog and throw or lay it down beside the peat stack.

To us these details may seem innocent enough, but the fire and the hearth were places very sensitive to magic and any action involving them which might strike an onlooker as odd, suspicious or untoward could easily turn into a conjecture of magic and thence, as here, into an outright allegation. After several weeks of consideration, the kirk session suspended Bailyie from his eldership and required him to ask pardon of the congregation. This Bailyie refused to do, defying the minister in the very body of the kirk during the course of a Sabbath service. 'I am now in the midst of the congregation', he retorted to the minister's repeated commands, 'and let him that is free of sin cast the first stone at me'. The incident now became a struggle of wills between the kirk and presbytery on the one hand and Bailyie on the other. Bailyie held out for nearly twelve months, but on 2 July 1704 eventually submitted and was duly absolved.³⁷

Was he actually guilty? The cat under the hearth – a very suspicious detail – disappeared from the proceedings, and the 'etc.' was never explained or explored. Certainly it will not do to dismiss the story as a piece of muddle

or foolishness. The kirk would not have wasted its time during the initial stages had it felt there was nothing to investigate, and we know of ministers who fully accepted, for example, such details of traditional witchcraft as the Devil's mark. One such was James Bell, minister at Gladsmuir, who wrote of the mark in 1705, 'I myself have seen it in the body of a confessing witch, like a little powder-mark, of a blue colour, somewhat hard, and withall insensible, so as it did not bleed when I pricked it.'³⁸

As was constantly the case throughout the centuries, however, the authorities, ecclesiastical and lay, were also faced by magical operators who worked or claimed to work beneficently. Lachlan Shaw recorded that 'in hectic and consumptive diseases, they pare the nails of the fingers and toes of the patient, put these parings into a rag cut from his clothes, then wave their hand with the rag thrice round his head crying *Deas-Soil* [clockwise], after which they bury the rag in some unknown place. I have seen this done', he added. In Elgin, in 1734, Duncan Gregor was referred to the presbytery for curing fevers, and in Strathblane in Stirlingshire, Katharine Cameron and William Muldoe were brought before the kirk session for curing a horse by passing a cat three times round and over it.³⁹

Magic and witchcraft therefore constituted the scenery, and often the script, of everyone's life during the eighteenth century as much as it had ever done in the seventeenth or sixteenth. But it cannot be denied that the script had begun to change. This is partly our perception. The majority of clerical and lay travellers who recorded their journeys or published diaries of their working lives concentrated upon the *Gaidhealtachd* and found what they were looking for. By tradition Highlanders were 'primitive', 'backward' and 'uncivilised' – unanglicised, too, as witness the attempts to eradicate their language — and so if magic and witchcraft, now firmly associated in the educated middle-class mind with Popery and the Middle Ages (a religion and a time, they said, of direst superstition), were to be found anywhere in Scotland, it would surely be there. So we must beware of our sources. Moreover, by labelling Highlanders as backward and superstitious, Lowlanders were helping to define themselves as people apart: modern and rational. They were Scots, not English, but Scots who had seen the way the world was going and were proclaiming, via their condemnation or patronising description of Highland people and Highland ways, that they should be taken seriously by the faraway political authorities in London.

In addition to this, we must take into account the nervousness, in some cases bordering upon fear, with which the Presbyterian Kirk realised that it was not being altogether successful in stamping out that same Catholicism which, they said, harboured magic and superstition. On 26 August 1760, for example, the kirk session of Elgin appointed ministers 'to exhort Alexander B. in Mostourie, who had taken his wife, labouring under trouble of mind, to a Popish priest in the Enzie, that he by his exorcisms might give her ease;

as also that Alexander H. in Colledge had gone with his son to the same priest to be relieved of the like trouble. The session *in abhorrence to such hellish practices* appointed that the above persons concerned be privately spoken to, and that Mr. Shaw intimate to the congregation that the above practices be guarded against by all in time coming'.⁴⁰ The number of Catholics, indeed, was not diminishing. A list of Papists in Keith in 1704 contained twenty-three names; by 1732 the number had grown to thirty-six. The same progression and the same nervous, hostile reaction can be seen in the presbytery book of Fordyce throughout the eighteenth century.

These nerves were caused, at least in part, because the Presbyterian Kirk was by no means a monolithic institution in Scotland, with an iron grip on all its ministers and congregations. It is therefore simple Protestant propaganda which makes people think of Scotland as a Presbyterian country. There were Catholic enclaves in plenty; the Episcopalian Church (essentially an Anglican version or imitation), flourished in various parts of the Lowlands; and a variety of -isms which rose to bestrew the religious landscape, like mushrooms in the night.⁴¹ In 1690, to be sure, the Westminster Parliament had attempted to impose Presbyterian government on Scotland by statute, but the results were not what that body intended. From now on, for example, anyone who might deviate from the résumé of faith known as the 'Westminster Confession' could be challenged in a court of law and perhaps, were he a minister or teacher, deprived of his livelihood; and in 1714 the law claimed its first notable victim when John Simson, Professor of Divinity at Glasgow, was charged with heresy because he had been denying the doctrine of predestination. In 1728 he abjured the errors imputed to him, but this made little difference and the following year he was suspended from teaching. The Westminster Parliament passed two more imprudent Acts. One granted toleration to Episcopal ministers, the other restored the rights of a patron to present someone of his choice to a ministry, and both by creating a breeding-ground for discontent threatened the stability of the proposed Presbyterian settlement.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the 1730s saw what is known as the 'First' or 'Original' Secession from the established Church of Scotland. The complaint against the repeal of the Witchcraft Acts issued by a seceding presbytery in 1743, which I quoted earlier, is thus an objection motivated by ecclesiastical politics as well as by theological conviction. Evangelical movements inspired by Wesley's Methodism made some inroad into Presbyterian orthodoxy, and a second secession in 1761 muddied the doctrinal waters still further – to all of which, of course, one should add the fashionable rationalism or deism which were pervasive in the drawing-rooms of Edinburgh, and the continuing covert, but effective, missionary work of Catholic priests in various parts of the country.⁴²

No wonder, then, if the kirk and presbytery sessions alike tended to

concentrate their energies on those aspects of their parishioners' conduct which most affected them in these disturbed times. The old concerns (sabbath-breaking, adultery, swearing) sat alongside the new (ecclesiastical legitimacy, theological correctness, payment of stipends), and the Devil's helpers took second place to these. For the immediate was with doctrinal dissenters, the encroaching power of the state, the pretensions of heretical or superstitious bodies. Most witches, as far as the Kirk could see (and the records bear this out), were ignorant charmers, not enemies of the Church in league with Satan.⁴³ If they had been his devotees in the seventeenth century, they had apparently ceased to be so regarded in the eighteenth, and although commissions continued to be sent out for the delation of 'whatsoever felonies or capital crimes, witchcrafts, enchantments, magical arts, sorceries', and the like, witches tended to make their appearance as part of a very mixed company of offenders – adulterers, fornicators, thieves, bigamists – or a gallimaufry of crimes such as treason, murder, manslaughter, incest, and the illegal fishing of salmon.⁴⁴

The Kirk and its officers therefore had other fish to fry, and this is equally true of the state. As we saw earlier, Scotland has never been a unitary culture and the differences between its component parts were emphasised rather than played down during the 1700s. First, and perhaps most important, during the eighteenth century Scotland, having surrendered herself to a political union which has been likened to that of a mouse lying down with an elephant, was to all intents and purposes ruled by a foreign country whose capital was four hundred miles away to the south. Rebellions against this political disposition in 1715 and 1745 subjected large parts of Scotland to military reprisal and then military occupation. At the same time, Scotland's aristocracy and landed gentry were conducting agricultural reforms and experiments which often resulted, designedly or not, in the displacement of large numbers of her population to the margins of the land or overseas in waves of both voluntary and enforced emigration. These changes and experiments needed a change in peasant attitude. Industriousness and honesty became the watchwords of the new culture being thrust upon the lower orders throughout both Highlands and Lowlands, although the latter were deemed to be naturally more receptive to it. In the *Gaidhealtachd*, on the other hand, the old social order was breaking down and Gaelic culture came under attack as the Kirk sought to impose both itself and the new secular notions of 'progress' on unpromising material, with varying degrees of success. 'Idleness, intemperance, and debauchery are abandoned; and, on the other hand, industry, integrity, and mutual confidence are introduced ... Agriculture, arts, and commerce are advanced', trumpeted Mr R. Henry in a sermon to the SPCK in 1773.⁴⁵ But, like those who confidently announced the end of superstition, his claims were premature.

In fact from a judicial perspective at least, the state, rather like the Kirk,

had been progressively losing interest in witches from the beginning of the century. To be sure, the offence continued to appear in legal textbooks of the period, but that may be ascribed to the innate conservatism of lawyers and their publishers rather than any deep or active concern in the crime of magic. It would seem that there was neither an outright rejection of the concept of witchcraft nor a great willingness to prosecute. Legal thought on the matter was far from unified though. George Mackenzie, writing in 1678, expressed scepticism regarding the prosecution of witchcraft and rebuked the willingness of judges to accept dubious evidence, yet over forty years later William Forbes was more accepting of the continued relevance of the crime.⁴⁶

But more important, perhaps, in its effects than these considerations, though intimately connected with them, was the breakdown in dialogue between the various groups of contemporary Scottish society. Favret-Saada has drawn attention to witchcraft as a kind of talking among and about one's neighbours – 'the witch is the person referred to by those who utter the discourse on witchcraft (bewitched and unwitchers)'⁴⁷ – and this entails the important consequence that if one or more parts of a society cease, for whatever reason, to take part in that common discourse, a fragmentation takes place and mutual understanding will come to an end. Favret-Saada gives the example of the believing and unbelieving priest:

An 'unbelieving' priest wears lay clothes, speeds along in his small car, condemns 'superstitions' wholesale (he even sends the bewitched [person] to the psychiatric hospital) ... preaches against drugs ... and advocates an 'enlightened' faith. Whatever his social origin, he identifies with urban values and represents the party of the Enlightenment along with the schoolmaster and the doctor. A 'believing' priest ... walks around the village reading his Latin breviary, agrees to sing the *Dies Irae* during funerals ... venerates the popular saints, and ... agrees to bless farmers and their belongings.⁴⁸

Evidence of breakdown in Scotland can be seen quite early in the century. In March 1710, for example, people within the sheriffdom of Kincardine were asked (and this was a regular feature of Scottish life) to provide information about a wide variety of crimes such as treason, murder, incest, adultery, etc., including witchcraft and charming. Their replies indicated a willingness to depone about adultery, illegal fishing of salmon, incest, and so forth: but not a word was said about witchcraft or any other form of magic.⁴⁹ Reports of parish visitations by kirk officers frequently record much the same. Are we, then, to imagine that the practice of magic had largely ceased throughout the country? The body of evidence we reviewed earlier suggests it had certainly not, and in consequence we must allow for the possibility that its apparent increasing absence from the official records of both the Kirk and the law indicates a cessation of one type of discourse between certain groups in society.

This cessation, in fact, mirrors the physical separation that began to take place in society's living arrangements. From 1767 onwards, for example, members of the landed gentry and the professional classes – especially advocates and doctors – who had lived cheek by jowl with the other social classes in the tenements and lands of Edinburgh's Old Town began to move away to the Georgian elegance and distance of the New Town, thereby helping to create not only a physical but also a mental and emotional series of ghettos from what had been a relatively cohesive, if turbulent, urban society.

Mutatis mutandis, parallels can be drawn elsewhere, in both the Highlands and Lowlands, and the Islands and the Borders. What is involved is not necessarily, or certainly not exclusively, the presence of disbelief among the educated classes; but the advocates, the politicians and the ministers had other pressing concerns, and became used to seeing the whole of Scottish society through their own limited prism, consciously or unconsciously surrendering to the common tendency of a dominant social group to subsume the differences of beliefs and assumptions other than their own into a homogeneous *lumpen Zeitgeist* which is easier to understand and easier to try to control or eliminate. Meanwhile the rest of society continued to talk within itself much as it always had done and gradually became accustomed, not simply to not talking to the advocates and ministers about witches and magic, but to not talking to them at all about anything.

Notes

- 1 *Answers by the Associate Presbytery to Reasons of Dissent* (Edinburgh, 1744).
- 2 See A. R. B. Haldane, *The Drover Roads of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1952), pp. 20–44.
- 3 A. I. MacInnes, *Clanship, Commerce and the House of Stuart 1603–1788* (Tuckwell, 1996), p. 211.
- 4 R. Wallace, *Ignorance and Superstition a Source of Violence and Cruelty, and in particular the Cause of the Present Rebellion* (Edinburgh, 1746), p. 31.
- 5 The language of the aftermath of the '45 employed such emotive terms as *crush*, *thieves*, *plunderers* and *robbers*: J. Hunter, *Last of the Free* (Edinburgh, 1999), p. 198. James Yorke, aide-de-camp to the Duke of Cumberland, wrote to his father, 'I hope ... we shall be able to ... extirpate the Race if we are not stopt by lenity', quoted in W. A. Speck, *The Butcher* (Oxford, 1981), p. 113. Even forty or so years later, in 1792, when the Lowlander Robert Heron arrived at Perth, 'the mouth of the Highlands', as he termed it, he expected to find that the Highlanders would be crude and uncivilised, and expressed himself surprised but gratified to find they were not: Robert Heron, *Observations Made in a Journey Through the Western Counties of Scotland in the Autumn of 1792*, 2 vols (Perth, 1793), vol. 1, pp. 58–9. Even so, he went on to produce the astonishing remark, relating to Perth's 'having been civilised and instructed in several of the useful arts by Cromwell's soldiers' (p. 74).
- 6 Quoted in R. J. Adam (ed.), *Papers Relating to Sutherland Estate Management, 1811–1816*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1972).
- 7 C. A. Whatley, *Scottish Society, 1707–1830* (Manchester, 2000), pp. 291–2.

- 8 As Whatley says, 'the hegemony of the Scottish Kirk was in certain respects more apparent than real. It certainly acted as an important bulwark for the Hanoverians ... Generally ... the more extreme the Calvinism, the stronger the adherence to a Protestant monarch': Whatley, *Scottish Society*, p. 166.
- 9 See further I. G. Whyte, *Scotland before the Industrial Revolution*, pp. 132–5; G. Whittington, 'Agriculture and Society in Lowland Scotland, 1750–1870', in G. Whittington and I. D. Whyte (eds), *An Historical Geography of Scotland* (London, 1983), pp. 156–68.
- 10 T. Devine, *Clanship to Crofters' War: The Social Transformation of the Scottish Highlands* (Manchester, 1994), pp. 32–53.
- 11 Whatley, *Scottish Society*, pp. 197–200. See, for example, the experience of a new Presbyterian minister who in January 1715 intruded upon the parish of Rathven currently held by an Episcopalian. 'When he was coming near to the church, he was mett by a great company of women who desired him to go back, otherwise he might come to smart for it; and he, offering to go forward, they laid hold on his horse bridle, struck him in the face, throwing a great many stones at himself to the effusion of his blood', Kirk and Presbytery Sessions Records, National Archives of Scotland (hereafter *CH*) 2/158/5: recorded 1 February 1715.
- 12 High Court Justiciary documents, National Archives of Scotland (hereafter *JC*) 3/1.
- 13 *CH* 2/833/3, pp. 237–8.
- 14 *CH* 2/833/3, p. 238.
- 15 *CH* 2/1132/5, pp. 292–6.
- 16 See, for example, *A True and Full Relation of the Witches at Pittenweem* (Edinburgh, 1704).
- 17 *CH* 2/833/4.
- 18 *CH* 2/833/4.
- 19 *JC* 26/88/D342. *JC* 26/91/D456 and 457.
- 20 Lachlan Shaw, *The History of the Province of Moray*, 3 vols (2nd edn, Glasgow, 1882), vol. 2, p. 203; vol. 3, p. 146. He also observed, 'Apparitions, fairies, witches, tarans [spirits of unbaptised children], have disappeared; and few regard the stories concerning them, except stupid old people who cannot shake off their prejudices, and bigoted Papists who give implicit faith to their Priests', vol. 3, p. 331.
- 21 *CH* 2/91/2. A. MacGregor, *Highland Superstitions* (Stirling, 1922), p. 52; J. Boswell, *A Tour to the Hebrides*, ed. F. A. Pottle and C. H. Bennett (London, 1936), p. 286.
- 22 MacGregor, *Highland Superstitions*, p. 42; W. MacFarlane (ed.), *Geographical Collections Relating to Scotland*, 3 vols (Edinburgh, 1906–8), vol. 1, pp. 207–8; W. Alexander, *Notes and Sketches Illustrative of Northern Rural Life in the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh, 1877), pp. 193–7. Bethelnie is in Aberdeenshire.
- 23 T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides, 1772* (2nd edn, London, 1776), vol. 2, p. 46; MacGregor, *Highland Superstitions*, p. 23. The *Gaidhealtachd* was particularly associated with the belief in *sithean*, as the poet William Collins makes clear in the second stanza of his *Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland*, 'Tis Fancy's land to which thou sett'st thy feet; Where still, 'tis said, the Fairy people meet, Beneath each birken shade, or mead, or hill', in Mrs Barbauld (ed.), *The Poetical Works of Mr William Collins* (London, 1797).
- 24 Pennant, *Tour*, vol. 1, p. 265; F. f. MacKay (ed.), *MacNeill of Carskey, his Estate Journal, 1703–43* (Edinburgh, 1955), p. 104; W. Shaw, *A Gaelic and English Dictionary* (London, 1780); Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London, 1987), p. 162. Sir Walter Scott's mother had a toadstone amulet which she lent out to protect new-born children and their mothers from the fairies: letter to Joanna Baillie, 4 April 1815.

- 25 MacFarlane, *Geographical Collections Relating to Scotland*, vol. 1, p. 132; J. M. MacKinlay, *Folklore of Scottish Lochs and Springs* (Glasgow, 1893), p. 27; *CH* 2/839/4, 12 January. Consider also Pennant, 'The superstition of making pilgrimages to certain wells or chapels is still preserved', *Tour*, vol. 2, p. 46; and Heron's remarks on the pool at Strath Fillan to which, he says, nearly two hundred people were brought every year to cure their madness. Small presents for the saint were left on a nearby cairn. 'The patient is then thrice immersed in the sacred pool. After the immersion, he is bound hand and foot, and left for the night in a chapel which stands near. If the maniac is found loose in the morning, good hopes are conceived for a full recovery. If he is still bound, his cure remains doubtful': Heron, *Observations*, vol. 1, pp. 282–3.
- 26 J. MacCulloch, *A Description of the Western Isles of Scotland*, 3 vols (London, 1819), vol. 2, p. 32; M. Martin, *A Description of the Western Islands of Scotland* (London, 1703), p. 300; Pennant, *Tour*, vol. 1, p. 323; Boswell, *Journal of a Tour*, pp. 87–8, 188–9, 311, 355. Colonel D. Stewart, while dismissing the second sight in 1822 as 'ridiculous', gave two examples from 1773 and 1775, the former of which was an experience related to him personally by 'a young gentleman [who] was not a professed seer. This was his first and his last vision; and, as he told me, it was sufficient. No reasoning or argument could convince him that the appearance was an illusion' – a circumstance which clearly puzzled Stewart, since the youth was 'a man of education and of general knowledge of the world': D. Stewart, *Sketches of the Character, Manners, and Present State of the Highlanders of Scotland*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1822), Appendix T. The eighteenth century was fascinated by the subject and saw the publication of several treatises upon it, as J. Frazer, *Deuteroscopia: or A Brief Discourse Concerning the Second Sight* (Edinburgh, 1707), and 'Theophilus Insulanus', *A Treatise on the Second Sight*, (Edinburgh 1763).
- 27 *CH* 2/839/4.
- 28 *CH* 2/216/2. *CH* 2/1020/12. Cf. Archibald Reddie from Fife who was consulted in 1723 anent stolen clothes, *CH* 2/49/3, pp. 32–3. Widely reputed to be a charmer, he was also consulted in the case of sick horses.
- 29 Pennant, *Tour*, vol. 1, pp. 264–5. See also Collins, *Ode*, stanza 4. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, MacCulloch wrote of St Kilda that 'here, as elsewhere, the ancient popular superstitions seem to have disappeared; that of the power of the evil eye, the only existing one, is equally common even in the Lowlands to this day': MacCulloch, *Description*, vol. 2, p. 31. Like so many educated middle-class commentators of the period, MacCulloch's assertions were actually based on little more than hope and blindness, either intentional or unintentional. Evidence of reality is constantly turning up in sad little remarks, such as that by the minister of Kirkwall and S. Ola in 1793: 'many of the lower class of people are still so ignorant as to be under the baneful influence of superstition': J. Sinclair, *The Statistical Account of Scotland*, 21 vols (Edinburgh, 1791–99), vol. 7, p. 560. Note also the following, 'It was during the ministry of [Robert Robertson of Loch], and from his parish, that the last unhappy woman that suffered for witchcraft in Scotland was executed. She was burnt at Dornoch; and the common people entertain strong prejudices against her relations to this day [1793]': Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, vol. 6, p. 321.
- 30 *CH* 2/308/1. Cf. Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, vol. 6, p. 321 and *CH* 2/541/6 for similar curses in 1714 and 1748.
- 31 *JC* 16/1, p. 24. Cf. Sinclair, *Statistical Account*, vol. 6, p. 89.
- 32 *JC* 26/88/D342. She was found guilty and sentenced to be burned on the cheek and banished, *JC* 26/91/D457. See also Bessie Chisholm who was fined twenty shillings by the presbytery session of Fordyce in 1729 for wishing that some persons might fall and tumble nineteen times in their illness, *CH* 2/158/6.
- 33 Walter Scott, *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* (London, 1830), pp. 273–5.

- 34 CH 2/348/8, pp. 266–72.
- 35 D. Butler, *The Ancient Church and Parish of Abernethy* (Edinburgh, 1897), pp. 482–4; D. Sage, *Memorabilia Domestica: Parish Life in the North of Scotland* (Wick, 1889), p. 60.
- 36 This work is being done and the results will be published in the fourth volume of my history of magic and witchcraft in Scotland. A possible limitation upon one's knowing about magic and the clergy is the fact that it was the minister or one of his trusted congregation, such as the schoolmaster, who tended to write the ecclesiastical records.
- 37 CH 2/293/2, pp. 37–56.
- 38 Quoted in C. K. Sharpe, *A Historical Account of Witchcraft in Scotland* (Glasgow and London, 1884), pp. 208–9. See Burt's story of his attempt to persuade a Highland laird that the laird's account of a witch's changing shape could not be literally true. A minister was present, and when Burt finally paused for breath, the laird turned to the minister and said, 'Sir, you must not mind Mr. [Burt], for he is an atheist': E. Burt, *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland*, 2 vols (2nd edn, London, [1754] 1815), vol. 2, pp. 267–9.
- 39 L. Shaw, *The History of the Province of Moray*, 3 vols (2nd edn, Glasgow, [1760] 1882), vol. 3, p. 154. CH 2/144/6. CH 2/510/3.
- 40 CH 2/144/7. My italics. Sermons preached annually before the SPCK in both Edinburgh and London throughout the eighteenth century constantly emphasised the energetic survival of Catholicism in various parts of the Highlands and Islands.
- 41 For example, the Macmillanites whose leader, John MacMillan (1670–1753) founded a reformed presbytery after being deposed from his ministry by the Presbytery of Kirkcudbright for disorderly and schismatical practices. Lay people might also express heterodox opinions. John Nichol, an exciseman, was cited before the kirk session of Pittenweem in Fife in November 1719 for openly saying that 'it is not in the power of God to save an ignorant person; that the Alcoran is preferable to the Bible; that the Whig ministers are worse than devils, lading people to Hell; and that they are dropping to Hell like peats out of a cart', CH 2/833/4.
- 42 See further J. Watts, *Scalan, a Highland Seminary, 1716–1799* (Tuckwell, 1999). See also 'Information of the presbytery of Kinkarden O'Neil against Popish priests, Jesuits, and their receptors, trafiqueing Papists, within the bounds of the said presbytery', JC 26/100/D898.
- 43 I have found scarcely any evidence that Satan was overtly named as a partner in crime in eighteenth-century witchcraft. Janet Hairstanes was alleged to have been 'in correspondence with the Devil', JC 26/88/D342, and Lilius Adie copulated with the Devil who had cold skin and cloven feet and kept his hat on, CH 2/355/2: 29 July 1704; but so far that is about it.
- 44 C. A. Malcolm (ed.), *The Minutes of the Justices of the Peace for Lanarkshire, 1707–1723* (Edinburgh, 1931), pp. 44–5 (1708); JC 26/89/D386 (1709); JC 26/92/D631 (1710).
- 45 *Revelation*, 5–6. The Kirk was in the forefront of this drive to modernism. In 1750 another sermon to the SPCK noted, as usual, that the Highlands were superstitious, rude, uncivilised, ignorant, disaffected, useless, and dangerous, [Hugh Blair], *The Importance of Religious Knowledge to the Happiness of Mankind* (Edinburgh, 1750), pp. 30–3. But the published version noted that 'the Society are authorised, by a second Patent obtained from the Crown, in the Year 1738, to cause such of the Children as they shall think fit, to be instructed and bred up to Husbandry, Trades and Manufacture, or to such other manual Operations as the Society shall think proper', *ibid.*, 33, note. On the theoretical bases on which many of these modernising practices were introduced in Scotland, see David Spadafora, *The Idea of Progress in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (New Haven, 1990), pp. 253–320.

- 46 George MacKenzie, *The Laws and Customes of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1678); William Forbes, *The Institutes of the Law of Scotland*, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1722–30). See also Edward J. Cowan and Lizanne Henderson, ‘The Last of the Witches? The Survival of Scottish Witch Belief’, in Julian Goodare (ed.), *The Scottish Witch-Hunt in Context* (Manchester, 2002), p. 200.
- 47 Jeanne Favret-Saada, *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage* (Cambridge, 1977), p. 24. This concept is of the first importance in coming to grips with the realities of magic and witchcraft in both the past and the present. See also the experiences of Perle Möhl, *Village Voices: Co-existence and Communication in a Rural Community in Central France* (Copenhagen, 1997), pp. 73–131.
- 48 Jeanne Favret-Saada, ‘Unwitching as Therapy’, *American Ethnologist* 16 (1989) 42.
- 49 *JC* 26/92/D631.

The Devil's pact: a male strategy

Soili-Maria Olli

By the second half of the seventeenth century, as the witch trials reached their climax in Sweden, belief in the interventionist powers of the Devil had become not only a major preoccupation of the educated classes, but also seems to have considerably exercised the minds of the wider population, illiterate as well as literate. It is apparent, however, that different groups in society held different views as to the nature and consequences of dealing with the Devil. Both the Lutheran Church and the secular authorities held up Satan as the fount of all evil and used the figure and fear of Satan as a means of disciplining and controlling the populace. To have any sort of dealings with him was to commit not only the gravest of personal sins but to be complicit in his master-plan to undermine Christian society.¹ Yet, as nineteenth-century folklore collectors found, the Devil was not always considered a scary, dangerous figure. He held an ambivalent position in popular beliefs, and was even thought of by some as a reliable friend and helper.² This contrasting view of satanic relations is also revealed in the records of eighteenth-century Swedish prosecutions of those accused of making pacts with the Devil. As these trials show, for men in particular, the Devil provided a strategy for bettering one's position in life, and not necessarily at the expense of society. These Devil's pact trials also highlight the differing conceptions of female and male satanic relationships, and the way in which that fundamental tool of the Enlightenment – growing literacy – enabled a wider section of society to engage with Satan rather than reject him.

The idea of the Devil's pact

The concept of the Devil's pact was a prominent theme in early modern European theology. Central to the debate was the idea that witches and magical practitioners of all types gained their powers from selling their soul to the Devil. According to learned doctrines no human being could possibly possess any supernatural powers or occult knowledge.³ Only God could

perform miracles, but the Devil's exceeding knowledge of the world and the hidden properties of nature enabled him to do extraordinary things which appeared miraculous. Only by making a pact with the Devil could witches and magicians take advantage of the preternatural powers he possessed, and thereby perform whatever harmful or benign spells and divinations they desired. In relation to witchcraft, the Devil's pact was also thought to be a precondition for participation in those diabolic, orgiastic, perverted sabbaths, lurid details of which exercised the minds of many a theologian.⁴

Yet the origins of the characteristics of the archetypal satanic pact are not fully clear. There are obvious parallels with the alliances God made with Old Testament figures such as Noah, Abraham and David. Other analogues for the demonic pact also existed in medieval society, such as the feudal system of pacts made between vassals and their masters, and the common practice of dedicating children to God or the saints. These might also have served to normalise the possibility and practicability of entering into an allegiance with Satan. But the pact proper can be found much earlier, in a story attributed to the fourth century which tells how St Basil saved the soul of a servant who sought Satan's help to marry his master's daughter. Far more influential, however, was the legend concerning the sixth-century churchman, Theophilus of Sicily. Having been fired from his post, Theophilus was said to have entered into a written pact with the Devil, in which he renounced allegiance to Christ and the Virgin Mary. The legend was widely disseminated in pre-Reformation northern Europe, particularly through the medium of miracle plays.⁵ During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries there were increasing concerns about the practice of demonic magic. To borrow Richard Kieckhefer's phrase, there existed a 'clerical underworld' of ritual magicians who attempted to call up angels, spirits and demons for both lofty and base purposes. Instructions for such adjurations were to be found in a variety of secretly circulated grimoires and scrolls. Although there is little evidence of these medieval mages actually making formal agreements with the Devil, their desire to communicate with and exploit demons, and their reliance on written texts, undoubtedly led to growing suspicions in some quarters that pacts were being drawn up. This was a developing notion that made its own contribution to the rise of the witch persecutions.⁶

From the late sixteenth century onwards the most well-known and influential template for making a pact with the Devil was the legend of Dr Faust.⁷ Georg Faust was an astrologer, alchemist and magician who also lectured on the classics at various educational establishments in Germany during the 1520s and 1530s. He achieved considerable notoriety in his own lifetime, and apparently once admitted to a Franciscan friar that he had signed a pact with Satan in his own blood. It is thought that Faust died in the early 1540s, but thanks to the development and spread of the printing press, over the next two centuries the Faust legend spread across Europe and across the

social scale. The story was printed for the first time in a cheap *Volksbuch* (chapbook) by Johann Spiess of Frankfurt in 1587 and the first of many Dutch and English editions appeared soon after. It was the content of the English chapbooks which formed the basis of Christopher Marlowe's famous play *Doctor Faustus*, written shortly before his untimely death in 1593.⁸ The chapbooks tell how Faust conjured up one of Satan's minions, Mephistopheles, and wrote a blood contract with Satan which stipulated that the latter would fulfil all Faust's desires for a period of twenty-four years. Satan was as good as his word, and when the pact expired he came to earth and ripped Faust to pieces. Although meant as an entertaining cautionary tale, twenty-four years of having one's wishes come true must have appeared a rather attractive proposition to some readers.

During the late seventeenth century Francois Henri de Montmorency (1628–95), Duke of Luxembourg, also attracted a similar notoriety for diabolic collusion. The military successes of the French army under his command during the War of the Grand Alliance, particularly the heavy defeat of the English at Namur in 1692, generated a couple of publications in the 1690s claiming he had made a pact with Satan.⁹ During the early eighteenth century several editions of a popular German chapbook fabricated a detailed account of how Montmorency signed a pact with the Devil in 1659.¹⁰ The chapbook claimed to have been translated from the French in 1702 and listed the twenty-eight demands in the satanic contract, including the dismissal of an accusation of murder made against Montmorency. As with Faust, the chapbooks mixed fact and fantasy. One edition stated Montmorency made the pact while in the Bastille, for example. Montmorency had indeed spent a few months in the Bastille in 1679–80 after having been implicated in a notorious aristocratic poisoning scandal – thus the reference to the murder accusations, but in the wrong decade. The influence of the Montmorency legend is apparent from the fact that a copy of the story was found amongst the belongings of a man tried before the Swedish *Justitierevisionen* or King's Council on a charges of making a Devil's pact in 1776.¹¹

One of the intriguing aspects of the dissemination of these legends in Sweden is that there is little evidence of there having been any trade in Swedish language versions of the aforementioned chapbooks during the period. The earliest Faust chapbook in the collection of the National Library of Sweden is dated 1813.¹² It would seem that the Faust legend found its way into Swedish oral tradition largely from German literature, in particular via the conduit of Swedish soldiers who had fought in German lands. The Luxembourg book cited in the 1776 trial mentioned above was also almost certainly a German chapbook edition, while one young man prosecuted for attempting a pact confessed to having taken German lessons.

The Devil's pact: a terrible crime?

For the period 1680–1789 at least twenty-nine cases of Devil's pact appear in the records of the Swedish *Justitierevisionen* or King's Council.¹³ This was the highest legal institution in Sweden at the time, and acted as an appeal court which could grant pardons for those facing the death penalty. In 1779 it became the Supreme Court of Sweden. The Devil's pact was considered the gravest of crimes and was punishable by death.¹⁴ It was considered the very worst of blasphemies, breaking the alliance made with God at baptism. It was, as the legal records described it, a '*Crime Laesae Majestatis Divinae*' ('Crime Against the Heavenly Majesty'). The crime of blasphemy during the period needs to be seen within the context of two broad, interrelated developments during the second half of the seventeenth century: concerted attempts by the state to extend control and discipline over the mentalities and activities of the populace, and the consolidation of religious unity according to Lutheran tenets. This is evident from the nature and number of laws passed at the time, particularly the *Religions Stadgan* (Statute of Religion) of 1655. One can fit this period of Swedish history within the wider move towards the reformation of popular culture outlined by Peter Burke.¹⁵

Bearing the above developments in mind, it is, perhaps, unsurprising that there were Devil's pact trials during the second half of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Yet, intriguingly, there was no decrease in the number of pact cases before the King's Council over the whole period concerned. Between 1680–1740 there were fourteen trials, and fifteen between 1741–89. While these figures certainly suggest a stable and unchanging popular belief in the power of the Devil during the eighteenth century, the trial material reveals a significant change in terms of the judicial interpretation of the alleged crime. One of the features of the Enlightenment was the general diminution of the scope of supernatural interventionism in earthly affairs, and as a result the Devil lost much of his power and threat in intellectual thought. So, during the first half of the period concerned great efforts were made by the secular and ecclesiastical authorities to ascertain whether the person accused of Devil's pact had actually gained anything from the Devil or not. From the mid-eighteenth century, however, attempts at making a demonic pact were increasingly but not always referred to as 'foolish imaginations'. The blasphemy of the satanic pact was explained more and more in medical rather than religious terms. Behaviour that had once been demonologised was increasingly pathologised. Those attempting a demonic pact were increasingly considered either ignorant, 'superstitious', mentally ill, or a combination of the three.

