

Grace D. VanFleet. From What They Wrote Came Fire: An Analysis of the *Malleus Maleficarum* and its Impact. A Master's Paper for the M.S. in I.S degree. May 2022. 120 pages Advisor: Brian Sturm

This paper aims to examine the spread of misinformation regarding witches, the cultural environment that allowed texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum* to flourish, the impact of that text, and the subsequent, bloody consequences that followed for the accused. Using the current literature available I will examine the history of witchcraft and witch hunting, the possible reasons for the witch hunts, and the reality of what it meant to be accused and tried as a witch. I will perform textual content analysis of the *Malleus Maleficarum*, which I believe to be a foundational text in understanding the cultural and religious implications of subsequent witch hunting practices.

Headings:

Legends

Historical source material

Folklore

Disinformation

FROM WHAT THEY WROTE CAME FIRE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE MALLEUS
MALEFICARUM AND ITS IMPACT

by
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Introduction

This paper aims to examine the spread of misinformation regarding witches, the cultural environment that allowed texts like the *Malleus Maleficarum* to flourish, the impact of that text and its contemporaries, and the subsequent, bloody consequences that followed for the accused. This paper also intends to focus heavily on the misogyny of witch hunting practices, the use of witch hunting as a means of social control, and similar modern practices involving misinformation and emotional manipulation to control populations. Using the current literature available I will examine the history of witchcraft and witch hunting, the possible reasons for the witch hunts, and the reality of what it meant to be accused and tried as a witch. There is a large body of work dedicated to the study of witch hunts and witchcraft, and this paper is intended to explain the debates within the field, the theories, and then to connect it to current events. I believe that there are a great deal of similarities between the proliferation of witch hunting manuals and their impact despite their complete lack of evidence, and the modern proliferation of fake news and misinformation.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

There were two types of texts published about witches in Early Modern Europe; ones that defied the common belief that witches were dangerous and real, and ones that fed into the popular narrative. The *Malleus Maleficarum* was hugely influential, gaining popularity and helping to codify what was and was not a witch, how to find them, and how they should be dealt with. There was no evidence to the claims made in this text and many written anecdotes were taken at face value. This subsequently led to the persecution and execution of tens of thousands of people on the basis of witchcraft.

1. What can the level of influence of *Malleus Maleficarum* as an information object tell us about the proliferation and effect of misinformation and propaganda, especially since this is a very old example of a long-standing pattern used by leaders and politicians to control populations?

2. How did the *Malleus Maleficarum*'s authors, Heinrich Kramer and Jacob Sprenger, structure their arguments? How does this structure play into the *Malleus*' success, despite the contents of the *Malleus* being highly controversial?

Key Terms:

- Witch: A person, usually a woman, who has made a pact with the Devil or a demon in order to gain power. Someone who uses magic for evil purposes, such as infanticide, killing livestock, destroying crops, and the mutilation of male genitals.

- Witch Hunt: An event carried out by professional Witch Hunters, Inquisitors, or Civilian Criminal Courts to uncover witches in the local population and bring them to justice.
- Witch Hunters: Men who roam the countryside offering their witch finding services to villages.
- Witch Pricker: A man who pricks, with a needle or other sharp implement, a woman's mole or freckle to determine if it is a "witch's mark" and show that she is a witch. Witch's marks are given to witches by the Devil after a pact is made and do not bleed or cause pain when stabbed; men who were paid per witch often resorted to underhanded means (like retractable needles) to frame women as witches.
- Inquisitor: A man on a Holy Mission from the Church whose job it was to identify and deal with heretics
- Witches Sabbat or Sabbath: A meeting of witches for infernal, dark purposes. Witches would fly there at night to worship the Devil and cast spells.

Literature Review

A Brief History of Witchcraft

Though the concept of witches and witchcraft, or even magic at its most basic level, have existed across cultures and time periods, the witch hunts of Early Modern Europe are unique in their length, scope and genesis. Some scholarship dates the witch craze, a term often used to describe the fraught emotional events surrounding the witch hunts, to as early as the 14th Century.¹ Others more often place the start of the witch craze in the 15th C. after the publication of the infamous witch hunting manual the *Malleus Maleficarum* or *The Hammer of Witches* in 1487.² In either case the witch trials in continental Europe and the United Kingdom spanned roughly three centuries with the last execution for witchcraft occurring in Switzerland in 1782.³ The woman killed, Anna Göldi, was beheaded after being accused of using witchcraft to poison the children of her former employer. Though she was officially charged with poisoning it was a clear case of her being accused of witchcraft, and those accusations were an act of revenge and damage control; evidence points to Göldi being romantically involved with her rich, ambitious employer and threatened to reveal their affair after being fired, leading the man to accuse her of witchcraft.⁴ The reasoning behind her killing is not uncommon—greed and the protection of one’s public image have led to a number of murders—but it is also indicative of the reasons why people were accused of witchcraft. Witches were in many

¹ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. “The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist’s Perspective.” *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 1–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778849>.