As early as 1727 a boy named Erik Ahlgren was punished for his credulity rather than for his evil intentions in attempting a pact with the Devil, and was forced to wear publicly a sign over his head stating what he had done.¹⁶ In

1757 after considerable investigation Axel Thomsson, who had stayed up many nights in a row in order to communicate with the Devil, was declared to be ignorant rather than a true blasphemer.¹⁷ According to his own statement in court, God could not help him in life but the Devil could. Several witnesses testified that Axel Thomsson was healthy in mind and body, so the reason for his ideas about the Devil was explained by the fact that he lacked a proper Christian education. His father had died when he was a young boy, no one had subsequently taken responsibility for his religious education, and he had never participated in Holy Communion. From such cases it would seem that judicial interpretation and leniency was also influenced by the youth of the defendants. Most of the boys accused before the King's Council of making a Devil's pact were pardoned from the death penalty because of their age, lack of knowledge of Christianity and for regretting their violation. The death penalty was, instead, usually transformed into some form of corporal punishment. All the youths had to undergo both secular and church punishment.¹⁸

The coexistence of both rational and supernatural legal interpretations of the criminal intent of those who professed to communicate with spirit beings, during the intellectual transitional period of the first half of the eighteenth century, is well illustrated by a legal case from 1722. In that year a young farmhand, Henrich Michelsson, from Yläkirjo village in the south of Finland, claimed to have met three angels on several occasions.¹⁹ The angels had, according to his own testimony, brought him messages from God to be mediated to the leaders of the church. Thorough investigations were made by the authorities concerning Michelsson's medical history, as his visions were initially thought to be the result of some illness. From a Lutheran perspective it would have been considered unlikely but not out of the question that angels had really visited him. It was the heavenly message, however, that caused problems and the need for alternative explanations, for Michelsson's angelic visitors communicated that the morals of the people needed improving, otherwise God would punish them by transforming all the bread in the city into stones. Examinations made by physicians showed, however, that Michelsson was of sound mind and body. According to several reliable witnesses there was no record of either mental or physical illness in his past. As Michelsson did not move in his sleep, it was concluded that the visions of the angels could not have been caused by dreams either. After a lengthy series of hearings and examinations the members of the court finally came to the conclusion that it must have been the Devil himself who had appeared to the young boy in the guise of the three angels. One indication of this was that the angels apparently appeared to be armed with bloodied swords.²⁰ A medical explanation was obviously preferred but despite strenuous efforts to find a flaw in Michelsson's medical history, the court had to fall back on the increasingly anachronistic model of demonological causation. In this way the idea of the power of the Devil still served an official function.

While the authorities obviously saw contact with the Devil as inimical to true Christian faith, at the popular level views on the 'unchristian' nature of pact-making were rather mixed. Certainly, in one case from 1740, three people explicitly pledged to cancel their Christian faith in writing in order to find a hidden treasure with the help of the Devil.²¹ Such pact-makers were quite aware of the gravity of the offence they were committing before God and the punishment the secular authorities could mete out. When Jöns Hasselgren was tried in 1714, he was asked if he knew what those condemned for Devil's pact were to expect. Hasselgren answered yes, and that this knowledge had not prevented him from committing the crime, but had rather inspired him.²² Awareness of the possible legal consequences is also evident in the case of Nils Svensson Bohlin, tried in 1746. He did not sign his contract with his own name, but made one up – Daniel Nilsson – in order not to be caught by the authorities.²³ Other evidence further suggests that people agreed with the authorities in considering the Devil's pact a heinous crime.²⁴ There are instances where people stumbled across written contracts, and immediately delivered them to the authorities instead of returning them to their authors, which proves the wisdom of Bohlin's strategy even if he was still caught in the end. In 1714, for example, a contract made by a soldier was found by his mother-in-law, who immediately gave it to a representative of the local authorities.²⁵ In 1702 a woman who had hidden a contract on behalf of a friend refused to keep the contract in the house once she became pregnant. The unborn child was potentially thought to be damaged by it.²⁶ Yet others did not necessarily see a fundamental conflict with the religious practice of their daily lives, nor consider their contract with God broken. Jöns Hasselgren, accused in 1714, upset the members of the King's Council by telling how he had kept his written contract with the Devil folded in his shoe while he participated in the Holy Communion. He had also continued saying his morning and evening prayers as usual after the contract had been written.²⁷ A journeyman had made his contract on a Sunday after he had taken part in the Divine Service and before he went to listen to the evening preaching.²⁸ Any guilt over the ungodly practice of bargaining with the Devil might have been assuaged by the notion that the Devil could be cheated at the time of the delivery of the body and the soul.²⁹ In popular belief it was thought possible to fool the Devil and it was common to tell stories about how easily he could be tricked. Such attitudes were far from the doctrines of the Lutheran church.³⁰

The Devil's pact: a male strategy

The vast majority of the accused brought before the Kings Council were men belonging to the educated classes. Only two were agricultural labourers. Nearly 50 per cent of the accused were soldiers, some of them of high rank.

Amongst the others one was a nobleman, a couple were farmers and the rest were burghers, clerks, journeymen, sailors, sheriffs and students. Most of these men were also from urban environments where the availability of the relevant literature and knowledge of the Faustian and Luxembourgian pacts circulated more freely.

The majority of those accused of making Devil's pacts were between seventeen and thirty years old, most being around twenty. Only two pact-makers were middle aged or older (fifty and sixty-two years of age). It is undoubtedly the case that in many instances, as Per Sörlin has observed, attempted assignments with the Evil One were boyish pranks, made out of pure curiosity rather than seriously contemplated and solemnly conducted affairs.³¹ Amongst schoolboys the attempt to make a pact was an act of anti-authoritarian bravado, akin to indulging in other forbidden activities such as smoking, drinking and playing cards. Some of the youths and young men admitted in court that they never had any real intention of handing over the contract. Anders Mårtensson, for example, said that he had made his contract just for 'fun' (*narrerij*).³² Apart from the letting of blood, the drawing up of the contract could be achieved quickly and easily, but the act of delivering it to the Devil was the cause of some hesitation and fear. In 1756 a student named Ganander left his contract under a gravestone, but immediately regretted what he had done and tried to retrieve the contract the same evening. As was explained in court, however, he had unfortunately been unable to move the heavy gravestone again.³³ As these cases show, the court was keen to determine the nature of the intent, and the effort which the accused had gone to in order to seek out Satan. A distinction was sometimes but not always made between assumed demonic contacts and actual pacts with the Devil. There are some cases where people were accused of Devil's pact even though they had not tried to establish such an agreement. The farmer Olof Johansson Lönneberg, for example, was accused of making a pact in 1776 even though he had not attempted to make either a written or oral pact. In the opinion of the authorities an agreement between Lönneberg and Satan must still have existed, as Lönneberg claimed to have been in close contact with the Devil. He had told people that he had been drinking together with the Devil, and according to several witnesses he had also called Satan 'my brother' on many different occasions.³⁴

While some of these youths and young men testified at their hearings that the idea and act of making a pact had been a spontaneous impulse,³⁵ most pact-makers had prepared themselves thoroughly. They gathered the required instruments, a tool to cut the finger with, paper, a pen and sometimes ink, as during the eighteenth century it became common to mix the blood with red ink. Several defendants told how they had carried this pact-making kit for a considerable time before plucking up courage and waiting for the right moment to come. The right moment was sometimes when the pact-maker bled

by accident. One soldier, for example, did not cut his finger in order to make the pact, but used blood from his leg when he happened to scratch it badly one day.

The written contract contained the conditions for both parties. In exchange for certain benefits, usually money, the Devil was promised the body and soul of the person who had entered the pact. The agreed duration of the pact was usually between five and thirty years, though one man asked for sixty years.³⁶ Most pacts were made individually, but in three cases two or three people drew up a joint agreement.³⁷ There was also a tradition that three copies of the contract had to be made, though in only three cases out of the twenty-nine studied had this been done. The signed contract was often left for the Devil in churchyards or at crossroads on a Thursday night, and in Scandinavia more generally numerous written contracts have also been found in the keyholes of church doors. All the essential aspects of the contract had to be correct otherwise it was considered invalid. Those like Anders Mårtensson, however, who failed to conduct the procedure properly could consider themselves fortunate if they ended up being prosecuted for their attempts. As the court heard at his trial in 1694, Mårtensson had neither signed nor dated his contract. Furthermore, he had carried the contract around with him in his pocket, believing that Satan would come and ask him for it when the time was right. As the contract was made incorrectly and had not been delivered, and as Mårtensson was obviously as poor as when he drew up the contract, it was concluded that the pact could not possibly have taken place and he was therefore pardoned from the death penalty.³⁸

The written contract was not the only means of making a pact.³⁹ The Devil accepted other methods of transaction. One could, for example, call upon him by running backwards around a church or blowing into the keyhole of a church door. In a trial from 1772 the defendant confessed to keeping some soil from an execution ground in a napkin, with the intention of giving it to the Devil in a churchyard, thereby making a pact.⁴⁰ Oral pacts were also made. In two cases soldiers accused of fraternising with Satan admitted in court that they had made a verbal agreement with him.⁴¹ In both of these cases the agreement had apparently been settled with a handshake.

Motives

It has been asserted that the main reason for making a pact with the Devil was to ensure success at hunting,⁴² but in fact by far the most common motive was money.⁴³ All those tried before the King's Council had expected to receive some form of financial reward from the Evil One. Sometimes an unspecified, one-off lump sum was requested, and sometimes a regular income was demanded for the entire duration of the pact. The soldier Zacharias Elfing, for instance, asked the Devil for three silver coins a month for a period of

twenty years.⁴⁴ The majority of youths and young men asked for money for specific purposes, usually to pay off debts. Inability to work and the consequent fear of economic ruin were also major determinants. For example, a journeyman wrote his contract after eighteen months of unemployment.⁴⁵ Johan Strömwall, who was condemned in 1776 was punished not only for making a pact with the Devil, but also for having written two false cheques, which indicates the state of his financial problems.⁴⁶ The farmhand Lars Olofsson, tried in 1776, was unable to work properly due to the onset of physical disability of some sort. His brother, who was a farmer, offered to support him if he would help with some of the easier tasks on the farm. After having stayed with his brother for several years, Lars decided to make a pact with the Devil in order to solve his financial dependence.⁴⁷

Erik Ahlgren confessed to entering a pact because of severe anxiety about his economical situation.⁴⁸ His financial problems were so bad that he had even considered committing suicide because of them. His distress shows clearly in his written contract as follows:

Högt ärade fader fanen⁴⁹ min högsta förtröstare
 Dhet jag åtskilliga gånger min kära fader tillskrifwer, men
 icke blifwit med swar hugnader, så will jag än en
 gång tillbedia min kära fader i min begjären
 sampt om Du intet min sedel till dig tager
 jag den igen får, om jag får så många penningar iag
 här i wärlden behöver skall iag tiena dig här i wärlden
 med Kråp och Siäl och när iag dör skall K(ära) fader
 fanen i betalning åtniutha både Kråp och Siähl
 iag wäntar härpå ett gunsigt swar och det
 i morgon afton, rent ut säijandes der iag
 intet blifwer med swar hugnader så skrifwer
 iag intet mehr ej heller friwilligen finner
 dig men blifwer iag i min
 begjären hugnade skall detta Contractet
 stå fast och aldrig i Efwighet rubbas
 som med mit blod och egenhändig
 namns undersätiande bekräftas
 d 5 Juli 1727
 Erik Ahlgren
 Härpå wäntas swar i morgon afton att iag wet hwar
 effter iag mig regulera skall hiepl mig fader
 skall intet ångrat

[Highly regarded father the Devil my highest comfort
 I have written to you several times dear father, but
 not been graced with an answer, so I will still one
 time ask you my dear father in my own request
 also if you don't accept this piece of paper

that I will get back, if I get as much money as I
will need in this world, I will serve you in this world
with body and soul and as I die will D(ear) father
the Devil as payment get both Body and Soul
I expect a positive answer and that
until tomorrow evening, frankly speaking if
I will not get an answer I will
never write again or deliberately look for you
but if I will be answered in my
wishes this Contract will stand and
never in eternity be removed
that with my own blood and my own
name and signature is confirmed

July 1727

Erik Ahlgren

Upon this I expect an answer until tomorrow evening so that I know
what I have to subject myself to, help me father
you will not regret it]

With regard to the financial incentives of selling one's soul, it is also worth mentioning that the Devil was also thought to operate a loans policy as well. The pact-maker's body and soul were only to be delivered to Satan if the sum of money was not returned on a settled date. Thus one man accused in 1702 had asked the Devil for 10,000 'rix-dollars' in silver coins, which according to the contract was to be paid back on 30 November 1710.⁵⁰

Although desire for money was an obvious reason for selling one's soul to the Devil, there were other common motives. Soldiers asked for protection against bullets and to be successful in battle. As one soldier wrote in his contract, 'please, just let me live for 20 years in this world'.⁵¹ Demands made by farmers and farmhands also reflected the nature of their existence, for they usually asked to be granted a 'free-shot' (*friskytt*), meaning that the quarry would always appear conveniently before them and that they would always be able to hit it. In order to be granted a free-shot by the Devil, one could also take a sacramental wafer from the Holy Communion, hang it in a tree and shoot through it. During the period under investigation three people were tried for stealing holy wafers, possibly for this reason, though the host was used in other magic rituals as well.⁵² Putting the host in the barrel of a gun was also thought to bring good hunting luck without involving the Devil. In one case brought before the King's Council the accused admitted that he had taken the host with him into the forest, then suddenly regretted his intentions and eaten it.⁵³ Other requests in addition to money and the above demands concerned good fortune in general, wisdom, physical strength, good luck in playing cards, to be successful with women, to have beautiful clothes and to possess the ability to play the violin and other musical instruments. Antero Heikkinen mentions a case from 1661 when a student at Åbo Akademi

in Finland was said to have learned several foreign languages, among others Latin and Hebrew, in less than one day with help of the Devil.⁵⁴

While all the above incentives for selling one's soul concerned bettering one's life in some way, at least one man used the pact as a rather confused strategy to end his life. In 1699 he confessed before a local court in Hällestad, that he had made a pact with the Devil in order to be executed.⁵⁵ Theologically it was possible for the soul to be rescued even if a person was executed for committing a crime, but if a person committed suicide there was no hope for eternal life. The Hällestad case is not some bizarre anomaly. Similar self-accusations to obtain 'judicial suicide' became frequent enough in the eighteenth century to constitute a real problem for the authorities, for innocent people might be executed while sinners might not be punished properly before the eyes of God.⁵⁶ Yet if this really was the intention of the Hällestad man then it was surely misguided from an official perspective. From the Church's point of view – if not from his own – his soul was damned for making a pact in the first place.

One wonders what similar conflicting and confused thoughts went through the mind of a soldier named Johan Gottfried Ekelau, who was condemned for sodomy in the year 1728. As the minister of his parish was preparing Ekelau prior to being beheaded and burned at the stake, he asked him if he had anything else on his conscience that he wanted to confess. At this moment Ekelau admitted, amongst other things, that he had made a pact with the Devil. The execution was thus postponed as new court hearings had to take place to try this addition to his crimes. The case finally came before the Kings Council in the year of 1731. Perhaps the three years' reprieve from death is what had motivated Ekelau. Because he had, according to his own testimony, received everything that he had wished from the Devil, the case was investigated thoroughly resulting in over eighty pages of statements and testimonies.⁵⁷ He had asked Satan for money, success in fights, good luck by playing cards and to be successful with women. On making the pact in 1724 the Devil had immediately given him a purse filled with money, which Ekelau, by his own admission, used for 'unnecessary expenses' such as gambling, drinking and buying beautiful clothes.

During the trial Ekelau described in great detail further meetings with the Devil. At springtime in the year of 1725 he was taken ill and decided to cancel the pact. He contacted the minister of his local church in order to get help to do this, but the Devil began to harass him in many different ways. Ekelau claimed that Satan appeared variously in the guise of a man dressed in black clothes, a black dog, a black cat, a lynx, a dragon, a goat and a gipsy. He violently attacked Ekelau on several occasions, throwing him from one wall of the room to another, splitting his head in three places, and demanded he re-establish the contract. The Devil had also taken back the purse of money, but asserted that Ekelau still belonged to him. Several witnesses

testified that they had seen how Satan had caused Ekelau physical pain and made it impossible for him to talk or to move his body. On one occasion the Devil lay on top of him as he was sleeping in his bed at night, so that he had difficulties breathing. In court Ekelau said that he thought that the Devil wanted to suffocate him.

The Devil, men and women

The characteristics of male contact with the Devil, as discussed so far, differed significantly from perceptions at the time of female relationships with the Devil, whether in the context of witchcraft or possession.⁵⁸ Men desired and deliberately sought out Satan, whereas Satan sought out women either to seduce and beguile them into a relationship or to physically force them into accepting his presence. Women were viewed as the weaker sex, emotionally and morally, and consequently easier prey for the wiles of the Devil. So far only one woman in Sweden is known to have made a formal pact with the Evil One in the same manner as those male examples described already.⁵⁹ Men turned to the Devil as an all-knowing masculine confidant. Axel Thomsen for example had stayed up many nights in a row just to talk to the Devil.⁶⁰ He said at his trial that his problems were so complicated, that Satan was the only one who could help him. Men also regarded the Devil as a business partner, and as such some of the young men who were prosecuted tried to make the pact look attractive to him. Per Nilsson, accused in 1698, had asked the Devil for wisdom and offered to give him a share of the extra earnings such wisdom would generate.⁶¹ Men like Nilsson felt it necessary to persuade the Devil into a bargain, as if he otherwise had little interest in seizing men's souls, a scenario contrary to that drawn by the theologians. When it came to females, though, the Devil was all too ready to ensnare them. Female contacts with Satan were, as a rule considered more of threat than those of men.⁶² A man who assigned himself to the Devil did so for personal gain but not at the expense of others, and only put his own soul in danger. Women, on the other hand, contracted with the Devil for anti-social purposes. The favours they gained from Satan were not concerned with personal aggrandisement, but were used to inflict misfortune on others, in particular to harm the production of milk and the breeding of cattle. As the folklore sources indicate, people believed women stole milk from their neighbours with the aid of the Devil, and paid him back with a portion of the butter produced.⁶³

Witchcraft accusations apart, women also actually resorted to the Devil for personal gain, but adopted a different strategy from that of men, which was consequently open to different interpretation. By way of example we can use two cases of female possession that were heard in the King's Council during the period under investigation, one in 1690 and the other in 1708.⁶⁴ In both cases the women were accused of blasphemy 'for having let Satan

take their body in possession', but were finally condemned for fraud.⁶⁵ It was decided that they had pretended to be possessed by the Devil in order to take personal advantage of the diabolic discourse amongst the clergy and the wider population. It is significant that both of the accused women lived on the margins of society. They were both somewhat elderly, unmarried, sick, homeless and had no relatives to support them. The woman tried in 1708 had an impressive criminal record. She had lied about her place of birth, used a false passport, had attempted murder and profaned God. She had in many ways been a burden to both the authorities and to the inhabitants in several villages where she had stayed. Because of her supposed possession villagers had provided her with food and a roof over her head. Some of them complained to their local authorities that they had to burn candles for her all night long and that several men had to look after her night and day. In respect of female strategies involving claims of satanic relations, it is also worth noting a recent study by the Finnish historian Jari Eilola.⁶⁶ He examined the seventeenth-century trials of three women in Finland accused of killing their newborn babies. In order to be pardoned from the accusations, they claimed that Satan was the father of the children, and so they were, therefore, mercy killings and not true infanticide.

From a legal point of view, the increased caution of the eighteenth-century King's Council towards proof of satanic relations in some respects worked in favour of women. Most of the men accused of making Devil's pacts were actually guilty of the 'crime', and confessed as much in court. More significantly there often existed physical proof of their crime in the form of the written contract. These were usually displayed as evidence in court. Although many contracts were destroyed as evil profanities after the trials were over, their contents were written down by the court clerks. Some of the accused understandably initially denied that they had written the contracts produced in court, but later admitted their guilt after handwriting tests were conducted. Because women accused of contracting with the Devil were rarely guilty of the crime, and, even if they were, they rarely resorted to written contracts, it was difficult to provide sufficient evidence to prove guilt.

As the cases heard by the King's Council demonstrate, in late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Sweden different groups in society used the concept of the satanic pact for different purposes. Despite the Church's attempt, through preaching and publication, to present the Devil as being the source of all iniquity, with whom no man or woman should ever have any dealings, many people saw the Devil as amoral, maybe, but hardly the essence of pure evil. He was someone they could do business with. The secular authorities supported the Church in its aims, and were responsible for punishing such blasphemous views, which were considered to disturb the social and moral

order. The fact that people continued to seek out the Devil in eighteenth-century Sweden represents, therefore, not only a failure of Lutheran inculcation but also of state social control. At a personal level, some individuals believed that the Devil could offer what neither state nor Church could provide. Through studying the trials we also gain new insights into the melting pot of intellectual thought at a time when Enlightenment philosophies and increasingly sophisticated attitudes towards jurisprudence, both combined with and reacted against still dominant and influential Lutheran views on society and morality.

Notes

- 1 For a general survey of religious attitudes to magic and witchcraft in Lutheran Scandinavia see Jens Chr. V. Johansen, 'Faith, Superstition and Witchcraft in Reformation Scandinavia', in Ole Peter Grell (ed.), *The Scandinavian Reformation* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 179–211.
- 2 See Ulrika Wolf-Knuts, *Människan och djävulen. En studie kring form, motiv och funktion i folklig tradition* (Åbo, 1991), pp. 219–21. Wolf-Knuts describes in what way the consequences of meetings with Satan could be positive and useful and how undesired contacts with the Devil could also be used successfully.
- 3 That a human being could make an agreement with Satan was not accepted by all intellectuals of the period. In the opinion of some demonologists Satan was nothing but a spirit and was therefore unable to have any kind of physical contact with humans. For detailed insights into the various intellectual views on satanic relations see Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997).
- 4 The concept of the witches' sabbath was not prominent in witch trials throughout Europe, and its distribution requires further analysis. While it was a strong element in Swedish prosecutions, for example, it was not in Danish witch trials. See Johansen, 'Faith, Superstition and Witchcraft in Reformation Scandinavia'; P. Sörlin, *Wicked Arts: Witchcraft and Magic Trials in Southern Sweden, 1635–1754* (Brill, 1999). More generally see Brian Levack, *The Witch-Hunt in Early Modern Europe* (2nd edn, London, 1995).
- 5 See Ülo Valk, *Perkele, Johdatus demonologiaan* (Tampere, 1997), p. 116; Roland Grambo, *Djevelens livshistorie: Scener fra en travel tilvaerelse* (Oslo, 1990), pp. 141–2; Carl-Martin Edsman, 'Djävulspakt och besatthet. Ett 1700-talsdokument', in Lennart Elmevik (ed.), *Dialekter och folkminnen. Hyllningskrift till Maj Reinhammar den 17 maj 2000* (Uppsala, 2000); J. B. Russell, *Lucifer: The Devil in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca and London, 1984), p. 81; Ingrid H. Shafer, 'Pacts with the Devil: Faust and Precursors' (1996), www.usao.edu/~facshaferi/faust.html; Jan Wall, 'Wilt thou nu falla nedh och tilbidja mig', in Ulrika Wolf-Knuts (ed.), *Djävulen. Seminarium den 13 Nov. 1990*, IF Rapport 13 (Åbo, 1990), p. 24.
- 6 Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1990), pp. 151–75; Edward Peters, *The Magician, the Witch and the Law* (Hassocks, 1978); Edward Peters, 'The Medieval Church and State on Superstition, Magic and Witchcraft: From Augustine to the Sixteenth Century', in Karen Jolly, Catharina Raudvere and Edward Peters, *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages* (London, 2001), pp. 173–238.
- 7 See Marianneli Sorvacko-Spratte, 'Ein unmoralisches anbot?' – oder der Teufelspakt Fausts in ausgewählten Werken der deutschsprachigen Literatur von der Entstehung der

- Legende bis zum Ende des 19. Jahrhunderts* (Åbo, 1998); Grambo, *Djevelens livshistorie*, Peter Boehmer and Sidney Johnson (eds), *Faust Through Four Centuries: Retrospective and Analysis* (Tübingen, 1989).
- 8 See, for example, P. F. Gent, *The Historie of the Damnable Life, and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* (London, 1592).
 - 9 See the following English versions, *The Bargain which the Duke of Luxembourg, General of the Troops of France, made with the Devil, to win battles* (London, 1692); *A Letter from a Trooper in Flanders, to his Comrade: Shewing, that Luxembourg is a Witch, and Deals with the Devil* (London, 1695).
 - 10 See, for example, *Luxembourg des weltberuffenen Herzogs von Luxembourg ... Pacta oder Verbündniss mit dem Satan, und das darauf erfolgte erschrockliche Ende* (c. 1715).
 - 11 Justitierevisionens Utslagshandlingar, 4 April 1776, nr. 1/2 k.
 - 12 See, for example, *Den i hela världen bekante store svart-konstnären och trollkarlen doctor Johan Faust och hans med djefvulen upprättade förbund* (Wexiö, 1813).
 - 13 The number of cases is not final as this paper is based on an on going research project. Finland was a part of Sweden from the Middle Ages until 1809.
 - 14 Sven Kjällström, *Den svenska kyrkoordningen 1571 jämte studier kring tillkomst, innehåll och användning* (Lund, 1971), pp. 9, 71, 88, 92.
 - 15 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978).
 - 16 Riksarkivet (hereafter RA), Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 November 1727, nr. 21.
 - 17 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 March 1757, nr. 27.
 - 18 For Lutheran attitudes towards the role of church and state regarding punishment see Sven Kjällström, *Den svenska kyrkoordningen*, pp. 304–5.
 - 19 Soili-Maria Eklund (Olli), 'Drängen Henrich Michelsson änglasyster. Demonologiska och medicinska förklaringsmodeller i tidig modern tid', in Hanne Sanders (ed.), *Mellem Gud og Djaevlen. Religiöse og magiske veldensbilleder i Norden 1500–1800* (Copenhagen, 2002).
 - 20 It was thought possible for the Devil to take any shape even that of an angel. On popular visions in Scandinavia see Arne Bugge Amundsen, "'Mig Engelen Tilltalte Saa ...': Folklike visoner som kulturell kommunikation, Saet ick evantro i min overtroes stead. Studier i folketro og folkelig religiositet', in Arne Bugge Amundsen and Anne Erikssen (eds), *Festskrift till Ornulf Hode på 60-årsdagen* (Oslo, 1995); Jürgen Beyer, *Conception of Holiness in the Lutheran Countries, c. 1550–1700*, Studies in Folklore and Popular Religion, vol. 3 (Tartu, 1999).
 - 21 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionenens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 24 January 1740, nr. 43.
 - 22 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, General Auditörens handlingar, Utslagshandlingar, 7 June 1714, nr. 8.
 - 23 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, General Auditörens handlingar, Utslagshandlingar 23 July 1746, nr. 84.
 - 24 Linda Oja, *Varken Gud eller Natur. Synen på magi i Sverige under 1600- och 1700-talet* (Stockholm/Stehag, 1999), pp. 194–5.
 - 25 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionenens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 16 September 1714, nr. 21.
 - 26 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 5 February 1702, nr. 16.
 - 27 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionenens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, General Auditörens Handlingar, 7 June 1714, nr. 8.
 - 28 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionenens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 11 November 1731, nr. 25.

- 29 Paul Danielsson, *Djävulsgestalten i Finlands svenska folketro, II. Djävulen i människogestalt, Bidrag till kännedom af Finlands natur och folk* (Helsinki, 1932), p. 42.
- 30 Russell, *Lucifer*, p. 63. See also Ülo Valk, 'On the Connections between Estonian Folk Religion and Christian Demonology', *Mitteilungen für Anthropologie und Religionsgeschichte* 8 (1994) 197.
- 31 Per Sörlin, *Trolldoms- och Vidskepelseprocesserna i Göta hovrätt 1635–1754* (Umeå, 1993), p. 30.
- 32 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 31 October 1694, Bunt III, nr. 334.
- 33 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 1 December 1756, nr. 3.
- 34 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 22 December 1776, nr. 49.
- 35 See also Sörlin, *Trolldoms- och Vidsk*, p. 30.
- 36 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, Utslagshandlingar, 30 May 1733, nr. 72.
- 37 Thus the total number of people accused in the trial period so far is thirty-five.
- 38 Soili-Maria Eklund (Olli), 'Church Demonology and Popular Beliefs in Early Modern Sweden. The Presumption of the Devil', delivered at the Budapest Conference 'Demons, Spirits and Witches, Christian Demonology and Popular Mythology', 7–9 October 1999, and to be published in the forthcoming conference proceedings.
- 39 See Wall, 'Wilt thou nu', p. 26.
- 40 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar 31 January 1772, nr. 102.
- 41 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 11 October 1698, Bunt VII, nr. 20 and JR Utslagshandlingar, 20 July 1731, nr. 87.
- 42 Ebbe Schön, *Häxor och trolldom* (Kristianstad, 1991). Schön did little systematic investigation of the legal material, and by making assumptions on the basis of only a few cases, has misrepresented the characteristics of the Devil's pact.
- 43 Sörlin, *Trolldoms – och Vidsk*, p. 30.
- 44 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 16 September 1714, nr. 2.
- 45 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 11 November 1731, nr. 25.
- 46 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 4 April 1776, nr. 1/2k.
- 47 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 July 1776, 17, nr. 56 1/2.
- 48 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 November 1727, nr. 21.
- 49 The Swedish name *Fan* was normally used for the Devil in popular contexts.
- 50 Eklund (Olli), 'Church Demonology and Popular Beliefs in Early Modern Sweden'. The similarity to a business agreement is obvious.
- 51 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 16 September 1714, nr. 21.
- 52 These three cases are not included in the twenty-nine cases of Devil's pact.
- 53 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 23 March 1699, Bunt IX a, nr. 15.
- 54 Antero Heikkinen, 'Paholaisen Liittolaiset. Noita- ja magiakäsityksiä ja -oikeudenkäyntejä Suomessa 1600-luvun jälkipuoliskolla (n. 1640–1712)', *Historiallisia Tutkimuksia, Suomen Historiallinen Seura* 78 (1969) 141–50.
- 55 Sörlin, *Trolldoms- och Vidsk*, p. 30.

- 56 For more information on 'judicial suicide' see Jonas Liliequist, *Brott, Synd och Straff. Tidlagsbrottet i Sverige under 1600- och 1700-talet* (Umeå, 1991), pp. 108–13.
- 57 Eklund (Olli), 'Church Demonology and Popular Beliefs in Early Modern Sweden'.
- 58 Marko Nenonen, *Noituus, taikuus ja noitavainot. Ala-Satakunnan, Pohjois-Pohjanmaan ja Viipurin Karjalan maaseudulla 1620–1700* (Helsinki, 1992); Wall, 'Wilt thou nu'.
- 59 Sörlin, *Trolldoms – och Vidsk*, p. 30.
- 60 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 17 March 1757, nr. 27.
- 61 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar, 11 January 1698, Bunt VII, nr. 20.
- 62 Linda Oja, 'Kvinnligt, manligt, magiskt. Genusperspektiv på folklig magi i 1600- och 1700-talets Sverige', *Kyrkohistorisk årskrift* (1994) 40.
- 63 Wall, 'Wilt thou nu', 27.
- 64 RA Stockholm, Justitierevisionens Arkiv, JR, Utslagshandlingar 13 June 1690, Bunt V, nr. W 111 and 19 March 1708, nr. 52.
- 65 Also this formulation used by the authorities shows that the woman is considered to be passive.
- 66 Jari Eilola, 'Paholaisen Rakastajattaret, Kolme naista ja heidän tutkimiseen liittyviä ongelmia', in Olli Matikainen (ed.), *Rikos Historiassa, Jyväskylän Historiallisen Arkisto* (Jyväskylä, 2000), pp. 181–228.

Public infidelity and private belief? The discourse of spirits in Enlightenment Bristol

Jonathan Barry

Recent work on the history of witchcraft and magic has identified three themes or approaches as of particular importance in our understanding of a subject which, although it has been centre stage since the publication of *Religion and the Decline of Magic* in 1971, has continued to trouble historians. The first problem, acknowledged as ‘the most baffling aspect of this difficult subject’ by Thomas himself, is that of ‘decline’: by rendering early modern witchcraft beliefs intelligible, historians have highlighted the issue of why and how far they ceased to have meaning (or function), and many have regarded this as the least satisfactory feature of Thomas’s account.¹ The great interest now being displayed in the culture of the long eighteenth century, including its occult aspects, has rendered this theme of pressing concern.²

The second issue concerns the need for case studies. It is broadly agreed that witchcraft must be studied as a conjunctural phenomenon, operating at a whole series of levels and affected by the interplay of a variety of institutions, interests and languages. While these can all be analysed separately, it is equally crucial to study their interrelationship and this, for the moment at least, is best done in specific settings where the evidence survives to allow a full reconstruction of the development and resolution of a witchcraft episode.³ Third, historians have become particularly interested in witchcraft as a linguistic phenomenon and one imbedded in narrative. This involves a concern to reconstruct the role played by conflicts over the use of contested terms (such as ‘witch’), and the provision of alternative stories of what was happening in a specific case. But it also involves an interest in the intertextuality of witchcraft cases, that is their shaping by reference to previous stories, authorities or cultural models of how, for example, a possession might develop and be resolved.⁴

The case to be discussed here fulfils all three of these criteria. It dates from 1761–62, some twenty-five years after the Witchcraft Act of 1736, and some ten years after the last English witchcraft episode that has been studied in any scholarly depth.⁵ Unlike that case, when a man was executed for

ducking a witch and thus causing her death, the Bristol case never generated any legal proceedings. However, three main sources have survived to enable us to report this affair, usually known as the Lamb Inn case after the inn near Lawford's Gate at the Gloucestershire exit from the city where the episodes began and, for the most part, occurred. They tell the story of the possession of the daughters of the innkeeper, Richard Giles. The girls suffered tormenting fits, saw visions, had crooked pins stuck into them, and became the mouthpieces of a diabolic spirit. Giles also fell ill and died. The family suspected witchcraft, and resorted to a cunning-woman for an eventual cure, but for one section of the Bristol intelligentsia with Methodist leanings the case was one of direct satanic possession and was to be dealt with through prayer.

The three main sources are the diaries of a Bristol accountant named William Dyer, a series of newspaper letters during early 1762 and a narrative account of the episode prepared by Dyer's friend Henry Durbin, a Bristol chemist of some standing, uncle to a later alderman, Sir John Durbin, and a leading figure among the Wesleyans in Bristol who opposed the separation of the movement into a denomination outside the Church of England. Taken together these enable us to reconstruct much of what occurred, and to follow the process whereby various rival understandings of what was going on were constructed and presented to the public. Furthermore, we have a great deal of contextual evidence to explain the position of those who believed in the reality of supernatural forces in this case, and sought to defend this view publicly. Even though the identities and motives of the sceptics are less clear, and no detailed work has been done on the social circumstances of the family at the centre of the case, enough can be deduced to draw tentative conclusions about what the episode may have meant to them as well.

Sources: private and public debate

In an earlier essay I used the diaries of William Dyer, covering the second half of the eighteenth century, to question some of the assumptions of Keith Thomas and others regarding the 'decline of magic' and 'secularisation' of healing in the eighteenth century.⁶ Outwardly a typical enlightened humanitarian in a modern profession, Dyer's own beliefs and medical activities, and those of the circle he moved in, with their extensive interests in electrical and chemical medicine, were shown to arise from their Pietist and anti-materialist philosophies, which attracted them to spiritual accounts of nature and its powers, as embodied in such movements as Hutchinsonianism, Behmenism and, later, Swedenborgianism and mesmerism. In religious terms they sought an ecumenical alliance of groups emphasising Biblical and Trinitarian ideas against Deist and Unitarian tendencies within both dissent and Anglicanism, though their response to evangelical Methodism was mixed.

Dyer and several of his closest friends, including Durbin, were drawn to Wesleyan Methodism, but remained attached to the Church of England, many of whose clergy in Bristol shared similar Pietist inclinations, but in religion, as medicine, they were eclectic, seeking out effective spiritual remedies just as they collected and purveyed what they saw as effective medical treatments. Indeed, this 'experimental' emphasis on spiritual vitality might be seen as their overriding concern.

In the case of Dyer's diary, we have two versions of events in 1762, for around 1800 Dyer produced a condensed version of his original diaries for the last fifty years.⁷ Having done this, he then destroyed all the originals save, fortunately, that for 1762, probably because of his interest in the Lamb Inn case.⁸ Thus we only have his retrospective account for late 1761, when the affair began, but then both contemporary and retrospective accounts for 1762. Dyer's diary reveals that a number of his fellow Pietists, such as Stephen Penny and George Eaton, also began narratives of the affair, as did Dyer himself, but none of these have survived. They were also involved, as we shall see, in the newspaper controversy that developed in February and March 1762 over the episode, with a sequence of eleven letters putting forward rival explanations of the incidents and how they should be approached in philosophical and religious terms. We know from Dyer that other letters on the subject appeared in other Bristol newspapers, now lost, and that Penny also wrote at least one letter to the London papers, where the matter was reported. Some of the attention it attracted arose from its coincidence with the so-called Cock Lane ghost affair in London, which was widely reported and discussed.⁹ Durbin also began to prepare his account in 1762 and in subsequent years the account, and his testimony, formed the basis of comment on the incident in the manuscript annals of several Bristolians, but his narrative was not published until after his death, which occurred in 1799. The next year was published *A Narrative of Some Extraordinary Things that Happened to Mr. Richard Giles's Children at the Lamb, without Lawford's Gate, Bristol; supposed to be the effect of witchcraft. By the late Mr. Henry Durbin, chymist, who was an eye witness of the principal facts herein related. (Never before published.) To which is added, a letter from the Rev. Mr Bedford, late Vicar of Temple, to the Bishop of Gloucester, relative to one Thomas Perks of Mangotsfield, who had dealings with familiar spirits.* The editor of this sixty-page pamphlet is not identified, but it is quite possible that it was William Dyer himself, as he prepared for publication other manuscripts by his Pietist friends. The relevance of the appended letter by Bedford will become clear later.¹⁰

I have gone into some detail regarding the sources for this case because my aim is not so much to consider the Lamb Inn events themselves, but rather to explore the responses of those involved and the way in which the episode was portrayed, both at the time and subsequently. As my title suggests, my concern is with the possible divergence of public and private

responses in 'the discourse of spirits' and, in a broader sense, the implications of this for our understanding of the decline in the 'public discourse' of witchcraft, magic and the supernatural during the eighteenth century. The standard interpretation of this has been to see public discourse following changes in private belief and understanding, as new views of religion, natural philosophy and the like cut back the realm of the supernatural in educated thought. The evidence presented here suggests instead both that public discourse may be only an approximate guide to private belief, dependent on the rules of public debate, but also that those very rules of public debate may themselves have moulded private belief, at least in the longer term.¹¹ If so, the outcome was not necessarily just secular enlightenment but also the range of beliefs that fed into nineteenth-century occult and spiritualist traditions.

In my earlier article I established that many of Bristol's mid-eighteenth-century intellectuals shared some or all of the beliefs in revelation, providence, spirits and anti-Newtonian philosophy which ran counter to the supposed 'enlightenment' tone of intellectual life at that period.¹² Whether Bristol was untypical in that respect may be debatable, but there is no doubt that, despite their position in Bristol life, most of these people felt themselves to be living in a world of 'public infidelity' – subject to the mockery or neglect of a sceptical public. Such a belief did much to shape their reaction to the Lamb Inn affair. Dyer and his friends kept notes and began narratives of the affair in order to put on record their side of the story in what they concluded was a 'clear case' of 'supernatural Agency'.¹³ Yet their motive in doing so was certainly as much to convince and edify themselves and their friends as to convince the broader public.

It was the sceptics who first brought the affair into the public domain through a letter that appeared on 6 February 1762 in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*. A week earlier the same newspaper had published a sceptical account of the Cock Lane affair in London. The letter began, 'As the two principal cities in this kingdom are supposed at present to be very much plagued with witches and spirits (to the terror of some, amusement of others and concern of most people)' an extract from Scot's *Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584) would be 'not unentertaining nor uninformative' to readers. At the end of this piece, which carried over into the next week's issue, the lesson was drawn that, as the 'far more amazing' case reported by Scot had turned out to be one of 'ventriloquy and plain cousinage', so would the modern cases. Thus the JPs should interfere to see 'if the arts of present witches can escape their cognizance and acuteness', bearing in mind what was being achieved in the way of ventriloquy by 'Mr Bilinguis', who was putting on public shows in Bristol at the time.

In Durbin's narrative it is the day after the second part of this letter appeared, on 14 February, that he notes the need for 'a certain Fact' to convince the world that the case was not one of imposture,¹⁴ and on 18

February Dyer reported that Durbin was taking down details of the affair in writing. The next day one of the clergymen involved told Dyer that the affair was also being ridiculed in a London paper. On 20 February *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* carried two more pieces, the first continuing the attack, though from a different angle, while the second letter, 'Some Seasonable Queries relating to the Affair without Lawford's Gate' offered the first public defence of those involved in the case. The title and tone of this piece is significant, implying a cautious response to the intemperate certainties of the previous letters, and this is indeed the theme of the letter, which focuses on the 'self-conceit' of those who say something cannot be because they cannot assign reasons why it should be permitted. It then appeals to God's inscrutability and Biblical examples. Just because of 'many cheats' and a 'thousand silly stories', 'well-attested' cases should not be disbelieved, for 'total denial of witchcraft' should be left to 'the shallow coffee-house critics and weak sadducees of Robbin-hood'. It became neither 'a gentleman' nor a 'Christian' after the 'testimony of so many credible persons in Bristol to print such a paragraph as was in the last papers, reflecting on Mr G——s' family and insinuating that the justices of the country ought to punish them for that which is really an affliction permitted of God'.

A number of themes are being developed here, including the fear, widespread at this time, that the press could be abused to harm private reputations,¹⁵ together with the associated denigration of coffee-house debating and Walpolean Whiggery (both implied by 'Robbin-hood') as centres of a shallow public opinion based on destructive scepticism.¹⁶ The believers had begun to develop their public case. We do not know who wrote this letter, but on 6 March Dyer noted his pleasure at reading it and other letters publicly supportive of his personal views on the matter. However, from Dyer's diary we learn that his friend Penny viewed the public debate with less satisfaction. On 30 March Dyer remarked that he was writing down all he could about the affair to give to Penny, who thought to publish a narrative with remarks on it, but that Penny then changed his mind because it might 'hurt the minds of the people by filling them with jealousies and fears'. This remark is susceptible of two interpretations, both perhaps valid.

The first is that Penny was concerned lest accusations of witchcraft and the diabolical fuelled popular 'jealousies and fears'. Critics of the affair suggested that its effect would be to fan ignorant superstition and bring innocent old women into suspicion, and there is no doubt that the Lamb Inn case did lead to the revival of old fears and the public surfacing, if not creation, of new ones. Durbin's narrative for 4 and 8 February shows that reported afflictions in Bristol had spread beyond the family first involved,¹⁷ and by 10 February Dyer was noting that 'people now began to be staggered concerning this affair'. On 21 February he noted further that people were remembering similar affairs in the past. As we shall see, the Durbin circle were profoundly

ambivalent about the development of the Lamb Inn affair into a witchcraft case or its movement into the public sphere. In this sense alone the publication of their side of the story was bound to be, in some senses, an own goal.

Second, as their comments on public debate of such matters have already suggested, this group was distrustful about the benefits of airing spiritual matters in the press. One of the repeated themes of their publications (ironically enough), as well as their private writings, is that vital religion was being damaged precisely by the growing torrent of words and opinions, distracting people from the simple truths of the Bible and quiet contemplation of their souls. This was one of the points of divergence between this group and the wholehearted evangelism of John Wesley and Whitefield, who were willing to use the media to stir up public attention whatever animosity and divisions it caused. Pietists like Penny and Dyer disliked and distrusted controversy.¹⁸

Such concerns, of course, explain why Durbin never published his narrative in his lifetime. The preface makes this quite clear. It opens by noting, 'In an age naturally inclined to Infidelity, it requires some courage in a man to stand up against the current of public opinion, to express his conviction that there is a *spiritual world*.'¹⁹ Later it notes Durbin's personal response to those who urged him to publish:

The present is an age of Infidelity – men scoff at spiritual things – if they believe not Moses and the Prophets, Christ and the Apostles, they will not, of course, believe my feeble testimony concerning a World which it may be their interest to discredit. When I first engaged in the Examination of this business, I was abused in the public Papers for what was termed my *credulity*. Should I publish the Narrative, the same abuse would be revived, and I wish to live and die in peace with all men. It will doubtless be published after my death, and the matter will then speak for itself.²⁰

The quietism of this latter statement offers an ironic perspective on the notion of 'courage' in the opening quotation: it seems that it was courageous enough to stand up against public opinion in one's own mind, without being required to enter the fruitless struggle to reverse that public infidelity. And yet the preservation and planned publication of the narrative clearly imply a belief that it might, after all, have its uses in converting a sceptical public, as well as its more private purposes for sharing with 'friends' on an individual basis. Significantly, moreover, we learn that some circumstances told to friends are not mentioned in the narrative.²¹ We are thus alerted to the likelihood that the narrative is shaped to win over a sceptical public, not to divulge its meaning for the already sympathetic. This can be substantiated both by close examination of Durbin's narrative itself – its language and its silences, its structure and its baffling lack of structure – and by comparing its account with that provided by the newspaper pieces and, in particular, by Dyer's observations,

which, while not spontaneous, do show a complexity of response and circumstance largely, though not totally, excised from the published narrative.

From its title page onwards, the tone of the narrative is one of cautious empiricism. Although the modern facsimile of the text is boldly entitled *Witchcraft at the Lamb Inn Bristol by Henry Durbin*,²² the original title only promises us a 'narrative' of 'some extraordinary things' 'supposed to be the effect of witchcraft', as related by 'an Eye and Ear witness of the principal Facts herein related', one who is named and whose position in Bristol life is very specifically emphasised, together with his occupation of 'chymist'. The main discursive strategies of the text are in fact encapsulated in these points. We are offered a 'narrative', written entirely in the first person as an account of what Durbin himself was involved in, from the first entry:

December 18, 1761, hearing that Mr Giles's children, Miss Molly and Dobby, were afflicted in an extraordinary manner, for a fortnight past, I went there this day, and saw Molly sewing, and found she had marks on her arms given on a sudden, like the marks of a thumb-nail; which I am satisfied she could not do herself, As I watched her, I saw the flesh pressed down whitish, and rise again.

Each subsequent entry follows the same format, with no attempt in the text itself to impose a pattern or explain the chain of events to the reader. The purpose throughout is to establish that Durbin was an actual witness of a series of very precisely described physical events, along with many other unimpeachable witnesses and that what they saw happening could not be the result of imposture but had occurred in a fashion beyond 'natural' explanation.

Sceptics and believers

To understand this narrative strategy it is necessary to look at the terms of the debate over the affair conducted in the newspapers. What these show is how public consideration of the incident was confined within a tight and highly polarised model of alternative possibilities. The sceptics rested their case primarily on two premises. The first, Reginald Scot-like one, was that all such incidents always turned out to have a natural and usually fraudulent explanation and were within the powers of conjurors. The second was that, in a modern and enlightened age, witchcraft was no longer accepted by the law, but fraudulent pretences at spiritual powers, such as fortune-telling, were now the essence of the crime of witchcraft, as defined by the 1736 Act. The sceptical position was thus the consequence of a long-lasting sceptical stance, epitomised by Scot, together with a modern legalistic position. Strikingly absent from any of the sceptical accounts is any effort to appeal to modern natural philosophy or medicine to explain the events described as true but natural.²³

In one sense we may be struck by the extremism and stridency of this approach: it certainly represents a 'strong' form of denial of the reality of 'preternatural' events in daily experience. Yet its very intemperance left open many inviting targets for the believers. If it sufficed to show that the events in question were really happening and were not the outcome of imposture, then a simple narrative that established the credibility, not the credulity, of the witnesses, was sufficient. As the editor of Durbin's narrative puts it:

he is willing that every man should abound in his own opinion; being convinced, that they have the same *right* to disbelieve relations of Witchcraft, &c. in general, as he has to credit those which he believes to be sufficiently authenticated. He thinks the following is a *clear case*, and that from it, every impartial reader will be drawing the following conclusion: Either this is a *real* case of Supernatural Agency: or, Mr Durbin has knowingly imposed on the World and gone into Eternity professing to believe what he knew to be false. – But in this case, Mr D's character swears for him; and will for ever preclude, with all who knew him, the possibility of such an imputation.²⁴

Hence the preface devotes itself in large part to establishing Durbin's social respectability, as an alderman's uncle and a charitable man of 'ample annual income', of probity and piety. Further, it presents Durbin as approaching the affair:

through a principle of critical curiosity to detect and expose what he deemed to be an imposture ... and shew such prudential caution, and rigid, critical examination, proceeded in with the most patient perseverance for a great length of time, as no *trick* or *imposture* could have possibly shielded itself from.²⁵

And this is indeed the burden of most of the text, with its details of what Durbin himself or other credible witnesses saw or heard or experienced directly, and the repeated efforts they made to ensure that there was no fraud, by checking for wires or hairs, holding the children or masking things from their view and the like. Those engaged with this task alongside Durbin are not named (though Dyer's diary allows us to put names to many of them), but their social and intellectual credentials as witnesses are established by references to their status. Many of them are presented, like Durbin, as initially sceptical, but all are convinced by their sense testimony. As the preface sums up: 'Several Clergymen of learning and piety, and Gentlemen of considerable abilities, some of whom were professed Deists' attended, and all were 'fully convinced that there could be no imposture in the case'. This is reinforced in the preface by reference to the preservation of bent pins and a warped glass for display to sceptical friends.²⁶ At several points in the narrative Durbin emphasised that at no point were the children ever discovered performing any fraudulent tricks.²⁷

The critics of the affair faced, therefore, a considerable problem in

discrediting all this evidence without violating the code of respectability by openly claiming, in the press, that the witnesses were either complicit or stupid. Their tactic was to avoid such direct accusations whilst casting doubt on the value of the witnesses indirectly. One way this was done was to suggest, perhaps correctly, that not everybody was welcome to witness the manifestations and that not all of the episodes were as clear-cut as presented in Durbin's account. They also, as we have seen, sought to present the witnesses as credulous rather than credible, thus avoiding outright accusations of falsity while implying that they were predisposed to credit what they were being asked to believe. Without knowing all the parties involved this is hard to judge. Dyer, perhaps inevitably, largely refers to the presence of his friends, so that the laymen and clergy that he mentions attending the affair are people who, like Durbin, were far from sceptical about the existence of spirits. Most of them at some stage tell Dyer of apparitions, dreams or other 'spiritual' experiences, quite apart from their common interest in metaphysical schemes with a heavy role for an active spirit world.²⁸

Not all of the clergy who attended, however, can be associated with Dyer's outlook, one such exception being the Grammar School headmaster, later Rector of St Michael's, Samuel Seyer, who 'asked many questions in Greek and Latin' on 10 February.²⁹ His son and namesake, when he was collecting notes about the affair around 1800, refers to conversations with Durbin but was apparently quite unaware of his own father's involvement. Seyer junior noted that 'Durbin was said to be a credulous man' but that he was known to be honest and could hardly be mistaken about what he had touched. The presence of hundreds of witnesses, gentlemen and ladies, convinced Seyer that the events recorded happened, but he left open the question of whether 'they were performed by supernatural agency or imposture', though noting that if the latter it was never discovered.³⁰ Another Bristol antiquarian, George Catcott, also hedged his bets in his annals of Bristol history. At first he described it firmly as 'pretended witchcraft', but later amended this opinion, not least because it was never detected, concluding that there was at least 'something supernatural in it'. Finally, reflecting his anti-intellectual leanings, he concluded that if it was a trick it was 'so artfully managed that all those learned gentlemen with all their scholastic knowledge' were unable to detect the fraud.³¹ An anonymous annal, compiled in 1790, gave a long account of the affair, concluding that 'some were filled with awe and astonishment' leading to a 'belief in the doctrine of witchcraft', while 'other persons of understanding staggered in their opinions concerning the causes of such unaccountable noises and sights'. But 'the people without doors in general treated the affair with derision'.³² This offers an interesting inversion of the normal assumption of popular credulity and elite scepticism.

Thus it might appear that, both at the time and in later years, the 'believers' had made good the relatively simple task of offering credible

enough evidence to undermine the 'imposture' interpretation.³³ In fact, Dyer's contemporary account shows matters in a rather different light.³⁴ If Durbin's claim to initial scepticism is questionable – he was already a convinced Wesleyan following a vision of light,³⁵ and in later years he stands out among Dyer's friends for his interest and belief in possession – then Dyer's own reactions as the affair unfolded, and those he reports among others closely involved, suggest a continuing tendency to doubt the whole affair. In Durbin's account people, including the Giles family themselves, move from initial scepticism to conviction of the reality of the affair. In Dyer's diary, their belief ebbs and flows with the twisting turns of an affair which lasted over a year in all and had several distinct periods. In particular, the period from early March until May, which is passed over rapidly in Durbin's account, and when the newspaper controversy died down, emerges from Dyer's diary as one when many of the supporters of the Giles family, notably the gentry Haynes family of nearby Wick, where the children were often taken to stay, concluded that it was 'a cheat'.³⁶ On 13 March Dyer reported that people were very clamorous about Mr Giles as their suspicions were now confirmed that the witchcraft was 'merely a contrived thing' to lessen the value of the inn, in which Giles had subsequently bought a share.³⁷ When the children then made a (short-lived) recovery, Dyer himself noted on 18 March, 'Lord pardon my weakness and what I have done amiss.' Dyer later recovered his belief in the supernatural character of the affair, as we shall see, but he continued to record the belief that it had all been to lessen the price of the house (10 April), and on 15 May he again noted that one of the Haynes family was 'very angry' over the affair and added, 'May the Lord prepare me for calumny.' Dyer's own employers, the leading Presbyterian merchants Ames and Bright, were very distrustful of Giles and 'interrogated' him concerning the matter both on 5 February and on 22 June.

It seems likely that this explanation, which remained the standard sceptical explanation into the twentieth century,³⁸ was formulated very early on, since Durbin's narrative notes on 10 January that the children had been sent to other houses to see if the manifestations continued, as if they did this would provide 'clearer evidence that it was no imposture'.³⁹ 'Some Seasonable Queries' on 20 February had questioned whether the Giles family could have any interest in manufacturing so 'long and troublesome' an affair and noted that Giles was suffering in business because some looked upon the affair as a judgement of God on him. More mundanely, the Durbin narrative notes in passing that the family were losers because customers were moving to other inns.⁴⁰ In the letter published over his name on 5 May Giles himself explicitly denied that it was a plot to reduce the inn's value, claiming that he was unaware of the decision to sell until three months after the affair began, and again drawing attention to his sending of the children away from the inn.

Without definitive proof of fraud, however, the case for imposture

remained purely circumstantial and it was thus possible for the supporters to argue that, in their rejection of the evidence presented, it was the sceptics, rather than they, who were being dogmatic. As their letters to the newspapers emphasised, sense testimony had to be accepted even if it could not be explained by what currently passed for 'reason'. As 'Philalethes' put it on 15 May, reason was a 'necessary handmaid' to the senses, but 'a poor weaksighted girl without their assistance'. The first asserters of the existence of the Antipodes had been regarded as 'heretics' by the 'reasoners' of 'those dark times'. Reason needed to be 'enlightened' by experience and it was the testimony of 'eyes and ears' that brought certainty. In their insistence on the need to rely on sense testimony, experiment and credible witnesses, the believers were thus presenting themselves, not their opponents, as the champions of Enlightenment values. 'Some Seasonable Queries' neatly reversed the usual charge by arguing that it was 'more credulous' to see as fancy the bites, cuts and flying objects appearing before the eyes of many than to accept the reality of sorcery or demonic contracts. Here empiricism could be turned to the advantage of supposedly occult beliefs, just as it could be used by non-professional healers to justify their cures, even if these ran contrary to accepted medical theory. The analogy is important, since, as I documented in my earlier essay, many of Dyer's circle adopted just such a medical empiricism. In a relatively free society where public opinion and its correlate, market demand, were held to be superior to professional or state control, the discourse of empiricism and enlightenment was open for appropriation by all sides.⁴¹

Yet it would be misleading to imply that the believers in the Lamb Inn case could win the argument easily by reliance on the evidence of the senses alone. There is considerable evidence both that they could not and that they themselves were dissatisfied with a purely sensory investigation of the affair. The consequence was that investigation of the case took on a further dimension with the questioning of the 'spirit' involved. This, while intended to strengthen the case for a supernatural force at work, offered the sceptics a much more congenial ground on which to criticise the believers. It was on 8 February that, according to the narrative, Durbin proposed asking the spirit questions in Latin 'which I thought would remove all suspicion of a fraud, if it answered right, but I find all the evidence insufficient to convince some'.⁴² This process gradually grew more elaborate as questions were later put, not only in Greek, but also with their back to the children, then in whispers and finally silently. The answers were made by scratching a number of times either to signify yes or no or to the correct number to answer the question asked. This procedure, and the use of learned languages to prevent comprehension by the children or uneducated, was of course a well-known technique in possession cases. However, its shortcomings were equally well established and these were quickly pounced upon by its critics. Even in

Durbin's narrative a number of inconsistencies can be detected: sometimes the spirit scratched and 'took no notice of the question', while its answer to a query concerning the number of satellites of the planet Saturn was wrong (though the editor notes that, since more had since been discovered by Herschel in nearby Bath, perhaps the spirit's higher estimate would be proved correct!).⁴³ The narrative also observes, 'I cannot think why it will not scratch or answer questions to a stranger the first time, unless it intends thereby to throw a reflection on the family, as if they did it by artifice.'⁴⁴ Dyer's diary reveals that one answer, incriminating an autodidact collier of involvement in the affair, was rejected as unacceptable or, as Dyer put it, 'no doubt a lying spirit'. All this gives credence to the criticisms made by 'Anti-Pythonissa' on 27 February. He pointed out that the answers were not in Latin and Greek but just by scratches and these were often wrong, while all the questions asked in Hebrew had been answered mistakenly although Hebrew was, surely, the Devil's first language!

Dyer, well aware that the answers might be of 'a lying spirit', noted on 18 February that he was 'fatigued' about the affair and hoped he was 'behaving with prudence' as became 'a Christian' and the next day recorded that 'some may say' that they were being too free with Satan in their constant visits, but reassured himself that he, at least, was doing so 'not to converse with that evil spirit', but to profit both himself and the children by 'dropping any little word of use'. Hence, presumably, Durbin's failure to record his interview with the spirit, as reported in the preface. 'His often repeated request to the Spirit, as it was termed, to favour him with an interview ... on any terms consistent with his character as a Christian' led eventually to a meeting where Durbin:

adjured it in the most solemn manner, to shew itself in any form, or way it thought proper. After a short time spent in waiting, a loud knocking took place on the opposite side of the wainscot (it was at night, and the place in deep darkness.) Lifting his eyes towards the place where the noise seemed to be, he discovered a coloured luminous appearance, of a circular form, about the size of a common plate: the colours resembled those of a rainbow: the brighter ones were extremely vivid, and deeply shaded with the *red*, *blue*, and *indigo*. The Writer believes that Mr. *D* said, he then asked some questions, but what they were, he cannot now recollect.⁴⁵

The sense of unease is palpable.

Why, given the mixed advantages of turning to this procedure, had recourse been had to asking questions? The simple answer to this is that the initiative in this respect was not taken by Durbin and his circle but by the women of the household, and that, as Durbin's account suggests, their intervention was to some extent a matter of stepping in to establish the credibility and experimental rigour, that is the learned male control, of a process already unstoppable. But, in doing so, Durbin and the others also

took the opportunity to extract from the process the kind of religious message which, arguably, had underlain their interest from the start. Both Dyer and Durbin agree that questioning began on 23 January, and the narrative makes it clear that the initiative was taken by the girls' grandmother, Mrs Elmes, who 'spoke to the invisible tormenter, when it was knocking and scratching, and said "Art thou a witch? if so, give scratches;" which it did'.⁴⁶ By the next day, Durbin himself was also asking questions by this method, although he cautioned against reliance on the answers given, 'as it [the spirit] might put it [the accusation of witchcraft] on an innocent person'. The following day he was actively leading the questioning, repeating the queries put first by the women.⁴⁷

As far as we can tell, all the early questioning related to the afflictions themselves, but once the questioning shifted into the learned languages, a new dimension appeared. The last recorded question on 8 February was 'Si Maximus est Deus' (if God be supreme) to which the scratching replied, of course, in the affirmative.⁴⁸ By 10 February, with a whole crowd of clergymen present, Durbin notes 'we were willing to see if it would acknowledge the great truths of Religion'. These were 'Si Jesus Christus, est deus eternus' (if Christ be the eternal God), 'Si hos liberos protegit Dei angelus' (if an Angel of God protects the Children), and (asked in Greek) 'If Christ be God and Man', to which an affirmative reply came 'very loud'.⁴⁹ On 16 March it also 'scratched as if in a passion' when asked, in thought, 'if Jesus Christ would come to judge the World?'.⁵⁰ Thus the spirit affirmed both the existence of a world of angels to oppose that of evil spirits and Trinitarian orthodoxy. The latter emphasis fits very nicely with other evidence that hostility to Unitarianism was one of the unifying forces among the 'anti-materialist' groups in Bristol. Furthermore a new and aggressive proponent of Unitarianism, the Rev. Edward Harwood, was just entering the Bristol scene as pastor of the Tucker Street Presbyterian meeting, precipitating a doctrinal dispute that engulfed the Bristol newspapers through the mid-1760s and led to many pamphlet publications. During this dispute, significantly, Harwood accused his main Trinitarian opponent, the Baptist minister Caleb Evans, of 'credulity and blind zeal' of the sort that led to the 'patronizing of extravagant delusions' such as 'a Cock Lane Ghost' or 'a Lawford's Gate witchcraft'.⁵¹

The linking of this affair to debate over the meaning and authority of the Scriptures may have had an ambivalent effect. Many concerned at liberal theological developments may have been alienated from the sceptics and pushed towards belief, just as Dyer and his friends were. On the other hand, the smearing of such belief as the product either of past Puritanism or modern Methodist extremism may also have had an effect. In a larger sense, the debate over the meaning of the Bible was fundamental in encouraging all sides to demonstrate, both from natural philosophy and from contemporary spiritual experience, that their understanding of the Bible was validated by

external evidence. This was the strategy underlying such movements as Hutchinsonianism, Behmenism and Swedenborgianism and it also, of course, had a major part to play in Methodism. It was hard to be sure how such evidence could be weighed against rival interpretations of the Bible itself. A critic writing on 27 February tellingly observed that many who believed in the Scriptures and all its 'important truths', doubted the reality of 'diabolical converse in the vulgar sense' and they felt 'no need of the testimony of evil spirits to strengthen their Faith in the Doctrines of the Gospel'.

Indeed, it was possible to extend the critique of the Christianity of those who chose to explore the affair. A letter of 20 February, which criticised the questioning of the Devil by scratches, also made a number of other charges. It was, 'astonishing that serious believers should find pleasure in seeing these performances repeated for weeks and months together. They enter the room and there wait with eager expectation to see the children pricked, pinched, cut, hit or scratched.' What were 'men of sense and learning' doing sitting 'dumb for an Hour while something is cooling over the fire that is to bring the witch to the door?' Finally, if, as hinted, a witch was being identified as to blame: 'Certainly every man of Religion or Humanity must tremble at the thought! As some poor person deformed by age or worn out by mere decay might fall a victim to the furious spirit of the credulous. In my opinion this affair has a manifest tendency to revive superstition and ignorance amongst us!' These queries require us to consider the process whereby what could be presented, as the Durbin narrative begins by doing, as the scientific investigation of what we might now call a 'poltergeist' phenomena, became a case both of possession and witchcraft. It also raised the question of the appropriate Christian response in the face of such phenomena. Was empirical enquiry compatible with the duty of comfort and healing? And what forms of remedy were appropriate and legitimate? In answering these questions, a considerable gap seems to emerge between the attitudes of the family, especially the women and children, and those of Durbin, Dyer and friends. In the most simple terms, this complies with the classic distinction between a concern for *maleficia* and identifying and neutralising the witch coming up 'from below', and the learned's concern for the religious issues involved, focusing on the reaffirmation of spiritual control. To a considerable extent that can also be seen as a gendered distinction, between the girls and their female relatives and servants on the one hand, and the men involved on the other.⁵²

But this simple dichotomy should not be overstated. For one thing our evidence is all drawn from the Durbin-Dyer perspective – the meaning of the episode to the children and women involved can only be inferred from their reported behaviour and words as filtered by these men. Secondly, Durbin and Dyer were far from immune to the fears and concerns of the family, as they became drawn into the unfolding drama. Furthermore, this is

one of the areas where Durbin and Dyer's presentations, the public and the private, diverge considerably. Whether deliberately or not, Durbin's narrative, while forced to reveal the growing element of anti-witchcraft behaviour in the affair, never commits itself on this matter and, without actually criticising their behaviour overtly, maintains a clear distance between the narrator and the women and children. Dyer, struggling to understand what was going on and to help the family, was drawn into much closer empathy with their position, while retaining severe doubts, at times, about their behaviour and interpretation of events.

Witchcraft?

It may be no coincidence that it was on 7 January that Dyer first referred to prayers being said over the children for their relief, by the Methodist-trained Anglican curate James Rouquet. Durbin's narrative is silent about this procedure although two days later it mentions that 'a clergyman went to prayers, and [the affliction] ceased directly, and was quiet all night'.⁵³ Dyer was explicit that Rouquet was praying for their relief, as enjoined in the Scriptures but (in official eyes) forbidden by the Canons of 1604, which outlawed Anglican exorcism; the narrative's indirect reference fudges this important question.⁵⁴ By 10 January 'the maid, nurse and two children' had seen 'a hand and arm' but there were few new developments until 21 January, when pins first make their appearance. However, on 15 January Dyer referred to 'the witch's pranks' and on 21 January to a dream of his about 'witchcraft' and 'the witch'. The spirit was also finding a voice, speaking to the children on 12 January and to the nurse on 21 January.⁵⁵

The stage was thus set for the role of the witch to be made explicit on 23 January when the grandmother first asked questions, starting with 'Art thou a witch?'⁵⁶ Durbin's narrative then rather distracts the reader (intentionally?) by describing other incidents before returning at the end of that day's narrative to note: 'By asking questions this morning, it answered that Mr. **** had employed it. Mrs. Elmes and the children heard it cry out, "Jee woah", as waggoners used to say in driving horses.'⁵⁷ Dyer's diary supplies the crucial details, naming the man concerned as Mr James, a wagoner, and saying that the scratches placed the blame on him and 'the old woman at the door'. Dyer also added the crucial information, omitted by Durbin, that the family had also 'tried the experiment of boiling the children's urine'. This, as we shall see, was a well-recognised counter-measure against witches, expected either to force them to reveal themselves or to harm the witch. A remedy against witchcraft printed in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* on 25 November 1752 had noted that a mixture of urine and other exotic ingredients, if boiled, would cause the witch agony and, if it boiled quite away, she would die. On 21 January the narrative admits that a 'person proposed relieving [the

children] by casting their urine into the fire'. When this was done: 'as soon as it burned clear, *that* child was as well as if nothing had happened. They did the same with the other's water, and she recovered in the same manner. But it returned in three hours as bad as before.'⁵⁸ There is of course no suggestion here that the action was a counter-measure to flush out or harm the witch. The final episode of this whole affair, both in Durbin's narrative and Dyer's diary, came when Mrs Giles, after consulting a cunning-woman, boiled the urine once again. She had been told to 'take the two children's first water in the morning, and put it in a pipkin on the fire; and if, when it boiled, all colours of the rainbow came out of it visibly, she [the cunning-woman] could cure it; and she would do the rest at home'. The procedure worked and the children were relieved. Durbin notes, 'how far the cunning woman may have contributed to this, I will not pretend to say'.⁵⁹

So, the 'reply' to the questions introduced not just the witch but Mr James, who ran a wagon business to London from the Old Market in Bristol. As the affair developed it became clear that, in the family's account, the whole episode revolved around the commercial rivalry between James and Giles in running wagons to London. On 20 February the narrative, after describing one of several incidents where Giles's wagons were stopped at Kelson Hill near Bath, their chains broken and the horses frightened off, observes 'The first week Mr Giles set up the flying Waggon for London these troubles began'.⁶⁰ On 9 February the porters testified before the Commissioners for Turnpikes, who were meeting at the inn, about a similar incident 'at the beginning of the affair with the children' and another occurred on 24 February.⁶¹ On 25 January questioning of the spirit established that Mr James had hired the witch for ten guineas and that it was her work that had stopped Giles' wagons on Hanham Hill 'when he was obliged to put on ten horses before he could move it', for which he 'paid 5l penalty for halling with so many horses'.⁶² On 17 June Dyer referred to the threats facing Mrs Giles from 'her adversary Mr. James, may Jesus oppose any diabolical charm which may be levelling at her'. On 15 September questioning of the spirit elicited the claim that the witch had been hired for a further year's tormenting for another ten guineas, although voices heard by the children and the maid on 15 November seem to reflect an uncertainty about whether there would be further tormenting and if so for how long.⁶³ Finally the cunning-woman confirmed that 'a man in Bristol had given many pieces of gold to a woman in Gloucestershire to do it'.⁶⁴ For the family, then, anxious about a new and risky commercial venture, a malevolent rival in trade had become the ultimate explanation of their misfortune.

The final twist of this misfortune came in May 1762 when Mr Giles fell ill and died. Durbin's narrative of this makes it clear that, to Giles at least and perhaps by implication to Durbin and the reader, this was tied up with the wagoning affair. The report of the death of this 'industrious, honest man'

in *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal* on 22 May just noted 'mortification in his bowels'. In his retrospective diary for 1762 Dyer recalled that the symptoms did not fit the prevailing influenza and that Giles had been sensible till he expired.⁶⁵ In his contemporary account Dyer recorded on 18 May his suspicion that:

the same infernal diabolical tormenter which persecuted his poor children may have had some hand in Giles's death. Though to outward appearances his decease seems natural, yet these spiritual wickednesses are capable ... of executing their horrible deeds in such manner as to deprive a man of life though as not to be perceptible by any man present nor the person so assaulted. May Jesus preserve and protect us against this accursed spirit.