² Kramer, Heinrich, and Jacob Sprenger. 1487. *The Malleus Maleficarum*. Germany.

³ Panko, Ben. 2017. “Last Person Executed as a Witch in Europe Gets a Museum.” *Smithsonian Magazine*. Smithsonian Magazine. August 27, 2017. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/last-witch-executed-europe-gets-museum-180964633/>.

⁴Ibid.

ways a scapegoat. The end of the Middle Ages and the start of the Renaissance marked a time of change in Europe, and with that change came fear. Fear that truths once held were in fact false, like the shaky belief in the literal existence of Angels or that the Eucharist actually transformed into the blood and body of Christ. This prompted civic and religious leaders to try and maintain society as it had existed up to that point. That meant reinforcing the people's belief in them and what they stood for, and nothing quite brings people together like a common enemy. Enter, the witch.

As I previously noted witches were not a new concept; what was new was the idea that they now lived among the general population waiting for the right time to blight the crops and kill your cattle. Prior to the witch craze most people, who were poor, uneducated and just trying to survive, didn't see witches as a direct threat to their existence, and neither did the Church.⁵ Witches were amorphous evil beings far off in the distance, and people, though as a whole very afraid of the Devil and angering God, also feared harsh winters and poor harvests. By making the witch "real" in the eyes of the Church, Heinrich Kramer's *Malleus Maleficarum* also impacted the people the clergy led. Many people were illiterate, and the ones who could read well were clergymen and nobles, so his manual was never intended to be directly consumed by the masses. The *Malleus* moved the threat of witchcraft from a scary, but relatively vague, place to "a pivotal position in the struggle between man and the devil."⁶ Being fed a steady diet of "witches are real, they are dangerous, and your neighbor might be one," by their local priests went a long way in convincing everyday people that those witches should be

⁵ Broedel, Hans. *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft : Theology and Popular Belief*, Manchester University Press, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=589314>.

⁶ Ibid.

found and dealt with. Couple that with the existing structure that handled Inquisitions of generic heretics and you have yourself some witch hunters.

Imported Witchcraft

When English and European colonists came to the Americas, they didn't just bring a brand of Christianity considered too extreme by the people they left behind in Europe, they also brought all of the superstitions and beliefs that came with it. It is fairly certain that by the time colonists established Jamestown in 1606, witch beliefs were baked in.⁷ That meant that it was only a matter of time until the colonists had their own witch hunts. It was considered a given, in the foundational *Malleus*, that witches meant bad things would happen, and that if bad things were happening there were witches about. It was essentially a vicious cycle that helped people avoid individual responsibility, and to make sense of why their God was not being merciful.

The most famous American witch trials are those that occurred in Salem, MA in 1682 where 19 people were hung, one pressed to death, and a handful died due to their imprisonment. That was by no means the only witch trial in New England let alone the colonies. Unlike in Europe no witches were burned at the stake—most were hung—but the formulaic trials remained largely unchanged: something bad happens, people decide whose fault it is, any witness testimony is considered valid and taken as the truth, a person is convicted and sentenced to death.

⁷ n.d. "The English Establish a Foothold at Jamestown, 1606-1610." U.S. History Primary Source Timeline. Library of Congress. <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/colonial-settlement-1600-1763/english-at-jamestown-1606-1610/>.

Why Were Witches Hunted?