Dyer also recorded 'another odd circumstance, that the very evening Mr Giles died an old woman with a straw hat looked in at the kitchen door' and asked a servant if her master was not dead yet. The maid went to get Dobby to see if the old woman was the witch but she had gone before she returned. This was reported to Dyer by George Eaton, a Quaker schoolmaster who was one of the most active visitors and questioners during the affair, who had been with Giles as he died. The death was followed by six weeks of quiescence, partly reflecting the absence of Molly, who had been sent for the summer to Swansea, but in mid-July a few incidents again affected Dobby and in reply to questions the spirit claimed that 'if Mr. Giles had spoken to the woman that day ... his life would have been saved'.⁶⁶ Despite all this, Mr James, as far as we can tell, was never accused directly by the family or the believers. Dyer referred on 16 May to a suspicion that 'Mr Giles' adversaries' might 'enter a persecution against his friends', but no further explanations are given and there is no reference to this aspect of the affair in the press. If it became public at all, it certainly did not destroy James's business, as he was still running his wagoning business to London from Old Market in 1775.⁶⁷

There was clearly a tendency for the children to become ever more directly and dramatically involved with the spirit, but equally clearly there was an adult suspicion that the children were too directly controlling what happened. One explanation of the growing scepticism evident by early March is that this factor, and the lack of any further new dramatic developments, led all concerned to feel dissatisfied. But at the same time, the process the children had begun was taking on a momentum of its own, and moving beyond the confines of the Giles household to make contact with wider Bristolian beliefs about possession and witchcraft. When Durbin had questioned the spirit on 25 January, he had 'named several parishes, to find out where the woman lived' before suggesting Mangotsfield and getting the expected response 'very distinctly'.⁶⁸ Dyer reported that on 9 February questions were asked about imps and familiars and whether there were good

spirits to restrain them, whether witches lived in Mangotsfield and how long it was since the witch had made a compact with the Devil. From this they learned that the witch's name was Elizabeth Hemmings. Although Dyer's diary makes it clear that Durbin was one of the questioners, there is no account of this in the narrative.⁶⁹ Instead the resonance of Mangotsfield is clarified only in the narrative of 10 February, which reports the questioning of the spirit as to 'its true name'. One of the party then asked 'Si nomen tuum Malchi est' [if thy name be Malchi], which it affirmed. The significance of this is then made clear as the account continues:

About sixty years ago, one Perks of Mangotsfield had a familiar spirit that was named Malchi, agreeable to the account written by the Rev. Mr. Bedford, a late Minister of Temple parish in this city. And as it had said the woman lived at Mangotsfield that did this mischief, it made us suppose it might be the same.⁷⁰

Hence the reproduction of Bedford's letter at the end of the Durbin pamphlet. However, no further reference is made by the children to Malchi, as reported by Durbin, and the Faustian case of Perks, who had conjured up the spirit to satisfy his curiosities in astronomy, mathematics and the like, and had seen spirits dancing at midnight, was completely alien to the vulgar violence of the Giles children's spirit. Malchi only returns to the story when Mrs Giles visits the cunning-woman at Bedminster in November when she learns:

it was a very powerful spirit that was employed; it was a chief of the familiar spirits; it was Malchi (which was the name it told me [Durbin] it was called by) and therefore she was in doubt whether she could stop it. And this spirit knew all languages, and all thoughts; for there were some learned spirits and some ignorant.⁷¹

In these terms, Durbin's Malchi was 'learned' but Molly and Dobby's spirit was 'ignorant'.

As noted before, news of the Lamb Inn case had begun to bring other supernatural incidents to light. On 4 February the spirit, when questioned, spoke of tormenting six people at that time. It was then asked 'If it had any power to torment Mr – 's daughter' and more questions were asked about this case the next day, when the spirit said she would be cured in four weeks 'and accordingly in a month she was cured, but left very weak'. Dyer, who dated these questions to 8 February, named the girl as Nancy Tudway. Durbin's narrative continues:

The doctor thought her incurable, and would take no fees. She used to bark four or five times and then crow somewhat like a young cock; turning her head from the right shoulder to the left, backwards and forwards twenty times, and yet her neck not swell. I have seen her tongue pulled, as it were, out of her mouth very long, then doubled down her throat; then after having rolled on the ground in great agony, she would go about the house, as usual,

or sit and sew, barking and crowing all the time. She has continued very well ever since it stopped.⁷²

The mention of such symptoms in Durbin's narrative takes on a rather tragic irony in view of incidents later in Durbin's life, of which Dyer informs us. On 10 April 1769 he reported that he electrified Durbin's daughter Hester, aged 14, who had 'an unaccountable complaint', 'a convulsive motion in her tongue' so that she:

sometimes made a singing noise, at other times like the crowing of a cock, yet in perfect health in all other respects. Dr. Drummond [who had also attended Giles before his death] had prescribed nervous medicines but without effect. It was suspected to be preternatural, as Mr. Durbin had been an assiduous attendant on Giles's children and fully convinced of a preternatural agency in regard to them and a zealous advocate in their defence against the unbelieving. He himself was led to think that his daughter's complaint proceeded from one and the same cause.

On 22 January 1775 Dyer again noted that she was ill, adding 'he [Durbin] calls it a possession'. Finally on 29 November 1788 Dyer refers to Durbin visiting his daughter at the asylum run by Richard Henderson, a fellow Methodist known for his religious piety and sympathy for patients.⁷³ Dyer comments: 'conceiving her disorder proceeded from diabolical possession he mentally without uttering a word abjured the spirit [Malchi?] which he believed possessed his poor child. She instantly felt it and said "Father what have you done?" She appeared better afterwards but unhappily relapsed.' This tragic replaying of the earlier episode within his own family may help to explain both Durbin's obsession with the earlier episode and his unwillingness to make it public.

Whatever their original doubts about viewing the Lamb Inn affair as a matter of witchcraft and possession, Dyer and Durbin had become drawn in to seeing the affair in that light. Yet in one respect, at least, they kept very firmly at arms' length from the family, and that was in the matter of counter-remedies. But here too they failed to keep control over the affair, a failure reflected in the ending of the narrative. Whereas the perfect ending would have been a deliverance through 'prayer and fasting', or at least waiting on God, in fact it was traditional counter-magic that finally broke the spell. As Durbin notes:

Mrs. Giles asked my opinion, whether they should not go to those called *White Witches*, to have these troubles stopped. I told them, if *they* could stop it, it must be done by the power of the devil; therefore I thought it not lawful to go to them; but to trust the providence of God for deliverance.⁷⁴

But eventually 'they were determined to go to the woman at Bedminster' and 'Mrs. Giles and two neighbours' went 'resolved not to tell what they came about, to see if the woman knew their thoughts'. She did, and 'told Mrs. Giles

that she should have come to her before, for that there had been horrible Witchcraft at her house', and 'so for an hour and a half told them every thing that had happened; and some secret things, which Mrs. Giles said, she thought she could not possibly have known by hearsay'. Durbin distanced himself by adding 'as all these things had been long and publicly talked of, she might easily have heard the whole, and yet no WISER than her neighbours'. Durbin's final sentence in the narrative, 'How far the *cunning* woman may have contributed to this, I will not pretend to say', might be read as a final rhetorical flourish of cautious empiricism, but perhaps was more of an expression of defeat.⁷⁵

Dyer's reporting is rather fuller and more revealing. On 20 November he noted that Mrs Giles told him about going to a woman at Bedminster 'who rents a room at the Queen's Head', about something which she 'had lost or mislaid but is since found agreeable to her prediction', from which Dyer concluded 'it appears pretty evident that the poor wretch has a familiar to attend her'. It was nine days later that Mrs Giles went to the cunning-woman at Bedminster (surely the same woman?) to ask advice about her affliction: 'may the Lord pardon her folly'. Then on 7 December 'Mrs. Giles told me the old woman of Bedminster had lately been there and given instructions how to manage the children in order to counteract the charm, likewise gave expectation that she would bring to light the persons concerned in that affair.' To which Dyer again appended 'Oh may Jesus be the refuge of that family and may they not flee to the Devil for assistance'. In his retrospective diary he was even more forthright: 'Mrs. Giles's serious friends blamed her for having recourse to a woman of equally bad repute with the miserable wretch who was the author, in conjunction with the spirit of darkness, of all the troubles experienced by poor Giles, his children and family.'⁷⁶

In Dyer's reproach, we may detect the censure of one who put religious purity before the urgent search for remedy that those actually afflicted might feel. Yet more was involved than a simple choice between Job-like patience and pragmatic counter-magic. Dyer himself was active throughout the Lamb Inn affair in supplying medical advice and medicines to the children and the family. In particular, during the autumn months he had been giving regular doses of his 'hemlock pills' as well as Dr James's powder and noting their effects. On 6 November he recorded that one child had received 'amazing benefit' from the hemlock. In this respect, the mother's decision to turn to the cunning-woman might have hurt Dyer, not just for its religious 'folly', but also as a rejection of his (free) remedies in favour of another 'alternative' medicine. The previous month, on 16 October, Dyer had reported with disgust that another of his clients 'Poor Miss Roe, has now applied to an old woman in Bedminster (and therefore laid aside the Hemlock) who promises her help.' In yet another sense, the women involved in the case were pursuing a path independent of their male advisers, challenging not

only their understanding of what was happening in spiritual terms but also their preferred human solutions.

For Dyer, at least, there was in fact no sharp dichotomy between providing material remedies and offering spiritual solutions to afflictions. To some extent this was natural, given his metaphysical preference for vitalistic world-views in which the spiritual and material were interwoven, rather than sharply divided. At the same time, it reflected what he would no doubt have considered his Christian duty to bring healing in whatever form proved effective. In that sense his medical empiricism and his religious convictions were indivisible. The same was no doubt true of Durbin, who had been apprenticed to a leading apothecary and spent his life as a 'chymist', although it is not clear how far he pursued an active medical practice. Since Dyer too had begun training as an apothecary, but had given it up in favour of accountancy, preferring to give his medical services free of charge and of orthodox responsibility, it is tempting to see in both men an 'alternative' medical approach.

Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, this is misleading, if it implies the radical opposition to establishment medicine with which nineteenth-century models of alternative medicine have made us familiar. Dyer and his circle were not sharply cut off from orthodox medical men and often shared ideas and practices with them. Eighteenth-century medical men were themselves deeply influenced by empirical eclecticism and slow to adopt a model of professional and scientific monopoly to protect themselves from the likes of Dyer.⁷⁷ One reason for this may be that, while some doctors had a reputation as deists or materialists, many were active members of various denominations, from whom they often drew their patients. They thus found it necessary to empathise, at the least, with their patients' understanding of the meaning of their afflictions, and in many cases they may have shared those understandings. A number of them participated actively in the intellectual circles that I described earlier. This may help to explain why the responses to the Lamb Inn case did not contain, as might have been expected, confident claims to understand the episode in terms of natural philosophy or medical knowledge. Instead the clear lines of division lay in traditional religious and ideological areas – polarised around the concepts of fraud and enthusiasm on the one hand, and of Scriptural example and Sadduceeism on the other.

Ultimately then, although the notion of 'public infidelity' and 'private belief' captures part of what was going on, and something of the mood of men like Durbin and Dyer, it creates too neat a polarity. The public world still offered many cultural resources to justify the opinions of Dyer and his circle, if properly deployed. At the same time they were privately well aware of the contradictions and failings of their position. It is clear that, as events unfolded, they were viewed from many different perspectives by the different parties

involved, and that a simple dichotomy between 'believers' and 'sceptics' fails to do justice to the range of both convictions and doubts about what was happening and how best to react to it which could be felt by those involved.

This conclusion would undoubtedly be strengthened if we had more direct access to the mentalities of the women and children at the centre of the episode. I have suggested repeatedly that the men could not control the activities of the women and children as they wanted. It would be wrong to assume, however, that the women and children were not themselves struggling to control a sequence of events that none of them had fully anticipated or desired. It is not my intention here to attempt a reading of what was happening within the Giles household, but there were surely tensions between the female adults and children, both overtly over the children's possible manipulation of their afflictions and, if one chooses to read the material psychologically, in the rather sinister pattern of physical abuse by older women played out in the children's accounts of their sufferings. On the other hand, the two girls, aged eight and thirteen, were part of a family of eight children, with at least one younger sister.⁷⁸ None of these other children were afflicted, while a number of the physical episodes directly involved the nurse, the maid and several of the other adults.⁷⁹ As has been suggested for other possession cases, the children's behaviour reflected not only their own models of the supernatural, but also involved a constant negotiation with the (often conflicting) expectations of others: this process led to a series of crises, some followed by new manifestations of evil, others by apparent quiescence. For the women and children, at least, the opportunity to put a definitive end to the episode through the agency of the cunning-woman may, consciously or unconsciously, have been a blessed relief.

It was still possible, as I hope I have shown, to justify beliefs in witchcraft, even on enlightened principles. Yet the price to be paid for doing so, in terms of the spiritual priorities of those who might have sought to defend the reality of witchcraft, was increasingly one that did not seem worth paying. In this respect it is particularly telling to consider the testimony of John Wesley. Historians have often cited Wesley as the last of the believers in witchcraft, both in his practices of conversion (which often, especially in the early years, involved the apparent dispossession of the convert's body from demons), and in his intellectual determination to maintain what he saw as the Biblical and experiential fundamentals of God and Devil (which included some reality for witchcraft).⁸⁰ Some have rightly insisted that this was not, for Wesley at least, incompatible with being an Enlightenment empiricist and publicist *par excellence*.⁸¹ Wesley could be pragmatic about whether the 'discourse of spirits' would or would not forward his evangelistic mission in particular cases and with particular audiences. His comment on the Lamb Inn case, which leaves the verdict open and yet, in another sense, shuts the matter off, as something incapable of useful resolution to practical effect, deserves to end

this discussion: 'The facts are too glaring to be denied, but how are they to be accounted for? By natural or supernatural agency? Contend who list about this.'⁸²

Notes

- 1 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London, 1971), p. 570. For a historiographical perspective on Thomas's work see my introduction to Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1996), pp. 1–45 and Alan Macfarlane, 'Civility and the Decline of Magic', in Peter Burke, Brian Harrison and Paul Slack (eds), *Civil Histories* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 145–61; James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness: Witchcraft in England 1550–1750* (London, 1996), pp. 33, 211–302.
- 2 See, for example, Peter Hulme and Ludmilla Jordanova (eds), *Enlightenment and its Shadows* (London, 1990); George Rousseau (ed.), *The Languages of Psyche* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford, 1990); Margaret Jacob, *Living the Enlightenment* (Oxford, 1991); Roy Porter (ed.), *Medicine in the Enlightenment* (Amsterdam, 1995); W. E. Burns, *Age of Wonders: Politics, Prodigies and Providence in England 1657–1727* (Manchester, 2002). Three crucial contributions to this development in relation to witchcraft are Michael MacDonald, 'Religion, Social Change and Psychological Healing in England 1600–1800', in William Sheils (ed.), *The Church and Healing* (Oxford, 1982), pp. 101–25; David Harley, 'Mental Illness, Magical Medicine and the Devil in Northern England, 1650–1700', in Roger French and Andrew Wear (eds), *The Medical Revolution of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 114–44; M. Hunter, 'Witchcraft Controversy and Free-Thought in Restoration England', in his *Science and the Shape of Orthodoxy* (Woodbridge, 1995), pp. 286–307.
- 3 For a European dimension see Robin Briggs, *Witches and Neighbours* (London, 1996). For England see Sharpe, *Instruments*, and for case studies, Ronald Sawyer, "'Strangely Handled in All Her Lymes": Witchcraft and Healing in Jacobean England', *Journal of Social History* 22 (1988–89) 461–85; Annabel Gregory, 'Witchcraft, Politics and "Good Neighbourhood" in Early Seventeenth-Century Rye', *Past and Present* 133 (1991) 31–66; Michael MacDonald (ed.), *Witchcraft and Hysteria in Elizabethan London* (London, 1991); J. Swain, 'The Lancashire Witch Trials of 1612 and 1634 and the Economics of Witchcraft', *Northern History* 30 (1994) 64–85; Malcolm Gaskill, 'Witchcraft and Power in Early Modern England: The Case of Margaret Moore', in Jenny Kermod and Garthine Walker (eds), *Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England* (London, 1994), pp. 125–45; Anne de Windt, 'Witchcraft and Conflicting Visions of the Ideal Village Community', *Journal of British Studies* 34 (1995) 427–63; James Sharpe, 'Disruption in the Well-Ordered Household: Age, Authority and Possessed Young People', in Paul Griffiths, Adam Fox and Stephen Hindle (eds), *The Experience of Authority in Early Modern England* (London, 1996), pp. 187–212; Malcolm Gaskill, 'Witchcraft in Early Modern Kent', in Barry *et al.* *Witchcraft* pp. 257–87; G. Gilbert and I. Bunn, *A Trial of Witches* (London, 1997); R. Rapley, *A Case of Witchcraft: The Trial of Urbain Grandier* (Manchester, 1998); J. Sharpe, *The Bewitching of Anne Gunther* (London, 1999).
- 4 This approach has been well developed for England by a number of feminist historians and literary scholars. See Frances Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars* (Ithaca and London, 1994), pp. 171–236; Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch-Hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England* (Ithaca and London, 1995); Diana Purkiss, *The Witch in History* (London, 1996) and 'Women's Stories of Witchcraft in Early Modern

- England' *Gender and History* 7 (1995), 408–32; M. H. Gibson, *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (London, 1999); Lawrence Normand and Gareth Roberts (eds), *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland* (Exeter, 2000). Historians are now following suit, for example: Peter Elmer, "'Saints or Sorcerers": Quakerism, Demonology and the Decline of Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century England', in Barry *et al.* *Witchcraft*, pp. 145–79; Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 1997); Malcolm Gaskill, *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, 2000) and Stuart Clark (ed.), *Languages of Witchcraft* (Basingstoke, 2001).
- 5 W. B. Carnochan, 'Witch-Hunting and Belief in 1751: The Case of Thomas Colley and Ruth Osborne', *Journal of Social History* 4 (1970–71) 389–403; Paul Muskett, 'A Late Instance of English Witchcraft: Some Questions Concerning Evidence', *Hertfordshire's Past* 48 (2001) 12–24. See also, P. J. Guskin, 'The Context of Witchcraft', *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 15 (1981) 48–71; B. C. Luxton, 'William Jenkin, the Wizard of Cadoxton-juxta-Barry', *Morgannwg* 24 (1980) 31–59, and most significantly, Ian Bostridge, 'Witchcraft Repealed', in Barry *et al.* *Witchcraft*, pp. 309–34; Bostridge, *Witchcraft and its Transformations c. 1650–1750* (Oxford, 1997), and Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999).
 - 6 Jonathan Barry, 'Piety and the Patient: Medicine and Religion in Eighteenth-Century Bristol', in Roy Porter (ed.), *Patients and Practitioners* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 145–75. In what follows I have not referenced background evidence cited in the earlier article. My arguments there have been developed further in David Shuttleton, 'Methodism and Dr George Cheyne's "More Enlightening Principles"', in Porter, *Medicine in the Enlightenment*, pp. 316–35.
 - 7 Bristol Reference Library, Bristol Collection (hereafter BCL), 20095.
 - 8 BCL, 20096. References in the text hereafter to Dyer's diary entries for 1762 refer to this volume, not the retrospective one, unless indicated.
 - 9 On this episode see Douglas Grant, *The Cock Lane Ghost* (London, 1965) and, for contemporary responses, *Gentleman's Magazine* 32 (1762) 43–4, 81–4, 339–40; *Annual Register* (1762) 142–7, and the discussions in A. Friedman (ed.), *Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith*, 5 vols (Oxford, 1966), vol. 4, pp. 419–41 and D. Grant (ed.), *Poetical Works of Charles Churchill* (Oxford, 1956) on Churchill's poem 'The Ghost'. On 18 February Dyer notes that Durbin was asking whether the London case was witchcraft or a ghost. For newspapers as sources see O. Davies, 'Newspapers and Popular Belief in Witchcraft and Magic', *Journal of British Studies* 37 (1998) 139–65.
 - 10 *A Copy of a Letter sent to the Bishop of Gloucester from a Clergyman of the Church of England Living in Bristol* (two editions, Bristol and London, 1704); John Beaumont, *An Historical, Physiological and Theological Treatise of Spirits, Apparitions, Witchcraft and Other Magical Practices* (London, 1705), pp. 296–300; Geoffrey Nuttall (ed.), *Calendar of the Correspondence of Phillip Doddridge DD, 1702–51* (Historical Manuscript Commission, 1979), p. 258, no. 1273 (a letter to Doddridge dated 10 September 1747 with a copy certified as correct by Bedford in January 1740); BCL, 396 (mistakenly dated 1763); BCL, 10364; *Arminian Magazine* 5 (1782) 425–9; Ebenezer Sibly, *A Complete Illustration* (London, 1788), p. 1121. What is probably Bedford's own copy of his original letter, with minor differences from the printed version, is in Bristol Record Office, Temple Lc 7. For Bedford see Jonathan Barry, 'Hell upon Earth or the Language of the Playhouse', in Clark *Languages of Witchcraft*, pp. 139–58.
 - 11 The line of argument pursued here owes much to a distinguished line of analysis within the history of science. See Steven Shaplin, *A Social History of Truth* (Chicago, 1994), although Shaplin's privileging of 'gentility' as the accepted condition for credibility is unfortunate, not least for the analysis of urban culture. There is no

intention to imply that 'public' and 'private' are unproblematic categories of analysis: for an excellent account of the issues involved see John Brewer, 'This, That and the Other: Public, Social and Private in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', in Dario Castiglione and Lesley Sharpe (eds), *Shifting the Boundaries* (Exeter, 1995), pp. 1–21.

- 12 Barry, 'Piety and the Patient'.
- 13 Dyer's diary for 24 February (for Eaton), 30 and 31 March and 10 April (for Dyer and Brown); Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 7.
- 14 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 32.
- 15 See Jonathan Barry, 'The Press and the Politics of Culture in Bristol 1660–1775', in Jeremy Black and Jeremy Gregory (eds), *Culture, Politics and Society in Britain 1660–1800* (Manchester, 1991), pp. 68–9.
- 16 There is probably an intended reference to the periodical *The Free Enquirer* (which ran from 17 October to 12 December 1761) by Peter Annet of the Robin Hood Society, which was condemned in 1762 as a blasphemous libel. The playwright Samuel Foote cashed in on both issues in his play *The Orators, in which is Introduced the Tryal of the Cock Lane Ghost* (Dublin, 1762), which contains a 'View of the Robin-Hood Society'.
- 17 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 24, 26.
- 18 Barry, 'Piety and the Patient', pp. 155, 169; Jonathan Barry, *Methodism and the Press in Bristol 1737–1775* (Wesley Historical Society, Bristol Branch, 1992).
- 19 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 3; here, as in all subsequent quotations, the italics are in the original.
- 20 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 5–6.
- 21 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 6–7.
- 22 With an introduction by Robert A. Gilbert (Leicester, 1981).
- 23 See Sharpe, *Instruments*, pp. 233, 273–5. Note also the comments of the Bristol Quaker James Gough in the preface to his *Select Lives of Foreigners Eminent in Piety* (Bristol, 1773), p. 13: 'Some things relating to sorcery and witchcraft, however well-attested at that time, will not easily obtain credit in the present age. I attribute them to the devices of those consummate impostors the Jesuits.' This is the more striking because of Gough's closeness to the Pietist position of Dyer and Durbin, for which see Barry, 'Piety and the Patient', p. 164, n. 43.
- 24 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 7–8. Italic in original.
- 25 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 4–5.
- 26 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 5–6. Despite the gendered emphasis on male witnesses here, the *Narrative* mentions a considerable number of female witnesses, including Durbin's sister (pp. 11, 50–2) and 'two ladies of the company' (p. 25).
- 27 For example, Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 22.
- 28 Barry, 'Piety and the Patient', pp. 161–2.
- 29 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 29. Dyer's diary identifies him as attending on 28 January and 6 February and as the clergyman involved on 10 February.
- 30 BCL, 4533 under 1762.
- 31 BCL, 22477 under 1761. Ironically, Catcott is best known for his championship of the authenticity of the Rowley forgeries of Thomas Chatterton.
- 32 BCL, 12196 under 1761. Another account, based on Durbin's narrative, can be found in BCL, 7956, fo. 272.
- 33 In 1788, the surgeon Samuel Norman, seeking to discredit the later 'possession' of George Lukins of Yatton near Bristol, refers to the Cock Lane ghost being discovered to be mercenary, but makes no mention of the Lamb Inn case, despite the fact that several of the participants had been connected with this case: S. Norman, *Authentic*

- Anecdotes of George Lukins* (Bristol, 1788), p. 15. On Lukins see Davies, *Witchcraft*, pp. 20–2.
- 34 Dyer's retrospective verdict was that the affair was 'at first unaccountable, at length imputed to diabolical magic or witchcraft' (BCL, 20095, 10 December 1761).
- 35 *Arminian Magazine* 20 (1797) 200–2, reprinting letter of 'H. D.' to John Wesley on 5 August 1743. Durbin, assuming it was him, described himself as then 'a student of philosophy for two years'; this would be about three years after his apothecary apprenticeship had ended. He had heard George Whitefield at the Baldwin Street religious society and then been given a copy of the Homilies by Wesley, after which he began to yearn for Christ. In his vision he had seen a very bright light arising from the side of a hill, which seemed to enlighten his whole soul; the enlightenment had lasted all the next day.
- 36 For the intellectual interests of the (Tory) Haynes family see Jonathan Barry, 'The History and Antiquities of the City of Bristol', *Angelaki* 1, 2 (1993–94) 57–8.
- 37 Eleanor Keate, *The Unfortunate Wife* (1779), described how she and her husband had been unable to sell a house outside Lawford's Gate, Bristol, for three years due to the 'mistaken notion' that it was haunted by the ghost of a man who had died there after living there thirty-six years. In 1754 they had to move in themselves to scotch the 'scandalous report' (p. 5).
- 38 See, for example, J. F. Nicholls and J. Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, 3 vols (Bristol, 1880–82), vol. 3, p. 196; John Latimer, *Annals of Bristol in the Eighteenth Century* (Bristol, 1893), pp. 348–50. It was Giles's wife and her mother, Mrs Elmes, who were held responsible for the fraud in these later accounts, but this was perhaps a redirection of suspicion following Giles's death.
- 39 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 17.
- 40 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 49.
- 41 Barry, 'Piety and the Patient'. See also Jonathan Barry, 'Publicity and the Public Good: Presenting Medicine in Eighteenth-Century Bristol', in William Bynum and Roy Porter (eds), *Medical Fringe and Medical Orthodoxy 1750–1850* (London, 1987), pp. 29–39.
- 42 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 26
- 43 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 29.
- 44 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 28.
- 45 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 6–7.
- 46 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 18.
- 47 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 20.
- 48 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 27 (the translations here and below are those given in the footnotes to the *Narrative*).
- 49 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 29.
- 50 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 32.
- 51 *Felix Farley's Bristol Journal*, 3 August 1765; Barry, 'Piety and the Patient', pp. 165–7.
- 52 For excellent guidance on the issues involved, see Clive Holmes, 'Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates and Divines', in Steven Kaplan (ed.), *Understanding Popular Culture* (Berlin, New York and Amsterdam, 1984), pp. 85–111. On possible conflicts between male and female attitudes to the trials see also Clive Holmes, 'Women, Witnesses and Witches', *Past and Present* 140 (1993) 45–78 and James Sharpe, 'Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process', in Kermode and Walker (eds), *Women, Crime and the Courts*, pp. 106–24.
- 53 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 17.
- 54 In Barry, 'Piety and the Patient', pp. 161–2, I contrasted Rouquet's willingness to act in this way with the refusal of the other Anglican clergy involved. I have since

discovered a suggestion (in Nicholls and Taylor, *Bristol Past and Present*, vol. 3, p. 196) that the Behmenist minister of St Werburgh's (where Rouquet was curate), Richard Symes, said prayers in the church for 'two children grievously tormented'. This was not, of course, the same as praying directly over the children, but even this act apparently caused great offence, with many people quitting the church in disgust. I have not been able to discover the original source for this statement.

- 55 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 17.
- 56 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 18.
- 57 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 19.
- 58 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 39–40. For counter-magic see Owen Davies, 'Healing Charms in Use in England and Wales 1700–1950', *Folklore* 107 (1996) 19–32.
- 59 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 54–5. See also Dyer's diary for 30 November and 7 December, discussed later.
- 60 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 39.
- 61 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 27, 41–2.
- 62 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 21.
- 63 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 51, 53.
- 64 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 54.
- 65 BCL, 20095 15 and 16 May 1762.
- 66 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 48.
- 67 *Sketchley's Bristol Directory* (Bristol, 1775), p. 51.
- 68 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 21.
- 69 Durbin refers to asking 'two Latin questions', but does not give them nor discuss the replies (Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 28).
- 70 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 29.
- 71 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 54–5.
- 72 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 24.
- 73 Barry, 'Piety and the Patient', pp. 174–5.
- 74 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 54. Italic in original.
- 75 Durbin, *Narrative*, p. 55. For cunning-folk see Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London, 2003).
- 76 BCL, 20095 7 December 1962.
- 77 Barry, 'Piety and the Patient', pp. 170–5; Barry, 'Publicity and Public Good'.
- 78 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 26–7, 48.
- 79 Durbin, *Narrative*, pp. 14, 17, 23, 40, 45, 53.
- 80 See, for example, Sharpe, *Instruments*, pp. 253–5.
- 81 See Henry Rack, 'Doctors, Demons and Early Methodist Healing', in Sheils, *Church and Healing*, pp. 135–52; MacDonald, 'Religion, Social Change and Psychological Healing'; Henry Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (London, 1989), pp. 387–8, 431–6. See also Owen Davies, 'Methodism, the Clergy, and the Popular Belief in Witchcraft and Magic', *History* 82 (1997) 252–65.
- 82 W. R. Ward and R. P. Heitzenrater (eds), *The Works of John Wesley: vol. 21: Journals and Diaries IV (1755–65)* (Nashville, 1992), p. 352 (27 March 1762). I am most grateful to David Harley, Michael MacDonald and above all the late Roy Porter for the inspiration they have offered in developing this subject and to the responses to this paper offered by those attending the conference on 'Healing, Magic and Belief in Europe, Fifteenth-Twentieth Centuries' at Zeist, the Netherlands, in September 1994 and by students on the MA course in the History and Literature of Witchcraft at the University of Exeter.

‘Evil people’: a late eighteenth-century Dutch witch doctor and his clients

Willem de Blécourt

As a part of the increasing interest in ‘popular’ culture, historians have become more conscious of the presence of witchcraft after the witch trials. Most of the time their attention, however, is restricted to simply indicating witchcraft occurrences. For newcomers in the field a methodological trap also looms. The name of that trap is ‘superstition’ and its character is an often undeclared but determining element in the history of witchcraft studies. The self-educated Dutch folklorist, Tiesing, writing in 1913, tackled the problem openly: ‘people did not consider as superstition everything they do now, because they were firmly convinced of things and events ... and that which is considered as conclusive, is no superstition for those who believe it’. This practical and relativising remark did not take root. The civilising offensive, in which Tiesing participated himself, overgrew it. ‘Who in witches and ghosts believes, is of his mind bereaved,’ a schoolteacher rhymed in 1949, and his opinion met with increasing approval. In Drenthe, as in other provinces of the Netherlands, it was the local elite, consisting of schoolteachers, physicians and ministers, who joined in battle against ‘superstition’ or ‘misbelief’. They constituted an echelon of the Society for the Public Welfare, who had already held a competition in 1798 to eradicate the ‘prejudices about Divinations, as well as those about Charming of Devils, Witchcrafts and Hauntings’.¹

In this chapter I want to not just proceed beyond the witch trials, but also beyond superstition. For witchcraft should not just be considered as an idea, but also as an action. Using a local case study I will chart the complex of expressions and actions concerning witchcraft and, through the reconstruction of the social, economical and political backgrounds of those involved, relate it to various contemporary contexts. I am furthermore interested in the channels of communication through which the reports about witchcraft have been transmitted. I want to stress at the start that generalising statements and conclusions will only be possible after a synchronic and diachronic comparison between several studies have been conducted in a similar manner.

The time is the end of the eighteenth century, the place is Meppel, and the man Derk Hilberding is a witch doctor nicknamed 'Popish Derk'.²

The judicial context

In 1712, the paragraph in the Laws of the province of Drenthe concerning the punishment of (harmful) witchcraft was deleted. However, the crime of scolding someone for being a 'Thief, Murderer, Witch [male or female]' remained, and was punishable by a fine of up to fifty gold guilders. This slander paragraph once contained the principle of the *talio*, the accusatory procedure that forced a slanderer either to prove or withdraw insults that accused someone of a crime, thereby harming his or her good name and honour. When (harmful) witchcraft stopped being a crime, if only for the judiciary, this slander law was primarily used to maintain social order. According to the Drenthe lawyer Van Lier, writing in 1773, it served 'to prohibit the superstitious or malevolent use of the word Witch, and similar words'. In the layered system of law in Drenthe, a slander trial did not always end up before the highest judicial institution, the central and only permanent court, the *Etstoel*. After the (compulsory) reporting of a complaint to the *goorspraak*, a lower moveable court held every half-year in each county, parties could reach an agreement or let the case slide.

Another paragraph retained during the revisions of the statutes in 1712 concerned fortune-tellers and soothsayers, especially those 'who dared to recover stolen or lost things by charming or other deceiving or illicit means'. These kinds of people, among whom cunning-folk and witch doctors were also counted, were to be flogged and banned. Even consulting them was punishable with a fine, which increased with the number of consultations made. Thus in eighteenth-century Drenthe witchcraft was punishable in three ways: for publicly identifying suspected witches, for consulting specialists in the field of unwitching, and for practising as a fortune-teller or witch doctor.

We also use his medicine

In the settlement of Meppel in 1762 Derk Hilberding, an unmarried man of Vreden in Germany, married the widow Jacomina (Mia) Snavels. His wife was a member of the Dutch Reformed church while he was a Catholic. Regarding the next twenty years of his life little more is known about him other than that a number of his children were baptised, and that most of them died young, although in 1788 two of them, a son and a daughter, were still alive. The tax assessment for his 'hearth stead' was fixed on the lowest payable level of one guilder, and he earned his bread as a weaver's hand.

The first recorded event linking Hilberding with witchcraft was a neighbour's row. On 10 September 1782 the weaver Hendrik Havezaat, who was

nicknamed 'Swissy' because he originated from Kaltenbach in the canton of Zürich, reported that Lucas Fidel had called his (Havezaat's) wife, a '*hexe*' or witch. At that point Fidel was about fifty-eight years old and he was provided for by the social welfare of the church. In turn, he reported 'that the children of Hendrik Havezaat offended him all the time' and that there had been a giant row between Havezaat and Hilberding. In the light of later developments it does not seem too far-fetched to suppose that Hilberding had suggested that Janna Kusters, the weaver's wife from Nordhorn, had been instrumental in bewitching one of the members of Fidel's family. The row seems to have been an internal affair between migrants, neighbours and colleagues; it was not continued in court.

Six years later, on 29 September 1788, the local bailiff made a note in the records of the *goorspraak* that, at his request, Jan Preuver had reported to him that Popish Derk told people that they were bewitched and that he had subsequently healed them. The same information was reported in a complaint made by Willem Kappers. These reports formed the basis of a trial against Hilberding that resulted in his banishment for life from the province of Drenthe. As it was formulated in the verdict, he had:

visited several people suffering from languishing illnesses and forced onto them, out of a dirty strive for profit, that their ailments were caused by evil people and they therefore were bewitched, and had next pretended daringly that he could cure them, and in order to gain more credence had not refrained from, while practising many externally superstitious performances and calling on God's holy name, applying medicines by the name of *heiligdom* [consecrated piece of wax] and holy water ... [pretending they were] miraculous, and even accusing of witchcraft citizens who were of good repute and fame.

The supplements to this verdict enable us to understand fairly well how Hilberding operated.³ He appeared to have had a series of patients whom he tried to convince, one by one, they were bewitched. In this series Jan Preuver and his wife occupied a central place.

For quite some time Preuver had been suffering from severe pains in his intestines. He had used medicines from the surgeon Kuijper, which had not helped. He had had remedies from a doctor who had lodged at Claas Brouwer's, but had not obtained relief by them either. Then he heard that Popish Derk was curing people. Together with his wife, who had likewise been suffering for some time, he visited him. Hilberding told them that 'with God's blessing he could cure them both, but that their ailment was caused by evil people'. In answer to the question who had done it, he said: 'you have to be careful with the wife of the baker Piet Schuphof'. Later at Preuver's home the healing ritual was held. Derk knelt down, mumbled or prayed something, and put something the size of a grain of rye on the tip of a knife. 'It should not be touched by the teeth,' he said, when he put it in their mouths,

'in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost'. Then he gave them some liquid out of a little bottle to rinse their mouths with. 'They had to read the First Chapter of the Gospel of St John'. Soon afterwards Derk also brought them a packet of herbs, to be brewed in spirits, and a bottle from which they had to take drops in the evening. Both Preuver and his wife felt markedly better afterwards. To support his diagnosis, Hilberding advised Preuver and his wife to cut open their pillows. Strange 'things' were found inside, 'that were marvellous, like the feathers had been braided'. Because Preuver's mother also found 'those things' in her pillow, she also swallowed a grain on the tip of a knife as a precaution.

The success of Hilberding's treatment was obviously broadcast. Berent Beugelink had an ill child of less than a year old. Preuver advised him to look in its pillow and he too found 'little things' or 'wreaths', which he discussed with Hilberding at Preuver's home. The witch doctor applied the same treatment, advising him 'to keep the door closed to the wife of sargeant Habik'. Because this was difficult to carry out, Beugelink sent his wife and child to Uffelte, a village nearby, for a few days. Minicus Geerts, a labourer in the employ of the carpenter Roelof Tijmens, was another who had felt unwell for quite a long time. He had used medicines supplied by the apothecary Radijs and from doctor Cok in Steenwijk. Nothing had helped, so he too consulted Hilberding at Preuver's home. Hilberding listened to his complaints and said: 'Yes, continue with using medicines, you will at first think that you have improved a bit, but you have to use medicines very long before you will get rid of it. Evil people did it to you.' At this point in time Minicus was not interested in the latter and was only concerned with the cure: 'if I could only get cured than I do not care how I got it'. After his course of treatment had finished, however, he did enquire who had made him sick. 'I do not know', Hilberding replied, 'better stay out of the church next Sunday, and do not meet too many people'.

Grietien Hendriks, the wife of the cobbler Harm Thalen, had been tormented for years by pain in her intestines. In Amsterdam, where she had served as a maid, and afterwards in Meppel, she had fruitlessly taken various medicines till she heard about and consulted Popish Derk. He was of the opinion 'that evil people in Amsterdam had done it to her and that she was bewitched. If you had gone immediately to a Roman Catholic church and had drunk a teacup full of holy water, than you would not have had any trouble'. Her husband did not believe this, 'but that it sufficed if his wife was cured from her ailment'. Hilberding performed the same ritual for her as well, and remarked that the remedy came from a Catholic monastery and that the bottle contained holy water.

Geesje Arents Bloemberg, the wife of Jan Mulder, also heard that Preuver and his wife thought themselves bewitched and used medicines supplied by Popish Derk. 'How could you who are sensible people, give credence to such

things', she asked. In reply they tried to convince her, 'with much force of arguments'. Her youngest child, who was unwell, could easily have the same 'inconvenience', suggested Geesje. The Preuvers said she should cut open the pillows at her home, and then she would find the tell-tale 'wreaths'. Once back in her own home, Geesje felt 'much affected' and told her maid that the Preuvers 'had tried to make her have such thoughts, but she could not believe such things'. The maid did not want to hear about it either as the youngest child had 'just started to gain some weight again'. They nevertheless decided to cut open the pillows, in which they found a multitude of 'round wreaths'. Upset, Geesje returned with the wreaths to Preuver, who advised her to visit Popish Derk and obligingly ferried her in his punt to Hilberding's home across the channel. Hilberding was not home, but his wife promised to send him along as quickly as possible.

As soon as Geesje was home again, the neighbours came round to have a look at the wreaths. The wife of Willem Kappers, with whom Geesje had very good relations – 'as if they were sisters', was still there when Hilberding finally arrived. He refused, however, to do anything in the presence of Mrs Kappers. The insinuation was that she was the cause of the trouble. Geesje initially objected saying that Mrs Kappers was 'much too big a friend of hers' and she could not 'ban her from the house'. Besides, that very same day, a Sunday, Mrs Kappers was going to help her cut beans. But Hilberding was adamant that 'That woman should stay away for a day or four'. The maid, who halfway through this exchange had withdrawn to the back of the house together with another female neighbour, was allowed to remain, but Mrs Kappers was asked to leave. To her the back door was now firmly closed. Only after this did Popish Derk perform his ritual acts.

Belief, superstition and behaviour

The practice of fortune-telling and beneficial magic was, like the unofficial exorcising of devils, punished by the pre-Reformation Church. When this aspect of church law was subsequently incorporated within secular law the meaning of such 'white magic' shifted: the distinction between ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical counter-witchcraft was replaced by the distinction between the Reformed Creed and superstition. By the latter Protestant ministers meant Catholic practices rather than irrational opinions. The fortune-tellers and cunning-folk thus saw their ranks swelled by popish sorcerers – at least according to the opinion of the only institution to report on this: the Reformed Church.

At the end of the eighteenth century Hilberding's actions were still branded 'superstitious'. The judges further opined that he had enticed 'citizens who were unknowing and of fickle belief' to commit an 'outrageous superstition' that should 'not have a place in these enlightened times'. They would have

concurred with the words of the Enkhuizen physician Gerbrand Bakker. In the same period he called for the eradication of everything 'that was still left of the miserable witchcraft prejudice'. A wreath, or a 'little crown' as he called it, was 'nothing other than a lump of coarse feathers, which by grubbiness and by being compressed too long, clung together. Everything strange which one finds in pillows or in mattresses has been put in there by humans, be it for fun or for other reasons'. Around the same time, the minister Beekhuis from the Frisian Garijp also highlighted the 'natural causes' of such phenomena. Wreaths formed because feathers became greasy through heating and sweating and because bits of fat had inserted themselves at washing. He suggested that pillows be thoroughly shaken, and as a form of proof advised that a control sample be taken by cutting open the beds of healthy people. By classifying witchcraft as 'superstition' it belonged to another genre for the local elites.

But in practice people involved in witchcraft accusations had less stereotypical opinions. The wish to be cured dominated the aspect of belief. The witch doctor – who was not always known as such – was only one healer in the medical market. Physicians, surgeons, apothecaries and quacks were all consulted in cases of lingering illnesses. It could be suggested in this respect that confidence in the efficacy of one category of medicine represented a choice *between* one or other of the systems of ideas available. This rule, however, is not compelling. Even when the remarks of witnesses under examination were influenced by the need to appease their examiners – the local sheriff and his officials – it still appears that Hilberding's patients were aware of the opinion that one should not believe in witchcraft, and that they expressed this opinion at relevant moments. The adoption of a symbolic frame of reference was at least selective, if not also temporary.

Only in the eyes of the civilisers did 'superstition' stand as a negatively-defined system opposed to official belief and science. In the daily lives of the 'common folk', official and condemned systems of belief were actually mutually complementary or exchangeable. People were capable of commenting upon beliefs and assessing their applicability. So, seen from the position of actual people, opposing frames of reference blurred into choices, which in practice were not necessarily contradictory. Lucas Fidel, for instance, continued to receive welfare from the church, even though the guiding Heidelberg catechism condemned witchcraft in question ninety-four. Minicus Geerts, the carpenter's labourer, was ordered not to enter the church for one Sunday, which suggests that he usually attended service. It is also questionable whether for the others the experience of Hilberding's ritual was seen as tantamount to denouncing the creed of the Reformed Church.

The connection between ideas and actions can only be made when we forsake vague social categories such as 'one' or 'the people' and instead consider cultural expressions as products of individuals. Witchcraft was not a universal heritage of an anonymous community, but a means of orientation within daily

life. Like any other expression, it cannot be considered as autonomous, which is certainly the case with a classification that does not reach beyond 'superstition' or 'folk belief'. Because it concerns actual people it is moreover possible to study their mutual relationships, and in that way make more explicit the social categories to which they belonged. In other words, additional material can be found about the behaviour and backgrounds of those who thought they were bewitched, of those accused of the bewitchments, and about the motives of the person who was professionally engaged to unwitch. The next step, then, is to look for the similarities and differences between the participants. Is it possible to identify constants regarding issues such as origin, family, age, gender, marital status, education, trade, political persuasion, character or income? Next to these synchronic points of attention the more diachronic, processual questions also deserve to be elaborated. Is it possible to discover intersections in the life histories of the participants, other than matters of witchcraft? Is it possible to consider witchcraft accusations as expressions of social conflict? Did conflicts between the participants already exist before the accusations, or were they on the contrary initiated by the accusations? What kind of reactions can be identified? What effects did the measures of the provincial and local governments have? To understand expressions concerning witchcraft within the contexts of those who produced them and those to whom they were addressed, it is also necessary to be able to situate these contexts within a more encompassing series of connections. Here, I restrict myself to sketching the situation in Meppel in the period concerned.

The township of Meppel

Meppel at the end of the eighteenth century has been described as a 'closely boarded township'.⁴ In the legal sense, though, it was no town. For judicial verdicts people had to rely on the *Etstoel*, which was established in Assen. Nevertheless, citizenships were sold in Meppel for five *guilders* and twelve *stivers* a person. The place was located on a transport crossroads. Towards the south the Meppel channel ran to Zwartsluis, from where Hasselt, Blokzijl and Amsterdam could be reached. A ferry to Amsterdam ran twice a week on Wednesdays and Saturdays. The Hogeveen canal ran eastwards, and to the north another canal to Assen had recently been dug between 1769 and 1780. Both canals facilitated the large-scale transportation of peat. Over land, Meppel was on the postal route from the south to Frisia and Groningen.

In 1774 a traveller described Meppel as 'very tidy'. From 1780 onwards they had street lights and from a regulation in 1787 it is clear that the council made an effort to tackle the mucky state of the streets and the water supply. Everyone who did not have room for refuse behind their houses had to put it, rather than throw it, in front of their doors in the morning, to be collected by cart-men. In 1788 the number of occupied houses, described as 'hearth

steads', amounted to 881. They were dispersed over eleven districts, each made up of around eighty houses. The districts were ordered in a spiral pattern. The first district was located in the north-west, the seventh in the south-east, the ninth in the south-west and the eleventh in the centre, due west and north-west of the church, which stood in the fourth district. Reports to the *goorspraak* took place district-wise, taxes were collected by district, fire-fighters and night watches were organised by district, and in 1795 the inhabitants were counted by the district. In that year there were 3656 inhabitants, of whom 1144 were men and 1179 were women above twenty years of age, who lived in 913 houses. The number of houses increased seven per year on average, though building stagnated slightly towards the turn of the century. There was a small death surplus between 1742 and 1795, and the number of births only began to exceed the number of deaths from around 1790. A contemporary statistician noticed this phenomenon. 'At Meppel', he observed, 'many maids, bargemen, weavers and factory labourers come to live from elsewhere, and this naturally means that the number of yearly deaths has to be bigger than that of births'. Many people lived in Meppel on a temporary basis, and many of those born there, such as maids, moved away for some time to places like Amsterdam. These fluctuations are hardly expressed by the total number of inhabitants and neither is mobility within Meppel. New inhabitants, around fifteen heads of family or single persons a year, came mostly from the surrounding countryside of Overijssel and the peat areas of Drenthe, while the rest came from other towns in the region and from across the border in Germany.

Bargemen constituted the biggest occupational group in Meppel (around 15 per cent, their workers included). They were organised in two guilds and their living quarters were located mainly in the west, alongside the Channel. The labourers, dockers and day-labourers (8 per cent) were concentrated in the same districts as the bargemen. In contrast, the weavers (10 per cent) and the carpenters (4 per cent) were more widely distributed across town, though there was a slight concentration of weavers in the east. In the period concerned, weaving was one of Meppel's most important forms of industry. There were linen weaving mills, where sailcloth was made for the East India Company. There were bedtick mills, as well as satin and tablecloth-weaving factories. Before 1790 over 400 looms would have been present, not counting domestic looms. Women and children were thus certainly working there, although they do not appear in the surveys. Because of this, little can be concluded about the division of labour between men and women. Quite often widows took over the activities of their husbands, which makes one suspect that they were already involved before. Normally, however, men and women had separate activities. In a marriage contract, for instance, in which the partners committed themselves to care for the children from a previous marriage: where both boys and girls had to learn how to read and write, the

boys were expected to master a trade and the girls to acquaint themselves with needlework and knitting.

As well as the weaving mills there were also some dye and bleaching works and significant numbers of tailors, hatters and button-makers. Furthermore the place harboured a dozen breweries and gin distilleries and a similar number of windmills for several purposes. Some 7 per cent of the occupational inhabitants, as noted in 1797, were engaged in commerce. Other occupations mentioned include: inn keeper, baker, cart-man, cobbler, tanner, soap-boiler, rope-maker, broom-maker, butcher, painter, glazier, diamond cutter, midwife, apothecary, rattle watch, lock-keeper, blacksmith, chandler, or saddler. From the 1788 hearth registers it is possible to deduce that 60 per cent of the main inhabitants practised an independent trade, 32 per cent worked in some kind of salaried employment and 8 per cent were paupers.

In social and economic respect Meppel was certainly a town. It had a Latin school, a bookshop and two well-attended comprehensive schools. The majority of the inhabitants belonged to the Reformed Church. Already before the French occupation in 1795 a small Lutheran church had been established, and in 1799 some 200 Jewish inhabitants inaugurated their synagogue. Politically the people of Meppel were, like elsewhere in the Netherlands, divided into 'patriots', who were to support the French occupation, and the monarchist Orangists. In the middle of the 1780s both groups clashed regularly, especially in 1785, when Willem V, of the house of Orange, made his entry into Meppel. Against this general portrait of the town, we can situate Hilberding, those he accused of witchcraft, and his patients.

The bewitched

Three out of the four families under study here had ties with Amsterdam. Preuver was born there and his wife, Lijsje de Vriese, had served there as a maid, as had the wives of Roelof Tijmen and Harm Thalen. This was not exceptional in itself. Commercial connections existed between the two places (peat and sailcloth) and there was an excellent ferry service. In the ten years from 1783 up until 1792 a little over one hundred issues of intended marriage occurred in Amsterdam in which one or both partners originated from Meppel. Regarding the flow of people moving in the other direction, around seven attestations a year were issued by the churches regarding people moving from Amsterdam to Meppel. Since the amount of people from Amsterdam settling in Meppel was much smaller in those years, the figures presumably concerned people who temporarily worked in Amsterdam.

Hilberding's patients, at least those described here, were not selected by chance. Jan Preuver and his family were directly involved in introducing Hilberding to Minicus Geerts and Berent Beugelink. All lived close next to each other by the *Sluispad*. This path ran west along the old branch of the

Meppel Channel, from the lock to Brewer's Street. At the back of the houses were fields while the fronts faced the Channel. They, therefore, only had neighbours to the left and right. In the early 1780s Preuver acted at the *goorspraak* as a representative of his district and in 1792 he was nominated to be a deacon. He was a pole- and block-maker, and we can consider him and the carpenter Roelof Tijmens more or less as colleagues. Berent Beugelink, a bricklayer, was, as is shown by the baptismal record of his first child, related to Preuver's wife. Family ties also constituted the link with the families of the bargeman Jan Mulder and the cobbler Harm Thalen, both of whom lived in two other outlying areas of Meppel, in the first and eight districts. Lijsje de Vriese, Preuver's wife, referred to Geesje Arents Bloemberg, Jan Mulder's wife, as 'cousin' (supposedly an expression for a third degree relationship). Harm Thalen was Roelof Tijmens' brother-in-law, as their wives Jacobje Hendriks and Grietje Hendriks were sisters. Within the district the mutual lines of communication ran through neighbours and outside it through female relatives.

Apart from Minicus Geerts the men were all self-employed craftsmen between thirty and forty-five years old. A number of the women had served as maids before their marriage. They were members of the Reformed Church, and were at least semi-literate. Jan Preuver could read and write and obviously expected his customers to be able to read as well. We know from a travel account that he had hung a poetic advertisement on his barn and that he composed rhymes for special occasions. Roelof Tijmens could write his own signature, as could Harm Thalen, who moreover, as was agreed at his (second) marriage, wanted to send his son to school 'to be taught decently to write and to do maths, as well as the principles of religion'. Jan Mulder and Geesje Arents Bloemberg were also capable of signing their names. They all originated from Meppel or from villages in the near vicinity. As far as their political affiliation can be traced, it seems they leaned towards the Orangists. The triumphal arches and crowns that bedecked Meppel to welcome the arrival of Willem V on 11 November 1785, were made at Roelof Tijmens' place 'since they had a barn of 40 feet long'. On the day he accompanied the royal coach but was not involved in the disturbances because, he said, he had three children. Bargemen and related craftsmen such as carpenters and labourers were generally sympathetic to the Orangists.

The witches

Hilberding accused three women of witchcraft, albeit in an indirect way. Were there any similarities between them, other than being the subject of witchcraft accusations? Did Hilberding employ a specific system of identification? In any case, he did not mention men as being responsible, only 'evil people' in general or specific women. The ages of the three women at the time of their

being accused were twenty-three, forty-four, and 'old'. Age was not a common factor, then, though being married may have been. The occupations of their husbands, baker, soldier and tailor, only point to a constant factor in a negative sense: they were not connected with bargemen or carpenters. On average, their financial position was below that of their supposed victims. With regard to religion and literacy, however, they seem to share the same profile as the bewitched.

More determining than the classification of being 'poorer' are two other factors: origin and place of residence. All three women were immigrants from beyond Meppel and its hinterland, as was Hilberding for that matter. Schuphoff and his wife were originally German. Habik (or Habiech)'s place of birth is unknown and was thus almost certainly from outside the Netherlands. Willem Kappers came from Rheden, in Guelders; his wife's parents had lived in Hoogeveen, but had migrated there. In this respect they stood as a group apart from those bewitched. Did Hilberding feel safer when he mentioned their names, rather than the more local inhabitants of Meppel? Or were his opinions related to a more general image?

By accusing neighbouring women he kept within tradition. It is significant that the families concerned did not remain neighbours. Two of three accused women moved home just after the witchcraft affair: Schuphoff and Kappers moved to different districts in Meppel. Beugelink also moved to another part of the town. At first sight, Geesje Tinholt, Schuphoff's wife, who Preuver suspected of witchcraft, was the exception. For she was *not* Jan Preuver's neighbour, at least not an immediate one since the *Oeverstraat* where she lived was located at the same side of the Channel as the *Sluispad*. Apart from Hilberding's personal considerations – after all he had to point out a credible 'witch' – social space may offer an explanation. In the two other cases, Beugelink *versus* Habik and Mulder *versus* Kappers, we are dealing with families who lived next to each other for a short period only, and who did not occupy a prominent place within Meppel. Jan Preuver, on the other hand, had been able to build a position of respect in his neighbourhood over the years. His social standing, although marginal within Meppel as a whole, was considerable within his district. For this reason the cause of the witchcraft that threatened his social position may have been sought in the next district, instead of in the next house. Because of her reputation for unruly behaviour (she was reported to have misbehaved herself at a funeral), the foreigner Geesje Tinholt would have made a good candidate witch in the minds of Hilberding and Preuver.

Out of a dirty strive for profit

It is difficult to ascertain whether political motives also played a role in the accusations. But it seems unlikely. None of the 'witches' or their immediate

family was explicitly involved in the disturbances in November 1785. It is, nevertheless, not improbable that, when identifying women as witches, a witch doctor was influenced by existing social and political frictions. An example of this will be discussed below. The possibility that Hilberding used his powers to blacken the names of Meppelers he found displeasing, suggests the absence of other ways of settling conflicts. Yet there were plenty of alternatives. The *goorspraak* reports clearly show that people openly insulted and fought each other, and that quarrels could be officially and unofficially settled. I did not find any indications that Hilberding had bad relations with the people he accused in 1788 (nor with others, apart from the 1782 case) and the same applies to his patients. Hilberding does not come across as a quarrelsome person.

The evening of the day before Prince Willem arrived in Meppel, Hilberding was visited by a broom-maker's hand who complained that the patriotic exercise association was to welcome the prince. Hilberding had told him 'that they should make sure that everything proceeded with Love, then tonight people might have a happy evening because of his Highness'. But the hand did not agree, and replied: 'when they thwart us, then things will happen, for we will sharpen the saws and axes, and when the saws are sharp at the wrong side then we can hew with them as well as they can with their sabres, for the Prince has to become Count of Holland'. On the day Hilberding did not stand in the first row to greet the arrival of the prince. He only went to have a look after someone had already died from a gunshot.

In the absence of clear social or political motives money may have been a reason for Hilberding taking up witch-doctoring alongside his mundane occupation. He had served as a weaver's hand with the manufacturer Willem Essink. In 1781 Essink decided to cut his production, leading to job losses. It was around this time that Hilberding began to earn an extra income through healing. It is not possible to prove the link between these two facts. But the financial aspect of Hilberding's illegal activities does deserve more precise attention. Usually he agreed with his customers beforehand what sum of money they should pay in fees. Jan Preuver was charged the most. He paid ten guilders for the medicines and the ritual, with the agreement that he would pay another fifteen guilders later. Minicus Geerts and Geesje Bloemberg both agreed to pay Hilberding six guilders. Harm Thalen paid a ducat and Berent Beugelink was twenty-six stivers poorer for his consultation. These were comparatively large sums. The local midwives, for instance, earned between seventy-five and one hundred guilders a year. With an average of around one hundred baptisms a year this amounted to about twelve stivers for each birth. In 1800 it was reported that the normal wage for labourers was fourteen stivers during the summer, twelve during autumn and ten stivers in the winter, and for a craftsman twenty stivers (one guilder). Around 1790 the price of a bushel of rye, in those days the main staple,

fluctuated between thirty and forty stivers. Depending on this, the price of twelve pounds of coarse rye bread was seven or nine stivers. The fine for fighting was twenty-four stivers; when a child was born too soon after the marriage of its parents, the fine was ten guilders. In 1785 Jan Mulder paid 697 guilders and fifteen stivers for his house, and in 1779 Harm Thalen paid 815 guilders for his. Loans of a few hundred guilders were usual. Hilberding's fees were thus high in comparison to a labourer's income and to the daily costs of living, but not compared to the tariffs of official doctors. The physician of Hooegeveen charged three to twenty guilders for assistance at births, dressing wounds or bloodletting.

For the authorities Hilberding certainly was not a profitable customer. On 13 November 1788 his transport to Assen, where his verdict was pronounced, cost the local council nine guilders for the wagon, four guilders and four stivers for the accompanying soldier and watchman, and two guilders, twelve stivers and eight pennies for 'refreshments on the road'.

Interlude

Hilberding's accusations provoked tensions rather than expressed them. For the court his words and actions had been the reason

why irreproachable people were offended in their good name and fame, even the best citizens innocently have been made suspect, the ties of good harmony and friendship between neighbours and citizens have been severed, which could cause the most detrimental effects for society.

The authorities may have turned a blind eye to his practice of medicine, but they strongly opposed the far-reaching social consequences of the witchcraft accusations he generated.

On 7 October 1788 the wife of Hendrik Overes, a neighbour of the wool manufacturer Willem Essink (Hilberding's employer), complained that Jan Abraham Schuurman had called her husband 'kees with the crooked legs' and had threatened 'to knock them straight again' ('Kees' was the common nickname for a patriot). He had also 'punched her on the chest three times' and called her '*hexenpak*' (member of a witch family) and 'black hole' (meaning that she had been, or should have been in prison). The two had a history of quarrelling. In May 1770, for instance, Overes had emerged from Schuurman's house with a 'bloody head' after a conflict of opinion about late payments. According to Schuurman, Overes had 'done him violence in his home, had called him scoundrel and also invited him in front of the door, upon which he had hit him 5 or 6 times, thinking he was allowed to defend himself in his own home'. In 1783 Overes reported that Schuurman had punched his labourer Sjoerd and that Sjoerd 'had hit Hendrik Overesch, because of which Hendrik Overesch had fallen down and got a bump on his

head'. Overes' political sympathies lay with the patriots. He was not the only one to have troubles with Schuurman. In 1774 someone had scolded the latter for being a 'flayer', a derogatory name for a leather worker. And at the end of 1781 his children had a 'problem' with the grandchildren of the widow of Jacob van der Veen, after which she reported him. Schuurman had little love for patriots, as is already apparent from his words 'kees with the crooked legs'. On 12 November 1785, a day after the entry of the prince, he asked Cornelis van der Stal whether he would remain a 'rifleman', that is to say a member of the 'patriotic exercise association'. When Cornelis confirmed this, Jan hit him. This clarity of the political affiliations of the two is in contrast to the vagueness of the witchcraft accusation. The term '*hexenpak*' which was addressed to his wife probably did not imply anything more than a mere insult.

Witchcraft was more openly present in December 1792. On the eve of Saint Nicolas (5 December) 'wreaths' were burned in the house of Engbert Harms in order to discover who had bewitched his child. The wife of Jacob van der Woude had entered and consequently been taken for a 'witch'. This had happened in the presence of Coop Worst and his daughters. Consequently Jannes Aartsen, the uncle of the child, had asked his neighbour Potgieter whether 'a witch doctor lived in Zwol'. In this case there are no extensive witness depositions. But it is possible to reconstruct events from other sources. In the first place, all the participants were close neighbours, although the shipwright Coop Worst lived a bit further away in the district than the others. Engbert Harms, a seller of puppets, had married Janna Aartsen on 22 October 1788. The bricklayer Jannes Aartsen was his brother-in-law. Their first child was baptised on 3 February 1790, the second on 19 January 1791 and the third on 5 August 1792. The first two children died shortly after birth. This series of misfortunes would have contributed to the suspicions of bewitchment when the third child fell ill, and later died in 1793. The only thing that is known about the 'witch', Cornelia Annes Kunst, was that her husband was supposedly a nephew of Engbert Harms's mother-in-law.

The burning of wreaths to detect witchcraft led to less predictable accusations of witchcraft than when a professional witch doctor dropped a hint. Everyone could enter a house, although in the evening it was more likely that it would be a female neighbour or a relative. It was not reported whether Jannes Aarsen found a witch doctor in Zwolle. The resort to the wreath ritual, after which the 'perpetrator' could be forced to unwitch, does not point to immediate professional interference.

Six weeks alone in the back kitchen

After his banishment from Drenthe, Derk Hilberding moved to Zwolle, where his daughter died. At the end of 1791 he was also forced to leave this town

because of his healing activities, and so he settled with his wife and son in Staphorst. It would seem that at this point in time they were not doing very well financially, since they were receiving church welfare. Things got worse. On the evening of 13 June 1793 'Catholic Derk' was caught in Hoogeveen by the local sheriff and transported to Assen the next day.

Over time Hilberding had enlarged his circle of patients to the settlements around Meppel and healed bewitched people in Staphorst, Wanneperveen, Kolderveen, Meppel, Yhorst, De Wijk and Hoogeveen. He told the Court of Justice in Assen that he knew the art 'to heal some illnesses as for instance painful ailments, tapeworm and more of the kind, and that he had learned this art from an old monk'. Later he elaborated that the monk was a father from the 'barefooters' (Capucins) in the east of his native town Vreden. To the question why he had returned from his banishment, Hilberding answered 'because the patients, who very much wanted to be helped, had requested it'. He asked for clemency, but this he did not get. At a place on the outskirts of Assen he was tied to a pole and whipped. Then he was banned for life from Drenthe (there was uncertainty about his previous conviction).

One of his clients in Meppel was Eentje Worst, the daughter of the shipwright Coop Worst. This girl had also been suffering from some time. She could not hold down any food. She was treated by Dr Van der Sande, a Dr Hulte in Zwolle, and a weaver named Michel without finding any improvement. In the autumn of 1792 she discussed this with Derk Hilberding at the house of Harm Soer. The healer thought for a bit and said he could help her, but 'when the medicines were blessed and only then'. The next day her father collected three 'powders' from Hilberding, 'which had to be put under Salt, as to prevent them from contact with the air'. Afterwards she swallowed something described as a 'Dragon' and 'a little bottle full of oil'. They paid six guilders up front, and later a further three guilders and then another twenty-four or twenty-five stivers. The remedies helped. Barta Worst, Eentje's older sister, declared that an hour after Derk had given her sister something to swallow, she had eaten 'a toast with a piece of bread, without being troubled by it, and that she afterwards could stand food and has now again recovered'. Although they had cut her pillow open and had found wreaths, Hilberding did not tell her who had bewitched her. He limited himself to the general category of 'evil people' who had 'done' it to her. To be protected from their influence she had to 'sit alone', she was not allowed to come 'in through the front door, or in the company of strangers'. This advice was followed. Eentje informed the sheriff that she had 'sat six weeks alone in the back kitchen and that strangers had not been allowed, although some family members had been with the witness during that time'.

It is impossible to clearly determine the sequence of the events involving the Worstes. The relationship between the two unwitchment techniques is

therefore somewhat unsure. The date of the test at Engbert Harms's house is known and Hilberding's treatment would have taken place around the same time, 'before the last autumn or new year's eve', as Barta Worst told sheriff Kniphorst on the morning of 5 July 1793. The fact that Jannes Aarsen inquired after a witch doctor seems to be decisive. He would not have needed to do this after Hilberding's name had become known, although Hilberding may have been the witch doctor in Zwolle his neighbour Potgieter had heard of. According to Eentje Worst she had talked to Hilberding at Harm Soer's, not at Engbert Harms'. It was not even attempted to interrogate the last about Hilberding, although it was known that he thought that his child had been bewitched.

Hilberding's role in the accusation of Cornelia Kunst, the wife of Van der Woude, in 1792, will have been indirect at the most. Perhaps people remembered the wreaths of Geesje Bloemberg, who in 1788 lived only a few houses removed from Coop Worst – several neighbours had come to look at them at the time. Possibly more people knew that wreaths were a sign of witchcraft and that when they were burned the witch was drawn to her victim. However it may have been, the category 'witch' which Hilberding applied, partly overlapped with the possible 'witch' that could be discovered by burning wreaths but was not totally identical with it. Evil people belonged to 'strange folks', people whom one could meet outside, 'outside the door' and to whom entrance could be refused. Friends and next of kin did not resort to that.

Change and continuity

Meanwhile political tensions continued to build in Meppel. On 17 September 1795 a day was organised in Meppel to celebrate the 'alliance' between the French and the 'Batavians'. The patriots had now gained the upper hand and marched through the town with music and two hundred girls dressed in white. At the end of November all the inhabitants were counted. From the list it appears that the weaver Derk Hilberding, his wife and son were back living in district five despite his banishment. At the end of March 1796, however, he was imprisoned for a third time. This time he had tried to deliver a pregnant girl from 'kreeplings in the body', which were the result of witchcraft. In April he was interrogated.

'In 1788 you have gotten yourself in prison because you would unwitch a bewitched child of J. Mulder. What kind of order would there be, if the judge would dare to not imprison you now as then?' Why had he returned?

Hilberding answered that he 'thought that the freedom implied that he was allowed to live in the Land [of Drenthe] again',

'Do you believe yourself to know remedies, which in case someone is bewitched, are powerful enough to stop the bewitchment?'

'Yes'.

'Do you know that we are against this witchcraft here?'

The detained was of the opinion 'that it was allowed to cure someone who was ill'.

'Have you not been caught because of it the first and the second time and been convicted?'

'Yes'.

'How do you dare to take on this old superstitious foolishness again and give free reign to the cursed superstition to fool the people about the whims of bewitchment and to venture to know remedies that will surely cure the sufferers?'

The detained said 'that he had acted badly'.

This interrogation was repeated in front of a 'full people's meeting' on 22 May 1796. On both occasions Hilberding's answers were most elaborate when discussing his art.

'How do you know that people are bewitched?'

'When someone had a closed body, the purge that was ascribed did not work, that was a test of bewitchment'.

'How do you cure people, by what means?'

'The medicines can be obtained at the monasteries in Vrene [Vreden] and Borst in exchange for tea and sugar and not for money, the medicines were known under the name of St. Hubes [Hubertus] bread', which finely grated was mixed with some powdered beans.

'How do they operate?'

'The remedy took away the pain, or increased it for a little while and provided then full recovery, but then one had to use purgatives to clean the body'.

These answers sound sincere. Hilberding meant what he said. The fact that he personally visited his patients supports this conclusion. But for the Drenthe authorities witchcraft was a relic of old, less enlightened eras. 'Their adherence to old customs, even in inconsequential affairs, is so strong, that it often almost turns to superstition,' the lawyer Tonkens wrote about the Drents: 'no one has so far succeeded to eradicate their belief in Witches and Werewolves etc.' The court condemned the healer to six years in the house of correction in Groningen. He died there on 9 October 1801. His wife remained in Meppel, was again supported by the church but finally ended up in the poorhouse, where she died in February 1807.

Much too close is much too close

The above case possesses various aspects worth exploring in more detail. In the winter of 1795–96 Wobbigje, the daughter of Gerrit Knipmeier and Hilligje Jans, started to suffer from a 'discomfort' in her belly. Pregnancy was perhaps suspected. First she consulted Doctor Van der Sande, but without results. Next she had a bloodletting at the hands of a surgeon named

Radijs, and when that did not help she resorted to Derk Hilberding. He told her that she was not going to give birth, but that 'evil people' had 'done' it to her: 'She was bewitched'. Jan Jans Bouknecht, Knipmeier's labourer, with whom Wobbigje was courting, paid Derk seven guilders for a packet of herbs, three powders and a bottle of oil, to be kept in a box of sand with salt over it. These medicines did not have any effect. New medicines, for twenty-four stivers, did not lead to a recovery either. According to Hilberding, Wobbigje had again been 'under the face of the witch' and so she had to receive further treatment, which cost five guilders. He added: 'it has to be broken, it should go out the way it came in'. By 'it' he meant an animal, probably a chicken, rat or mouse. Later in court Hilberding explained that he had handled similar things before. Once he had cured a woman who had thrown up something that resembled a duck, another had expelled an adder or a snake, and his own wife had once 'discharged a thing through her urethra that looked like a calf's head and at the end like fish bones'. He told Wobbigje's mother 'that he had cured women who had gotten rid of the discomfort though the back way, others who had lost it like a woman in labour'.

Hilberding did not call the witch by name. He let the family Knipmeier guess. 'She does not live far, do you know a woman whose first husband has been suffering for some time and then died, and whose present man is not free either. Now they should have a guess'. They decided upon Hilligje Koster, the wife of Jan Detlef Arp, who lived diagonally across from them. Hilberding did not confirm this in so many words, but hinted that she was indeed the witch by saying such things as, 'much too close is much too close'. For Hilligje Koster was a full cousin of Gerrit Knipmeier. Because of this Wobbigje was not allowed to leave through the front door because she was not allowed to have her aunt 'look upon her'. The use of the back door was permitted. During the treatment Hilberding let slip the following remark in the presence of Wobbigje's mother: 'the history with Kleibakker's daughter [the wife of Willem Kappers] should be over by now, it was better if he would meet her half way, now he had more on his side [he was better equipped], they would stay away from them'. Jan Bouknecht remembered that Hilberding had given him some recipes to counter the witch. He said she would get 'insufferable pains' when they boiled the urine Wobbigje had passed in the morning. She would even die 'if he took a black hen and took its heart out when it was still alive, and then put the hen in a new pot with a lid on it covered with a cloth and put it on the fire to simmer'.

The woman across the street was not accused directly. She heard it herself from the greengrocer Leffert Benninge, who had told her that Hilberding had,

on a certain evening told the people present in the house of Gerrit Knipmeier that if they wanted to know who the witch was they had to knock on the

door of the old hat maker at a certain hour when they would find a black cat without a tail on Gerrit's threshold and her [Hilligje Koster] not at home.

In the end Wobbigje Knipmeier did turn out to be pregnant. Although Hilberding had let her 'use' a cup of soot two weeks before and on the evening before 'had let them lay regularly woollen cloths, drenched in warm sweet milk stiff and strong, on her belly', and maintained that she was bewitched, she appeared not to have carried a monster but a 'shapely life son'. That was on Thursday 24 March 1796. The following Tuesday the witnesses' depositions were taken. On 4 April it was reported at the *goorspraak* 'that the daughter of Gerrit Knipmeier had given birth without being married' and two days later, on Wednesday 6 April, the child was buried. On 3 July of the same year Wobbigje married Jan Bouknecht.

This time Hilberding had not selected a poorer neighbouring woman, although Hilligje Koster, whose father came from Nordhorn, did belong to the same group of immigrants he had accused earlier. He did not hesitate either to accuse a member of the family of his patient. To him, however, it may have been more important for his choice of witch that Hilligje was also related to Janna Coster, the wife of Hendrik Havezaat who was insulted for '*hexe*' in 1782, and to Grietje Kleibakker, Willem Kappers's wife, by whose agency he had been banned in 1788 for the first time. Kappers acted as witness at the second marriage of Hilligje Koster; his wife's mother, Hendrikje Alberts, was a sister of the mother of Hilligje Koster. Hilligje's father, Jan Coster, was supposedly a brother of Janna Koster; they both had roots in Nordhorn. In this light the pronouncements of Hilberding achieve a more concrete meaning and it appears that his accusation was also based on feelings of revenge against a group of relatives. When the accusation was deliberate, it also become doubtful whether in this particular case Hilberding had been sincere in his diagnosis. The question also arises as to the effects and reliability of official medicine.

A cultural field of tension

The local attitude towards witchcraft can be analysed from four overlapping and complementary points of view: ecclesiastical, medical, legal and social. The church council of Meppel does not seem to have involved itself deeply with these witchcraft affairs. Although no extended reports of the meetings have survived, only a list of decisions, they do not indicate that any disciplinary measures were taken against Hilberding's patients. They were almost all members of the church and they all paid for their own chairs in church, like the accused. Jan Preuver, as well as Peter Schuphof, was even nominated for the position of deacon in 1792. Hilberding's Catholicism – he was one of the few Catholics in Meppel – was not an obstacle to his wife receiving church

welfare. Even the 'propaganda' in favour of Catholic medicines and rituals espoused by Hilberding did not influence the church in this respect. An explanation for this may perhaps be found in the fact that the church in Meppel at this time was going through a period of religious strife, with local ministers taking different sides. Compared to the reaction of the civil authorities regarding the political troubles and Hilberding's activities, this seems unlikely, however. The church had basically stopped being concerned about witch doctors a century earlier.

If for Hilberding's patients the notion of a bewitchment did not conflict with their religious beliefs and practices, equally their attitude towards physicians effectively prevailed. As was written in the *Present State of the Land of Drenthe*, 'The people are usually their own medical doctors and surgeons.' 'They use simple medicines, of which experience has taught, that they have a good effect.' As we have seen, as well as self-medication a series of healers were consulted, especially when it came to languishing illnesses. Meppel was one of the few places in Drenthe with its own doctor, Bernardus Willem van de Sande. This man, who in 1792 had failed to improve the condition of Eentje Worst, and in 1795 had not managed to deal with Wobbigje Knipmeier's pregnancy, had in 1784 finished his studies in Groningen with a dissertation about the eardrum. In 1792 he had even won a competition, organised by the government of Drenthe, concerning the practice of midwifery and the organisation of midwives. This competition was in part instigated in response to the number of children's illnesses in Meppel, which in 1788 and 1789 had caused a severe increase in infant mortality. A link between this demographical data and the refuge that some Meppelers took in alternative medicine is not immediately present. For them the accumulation of misfortunes in their immediate surroundings and their experience with combating them counted more than the general state of health. Witchcraft was a possible model of explanation for individual cases of illness, temporarily chosen on the basis of a mixture of existing suspicions and experimental persuasion. It could be put into practice and easily explained. The authorities' labelling of witchcraft as 'superstition' clearly lost out to the presence of wreaths of feathers. And when Hilberding ascribed an otherwise incurable ailment to witchcraft, and succeeded in providing a cure on the basis of that diagnosis, it would have had more effect than any governmental measures. The option of a final negative assessment was kept, however.

The measures of the government had several aims. The fight against what was called 'superstition' from a scientific point of view, and the repression of what from a religious point of view was characterised as Catholic and 'superstitious', only constituted one argument. There is little to be found regarding a systematic approach; Hilberding's banishments were not accompanied by publicity campaign against witch doctors. A more general campaign against witchcraft was likewise missing, and the law against consulting

fortune-tellers and the like was not stringently enforced during the period. The incidental measures taken against one unwitcher and unofficial healer, which focused on symptoms, primarily concerned counteracting social unrest caused by the accusations – the repair of ‘the ties of good harmony between neighbours and citizens’.

Punishing and banishing Hilberding reduced the range of possible frictions between neighbours. At the same time medical choice decreased and a healer was deprived of his income and his individual freedom. Apart from abuse and a possible act of revenge, the activities and answers provided by Hilberding do not give the impression that he always intended to swindle – he took too many risks for that to be his primary motivation. The structural social effect of governmental measures needs to be studied and described over a longer period of time. But the presence of witchcraft accusations that were only indirectly related to Hilberding’s cures shows, in any case, that in the short term the measures had only a limited effect. In 1800, for example, another relative of Hilligje Koster was insulted for ‘*hexenpak*’.

For those accused of witchcraft there existed the legal route to obtain satisfaction. None of the Meppeler reports, however, resulted in a slander trial, which at the time was still the case in a few smaller villages and hamlets. Maybe the trial of Hilberding was considered as implicit reparation of honour, but it is also possible that the social relations within Meppel made a revocation of the insults unnecessary. In a place of transition people were less dependent on each other, and moving to another district offered an alternative to legal procedure.

Seen on the level of actions, witchcraft mainly appears as a way to mark out social contacts. Through an accusation people from the immediate surroundings were classified as ‘evil’. To associate with such people was unwise; to grant them access to your home was asking for trouble. The witch doctor had a catalysing role in defining this kind of person. It is not impossible that he put into words already existing discords. Yet through his accusations he evoked new frictions. Witchcraft accusations hardly offered an outlet for social tensions; they rather produced them. A witchcraft accusation entailed a change in behaviour. In particular the boundaries that people observed towards each other were altered. This could be in effect for a long period or just for the length of the healing. To safeguard his child from the presence of Habik’s wife, Beugelink sent his wife and child to her family in Uffelte for a couple of days; later they moved. Minicus Geerts was given the advice ‘not to meet too many people’. Similar advice was also given to the other bewitched and was usually followed – the clearest example is Eentje Worst’s stay in the back kitchen. The house was considered as a private domain from which evil influences had to be banned and the threshold was the magical boundary. But where some doors were kept shut for some (female) neighbours others were especially opened. Jan Preuver’s house, for instance, functioned

as a meeting place for suffering people, in particular neighbours and female relatives.

To determine the differences between 'good' and 'evil' neighbours, we should first take account of the kind of accusation. In the material collected here, we can discern three situations in which an accusation occurred. First, when by or via a mediator (in this case Hilberding) a specific suspicion was expressed. Second, when after a ritual of recognition (burning feather wreaths), performed by the bewitched and their immediate family and friends, someone attracted suspicion merely by entering. And third, when someone was insulted without any suspicion of bewitchment – a possible example of this is the conflict between Schuurman and the Overes family. In the last situation the witch or *heks* was the one with whom or with whose family earlier rows had taken place. In the second situation the possibilities are broadened to everyone who crossed the threshold at the crucial moment. In both cases neighbouring women were primarily involved. Those at whom a direct accusation was aimed were also female neighbours, who in contrast to the accused in the two other situations, appeared to have as their most noticeable similarity their origin from outside Meppel and its immediate countryside. Comparison with other cases should establish whether it concerns a more general characteristic or a personal preference of Hilberding. This also applies to his accusations against relatives.

In conclusion we can state that for a better knowledge of witchcraft in all its aspects, it is desirable to consider each time and place as a symbolic frame of reference beside other frames of reference. Next to this it appears important to consider the behaviour shown during expressions of witchcraft, to take account of the different social opinions about witchcraft, and to trace the backgrounds and motives of the participants in witchcraft affairs. In this way we do not just obtain a more adequate knowledge of witchcraft, but enable ourselves to understand the meanings of witchcraft in their historical contexts.

Notes

- 1 This is a translated, condensed and edited version of 'Toverij in Meppel aan het eind van de achttiende eeuw', published in Willem de Blécourt and Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra (eds), *Kwade mensen. Toverij in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 1986). See also Willem de Blécourt, *Termen van toverij. De veranderende betekenis van toverij in Noordoost-Nederland tussen de 16de en de 20ste eeuw* (Nijmegen, 1990), pp. 145–52. Because of matters of space references have been kept to a minimum. Readers who want to follow up published and unpublished Dutch language material are directed to the footnotes in the original article.
- 2 For discussion on witch doctors in a European context, see Willem de Blécourt, 'Witch Doctors, Soothsayers and Priests. On Cunning Folk in European Historiography and Tradition', *Social History* 19 (1994), 285–303; Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London, 2003), ch. 7. For some examples of other

Dutch cunning-folk operating in the period see de Blécourt, 'Four Centuries of Frisian Witch Doctors', in Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra and Willem Frijhoff (eds), *Witchcraft in the Netherlands from the Fourteenth to the Twentieth Century* (Rotterdam, 1991), pp. 161–2.

- 3 The dossiers used for my description and analysis can be consulted at the Rijksarchief of Drenthe: Archief Etstoel 9, doss. 437 and Etstoel 32, doss. 486 and 519.
- 4 See M. A. W. Gerding (ed.), *Geschiedenis van Meppel* (Meppel and Amsterdam, 1991).

The archaeology of counter-witchcraft and popular magic

Brian Hoggard

One aspect of the study of witchcraft and magic, which has not yet been absorbed into the main stream of literature on the subject, is the archaeological record of the subject. Objects such as witch-bottles, dried cats, horse skulls, shoes, written charms and numerous other items have been discovered concealed inside houses in significant quantities from the early modern period until well into the twentieth century. The locations of these objects within houses, and primary literary sources relating to witch-bottles in particular, indicate that at least some of these artefacts were concealed to ward off witches and other perceived 'evil' influences such as ghosts and demons. The following discussion presents the results of a survey of United Kingdom museums and archaeological establishments, and introduces the current facts and theories about these artefacts.

The material record makes up a substantial body of evidence and provides unwitting testimony to the beliefs and practices of the past, many of which were never recorded at the time. When studying periods when levels of literacy were poor, physical artefacts represent one of the few direct links with the actions and beliefs of the silent majority. In the case of dried cats, horse skulls and other practices it seems that the physical record is the only record we have that these practices went on. By studying these objects we can learn about their distribution and frequency, and also some idea of the level of effort, and by association maybe the depth of belief, involved in the act of depositing these ritual objects. Their analysis also provides additional clues and signs of practices which have never been recorded on paper before, giving us tangible, physical evidence in ways which the written archive does not. Viewed in conjunction with the written archive, this physical resource could contribute greatly to what is known about witchcraft, fear of witchcraft and counter-witchcraft. With the notable exception of Ralph Merrifield's 1987 book, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, work on this subject has been largely confined to small journals, magazines and newspaper articles.¹ Excepting Merrifield's book, these papers tend to focus either on individual finds

or they have a broad focus and contain little supporting evidence. The purpose of the project currently being undertaken by the author is to remedy this, and to look closely at the meaning and significance of the related practices. A full survey of this type has never been undertaken until now.

The artefacts concerned provide physical evidence of the continuation and survival of counter-witchcraft practices before, during and after the witch trials. This evidence suggests that popular beliefs and practices concerning the fear of witchcraft and other malign forces changed little after the period of the witch trials, except in minor details, and continued through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and well into the twentieth. These objects constitute a large and important body of evidence attesting very positively to the widespread use of and continuation of these practices. At least in terms of the material evidence, it seems that the decline of magic was a slow and long-drawn-out affair.

Dating and estimating

There are many problems associated with studying these artefacts. The literature on the subject is sparse and variable in quality, and within archaeology these objects often do not find their way into final reports. There are other problems affecting the task of assessing the distribution and extent of these practices. The first and most obvious problem is that many buildings which formerly existed have been demolished, altered, renovated and stripped, so that any objects recorded or reported can only represent a portion of those which must have existed. Another problem is the simple fact that these objects were concealed in buildings, making their discovery a chance affair in most cases. Further compounding this, most of these objects go completely unrecorded or reported and find their way ultimately into builder's skips, garden bonfires and collectors' homes. Many individuals own or know of these objects and, if asked, will supply relevant details, but often this is so long after the original discovery that the details are frequently vague or incorrect. Hence the recorded figures represent only a tiny portion of the true number of objects that must have existed. Although the figures in this paper are the most thorough and comprehensive to date, they still only account for those rare objects that found their way into museum collections, archaeological reports and the files of local researchers.

Another difficulty with interpreting these objects lies in establishing when they were concealed. It is not always easy to tell when a dried cat has been inserted into a building for example, and horse skulls present similar difficulties. The date of manufacture can often be ascertained for glass or stoneware witch-bottles, but this does not always mean they were concealed around the same time. Written charms can be dated broadly by writing style and context but they rarely have a date written on them. The objects which

offer the most precise dates are concealed shoes. The staff of the Boot and Shoe Department at Northampton Central Museum and Art Gallery can provide quite narrow date ranges for shoes that they have been allowed to examine.

In cases where precise methods of arriving at a date are not available, the date of the building in which they were found must be taken into account, along with any known changes to the building. Arriving at a date for objects concealed in buildings can be difficult, therefore, and often depends on inspecting the building, which is not always practical. Using the building to date the objects often only provides a broad date range in which the item may have been concealed, but more precise dates can sometimes be arrived at where the object coincides with recognisable alterations to the structure. Where groups of objects including shoes are discovered adjacent to an obvious alteration, it is sometimes possible to arrive at a very clear date for the objects, but rarely to a precise year.

The survey

The survey for this project was carried out by post and a total of 661 museums, archaeological units and individuals were consulted from throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Owing to financial constraints the survey did not include every museum in each county and it is likely that some finds have been missed as a result. Only the figures for England have been calculated and, out of a total of 508 English establishments and individuals contacted, 328 (65 per cent) responded and of these 237 (47 per cent) reported objects of interest to the survey.² It is highly likely that many of those who did not respond do in fact hold objects of relevance and also that those who responded with information did not in every case supply all of the information.³ Before describing the objects in detail it is important to stress that, with the exception of witch-bottles, there is very little primary documentary evidence to support or explain why they were concealed in buildings. This is the main reason why the significance of these objects has not been addressed within the field of history. Attempts to explain why these objects were concealed must rest on detailed examination of the object and its context within the building, and comparison with other objects found in similar circumstances.

For the purposes of this paper, the numbers for the finds will be separated in to pre- and post-1700. Of the 749 deposits discovered within buildings in England and reported to me 231 (31 per cent) are pre-1700, 159 (21 per cent) are post-1700, and 359 (48 per cent) could not be accurately dated.⁴ The latter figure for imprecise dating reflects several factors, namely the general lack of good records relating to individual objects, the small amount of detailed research which has been undertaken on the objects, and the broad

difficulties involved in establishing a date for the objects. Clearly more detailed research into individual finds is needed if this material record is to illuminate folk beliefs in a sophisticated way.⁵

Witch-bottles

From the middle of the sixteenth to the twentieth century many people concealed stoneware and glass urine-filled bottles beneath their hearths, thresholds and sometimes in walls. The placing of these bottles evidently required significant effort, and the contents found inside the bottles suggests that some kind of recipe or formula of symbolic value was being adhered to. It appears that this practice, like the others discussed in this paper, was an act of house protection used to prevent a variety of bad influences from entering the home and causing harm to the occupants.⁶ More specifically, witch-bottles could also constitute a retaliatory act against a particular witch to force her or him into removing a bewitchment.

Until the mid-eighteenth century the most popular form of bottle was a type of German stoneware which became popularly known as 'bellarmines',⁷ but glass bottles were also concealed with similar contents. At present, 187 English examples of these bottles and other vessels have come to light through the survey. Of these, 108 (58 per cent) are pre-1700, twenty-one (11 per cent) are post-1700 and fifty-eight (31 per cent) could not be accurately dated. It is highly likely that the substantial majority of those as yet undated bottles belong to the period post-1700. Witch-bottles are most densely concentrated in the south-east, particularly East Anglia, London and the stretch of the south from Hampshire through to Kent – although at the extreme ends of their distribution they have been recorded in Cornwall, Worcestershire, and as far north as Yorkshire.

The glazed stoneware bottles known as 'bellarmines' are of various sizes and all have a large round 'belly'. Most of these bottles have a small mask portraying a bearded individual of menacing appearance which has been placed on to the neck of the bottle, making them anthropomorphic in appearance. This mask takes the form of a clay tablet pressed into a mould and fixed to the bottle before firing. They usually also have a medallion on the belly of the bottle which contains armorial devices, sometimes related to their location of origin and sometimes also showing their date of manufacture. These bottles were initially imported in large quantities from the Rhineland of Germany, but later Dutch examples began to appear and English manufacturers began mass-producing copies.⁸ The colloquial name for these stoneware bottles, 'bellarmines', seems to have evolved from tales told about Cardinal Bellarmine. It appears that some comparison between the mean face on the bottles and the perceived nature of the Cardinal was the satire here.⁹ By 1700 the popularity of imported stoneware drinking vessels had

waned and glass was becoming more commonplace. This is mirrored by the increased finds of glass witch-bottles during the eighteenth century, and it is glass, with only rare exceptions, which is found in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ralph Merrifield's 1954 article on 'The Use of Bellarmine's as Witch-Bottles', in which he combined archaeology and documentary evidence to examine their nature and purpose, was the first serious investigation of the subject.¹⁰ Although the literary sources used by Merrifield related primarily to the early modern period, their detailed description of the contents and purpose of the bottles show clear similarities with the evidence of bottles from later centuries. The most insightful accounts derive from the late seventeenth century. In his *Late Memorable Providences*, published in 1691, Cotton Mather described how witch-bottles contained, 'Nails, Pins, and such Instruments ... as carry a shew of Torture with them'.¹¹ That defender of the reality of witchcraft, Joseph Glanvill, related a tale of witchcraft involving witch-bottles. He tells of a woman whose health had been languishing and how a travelling cunning-man diagnosed that the cause of her malady was a 'dead Spright'. He recommended that her husband, 'take a Bottle, and put his Wife's Urine into it, together with Pins and Needles and Nails, and Cork them up, and set the Bottle to the Fire, but be sure the Cork be fast in it, that it fly not out'. The inevitable result was that the cork flew off with a loud bang and showered the contents everywhere. When they next saw the man he recommended burying the bottle instead, at which point the wife's health began to improve.¹²

Joseph Blagrove, in his *Astrological Practice of Physick*, described how one way to counter witchcraft was to

stop the urine of the Patient, close [it] up in a bottle, and put into it three nails, pins or needles, with a little white Salt, keeping the urine always warm: if you let it remain long in the bottle, it will endanger the witches life: for I have found by experience that they will be grievously tormented making their water with great difficulty, if any at all, and the more if the Moon be in Scorpio in Square or Opposition to his Significator, when its done.

The reason for its success was, he thought, 'because there is part of the vital spirit of the Witch in it, for such is the subtlety of the Devil, that he will not suffer the Witch to infuse any poisonous matter into the body of man or beast, without some of the Witches blood mingled with it'.¹³ It seems that the idea was that the bottle represented the witch's bladder and, by inserting pins and the victim's urine into the bottle, this would cause intense pain in the witch's groin, forcing him or her to remove their spell from the victim.

The following instructions for making a witch-bottle were given to a pregnant woman in 1701 by a cunning-man of St Merryn, Cornwall:

For Thamson Leverton on Saturday next being the 17th of this Instant

September any time that day take about a pint of your owne Urine and make it almost scalding hot then Emtie it into a stone Jugg with a narrow Mouth then put into it so Much white Salt as you can take up with the Thumb and two forefingers of your lift hand and three new nails with their points down wards, their points being first made very sharp then stop the mouth of the Jugg very close with a piece of Tough cley and bind a piece of Leather firm over the stop then put the Jugg into warm Embers and keep him there 9 or 10 days and nights following so that it go not stone cold all that mean time day nor night and your private Enemies will never after have any power upon you either in Body or Goods, So be it.¹⁴

Other later examples of the use of witch-bottles can also be found in the historical as well as archaeological record. During a case of spirit possession in Bristol in 1762 a local cunning-woman was consulted who confirmed that witchcraft was responsible for the fits, visions, voices and other manifestations that were suffered by the daughters of Richard Giles, an innkeeper. Her recommendation was that a witch-bottle be boiled and it is reported that the daughters recovered after this was carried out.¹⁵ Another example of the boiling of a witch-bottle proved fatal in 1804 when a cunning-man, John Hepworth of Bradford, experimented with boiling an iron witch-bottle which exploded, killing his client.¹⁶

These examples demonstrate that there were two principal methods of employing witch-bottles. One consisted of heating the concoction over a fire, and the other of burying it. Bearing this in mind it is likely that this particular practice must have been significantly more widespread than can presently be estimated from the number of finds for the bottles may have been discarded after their apparently successful use on the fire.

Less than half of all the bottles were found with any contents.¹⁷ Of those that did by far the most common component (in 90 per cent of cases) was some form of iron in every stage from rust stains through to well preserved pins and nails. Other types of metal were represented in around 20 per cent of the bottles. Second to iron in its various forms is human hair that appears in 22 per cent of the bottles. Other sharp objects such as tree bark, fragments of wood, nail pairings, blades of grass and thorns were found in 10 per cent of the bottles, as were small animal bones. In 10 per cent of bottles small heart-shaped pieces of fabric were discovered, and in a further two bottles the remains of possible effigies have been found. In most examples where tests for the former presence of urine have been carried out, it has proved positive. It must be pointed out that each of these bottles were found in varying degrees of preservation. Only very few were found intact with all their contents and in these cases the excavators often report a loud pop, hiss or sometimes a noxious explosion on opening the bottles. The contents of the bottles change over time and in different circumstances certain ingredients will decay before others. Detailed analytical work is being undertaken

by Dr Alan Massey of Loughborough University to trace the original ingredients of some of the bottles.¹⁸

The evidence provided by the contents endorses the descriptions of witch-bottles in the documents, but clearly the practice developed to include other items too. Urine and pins or nails appear to be the primary ingredients in the bottle, although other sharp or pointed objects also seem to have served the purpose. The reports of small animal bones have not commented on whether the bones had sharp points or not but there may have been other reasons for including them. In the few cases of heart-shaped pieces of fabric it appears that even greater damage was aimed at the witch by harming the heart. It is very likely that the choice of bellarmine bottles (before glass became more popular for this practice) also contributed to the spell with its anthropomorphic appearance probably contributing to the idea that here the witch was being revenged upon. The location of witch-bottles within the building is also significant. Of those which had their location recorded, 50 per cent were found beneath or within the hearth and this was by far the most common location for the bottles overall. Eleven per cent of the bottles were found under the floor, 10 per cent were found beneath the threshold, 8 per cent were found in or beneath walls and the remainder were found in various locations outside of known buildings, including a group found in a stone-lined culvert in London.

The hearth appears to have been a focal point for many of the artefacts that can be discovered concealed in buildings. The hearth was always open to the sky and it was also the place where the whole family would gather in winter in order to keep warm. R. W. Brunskill has described the hearth in his *Traditional Buildings of Britain*: 'It is impossible to exaggerate the significance of the hearth in the design of vernacular houses ... it has been suggested that the house began as a shelter for fire and that it was fire that made the house sacred.'¹⁹ The hearth was a point of vulnerability for those who believed that dangerous creatures, including witches, were abroad at night and as such needed to be protected. Exactly why this would cause people to bury the bottle there when its success seemed to depend on the sympathetic link between witch and victim rather than location is not clear. It has been suggested that burial in this location would add to the heat inside the bottle causing more discomfort for the witch, but in many cases the bottles are found over half a metre down where it is unlikely that the heat had any great effect. It, therefore, seems possible that the burial of a witch-bottle by the hearth or threshold may not always have been as a specific retaliatory act against the witch and may also have served a more general protective purpose. In support of this, burial by the hearth or threshold is a popular location for other house protection methods discussed in this paper. It seems, however, that through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries practices began to vary and

unusual examples of witch-bottles began to appear in addition to the more traditional ones.

In the grave of a young adult at All Saints Church, Loughton, Buckinghamshire, a late seventeenth- or early eighteenth-century glass steeple bottle was discovered lying between the left humerus and upper chest. The bottle contained several copper pins and a number of pins were also stuck into the cork. The bottle contained liquid that may be urine, although no analysis has yet been attempted on this substance. The author of the report into the bottle noted that witch-bottles are unusual in this context.²⁰ Based on currently available records for witch-bottles it seems that this is the only case of one being discovered in a coffin although several other bottles have been found buried in churchyards.²¹ Despite the fact that the location for concealing the bottle is apparently unusual, it may have occurred more frequently than excavations have so far revealed. The contents of the bottle adhere to the formula of pins and urine and presumably the bottle placed in the coffin as a kind of counter-witchcraft revenge when the individual died.

A late example of a stoneware witch-bottle dated to the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century was discovered under the hearth of Clapper Farm in Staplehurst, Kent. When the bottle was found it contained nails and pieces of wood.²² This example demonstrates the custom of burying the bottle by the hearth and also shows the addition of materials not described in the early modern references to witch-bottles. It is difficult to comment on the inclusion of wood in this case as no precise details about it were provided; however, in other examples small sharp pieces of wood were included and it seems that this was to inflict more harm on the witch in addition to the pins and nails. In Pershore in Worcestershire two small glass phials were discovered along with three child's shoes and a collection of toys. The group was discovered under the floor or behind the hearth.²³ In this instance the group of objects were dated to the mid-nineteenth century.²⁴ The phials contained wheat husks and possibly some resin from a pine tree – tests for urine have not been concluded yet.²⁵ Again, the use of small glass phials in this case appears to be some kind of reinterpretation of the original idea of witch-bottles. A much more recent example was discovered at St Augustine's Church, Wembley Park, where a bottle containing a liquid, possibly just water, and a small pottery figurine was found. The figurine resembled the modern stereotype of the witch and it is possible that this 1906 deposit under a concrete floor was a modern reinterpretation of the witch-bottle.²⁶

In terms of the archaeological record the practice of creating and concealing witch-bottles has continued from at least the mid-sixteenth century until well into the twentieth century, albeit in a slightly altered form. The effort involved in creating and concealing witch-bottles could be considerable at times, demonstrating a level of belief that must have been very strong indeed. The numbers of witch-bottles recorded to-date are only a very small

sample of those which must have been concealed originally. Many bottles have not been reported or recorded and it is likely that many more remain to be discovered. These bottles provide hard physical evidence in support of belief in witchcraft and are an indicator of the strength of belief well beyond the period of the witch-trials. The archaeological record in the case of witch-bottles could contribute significantly to the historical debate on witchcraft.

Dried cats

Based on the information received through the survey, dried cats and sometimes the meagre remains of cats are commonly discovered in buildings of all types throughout England, Wales and parts of southern Scotland. They are usually found concealed in walls, but also under floors and in roofs. Since Margaret Howard's 1951 article, 'Dried Cats', there have been very few attempts to address the issue of why so many dried cats are discovered in buildings.²⁷ Theories about their presence vary. Many individuals, when asked, ridicule the suggestion that the animals were placed in the building, preferring to believe that they crawled into a tight space and became trapped or crawled away to die. While this is distinctly possible it does not account for many examples that have clearly been sealed into places or fixed in position. In some cases it is difficult to tell if the animal has been purposely concealed or not, but it is worth noting that the smell of any animal which dies in a house is usually sufficiently bad to suspect that few cases of accidentally trapped animals would have been left if it were possible to remove them.

Margaret Howard outlined the two main theories as to why cats were concealed in buildings. She explored both the foundation sacrifice idea and also the possible practical function of scaring vermin. Her conclusion was a combination of both ideas: 'The evidence at present available thus suggests that, generally speaking, the cat was first immured for utilitarian reasons, but, having become an object of superstition, it came to be used as a luck-bringer or building sacrifice and also as a protector against magic or pestilence.'²⁸ The notion that dead cats were used in past times to scare vermin does not seem very likely. Rats in particular are probably more likely to eat a dead cat than run away from it no matter how fierce it looks. It is possible, though, that people believed that a dead cat concealed in a building might continue its vermin catching role on a more spiritual plane of existence. Likewise it may be that people immured cats believing that their spirits could ward off other evil spirits.

Howard thought the foundation sacrifice hypothesis as the less probable of the two explanations. The evidence put forward is that of the ancient tradition of foundation sacrifices to appease the land and local gods.²⁹ Several

people have also suggested during the course of the survey that the sacrifice is to the building itself, to give it a life so that it will not take one later through some kind of tragic accident. This practice is extremely ancient and it is possible that there is some link between the practice of concealing cats in buildings and such foundation sacrifices. John Sheehan's in-depth study of a dried cat found at Ennis Friary in Co. Clare came to the conclusion that it, 'appears to have been the subject of a seventeenth-century reduced form of foundation sacrifice'.³⁰

A dried cat and rat were discovered in thatch at Pilton, Northamptonshire, when the house was demolished in 1890. The cat is said to have been pinned down with wooden pegs.³¹ It is unlikely that this cat, and some of the following examples, were accidentally trapped in buildings. A dried cat was discovered at St Cuthbert's Church, Clifton, near Penrith in Cumbria. It was discovered between slates and plaster in the roof of the church during restoration in the mid-1840s. The church dates from the twelfth century but it is likely that the cat was added to the fabric during roof repairs at some much later date.³² In a house in Parracombe, North Devon, a dried cat, thick glass jam jar, sardine tin and horseshoe were all discovered together in an iron bread oven which had been bricked up. They were probably concealed at the end of the nineteenth century or early twentieth century.³³ Many more examples of cats that have been concealed with obvious intent could be provided here. Taking all the cases as a whole there does not appear to be any obvious evidence that cats have been concealed alive; however, several individuals reported modern cases where cats have gone missing during building and later discovered sealed into places where it would have been impossible not to have noticed the presence of a cat.³⁴ This suggests that the practice has occurred recently in some areas, and that, on occasions at least, they are sealed in alive. In many of the cases from previous centuries, however, the evidence of cats being manipulated and attached to beams suggests that they were dead already.

Dried cats are the most frequently disposed of type of object that can be found in buildings for obvious reasons. From speaking with builders it has become apparent that a very large number of dried cats are discovered but never reported. They are usually thrown away or burned and as a result very few well-documented cases survive compared to the considerable amount of anecdotal references that exist for them. In the survey only 139 documented cases of dried cats have been reported for England. Of these only sixteen (12 per cent) are pre-1700, seventeen (12 per cent) are post-1700 and the remainder of 106 (76 per cent) could not be dated. This illustrates clearly how difficult it can be to arrive at a date for when these animals were placed in the buildings. It is likely that many more remain to be discovered in buildings.

Horse skulls

Concealed horse skulls and other animal bones have been found throughout England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. The survey has collected a total of fifty-four examples of these in England, of which eleven (20 per cent) were pre-1700, seven (13 per cent) were post-1700 and thirty-six (67 per cent) have not been assigned a date. It is likely that many finds of bones and skulls in buildings shared the same fate as dried cats and ended up on rubbish tips. It also seems to be the case that many of these objects are not reported when they are discovered. A further complicating factor in the case of bones is their use as building material in some houses and farm buildings. There are many examples of entire floors or walls which have been created out of animal bones or teeth,³⁵ and in the numbers presented here only those which do not appear to have a structural function have been included. Where bones are found in buildings with no apparent structural function then the theories presented below need to be considered.

In 1945 Seán Ó Súilleabháin undertook a survey of concealed horse skulls in Ireland by asking members of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland to enquire in their local areas about the practice.³⁶ In almost every area of Ireland it was reported that horse skulls were concealed in several houses, most usually under a stone before the hearth. The explanation given in many cases was that doing this improved the sound when dancing took place before the fire.³⁷ Similarly in Herefordshire at an inn called the Portway in Staunton-on-Wye at least twenty-four horse skulls were found screwed to the underside of the floor where they were reputed 'to make the fiddle go better'.³⁸ Ó Súilleabháin was not convinced by the acoustic theory, believing that this was a modern interpretation which had evolved in order to explain the presence of horse skulls in buildings long after the original reason had been forgotten:

It can hardly be doubted that the now popular explanation of the burial of horse-skulls under the floors of houses, churches, castles, or bridges (to produce an echo) is a secondary one. It may indeed be a practical explanation but a little consideration of the problem must inevitably lead to the conclusion that this custom is but another link in the chain of evidence regarding foundation sacrifices.³⁹

Ó Súilleabháin's conclusions were disputed by Albert Sandklef of Sweden who undertook research into the custom across Scandinavia. He found that it was a common practice in southern Scandinavia to conceal horse skulls and pots beneath threshing barn floors, because it helped produce a pleasant ringing tone while threshing. Sandklef's ultimate conclusion was that horse skulls were only concealed for acoustic purposes and that the foundation sacrifice theory was invalid.⁴⁰ Eurwyn Wiliam, in his recent study of horse

skulls in Wales, concluded after considering both theories, that the real answer to this practice remains unclear. He did, however, think it possible that, 'it may be that we have here a custom, weakened by no longer serving its original function and with that function metamorphosed over time, rejuvenated and given a new imperative by fresh factors'. This essentially supports an ancient origin for the practice, but in William's view this changed in Wales from the eighteenth century onwards due to the interest in the acoustic properties of new chapels and the importance of the horse in the development of agriculture.⁴¹

In several cases where horse skulls have been discovered the acoustic theory does not appear to be relevant. In Elsdon Church, Northumberland, for example, a box containing three horse skulls was discovered in the bell turret during restoration work in 1837.⁴² It seems unlikely that these skulls were concealed to aid acoustics in that location. Another example which has no apparent acoustic function is cited by Merrifield where a horse skull was found concealed in a cavity between a chimney flue and two enclosing brick walls at Little Belhus, South Ockenden, Essex.⁴³ Evidence from horse skulls found at Bay Farm Cottage, Carnlough, Co. Antrim also suggests that no acoustic function could be derived from the placing of at least ten horse skulls beneath a floor.⁴⁴

As in the case of dried cats, it may be that some of the perceived qualities of the horse also played a role in this practice. The horse serves humans in a direct way through transport and work and they are not generally regarded as food animals. They are also seen as particularly sensitive creatures, highly alert and are generally valued above other animals. Perhaps it was hoped that these qualities would be effective in protecting the house. Much of the folklore associated with the horse concerns luck and it has been said that the horse skull brought luck into the house, but how this association began is not clear. The example of the three horse skulls discovered in the church at Elsdon perhaps suggest a link with the original function of church bells, to scare spirits away while calling people to prayer, but this is the only known example of horse skulls found in this location. The placing of horse skulls and other animal bones in buildings appears to have no practical function and it can only be assumed that some other purpose was intended. The concealed nature of the items suggests that they (along with the other items described in this paper) were positioned in secret, which may have contributed to the perceived importance of the act.

Concealed shoes

Concealed shoes are by far the most commonly encountered objects discovered in houses. It seems that wherever an individual begins researching them, a very large number of reports turn up of people who have discovered

them but not realised their significance. The Concealed Shoes Index at Northampton Central Museum receives on average one find per month and Andrew Mackay, former Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection, is of the opinion that there are probably hundreds of finds every year that are simply not recorded and that the amount they receive is merely the ‘tip of the iceberg’.⁴⁵ By February 1998 the index recorded over 1100 examples primarily from Britain, but with some from as far away as Canada. The date range of the finds is interesting and appears to be proportionally related to surviving buildings from the period concerned, until the twentieth century when the practice appears to have gone into serious decline. For instance, pre-1600s there are around fifty examples, between 1600 and 1699 around 200, between 1700 and 1799 approximately 270, between 1800 and 1899 around 500, and post-1900 around fifty.⁴⁶ The decline in the twentieth century may be due to there being no need to investigate chimneys and other house structures of this period because they are still in good repair. Most of the finds have been discovered during demolition work or alterations to buildings and are usually discarded as rubbish.

Denise Dixon-Smith, Assistant Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection (1986–90), states that the most common places to find concealed shoes are chimneys, walls, under floorboards and in roofs, but they can also be found around doors, windows and staircases. She suggests that, ‘One reason for hiding shoes in chimneys and around doors may have been because these were “openings” where evil spirits could enter the home, and the shoe – as a good luck symbol – should warn them off.’⁴⁷ Ralph Merrifield suggested that the practice may have derived from one of England’s unofficial saints, John Schorn of Buckinghamshire.⁴⁸ He was alleged to have performed the remarkable feat of conjuring the devil into his boot. This legend, Merrifield continues, may have resulted in shoes being seen as some kind of spirit trap, which might explain many of the locations in which they are found.⁴⁹ Alternatively the legend may be the first written account of a long-practised folk magic technique. Further to beliefs concerning shoes, Reginald Scot mentioned that spitting on shoes was a form of protection against witchcraft.⁵⁰ There are other theories about how the practice developed.

There appears to be a link between shoes and fertility, but whether this has anything to do with the practice of concealing shoes at entry and exit points in a building is another matter. For example, Roy Palmer in *The Folklore of Hereford and Worcester* cites a very recent account from Broadwas-on-Teme where in 1960 a midwife refused to allow a young woman to remove her shoes until her child was born.⁵¹ Merrifield notes the old rhyme, ‘there was an old woman who lived in a shoe ...’ as being further evidence of the connection with fertility, and states that in Lancashire women used to try on the shoes of women who had just given birth in order to try and conceive.⁵² This seems to relate to the personal nature of shoes and is reminiscent

of the old American Indian practice of enemies walking in one another's shoes in order to empathise more deeply – in this case to hopefully 'catch' something of the new mother. E. and M. A. Radford, in their *Encyclopedia of Superstitions*, recite an old method for young ladies to have dreams of their future partners. It involved pinning their garters to a wall and arranging their shoes in the form of a 'T' and singing a short rhyme.⁵³ June Swann, the pioneer of the study of concealed shoes, is of the opinion, however, that the practice is probably a male ritual owing to the fact that the shoes need to be concealed during building and thinks that it may be a symbolic substitute for ancient practices related to making sacrifices at the foundations of new buildings.⁵⁴ However, Timothy Easton has shown that many places where shoes were concealed could be accessed by the occupants and has termed them 'spiritual middens'. In these circumstances it is possible for the occupants to add to the objects in the spiritual midden over time. These cavities, which can be often filled, occur where chimneystacks have been inserted into buildings and dead spaces have been created.⁵⁵

June Swann states, 'Apart from 20 unworn shoes, all other concealed shoes are in a worn condition and they have taken on some of the character of the wearer.'⁵⁶ This does indicate the personal nature of shoes and would seem to support some kind of ritual connected with making a place more personal to the person who conceals the shoe. Fiona Pitt suggests that in some cases concealing shoes may have been a way for people of limited literacy to 'leave their mark' in places of deep personal significance.⁵⁷ Another theory suggested by Merrifield is that some relatives may have simply been unable to throw away the shoes of their dead kinfolk because of the intensely personal character of worn shoes.⁵⁸ These seem to be very plausible explanations for the practice but they do not account for the often very specific locations of the finds at exit and entry points into the building, which seems to favour an explanation in terms of warding off evil spirits. The locations of horse, chicken and cat remains in buildings is similar to that of shoes and seems to be related to fear of evil spirits, providing possible support for this particular theory about shoes. Merrifield seems to further confirm this by stating that the drawn outline of shoes is sometimes found scratched on to lead roofs, often on churches.⁵⁹

At The Old Vicarage in Upchurch, Kent, six concealed shoes were discovered during demolition of the central chimney stack. They comprise three ladies' walking slippers and three shoes, probably for male children of varying ages. All the shoes are of leather and are provisionally dated to 1740–1820.⁶⁰ This implies that the clergy, or more likely their servants, took part in house protection. At Little Moreton Hall in 1992 eighteen assorted boots and shoes were discovered which have all been dated to the nineteenth century.⁶¹ A single left shoe, dated to after 1850, was discovered in a fireplace in Goole in the East Riding of Yorkshire.⁶² At Geddington, Northamptonshire, a shoe

was found in the thatch of an eighteenth-century building.⁶³ These examples are all typical reports illustrative of the kind of circumstances in which shoes are discovered.

Written charms

Written charms were usually the result of people's need to have their property or livestock protected from supernatural attack. The evidence suggests that the person in need would generally contact the local cunning-man or wise-woman and ask him or her for a charm to protect the desired creatures or buildings. The charms themselves, through their combination of symbols and carefully laid-out text, are almost artistic in appearance. They frequently include astrological and occult symbols, and Christian invocations to God to protect the relevant items.⁶⁴

It is not sufficient to look at the text alone when studying a written charm as clearly a great deal of effort and care went into the appearance and nature of the symbols. The word triangle of 'abracadabra' decreasing down to just 'a' is also often encountered. These magical components to the charm appear to have been ways of adding more power to the charm. Written charms are as much artefacts as documents and the secret placing of them in buildings is an act as important as their contents. The text and associated symbols are all usually fitted on to a rather small piece of paper and very carefully handwritten. The charm is then folded and placed into a gap between timbers at the most convenient threshold or other location in the building concerned. One example was found folded inside a small sheet of lead and inserted into a gap above a doorframe, and sometimes charms are found inside bottles.

Although the focus in this paper is on the evidence from England the following extract from a charm found in Sarn in Wales is typical of many found in England:

Lord Jesus Christ his redeemer and saviour he will releve William Pentrynant his cows, calves, milk, butter, cattle of all ages, mares, suckers, horses, of all ages yews, lambs, sheep of all ages, pigs, sows and prosper him in all his farm and from all witchcraft and Evil diseases amen xxx.⁶⁵

Here it is clear that William Pentrynant believed that witches could cause damage to him and his livestock. Another example from Stalbridge in Dorset included phrases such as, 'Let this be a safe guard to this house', and 'Remove the Evil from this house'. This particular example was found inside a six-sided bottle beneath the floorboards of a house in the village. Another interesting example is of a nineteenth-century doll with a curse attached which was found during the rebuilding of an old house in Hereford.⁶⁶ Written charms have also been found in Lancashire, Yorkshire, Somerset, Devon, Gloucestershire and Shropshire.

Written charms were deposited in a manner similar to that of witch-bottles, shoes, horse skulls and cats, and secrecy was clearly an element in the way that these charms were handled. Unlike the other objects found in buildings, however, the meaning and reason for concealing a written charm in a building is obvious from the wording of the text. The juxtaposition of astrological and occult symbolism in the same document is very informative regarding the nature of the beliefs of the people who constructed them. It appears that the emphasis was on invoking power, whether religious, astrological or magical. So far, only twenty-one charms have been reported from England. Of these only two were pre-1700 and seven post-1700. The remaining twelve have not been dated. The fragility of these written charms is in large part responsible for the small numbers that have been recorded.

Other finds

The objects detailed in this paper are the most frequently encountered types but there are other objects which were also placed in buildings, presumably for magical purposes. Such finds reported to the author include: dolls (one cut in half), rats, toads, belt buckles, pipes, coins, knives and garments. Other finds worthy of note include a complete pig skeleton under a floor in Norfolk, a human skull and crossbones from beneath a nineteenth-century public house, an entire donkey buried under a barn, a dried puppy and several dried hares. Many artefacts from the Neolithic and Bronze Ages have also been found concealed in buildings. Stone axes and flint arrowheads were thought to be particularly effective against lightning and were known as thunderstones. They were believed to have been created where lightning struck the ground.⁶⁷ All of these appear to have been considered as part of the spiritual armoury of the house.

Ritual marks in buildings may represent another type of magical protection, as pioneering work by Timothy Easton suggests. The marks are usually lightly inscribed and are generally found on chimney lintels and other timbers in buildings. In order to see them it is often necessary to shine a torch obliquely along the beam. They often include 'M', 'W' and 'V' marks, which appear to have been created as an invocation to the Virgin Mary in many cases. These marks have been very thoroughly investigated by Timothy Easton in the county of Suffolk where a very large number of examples have been recorded.⁶⁸ The marks have been reported from as far apart as Yorkshire, Wiltshire, Cornwall, Wales and Scotland but they are not well represented in the survey as this is not the kind of record that museums or archaeological establishments keep. A number of ritual marks have been dated to the eighteenth century with one particular type known as the 'daisy wheel' being of a definitely earlier date. Another form of possible ritual marking are so-called 'witch-posts', which have been found in twenty-two houses in

North Yorkshire and parts of Lancashire dating to the early modern period. They are upright supporting timbers found on the ground floor near the entrance or the hearth which usually have a 'St Andrews cross' cut into the upper portion of the timber. It is not certain what their specific function is although it is generally accepted that they are a form of house protection.⁶⁹

All these archaeological finds provide material evidence for the continued preoccupation with witchcraft and evil influences from the early modern period through to the early twentieth century. They are tangible links with the magical beliefs of the past, and in some cases they are the only surviving testament to ritual practices absent from the written record. Although the survey has revealed very large numbers of objects they undoubtedly only represent a very small portion of the objects that were originally concealed, while many more remain to be discovered and reported. The archaeological record illuminates our historical understanding of witchcraft and the popular fear of misfortune by providing primary physical evidence of individual actions, and therefore requires more consideration from those researching the cultural history of witchcraft and magic.

Notes

- 1 Ralph Merrifield, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (London, 1987).
- 2 The results presented here represent the state of the evidence in 2001.
- 3 Many instances occurred where a museum reported no finds of interest, only for another expert or sometimes another member of the museum staff to correct this. It appears to depend on the staff's familiarity with the items held in store in many cases.
- 4 Note that this figure of 749 relates only to items reported to me, not to the large number of concealed shoes recorded by Northampton Central Museum's Concealed Shoes Index, started by June Swann.
- 5 Find reports are still being collected for this project via my website. See <http://www.folkmagic.co.uk>.
- 6 It should be noted that bottles were sometimes used for other kinds of magic, notably certain love spells.
- 7 This is a colloquial name, the technical term is 'bartmann' stoneware: see David Gaimster, *German Stoneware 1200–1900* (London, 1997).
- 8 John Allan, 'Some Post-Medieval Documentary Evidence for the Trade in Ceramics', in Peter Davey and Richard Hodges (eds), *Ceramics and Trade – The Production and Distribution of Later Medieval Pottery in North-West Europe* (Sheffield, 1983), pp. 37–45.
- 9 The naming and chronology of bellarmine stoneware is discussed in M. R. Holmes, 'The So-Called "Bellarmine" Mask on Imported Rhenish Stoneware', *Antiquaries Journal* 31 (1950) 173–9.
- 10 Ralph Merrifield, 'The Use of Bellarmine as Witch-Bottles', *Guildhall Miscellany* 3 (1954) 3–15.
- 11 Cited in George L. Kittredge, *Witchcraft in Old and New England* (Cambridge, Mass., 1928), p. 102.
- 12 Glanvill, *Sadducismus Triumphatus* (1681), pp. 205–8; cited in Merrifield, 'The Use of Bellarmine', 9.

- 13 Blagrave, *Astrological Practice of Physick* (1671), pp. 154–5; cited in Merrifield, *Archaeology*, p. 170.
- 14 Cornwall Record Office no X268/83; cited in Jason Semmens, 'The Usage of Witch-Bottles and Apotropaic Charms in Cornwall', *Old Cornwall* 12, 6 (2000) 25–30.
- 15 See Barry, 'Public infidelity and private belief?', in this volume.
- 16 Owen Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999) pp. 19, 218.
- 17 Analysis of the contents of bottles is currently in progress and absolute figures have not yet been established.
- 18 At present the only published example of Dr Massey's work on witch-bottles is, Alan Massey and Tony Edmonds, 'The Reigate Witch Bottle', *Current Archaeology* 169 (2000) 34–6.
- 19 R. W. Brunskill, *Traditional Buildings of Britain: An Introduction to Vernacular Architecture* (London, [1981] 1992), p. 110.
- 20 David Bonner, *Archaeological Investigations at All Saints Church, Loughton, Milton Keynes*, Buckinghamshire County Museum Archaeological Service, July 1994, County Museum Technical Centre; Buckinghamshire Sites and Monuments Record, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire.
- 21 For one example see Owen Davies, *A People Bewitched: Witchcraft and Magic in Nineteenth-Century Somerset* (Bruton, 1999), p. 89.
- 22 Ernest W. Tilley, 'A Witch-Bottle from Gravesend', *Archaeologia Cantiana* 80 (1965) 252–6.
- 23 This is an example of unclear recording. The builders kindly donated the objects to the local heritage centre but details were not collected at the time.
- 24 A date for the shoes was kindly provided by staff at the Boot and Shoe Collection at Northampton Central Museum and Art Gallery.
- 25 My gratitude must be extended to Alan Massey for permission to use his unpublished research here.
- 26 Merrifield, *Archaeology*, p. 182. Many witches from the US, Australia, Europe and England have informed me via email that they use witch-bottles. The contents in some cases are identical to early witch-bottles and in others they are very different, using iron filings and herbs in one example. The use is also different as they are used primarily by witches as protection against either non-specific negative energies of various kinds or other witches.
- 27 Margaret M. Howard, 'Dried Cats', *Man* 51 (1951) 149–51.
- 28 Howard, 'Dried Cats', 151.
- 29 Howard, 'Dried Cats', 150.
- 30 John Sheehan, 'A Seventeenth Century Dried Cat from Ennis Friary, Co. Clare', *North Munster Antiquarian Journal* 32 (1990) 64–8.
- 31 Howard, 'Dried Cats'.
- 32 Thanks to Keswick Museum and Art Gallery, Fitz Park, Station Road, Keswick, Cumbria, CA12 4NF, for this information.
- 33 Thanks to Jean and Phil Griffiths of Parracombe, North Devon, for this information.
- 34 Personal communication, Dorset and Gloucestershire areas.
- 35 Philip L. Armitage, 'The Use of Animal Bones as Building Material in Post-Medieval Britain', in D. Serjeantson and T. Waldron (eds), *Diet and Crafts in Towns: The Evidence of Animal Remains from the Roman to Post-Medieval Periods*, BAR British Series 199 (Oxford, 1989), pp. 147–60.
- 36 Seán Ó Súilleabháin, 'Foundation Sacrifices', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland* 75 (1945) 45–52.
- 37 Ó Súilleabháin, 'Foundation Sacrifices', 45–9.

- 38 Merrifield, *Archaeology*, p. 123.
- 39 Ó Súilleabháin, 'Foundation Sacrifices', 49–50.
- 40 Albert Sandklef, 'Singing Flails: A Study in Threshing-Floor Constructions, Flail Threshing Traditions and the Magic Guarding of the House', *FF Communications* 56, 136 (1949).
- 41 Eurwyn Wiliam, 'Concealed Horse Skulls: Testimony and Message', in Trefor M. Owen (ed.), *From Corrib to Cultra – Folklife Essays in Honour of Alan Gailey* (Belfast, 2000), pp. 136–49.
- 42 Thanks to Northumberland National Park Authority, Eastburn, South Park, Hexham, Northumberland, NE46 1BS, for confirming these details.
- 43 Merrifield, *Archaeology*, p. 124.
- 44 Jim Mallory and Finbar McCormick, 'Horse Skulls at Bay Farm Cottage, Carnlough', *The Glynn's – Journal of the Glens of Antrim Historical Society*, 12 (1984) 50–3.
- 45 Andrew Mackay, 'Northampton Museums Concealed Shoe Index', Northampton Museum, 16 April 1991.
- 46 Fiona Pitt, 'Builders, Bakers and Madhouses: Some Recent Information from the *Concealed Shoe Index*', a report on a talk she gave at the Archaeological Leather Group AGM in September 1997 contained in an article, 'Hidden Shoes and Concealed Beliefs', *Archaeological Leather Group Newsletter* (February 1998) 5.
- 47 Denise Dixon-Smith, 'Concealed Shoes', *Archaeological Leather Group Newsletter* 6 (1990).
- 48 According to John Vince, *Discovering Saints in Britain* (Aylesbury, [1969] 1979), p. 20, Sir John Schorne died in 1308 and was Rector of North Marston, Buckinghamshire.
- 49 Merrifield, *Archaeology*, p. 135.
- 50 E. and M. A. Radford (eds), *The Encyclopedia of Superstitions*, edited and revised by Christina Hole (London, [1948] 1978), p. 319.
- 51 Roy, Palmer, *The Folklore of Hereford and Worcester* (Almeley, 1992), p. 87.
- 52 Merrifield, *Archaeology*, p. 134.
- 53 Radford, *Encyclopedia*, p. 169.
- 54 June Swann, 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', a report she gave at the Archaeological Leather Group AGM in September 1997, published as part of 'Hidden Shoes and Concealed Beliefs', *Archaeological Leather Group Newsletter* (February 1998), 2–6. For further details on June Swann's research the following two papers are recommend; 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', *Costume Society Journal* 30 (1996) 56–69; and 'Shoes Concealed in Buildings', *Journal of Northampton Art Gallery and Museum* (December 1996) 8–21.
- 55 Timothy Easton, 'Spiritual Middens', in Paul Oliver (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World* (Cambridge, 1997).
- 56 Swann, 'Hidden Shoes', 2.
- 57 Pitt, 'Hidden Shoes', 6.
- 58 Merrifield, *Archaeology*, p. 134.
- 59 Merrifield, *Archaeology*, p. 135.
- 60 Michael Moad, 'The Old Vicarage, Upchurch and the Discovery of Leather Shoes', *Kent Archaeological Review* (Autumn 1976) 110–12.
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- 63 Thanks to Milton Keynes Sites and Monuments Record, Milton Keynes Borough Council, Planning Department, PO Box 112, Civic Offices, 1 Saxon Gate East, Milton Keynes, MK9 3HQ for this information.

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- 66 Thanks to Jeremy Harte for information regarding the former. The latter charm is held in Hereford City Museum.
- 67 See, for example, Stephen H. Penney, 'Axes, Arrowheads and Other Antiquities in Irish Folklore', *Ulster Folklife* 22 (1976) 70–5.
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The dissemination of magical knowledge in Enlightenment Germany

The supernatural and the development of print culture

Sabine Doering-Manteuffel

The so-called Age of Enlightenment has traditionally been portrayed as a phase of European history during which new philosophies came into existence concerning people's ability to determine their own fate through reason. This era saw the development of future-oriented conceptions of state and society as well as new ideas about mankind's ability to control and govern nature. The dominance of theological world-views ceded considerable ground to secular intellectual concepts. Latin disappeared as the language of elite discourse. Increased educational provision provided access to sources of knowledge that were previously unattainable to all but a few. A market for books and newspapers, for journals and weeklies developed rapidly.¹ More and more people lower down the social scale became increasingly involved in a literary culture. Accordingly, the 'common' people began to learn from their history. They were taught new methods of agriculture, trade and morals, were informed of the latest achievements and news from all over the world by self-appointed public enlighteners.² As the eighteenth century progressed the populace became increasingly divorced from the old traditional oral cultures and conceptions of the world.

Although there are some truths in this classic version of the Enlightenment there is reason to give it only partial credence, as the study of supernatural literature of the period demonstrates. The development of printed media during the second half of the seventeenth century created a new information culture, which came to play a dominant role in the spread of new, more 'rational' ideas, yet not all of the information disseminated immediately strikes one as being 'enlightened'.³ Business-minded publishers took advantage of the continued, widespread belief in magic and supernatural phenomena. Belief in miracles, magic knowledge and fortune-telling were exploited in the new market, and the more literature that was printed in general, the more magic and occult literature was also printed. By the end of the eighteenth century, the market for mass-produced literature on magic and the occult had been established, and in the following century this

literature attracted popular attention and notoriety in a number of European countries.⁴

One can see this period as giving birth to a new culture of popular magic. It was not an oral culture but a literary culture that fostered it; not the simple peasant but the publisher, the printer and the reader who cradled it; not the rural but the urban population which initially absorbed it.⁵ This literary occultism was a thoroughly modern phenomenon.⁶ At the same time it was a repackaging of centuries-old ideas and rituals. The magical literature of the Enlightenment contained instructions for the invocation of demons, recipes for conjuring love and protection against harmful spells, all to be conducted in the cottage rather than the study or laboratory.⁷ It included huge numbers of works on simple divination involving, for example, magic mirrors and amateur astrology.⁸ Furthermore, the reporting of miraculous signs, which were so popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, continued to play a central role in the transmission of supernaturalism. Yet it is important to be aware of distinctions between the forms of magical beliefs mentioned above and related spiritual beliefs expressive of people's devoutness. I am more concerned with a *Weltanschauung* (philosophy of life), which was not explicitly religious but which was nevertheless concerned with the spiritual, and derived primarily from written sources and not from the spoken word.

Broadsides, pamphlets and newspapers

Broadsides and pamphlets were early print formats, which were already penetrating the incipient media market by the mid-sixteenth century. In early modern Germany the main centres of printing were Leipzig, Frankfurt, Strasburg, Augsburg, Erfurt and Nremberg. Produced in towns and cities, they were bought in bulk for local markets and sold to the rural population by travelling hawkers. A similar distribution network of print-peddlars selling broadsides and pamphlets still existed in the nineteenth century. Undoubtedly the most popular format were the one-page broadsides, which nearly always contained illustrations, and were not only used as a source of news but also as wall decorations. They have also been found glued inside the lids of trunks, boxes and cases.

The majority of sixteenth-century broadsides and pamphlets were the products of religious propaganda. Martin Luther, one of the first media stars of print culture, demonstrated the power of simple literary forms, and deliberately exploited popular formats and idioms to spread his message of religious reformation. By the second half of the seventeenth century a more secular, sensational press can be distinguished. The content was, as in the past, still religious in nature, but the various elements were combined according to the principle of unit construction. It is during this period that we find early signs of the standardisation that characterised media in the

modern period. This was made possible by new printing technology. The units of many broadsides consisted of a text and a picture. The text reported a miraculous occurrence, for example, and the picture provided a graphic description for the illiterate. If it concerned a celestial sign, such as a celestial army, a flying snake or some other indicative sign, then it filled the upper part of the picture. If, however, it concerned a miracle spring, corn falls or a resurrection, then a montage was created and the occurrence was superimposed into the picture of some location. These three elements – the text and the two halves of the picture – were combined at will. It thereby becomes possible to ink the sensation into a local context without having to prepare a new relief plate. By the middle of sixteenth century, this technique was already being used in the printing of religious pamphlets. In 1572, for instance, the printer Nikolaus Basse from Frankfurt printed a copy of a broadside about a food miracle in the Swabian village of Weidenstetten, which the printer Peter Hug from Strasburg also produced in the same year.⁹ The text is nearly identical, only the pictures are different. The picture used by Hug can be found again beneath another text produced by another printer.¹⁰ The invention of unit construction thus allowed the possibility of employing pictures and texts independently of one another. Naturally, this raises the question of the purpose of such printed material.

During Luther's time, the concept behind the portrayal of such miraculous occurrences was to induce a fear of God amongst the people. It was claimed that if there were an increase in earthly sins then a wrathful, avenging God would manifest himself. He threatened the world with war, famine and plagues. Should mankind continue to commit sin then the signs would increase accordingly. The appearance of wars, famine and plagues were to be understood as just punishment for mankind's wrongdoings. Many of the authors of pamphlets containing these kinds of messages were Lutheran preachers.¹¹ They preached about God's signs of wrath not only from the pulpit, but also via the text-picture medium sold at markets throughout the Protestant states. The technique was taken up by publishers in Frankfurt, Strasburg, Leipzig and Augsburg.¹² As these Lutheran theories about miracle signs began to dissipate towards the end of the seventeenth century, and the educated belief in miracles diminished due to new scientific and philosophical developments, the reports of miracle signs began to lose their religious content but still retained their sensational value. The stories of faces in the sky, celestial armies and the apparitions of angels continued to be disseminated widely. The hundreds of broadside and pamphlet reports of miraculous signs published during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries not only left their mark on generations of believers, but they also inspired a popular literature which, during the eighteenth century stripped away more and more of their theological significance. Miracle showers of flour and grain were still being quite regularly reported during the first half of the eighteenth century.

Miraculous cornstalks with seventy-two ears, which had been reported near Strasburg back in the sixteenth century, continued to turn up two hundred years later.¹³ What about the story of the old derelict church in Bohemia? A church that radiated light at night, where singing was heard and where frightening faces had been seen. The story was first published in a broadside printed in Augsburg in 1614.¹⁴ During the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries it was printed again in tracts and erudite discourses by Erasmus Francisci. Francisci passed on these kinds of stories to his readers with the intention of proving the existence of ghosts.¹⁵ In another publication, he actually referred directly to a miracle sign report by Job Fincel, of Erfurt, believing it to be a reliable source of information about an omen of war, namely an invisible army seen in a field in Sachsen in 1553.¹⁶ Fincel was an ardent Lutheran preacher and one of the most reputable creators of such miracle reports.¹⁷ With Francisci, however, the story became less a piece of Protestant propaganda, and more a justification for the existence of demons and ghosts. He no longer believed that the omen really was a prophecy of war but he was convinced that the apparitions were genuine.

During the eighteenth century, news of such occurrences was increasingly announced in the newspapers. In 1748, for example, the *Augsburger Intelligenz-Zettel* reported on the 'Apparition of a Miraculous Fish' and on the finding of a 'miraculous root'.¹⁸ There had been an explosive development in the newspaper market. The first German language newspaper had already been printed in the early seventeenth century, but the periodical press really took off commercially during the eighteenth century.¹⁹ In Augsburg, for example, which had long been an influential media and printing centre, the handful of newspapers produced during the early eighteenth century swelled to around 200 by the end of the century.²⁰ Some of them, such as the *Intelligenzblätter*, contained a rubric with mixed messages. And here we come across the sign reports again. By this time they were reduced to mere textual announcements. The simple illustrations, which were one of the main selling points of the broadside and chapbook, were not replicated in the newspaper format.

Books and brochures

It was not for nothing that the eighteenth century was given the derisive nickname *Tintenklecksendes Säkulum* (ink-spilling century). From university scholar to schoolteacher, the learned believed that they should put their thoughts down on paper. One continuing area of debate concerned the importance of the Devil. Philosophical disputes about the power of the Devil appeared in numerous publications.²¹ Could he metamorphose the bodies of humans? Could he make gold from base metals? Could he awaken the dead? The answers were increasingly negative. The Devil merely deluded the people with illusions in order to lead them into temptation. Furthermore,

the concept of the Devil became more abstract, and he was no longer commonly perceived, even in popular literature, as being a physical entity walking amongst the living.

Newspapers were the preferred medium for airing one's views on a huge range of often obscure subjects. Between 1791 and 1793, for instance, the *Dresdner Gelehrte Anzeiger* newspaper printed articles discussing variously how to make an alcoholic spirit out of carrots, the importance of hour-glasses for pulpits in Protestant churches, and how the internal make-up of a pine-tree caterpillar was structured. A wealth of discourses materialised which may seem faintly ridiculous today, but which symbolised the Enlightenment sense of intellectual exploration, and the overwhelming urge to explain rather than just accept.²²

This is well illustrated by the published exchanges between a spice trader named Tobias Conrad Hoppe from Gera, and Johann Friedrich Schreiber, a priest from the Lausitz, during the mid-eighteenth century. They argued publicly over three main issues. The first concerned whether or not the flowers found on the oak trees in the Lausitz region in the summer of 1747 were genuine roses. The second question was about the existence of unicorns, and the third considered whether or not young frogs fell out of rain clouds, as reports had suggested. These were certainly not the most pressing questions of the day, but they were unmistakably influenced by the miracle sign literature disseminated during previous decades. In 1748 both gentlemen had their correspondence printed by publishers in Leipzig and Gera. As time went by, these letters assumed the character of a polemic. Neither of the men wanted to admit that the other was right. The spice trader was an enlightened man. He vigorously held the opinion that the flowers on the oak tree were not roses but worm nests. He made it clear that unicorns did not exist, and that frogs could not fly and therefore could not fall out of the sky. The priest on the other hand had his doubts. Did nothing count anymore? Were all the miracles of nature, which God in his incomprehensible will had created, of no worth at all? Were there to be no more omens signalling precious time, hunger and war? Two seemingly irreconcilable positions faced one another.

The priest personified men of the past, the spice trader was a representative of the Enlightenment. It is remarkable that this argument of such remote questions was even printed. With it, both publicity and standardisation came into being. That is how we know today what the contemporaries concerned themselves with. It is also remarkable, however, that the dispute ended without any real conclusion. The priest gave to understand that many people still believed in these signs and that he hoped the new perspective, which attempted to put all miracles down to natural causes, would not gain acceptance. He was altogether scared. He was scared of the consequences of a dissected world. Today we sometimes, somewhat misleadingly, call this a deprivation of the world's mystique. The spiritual

man feared that request for all creation would be lost when one no longer recognised celestial signs. He saw the approach of a vacuum.²³

This clash of ideas shows that both views of the world – one founded on religion, the other on science – existed side by side. The one then separated itself off from the other and the dominance of science progressed. Public enlighteners and scientists worked with increasing energy on secular explanation and produced countless discourses on the structure of the world. Learned societies came into existence. New universities were founded and new university subjects were established. This story is sufficiently familiar, and so far we have regarded it as a success story. However, the market for publications on the supernatural continued to blossom, and assumed an increasingly occult character. They lost their religious character, but appealed to people who did not want to be totally separated from the idea that there was actually a higher, non-classifiable principle influencing fate.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century a new genre of non-fiction emerged, which was influenced by the types of issues debated by the country priest and his protagonist, and in the burgeoning newspapers. They are reminiscent of *hausvater* (housefather) literature and ‘house books’, which had circulated in both handwritten and printed form since the late Middle Ages. This literature did not merely contain practical instructions on how to care for house and garden, man and animal and so on, they also included instruction on magic and the occult.²⁴ More so than their predecessors, they also contained ghost stories and discourses about mermaids, unicorn and werewolves. They often contained the word ‘collection’ in the title, and were compiled from a range of older sources, though it is difficult to pinpoint exactly from where individual passages originate. Some of it may have been fictitious. But one look is enough to realise that they dealt with a mix of old and new learned notions reworked into an accessible form.

The history of the Endter’s influential Nuremberg publishing company during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries demonstrates well how the publishing agenda changed with regards to the printing of occult books. In the 1670s the young Wolfgang Moritz Endter took over the large and influential family publishing house, and under his guidance business continued to flourish. It is difficult to estimate just how many works were printed at Endter’s in the years between 1650 and 1800. Today there are about 2000 different titles housed in Bavarian archives. After the Thirty Years’ War, Endter’s printed works on everything that the literate educated classes regarded as important: mathematical textbooks, maps, city views, song books, municipal authority decrees, works on bookkeeping and banking, and, above all, editions of the Bible.²⁵ Funeral sermons were one of the most lucrative products, which enabled Endter’s to tick over financially. At least three-quarters of their entire production was printed in German. Theology and specialised medical literature were the only subjects still produced in Latin.

Yet one of the main reasons for Endter's continuing success from the late seventeenth century onwards was the shifting emphasis of production to prognostic works. Alongside learned astronomical textbooks, literature on astrology and miracle signs became an increasingly dominant commercial area at a time when astrology was under attack from Enlightenment critics. Such literature was no longer produced in the pamphlet form typical in the years before the Thirty Years' War, but as tracts and discourses, which had become the fashionable conduit for academic discussions on subjects concerning natural history. As early as 1648 a considerable number of different astrological war calendars appeared on the publisher's lists.²⁶ Of course, this kind of prognostic calendar was hardly new. Examples can be found concerning the large comet that appeared over Europe in 1618. In 1688 and 1785 the same edition of a calendar of this kind, filled with omens and miracle signs by an author named Philemon Adelsheim was printed by Endter. Unfortunately, the number of copies made of either edition is still not known, but sales of similar literature appeared to have boomed. One reason for this is that they were adapted more and more for the lower end of the market. Towards the end of the eighteenth century they were increasingly being published under the description *Bauernkalender* (*Peasant Calendar*), which is not how they were originally titled, and denotes their reduced readership in social terms. The publisher acquired a second pillar of success with their popular editions of the Faust legend. The first Endter edition of the life of the high magician Johann Faust was published in 1647, then again in 1674, 1681 and 1717.²⁷ At the moment it is not known whether there were later editions, but by 1717 the Faust chapbook had been bundled with two other discourses on magic and the art of invocation.²⁸ Furthermore, from the 1720s onwards Endter produced a new series of popular fortune-telling publications, in particular the *Weissagungen der Sibyllen*.²⁹ Thanks to publishers like Endter, by the end of the eighteenth century literature on fortune-telling and the reading of planets had become more widely available than ever before.³⁰ Around 1780 it was observed that in many German cities, professional fortune-tellers were making good use of such publications, much to the chagrin of some.³¹ Efforts made by public enlighteners to encourage people away from such publications were in vain, despite censorship laws. Their popularity remained strong well into the twentieth century. Just before the First World War, for example, a priest sneeringly remarked that every housemaid kept a planet book hidden under her pillow.³²

Before moving on to Stephan Bachter's survey of grimoires it is briefly worth considering the influence this burgeoning German magic media market had in America. This has a direct connection with the question concerning the relationship between print and orality in the transmission of folk magic. In the collections of various American folklore societies, we find traces of the oral traditions of German immigrant communities.³³ From these it is clear

that the charm books first printed in Germany during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were still known to the older population of Ohio, though there is little evidence of any preserved copies having survived into the second half of the twentieth century. Research on this subject has only just begun however. Folklorists have, until recently, shown more interest in the oral traditions themselves rather than their possible printed origins.³⁴ One exception is the work of Yvonne Millspaw, who studied an ethnic German family in Pennsylvania whose members for numerous generations had been practising *Braucherei* (traditional magic).³⁵ The family had arrived in America from the upper Rhine region in about 1750. All members of the family were active in either the fundamentalist or conservative Protestant communities. At the time of the generation born around 1890, manuscripts and a book were being used in their *Braucherei*. The book was Johann Georg Hohmann's *Long Lost Friend*, a popular American charm book of the nineteenth century. Handwritten magic recipes had also been entered into the family cookbook where Millspaw found them tucked between recipes for marmalade and sand-cake. None of the orally transmitted instructions on conjuring differed in any way from the written magical instructions. So even this family were a part of the Magic Media Market, despite the fact that, at first glance, they could boast a long family tradition of orality. There was no real 'old' knowledge to be found here, which would at least have given us some indication of the magic art of the upper Rhine during the early eighteenth century – the time of the family's emigration.

Grimoires and the transmission of magical knowledge

Stephan Bachter

In the eighteenth century becoming rich and happy through magic had its difficulties, and not just from a legal point of view.³⁶ It was not easy getting hold of the kind of literature that enabled one to conjure up wealth, good health and love. This problem of access is well illustrated by the following case from Bavaria. Around 1770, an itinerant glass-painter named Joseph Reuther was engaged in a lengthy search for literature on magic. He roamed around the small towns and villages in the provincial area between Ulm, Augsburg and Donauwörth, and while on his commercial travels asked people if they possessed any literature that helped counter life's miseries, since he wanted to make copies of them. His quest proved successful with a number of officials, soldiers and craftsmen. Reuther was not working on his own initiative, however. People actually hired him to seek out copies of magic manuscripts. He was the mediator and gatherer of magic literature, but he

had one handicap: he had no knowledge of Latin, the language in which many books of magic were written at the time. As a result he struck up a partnership with a weaver, Christopher Reger, of Lauingen, who made copies of the texts Reuther found. Reger had been a novice with the Augustinian monks and had been through their Latin school. He was, however, a little out of practice, and had to admit that he was not able to read and understand everything in the originals, and therefore simply omitted those parts in the copies he made. When Reuther's illegal magic trade was discovered by the authorities, Reger was also hauled before the courts as an accomplice. It came to light that he was far more deeply embroiled in the world of magic literature than could be guessed at from his role as copyist. Reger strongly believed in the contents of the literature and practised the spells and conjurations elucidated in the texts. With one piece of literature in particular, the *Christopherus-Gebet* (Christopherus Prayer), he confessed to attempting to call up and compel a demon to hand over a hidden treasure.

Reger was not the only one in the little town of Lauingen who believed in and attempted such conjurations. During the criminal investigation a nest of treasure hunters came to light. Weavers and painters, castle guards, tailors and landladies were all involved. The handwritten instructions for performing conjurations circulated amongst them. A tailor bequeathed one such manuscript to his landlady who, in turn, passed it on to Reger's wife so that her husband, with his knowledge of Latin, could try it out and in this way make their fortune. Reger and his partners in crime prayed and conjured for many hours over a period of thirty-three nights until they were practically crooked and hunchbacked. Nevertheless they remained the poor beggars they were, and were fortunate to receive only a mild punishment by the court.³⁷

The object of the following discussion is to examine the nature and dissemination of these *Zauberbücher* (books of spells) or grimoires, which contained instructions not only on how to invoke demons to find hidden treasure, but also to restore health, to reverse the effects of witchcraft and love spells and to safeguard and increase material wealth. Tracing the origins of these texts, both in their manuscript and printed form, is not easy. The place of publication and dates were often false, and equally fictional was their authorship, with some of them purporting to be the work of famous figures from the past such as Moses, Solomon, Albertus Magnus and Dr Faustus. This discussion will examine the history of grimoires from the middle of the seventeenth century, since from this time there is surviving evidence of multiple copies of both handwritten and printed charm books. After 1800, not only is there a noticeable increase in the number of books in print but also in the number of handwritten copies of spell books intended for domestic use. Since 1900 there has been an immense variety of titles in mass circulation which continue to be popular today.

It is paradoxical that only since the Enlightenment have spell books been

disseminated and taken up by wider sections of the population. Magic literature experienced a popularisation in both rural and urban society in a world in which all mystique had supposedly been dispelled. As the century of the Enlightenment came to an end a 'Magic Media Market' was being formed.³⁸ Magic was being offered openly as, for example, in an advertisement published in the urban readership *Allgemeiner Litterarischer Anzeiger*, 28 March 1797, which offered for sale alchemical and magic manuscripts from the collection of a 'famous adept'. This advertisement, incidentally, provides the earliest printed reference found so far to the notorious *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*.³⁹ In fact, it would seem that despite their supposedly venerable origins, a number of grimoire titles like the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, were the product of the second half of the eighteenth century.

Who were the customers who generated this burgeoning trade? The Reuther case indicates a market amongst the artisan and tradesman class, but there was also interest from those higher up the social scale. One collector of grimoire manuscripts was none other than Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. There is no evidence that Goethe had a practical interest in the occult but rather collected them out of a spirit of antiquarian interest. The author of the celebrated *Faust* described a certain variant of a notorious grimoire called 'Faust's Höllenzwang' ('Faust's Hell's command'), which contained a recipe to call up the demon Mephistopheles, as an 'extremely odd work of reasonable nonsense'.⁴⁰ Goethe's most prized text was a manuscript entitled, 'Bibliae Magicae / das ist / Die gantze heilige Schrift / Alten Testament / von Hanns Weymar des VI = VII Buch Mosis'. It emerges from his letters that he had been on the trail of this magic manuscript for some time and had paid such a high price for it in 1817 that he expressed some embarrassment about it.⁴¹ It consists of twenty-two loose, bronze-coated cardboard pages measuring 30.5 x 44.5 centimetres. They each have writing on the front and the back, mostly in blood red characters that are or at least appear to be oriental. The sections of text that are formulated in German, the headings in particular, are also written using Latin letters, which are blended with the oriental signs. Statements made by Goethe about the previous owners and age of the book, as well as examinations currently being carried out, suggest that the manuscript dates to around 1750. This means, that the 'Bibliae Magicae' of Weimar is one of the oldest manuscripts with the title 'Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses'.

Another less well-known contemporary collector, a councillor of Darmstadt called Karl Wunderlich (1769–1841), put together a large collection of grimoires during his lifetime, which today gives us an interesting insight into which titles were in circulation and available around the time that the advert in the *Allgemeiner Litterarischer Anzeiger* appeared. Wunderlich had studied cameral sciences in Giessen and Heidelberg and was employed as a secretary at the *Herzogliche Rentkammer* (Ducal tax authority). Although familiar with

the new intellectual ideas of the 'Enlightenment' through his studies and occupation, Wunderlich retained a lifelong practical interest in the occult arts. Darmstadt was an appropriate place for a man with such interests, as the counts of Hessen-Darmstadt had a legendary reputation for calling up demons and making gold by magical means. Wunderlich's study was filled with nearly 1700 volumes, including many works on magic and alchemy, as well as all of the instruments necessary for making gold, calling up demons and hunting treasures: crucibles, ovens, test tubes, divining rods, magical circles and an *Erdspiegel* (instrument for looking into the future).⁴² Wunderlich copied several dozen magic manuscripts. Amongst them, were several texts based on the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, such as 'Biblia Arcana Magica Alexander nach der Traduction des VI und VII Buch Moyses nebst magischen Gesetzen', 'Rezabla wegesehen harez arzas oder Geheimniße VI. Buch Mosis', and 'Rezabla wegesehen harez arzas. Rabole oder Geheimniße des VI. Buchs Mosis. 1540' ('Rezabla wegesehen harez arzas or Secrets of the Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses'). His collection also included several 'Höllenzwänge' manuscripts (a grimoire often used by magical treasure hunters), including one apparently formerly owned by a Jesuit, 'Hoellenzwang des Rev. Pater Eberhard Soc. Iesu Ingolstadt 1705'. There were several manuscripts attributed to Dr Faust: 'Des Doctor Faustens Rechter Geisterzwang durch welche man alle Geister citiren kann, daß sie einen in allen willfährig sein müssen. Gedruckt Anno 1511' ('Dr Faust's right command for demons'), and 'Beschwörung und Ruf des MeerGeistes Doctoris Fausti, oder des Wassergeistes Quirumndai' ('Calling up a Demon of the Sea'), 'Der schwarze Rabe. Passau, Anno 1519' ('The black raven'), as well as some more generic titles like 'Wahrhafte Beschwörung eines Schatzgeistes, daß derselbe seinen Schatz in das Zimmer bringen muß' ('True conjuration of a demon guarding hidden treasures'), 'Großer Zwang für die widerspenstigen Geister' ('Greater command for the wilful demon'), 'Schneller Ruf des Höllischen Geistes und Teufels Fürsten Aciel Nebst denen dazu benöthigten Gebeten Hinterließ P. Huber S. J. Ingolstadt 1732' ('Quick call of the demon Aciel'). One small grimoire in the collection, dedicated to calling up demons and assuring their help in the search for hidden treasures, is apparently unique to the Wunderlich collection. The writing bears the title 'Der Zwicker' ('The Pincher'), and a verse in German on the front page explains its use:

I'm called The Zwickerlein
Not known to everybody
The one to possess me will manage
to get all the treasures from the Devil.
So may look who understands:
poverty will pass.⁴³

It is no surprise that Wunderlich also possessed a copy of the very title

that the treasure hunters Reger and Reuther were interested in – the ‘Christopherus Prayer’.

It would seem, then, that towards the end of the eighteenth century magical manuscripts were in circulation up and down the social scale, and were put together and compiled by numerous collectors. During the following century increasing numbers of spell books also found their way into print. In this respect the editions published by the Stuttgart publisher and antiquarian Johann Scheible are particularly worth noting. It was Scheible who, in 1849, published the first printed copies of the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*.⁴⁴ Although increasing numbers of grimoires were put into print, handwritten copies still continued to be produced and circulated.

There are two basic versions of the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, each having significantly different content, each pandering to a different market. Goethe’s ‘*Bibliae Magicae*’ is representative of the ‘high brow’ version, which professes to contain incantations and magic signs supposedly used by Old Testament figures to perform wonders, in particular Moses’ incantations over the staff, the seven plagues and the columns of smoke and fire, as described in *Exodus* 7–8. It is this variant in manuscript form which dates back to the mid-eighteenth century. Of a slightly later date, and more familiar to people today is the more ‘low brow’ variant for use in daily life, which contains recipes of sympathetic medicine and instructions on how to counteract harmful spells. In Germany both variants were printed and in circulation from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, though it is the ‘low brow’ printed version which disseminated more widely, and found its way to America, particularly to Pennsylvania, via German emigrants.⁴⁵ Even within both variants the contents of different editions varies widely, and from a detailed analysis of the borrowings, crossovers and complexities of such manuscripts and printed pamphlets, originals and copies, titles and editions, I would like to suggest a new method of examining the spell book genre, their contents and their usage in everyday practice.

Grimoires can be described as being created according to a unit construction system, as indicated by Sabine Doering-Manteuffel. Texts, pictures, names, illustrations, magic signs, titles, incantations, recipes, possible uses, dates, places of printing, publishers, legends about origins: different combinations of all these elements or units were put together by the producers of spell books, both professional publishers and those who made copies for their personal use. One result of this process is that the individual elements can lose their sense and meaning. This is illustrated by the following example of the way in which pictures and authoritative names were treated. In a rare published version of a ‘Faust’s *Höllenzwänge*’ printed around 1775, though dated ‘Rome 1510’, and entitled *D. Faust’s original geister commando der Höllen und aller ander geister zwang sowohl die bösen, als guten spiritus*, we find a small picture. According to the inscription that circumscribes the head of the figure,

it depicts one Dr Habermann, otherwise described as 'Magus Habermannus', a well-educated man and powerful magician.⁴⁶ However, in another *Höllenzwang* edition, we find a near identical picture, which this time was supposed to depict Sadock, King Solomon's high priest. So far, as an element of the unit construction system, the illustration has been combined with different names. The names Habermann and Sadock are further unit construction elements that reappear in other places in new combinations. A number of spell books were named after Dr Habermann, for example *Der Goldene Habermann*, which we are familiar with from manuscript copies made in Darmstadt around 1800, as well as those from the Scheible printing press from around 1850. According to the *Höllenzwang* in the British Library Habermann is said to have taken the grimoire out of the Vatican dungeons and had it printed. Rumours had long circulated that several powerful grimoires were kept hidden in Rome by the Catholic Church, and the phrase, 'bring a spell book from the dungeons of the Vatican', became another element in the spell book unit construction system. Habermann is sometimes claimed to have had an accomplice, a certain Hans Weymar. The name Hans Weymar is, however, just another set piece. He is also mentioned on the title page of the *Höllenzwänge* manuscript acquired by Goethe. These examples demonstrate well the constant to-ings and fro-ings of names, claims, illustrations and signs.⁴⁷

When we hear that in the eighteenth century a certain Johann Ernst Philippi, former professor for theology in Halle, had for years earned a living by making copies of magic literature, and that when he could not get hold of the original simply reproduced the same thing himself,⁴⁸ and when we remember how the compiler from Lauingen only copied whatever he could understand with his basic knowledge of Latin, then we must also suspect the purity of the transcription of this literature. New additions and adaptations were patently made to standard titles, and in this respect one wonders about which magic manuscripts and text fragments were washed up into the 'Magic Media Market' as a result of the monastic dissolutions following the secularisation moves in 1802 and 1803.

Every printed copy put on to the market could serve as a model for a handwritten copy. Likewise, every handwritten copy could be the model for a printed copy. In this way books of spells transported certain elements of magic and pansophic knowledge from the early modern period to the present. Speculations about the connection between macrocosm and microcosm, about the secrets of the cabbala or the order of hell, which were formally only topics for scholars like Paracelsus, were simplified and made more accessible. It is sometimes astonishing to see the course that scholarly ideas have taken from the early modern period to the present. This can be illustrated by tracing the publishing history of just one love charm. In his *Artzney Kunst und Wunderbuch (Book of Art and Wonder)*, published in Leipzig in 1592, the priest

Michael Bapst gave a report about a way of counteracting the conjuring of love. One had to walk a certain distance in one's shoes until the feet began to sweat. Wine or beer must then be poured into the right-hand shoe and emptied in one gulp. These instructions were subsequently reported in Wolfgang Hildebrand's *Magia Naturalis: Das ist Kunst und Wunderbuch*, which first appeared in Darmstadt and Leipzig in 1610. Next, in 1699, Eberhard Gockel recommended taking these steps against magical love and love potions in his *Tractatus Polyhistoricus Magico-Medicus Curiosus. Die bekannten Hundert acht und dreysig Geheimnisse* (*The famous one hundred and thirty eight secrets*). An edition dating from 1737 contains the same receipt. In 1790 the charm appeared again in Eberhardt Heinrich Fischer's *Albertus Magnus der Andere* (*Albertus Magnus the Other*). The charm can also be found in the 'Pfühler Hausbuch', a handwritten spell book from near Ulm, which was put together during the early nineteenth century. Around the mid-nineteenth century it appeared in print again in *Albertus Magnus bewährte und approbierte sympathetische und natürliche Geheimnisse für Menschen und Vieh* (*Albertus Magnus's tried and tested sympathetic and natural secrets for men and animals*). In the 1930s it was reproduced in Franz Rupfer's cheap tract, *Sympthiemittel für Menschen und Tiere* (*Sympathetic remedies for men and animals*) (Kempten, 1931), and in an edition of the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* sold by the Dresden book distributors Gutenberg. More recently it found its way into another edition of the *Book of Moses* printed in 1979 and again in Berlin in 1996.

The instructions given in such books for achieving wealth, happiness and good health were not only handed down for their antiquarian interest. They were also put to everyday use, and they influenced the daily practices of their owners and users. We are familiar with this fact from a number of sources, and I have come to know it through my own investigations, but one of the best piece of evidence comes from the influential German folklorist Adolf Spamer, who analysed the letters sent to a grimoire publisher from Dresden during the 1930s. A postman from Magdeburg, for example, wrote about wanting to hunt for hidden treasure and for this reason was looking to obtain Dr Faust's current address, as he had already sent three letters to Wittenberg, a town connected with Faust according to the chapbook legend, which had been sent back stamped 'return to sender'. A farmer from Mecklenburg asked:

Send me a book with which, one is sure to discover gold ... I also have the 6th and 7th Books of Moses, but that is too difficult to learn and involves too many costs, I also have a poor memory and I cannot understand it either. Please be so kind as to send me the sort of book which one only has to read and a ghost comes and inquires after one's wishes and then shows one where to get the gold.

In 1933 a woman enquired about obtaining a goblin, preferably in a jar as she said, and closed her letter by declaring, 'I am all in favour of magic.'⁴⁹

The Germanist Peter-André Alt believes that some of the main currents and leading characteristics of the Enlightenment were the education of the people, the delatinisation of established education, the expansion of the media market, the 'improvement of technical possibilities for the printing trade and the more efficient structuring of its sales department', the suppression of an authoritative church and secularisation.⁵⁰ It was these mechanisms and principles of the Enlightenment that opened the path of magic to everyone. The folklorist Christoph Daxelmüller has further explained how from the time of the Enlightenment scholars also turned away from the pansophic-magic explanation of the world and, in doing so, their knowledge was passed on into the hands of those who were not so much concerned with philosophical knowledge of the world as with their own immediate applicable benefits.⁵¹ In the shadows cast by the light of the Enlightenment, the transmission of magical knowledge was easier than ever before, and its impact far-reaching, with ripples reaching us today in the form of the current popularity of esoteric literature. Not surprisingly, the spread of occult literature was viewed as unwelcome competition by religious authorities. When, in the 1920s, a Munich occult bookshop had advertisements sent out to every household in the locality, the *Klerusblatt*, the mouthpiece of the diocese and its associated Economic Association Limited, responded by drawing up a plan 'to counteract true evil with an effective dam'.⁵²

As Sabine Doering-Manteuffel has already indicated, the influence of the German magic media market was also felt in the New World. Germans who emigrated to America, particularly to Pennsylvania, brought with them their books of spells, especially the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*. During the 1850s and 1860s the German version published by Scheible was reprinted to cater for the immigrant community, and in 1880 the work was translated into English and published in Chicago, New York and Philadelphia.⁵³ As well as the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses*, German emigrants to Pennsylvania brought over *Albertus Magnus' Egyptian Secrets* or *The Romanus Book*. The German influence was also prominent in Johann Georg Hohmann's *The Long Lost Friend*, a popular collection of medical and magical receipts printed during the mid-nineteenth century.⁵⁴ Much of the *Long Lost Friend* was, in fact, taken from *The Romanus Book* with some additions from other sources.⁵⁵ The ownership of spell books found expression in fabulous and sinister stories and legends, whose motifs we also know from Germany, and which are documented in the collection of the *Deutsche Sagen Archiv* (German Legend Archive) in Freiburg. Faith healers and witch doctors, whose services were hardly distinguishable from those of their European colleagues, also established themselves amongst the Pennsylvanian Germans, and no doubt found the American magic books most useful.

The contents of the spell books developed in two distinctive ways once they began to be published in America. First, the old recipes were adapted

to suit the conditions of the new environment. New animals, plants and minerals were inserted. In the charm books of Germany, for example, the oil of earthworms was said to be a tried and tested remedy for rheumatism, but in America it was replaced by rattlesnake oil.⁵⁶ A single element of the unit construction system was exchanged without the recipe actually being altered. Secondly, in America magic knowledge from Germany fused with the traditions of the other ethnic groups. Thus the *Sixth and Seventh Books of Moses* was incorporated into the Afro-American population's Hoodoo beliefs. During the mid-1920s, Newbell Niles Puckett reported that the sale of the book was "enormous" and its use widespread among Negroes in the American South'.⁵⁷ Copies of the Moses grimoire also reached the islands of the West Indies. In Jamaica, a reggae group even recorded a song entitled 'Six and Seven Books of Moses'. Hohmann's *The Long-Lost Friend* also spread amongst various populations in America, 'to the Negro, the Cajun in Louisiana, the hill man in the Ozarks and other groups'.⁵⁸ For both processes, the composition of charm books consisting of movable and exchangeable elements was a vital prerequisite for success in new environments, across centuries and social levels. It was not necessary to replace the entire textual context but only the individual elements when taking the needs of the new environment into account.

Further detailed investigation of the transatlantic relationship between charm books should prove an exciting and worthwhile task, particularly if it recorded and evaluated the magic books, manuscripts and pamphlets that still survive in America and compared them to those existent in Germany during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Further work also needs to be conducted on the influence the dissemination of spell books in America may have had, in turn, on Europe. Is there any proof of reimportation? One thinks of the American influence on the New Age and esoteric movements. How much does the modern renaissance of occult and magic practices owe to the grimoires that originated in Enlightenment Germany?

Notes

- 1 Sabine Doering-Manteuffel, Josef Mancal and Wolfgang Wüst (eds), *Pressewesen der Aufklärung* (Berlin, 2001).
- 2 Holger Böning and Reinhart Siegert, *Volksaufklärung: biobibliographisches Handbuch zur Popularisierung aufklärerischen Denkens im deutschen Sprachraum von den Anfängen bis 1850*, 5 vols (Stuttgart, 1990–2001).
- 3 See, for example, Werner Faulstich, *Medien zwischen Herrschaft und Revolte: die Medienkultur der frühen Neuzeit (1400–1700)* (Göttingen, 1998); Werner Faulstich, *Die bürgerliche Mediengesellschaft (1700–1830)* (Göttingen, 2002); Robert Darnton, *Mesmerism and the End of the Enlightenment in France* (Cambridge, Mass., 1968); Adrian Johns, *The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making* (Chicago, 1997).
- 4 See, for example, Judith Devlin, *The Superstitious Mind: French Peasants and the Supernatural in the Nineteenth Century* (New Haven and London, 1987), ch. 7; Owen

- Davies, *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736–1951* (Manchester, 1999), ch. 3; Faith Wigzell, *Reading Russian Fortunes: Print Culture, Gender and Divination in Russia from 1765* (Cambridge, 1998).
- 5 See, for example, the influential work of Johann Heinrich Jung-Stilling, *Theorie der Geister-Kunde, in einer Natur- Vernunft- und Bibelmässigen Beantwortung der Frage: Was von den Ahnungen, Gesichtern und Geistererscheinungen geglaubt und nicht geglaubt werden müße* (Nuremberg, 1808).
- 6 This is illustrated by the development of spiritism in Germany. See Diethard Sawicki, *Leben mit den Toten. Geisterglaube und die Entstehung des Spiritismus in Deutschland 1770–1900* (Paderborn, 2002).
- 7 For examples see Andreas Kopp, *Das Pfulher Hausbuch. Transkription und Kommentierung einer volksmedizinischen Handschrift aus dem Ulmer Raum* (Ulm, 1998).
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- 9 Nikolaus Basse, *Wunder seltzame Geschicht/von einer armen Frawen und fuenff kleiner Kindern oder Weißlinien/ welche fuer ir essen schlaffend auff einem gesaeyten Korn acker gefunden* (Frankfurt am Main. Event dated 25 January 1572). Peter Hug, *Wunder seltzame Geschicht/von einer armen Wittfrawen und fuenff kleiner Kinder/welche für ir essen schlaffend auff einem gesaeyten Kornacker gefunden* (Strasburg. Event dated 30 January 1571).
- 10 Bruno Weber (ed.), *Wunderzeichen und Winkeldrucker 1543–1586. Einblattdrucke aus der Sammlung Wickiana in der Zentralbibliothek Zürich* (Zürich, 1972).
- 11 See, for example, Bernward Deneke and Kaspar Goltwurm, 'Ein lutherischer Kompilator zwischen Überlieferung und Glaube', in Wolfgang Brückner (ed.), *Volkserzählung und Reformation. Ein Handbuch zur Tradierung und Funktion von Erzählstoffen und Erzählliteratur im Protestantismus* (Berlin, 1974), pp. 125–77; Robert Scribner, *For the Sake of Simple Folk: Popular Propaganda for the German Reformation* (Cambridge, 1981); Paul Russell, *Lay Theology in the Reformation: Popular Pamphleteers in Southwest Germany, 1521–1525* (Cambridge, 1986).
- 12 Walter L. Strauss, *The German Single-Leaf Woodcut 1550–1600*, 3 vols (New York, 1975); Wolfgang Harms, *Deutsche illustrierte Flugblätter des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen, 1980).
- 13 Thiebold Berger, *Warhafftige eigentliche Abbildung des wunderbaren schoenen Weizenstocks* (Strasburg, 1563). Later examples can be found in Erasmus Francisci, *Der höllische Proteus, oder Tausendkünstige Versteller, vermittels Erzählung der vielfältigen Bild-Verwechslung erscheinender Gespenster* (Nuremberg, 1695); Eberhard David Hauber, *Bibliotheca Sive Acta et Scripta Magica*, 3 vols (Lemgo, 1738–45).
- 14 Georg Kress, *Eine Wahrhafftige und gantz trawrige neue Zeitung. So sich begeben und zugetragen im Böhmerland den vier und zweintzigsten Junij dises 1614* (Augsburg, 1614); Matthäus Pfeilschmidt, *Eeine warhafftige und gantz trawrige neue Zeitung: So sich begeben und zugetragen im Böhmerland den vier und zweinzigsten Juni dises 1614 Jars in der Statt zu Plan genant* (Hof, 1614).
- 15 Francisci, *Der höllische Proteus*. See also Johann Beaumont, *Historisch-Physiologisch-und Theologischer Tractat von Geistern, Erscheinungen, Hexereyen und andern Zauber-Händern* (Halle, 1721), which was a translation of John Beaumont, *An Historical, Physiological and Theological Treatise of Spirits, Apparitions, Witchcrafts, and Other Magical Practices* (London, 1705); Karl von Eckhartshausen, *Sammlung der merkwuerdigsten Visionen, Erscheinungen, Geister- und Gespenstergeschichten* (Munich, 1792).
- 16 Francisci, *Der höllische Proteus*, p. 226.
- 17 Rainer Alzheimer, 'Job Fincel und die Zeichen der Endzeit', in Wolfgang Brückner

- (ed.), *Volkserzählung und Reformation. Ein Handbuch zur Tradierung und Funktion von Erzählstoffen und Erzählliteratur im Protestantismus* (Berlin, 1974).
- 18 *Augsburger Intelligenz-Zettel*, no. 24, 1748; *Augsburger Intelligenz-Zettel*, no. 33, 1748.
- 19 Martin Welke, 'Zeitung und Öffentlichkeit im 18. Jahrhundert. Betrachtungen und Funktionen der periodischen deutschen Tagespublizistik', *Presse und Geschichte. Beiträge zur historischen Kommunikationsforschung* (Munich, 1977), pp. 71–99; Holger Bönnisch, 'Bibliographie der deutschsprachigen Presse von den Anfängen bis 1815', *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* (Tübingen, 1992), pp. 110–37.
- 20 Jochen Brüning and Friedrich Niewöhner (ed.), *Augsburg in der Frühen Neuzeit* (Berlin, 1995); Helmut Gier and Johannes Janota (ed.), *Augsburger Buchdruck und Verlagswesen – von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Wiesbaden, 1997).
- 21 See, for example, *Philosophische Untersuchung von Gewalt und Wirkung des Teuffels in natürlichen Körpers* (Frankfurt, 1704).
- 22 *Dresdner Gelehrte Anzeigen aus den meisten Theilen der Gelehrsamkeit, der Künste und der Wissenschaften* (Dresden, 1792–93).
- 23 Tobias Conrad Hoppe, *Einige Nachricht von den sogenannten Eichen-, Weiden-, und Dorn-Rosen, welche in dem vorigen Jahr in der Lausitz ... sind gefunden worden* (Leipzig, 1748); Johann Friedrich Schreiber, *Sendschreiben an den Wohledlen und Wohlfürnehmen Herrn Tobias Conrad Hoppen* (Gera, 1748); Hoppe, *Antwort-Schreiben auf diejenigen Zweifel, welche der Wohlehrwürdige ... Johann Friedrich Schreiber zweyey Sendschreiben von den so genannten Weiden-Rosen ... entgegen gesetzt* (Gera, 1748).
- 24 For example, *Ob ein Hausvater mög mit guten gewissen unchristlich und Böpstlich-Eehalten gedulden* (Nuremberg, 1532); Christoph Meurer, *Kurtz und nützlich hauss-regiment darinnen gründlichen vermeldet und angezeigt wird wie ein hausvater sich und sein gesind vor der schrecklichen seuche der pestilentz huten sol* (Leipzig, 1607); Johann Joachim Bechers, *Kluger Haus-Vater, verständige Haus-Mutter, vollkommener Land-Medicus wie auch wohlerfahner Ross- und Viehe-Arzt: nebenst e. deutl. u. gewissen Handgriff, d. Haushaltungs-Kunst innerhalb Stunden zu erlernen* (Leipzig, 1747).
- 25 In 1686 they produced one of the most sumptuous illustrated editions of Luther's Bible ever produced. It was prepared for the Duke of Saxony, with richly gold-tooled covers, spines and turn-ins and a binding in red morocco (goatskin).
- 26 For example, *Alt und newer astrologischer Kriegs-Calender* (Nuremberg, 1646); *Astrologica practica* (Nuremberg, 1669); *Des Grossen Italiänischen Wahrsagers ... allgemeiner Welt- und Staats-Calender auf das Jahr 1714* (Nuremberg, 1713); *Prognosticon generale oder Allgemeiner Astrologischer Discurs* (Nuremberg, 1713).
- 27 A typical edition is *Das ärgerliche Leben und schreckliche Ende deß vielberüchtigten Erzt-Schwartzkünstlers D. Johannis Fausti von Georg Rudolph Widmann. Jetzo, aus neue übersehen ... durch Joh. Nicolaum Pfitzerum* (Nuremberg, 1681).
- 28 *Das ärgerliche Leben und schreckliche Ende des vielberüchtigten Erzt-Schwartzkünstlers D. Johannis Fausti erstl. vor vielen Jahren, fleissig beschrieben von Georg Rudolph Widmann* (Nuremberg, 1717); Johannes G. Scheffer, *Anhang oder kurtzer Bericht von der Lappländer Zauber-Kunst* (Nuremberg, 1717); Conrad W. Platz, *Kurtzer, nothwendiger und wohl-gegründter Bericht von dem zauberischen Beschwören und Segensprechen* (Nuremberg, 1717).
- 29 *Der astrologischen Sybillen sinnreichen Weissagungen: welche in diesem verbesserten Stadt- und Land-Calendar ... an das Tags-Licht gegeben werden* (Nuremberg, 1727).
- 30 *Berlinische Monatschrift* 1 (1783) 376.
- 31 Andreas Riem, *Über Aufklärung. Ob sie dem Staate – der Religion – oder überhaupt gefährlich sey, und sey könne?* (Berlin, 1788), vol. 4; *Etwas über Aufklärung und aufgeklärte Erziehung* (1786).

- 32 Johannes Hausmann, 'Über und wider den Aberglauben im deutschen Volke', *Lehr und Mehr für's deutsche Volk* 40 (1911) 1–16.
- 33 See, for example, Wayland Hand, Anna Casetta and Sondra B. Thiedermann (eds), *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions: A Compendium of American Folklore* (Boston, 1981), vol. 2.
- 34 See, however, the work of Linda Dégh, in particular *American Folklore and the Mass Media* (Bloomington, 1994).
- 35 Yvonne J. Millspaw, 'Witchcraft Belief in a Pennsylvania German Family', *Pennsylvania Folklife* 27, 4 (1978) 14–31.
- 36 See the legal and philosophical debates about witchcraft and magic in eighteenth-century Germany, as discussed in Wolfgang Behringer, *Witchcraft Persecutions in Bavaria: Popular Magic, Religious Zealotry and Reason of State in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1997).
- 37 Hans Böhm, 'Strafverfahren gegen Schatzsucher in Dillingen und Lauingen. Zum Lauinger Christopherusgebet', *Jahrbuch des Historischen Vereins Dillingen* 89 (1977) 195–209.
- 38 Sabine Doering-Manteuffel, 'Medien, Märkte und Magie. Ein Augsburger Volkskundeprojekt zur kritischen Reflexion der Aufklärung', *Bayerisches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* (2000) 1–14.
- 39 Hans Sebald, 'The 6th and 7th Books of Moses: The Historical and Sociological Vagaries of a Grimoire', *Ethnologia Europea* 18 (1988) 53–8; Karl-Peter Wanderer, *Gedruckter Aberglaube: Studien zur volkstümlichen Beschwörungsliteratur* (Frankfurt, 1976).
- 40 Frank Möbus, 'Kein Meister über die Geister: Doctor Fausti "Höllenzwänge"', in Frank Möbus, Friederike Schmidt-Möbus and Gerd Unverfehrt (eds), *Faust. Annäherung an einen Mythos* (Göttingen, 1995), p. 47.
- 41 Hans Tümmler (ed.), *Goethe's Briefwechsel mit Christian Gottlob Voigt* (Weimar, 1962), vol. 4, p. 297.
- 42 Ferdinand Dieffenbach, 'Der letzte Adept', *Die Gartenlaube* 17 (1873) 279–82; Karl Esselborn, *Darmstädter Originale* (Darmstadt, 1919).
- 43 All the magical manuscripts mentioned in this section can today be found in the *Handschriftenabteilung* of the *Hessische Landes- und Hochschulbibliothek*, Darmstadt.
- 44 *Das sechste und siebente Buch Mosis, das ist: Mosis magische Geisterkunst, das Geheimniß aller Geheimnisse. Wort- und bildgetreu nach einer alten Handschrift mit 23 Tafeln* (Stuttgart, 1849). See Wanderer, *Gedruckter Aberglaube*, pp. 20–1.
- 45 For publication details see Wanderer, *Gedruker Aberglaube*, pp. 77–85.
- 46 The original is housed in the British Library; see also the facsimile reprint, Hans Henning (ed.), *D. Faust's original Geister Commando der Höllen und aller ander Geister Zwang* (Leipzig, 1979).
- 47 See Johann Scheible, *Das Kloster. Weltlich und geistlich Meist aus der ältern deutschen Volks-, Wunder-, Curiositäten-, und vorzugsweise komischen Literatur* (Stuttgart, 1847), vol. 5, pp. 1159–1200.
- 48 Johann Christoph Adelung, *Geschichte der menschlichen Narrheit oder Lebensbeschreibungen berühmter Schwarzkünstler, Goldmacher, Teufelsbanner, Zeichen- und Liniendeuter, Schwärmer, Wahrsager, und anderer philosophischer Unholden. Sechster Theil* (Leipzig, 1788), p. 345.
- 49 Adolf Spamer, 'Zauberbuch und Zauberspruch', *Deutsches Jahrbuch für Volkskunde* 1 (1955) 109–26.
- 50 Peter-André Alt, *Aufklärung* (Stuttgart, 1996).
- 51 Christoph Daxelmüller, *Zauberpraktiken. Eine Ideengeschichte der Magie* (Zürich, 1993).
- 52 Cyrillus Wehrmeister, 'Benedichte! Ein Beitrag zum Aberglauben der Gegenwart',

- Klerusblatt. Organ der Diözesan-Priestervereine Bayerns und ihres Wirtschaftlichen Verbandes G. m. b. H.* 47 (1925) 397.
- 53 Kevin J. Hayes, *Folklore and Book Culture* (Knoxville, 1997), p. 17.
- 54 See, for example, Johann Georg Hohmann, *The Long Lost Friend, or, Faithful & Christian Instructions Containing Wonderous and Well-Tried Arts & Remedies* (Harrisburg, 1850).
- 55 Don Yoder, 'Folk medicine', in Don Yoder (ed.), *Discovering American Folklife: Studies in Ethnic, Religious and Regional Culture* (Ann Arbor, 1990), p. 99.
- 56 Karl Knortz, *Streifzüge auf dem Gebiete amerikanischer Volkskunde* (Leipzig, 1902), p. 56.
- 57 Hayes, *Folklore*, p. 18.
- 58 Yoder, 'Folk Medicine', 99.

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