Debate Around Feminist Framing of Witch Trials

There are some scholars that argue calling the witch trials a “war on women” is uncalled for, and they point to the existence of male witches and female accusers as proof that they’re right. The complete rejection of the feminist examination and reasoning behind the witch trials as James Arnt Aune argues is valid because, “[t]he feminist account of witchcraft has failed to explain two important facts about the witchcraft trials: both men and women were accused of witchcraft, and most witchcraft accusations were made by women against other women”.⁸ He is not the only scholar who feels this way. Diane Purkiss has a chapter in her larger book about witches *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*, called *A Holocaust of One's Own: The Myth of the Burning Times*. The chapter starts with a title that directly calls into doubt the modern feminist movement’s ownership of the witch trials and the tendency of new-age mysticisms and wicca practitioners to call this period in European history “the burning times” in reference to the method of execution for many witches.⁹ In her disdain for the radical feminist historians who have taken the idea of what they *think* witch trials were like and wrapped themselves in it alongside their goddess worship and neo-pagan rituals, Purkiss has herself gotten farther away from the realities of the witch craze. Her fundamental belief is that as a feminist herself, her critique is necessary for the correction of other feminists, namely those second wave feminists of the 1970’s through the 90’s. They, she insists, “represe[n]t patriarchy’s continued existence as the consequence of

⁸ Arnt Aune, James. 2004. “Witchcraft as Symbolic Action in Early Modern Europe and America .” *Rhetoric & Public Affairs Michigan State University Press* 6 (4): 767–77.

⁹ Diane Purkiss, "A Holocaust of One's Own: The Myth of the Burning Times," *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 7-29

systematic sexualised violence against women, which in turn was the result of a fear of female sexuality,” and view the witch trials as one entry in a long list of this violence.¹⁰ She would prefer instead the criticism of the patriarchy focus on pay inequality.¹¹ Though I do agree with Purkiss on one point: that the neo-pagan feminist movements use of the Holocaust as a comparison to the witch trials isn't a good idea. They are fundamentally different events. One happened over the course of 300 years while the other lasted less than 10, one killed up to around 50,000 people while the other killed at least 6 million people, and they have stark differences in ideology. They really should not be conflated with each other. Overall Aune and Purkiss' insistence that the witch trials were not gendered violence ignores some key points, that simply by the numbers the vast majority of victims were women, that misogyny doesn't need to be explicitly stated to be a reality, and that women's internalized misogyny can cause them to hurt other women.

Potential Reasons for the Witch Craze

The reason for the witch trials is also debated, as is the best method to study witches. In his broad work, *The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective*, Nachman Ben-Yahuda explores three major theoretical approaches to the anthropological study of witches and witch trials. The first approach is used by scholars Bronislaw Malinowski, E.E. Evans-Pritchard, C. Kluckhohn, and Neil J. Smelser, all of whom articulated their belief that witch trials served “‘useful’ functions [like] the alleviation of anxiety, integration and the creation of cohesion”.¹² The second is

¹⁰ Diane Purkiss, "A Holocaust of One's Own: The Myth of the Burning Times," *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (London: Routledge, 1996), 7-29

¹¹ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. "The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective." *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 1-31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778849>.

¹² *Ibid.*

that witch trials arise “in times of rapid social change, because of social inequalities, various authority systems, or links with the social structure itself,” which is championed by Mary Douglas, M. Gluckman, M. G. Marwick, Siegfried Nadel, Victor Turner and Monica Hunter Wilson.¹³ It is interesting to note that a number of the scholars Ben-Yahuda reference have a more global view of witchcraft or instead focus on a completely different culture's expression of it. For example, both Marwick and Wilson’s writings on witchcraft deal with it in African culture. But as is often the case with human nature there are cross-cultural parallels that can be examined, and the reasoning behind witch trials in one location can certainly be compared to the reasoning for witch trials in another. The third potential approach examines “the symbolic level in witchcraft rituals, focusing on the utilization, meaning, efficiency, and universality of various symbols used in magical practices,” which was used by Victor Turner and the famous Claude Lévi-Strauss.¹⁴ It should also be noted that some historians and scholars view the witch craze through a medical lens, attributing some of the hallucinations suffered by accused witches to be caused by toxic ingredients used in ointments, and also examining the presentation of psychiatric symptoms and the “emotional needs of the accusers”.¹⁵

Ben-Yahuda goes back farther than many of the other scholars I have read, starting his examination of the timing of the witch hunts prior to the 13th century, arguing that the genesis of the witch hunts grew out of the original objectives laid out by the Inquisition. Its primary mission was to reconvert heretics and to solidify the power of the

¹³ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. “The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist’s Perspective.” *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 1–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778849>

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ The list of medical scholars Ben-Yahuda references is very long so I have instead included it in this footnote: Thomas S. Forbes, Micheal Harner, Marvin Harris, E. Caulfield, T.R. Sarbin, Thomas Schoeneman, G. Zilboorg, Robert D. Anderson, G. Rosen and T. Szasz

Catholic Church, as there had been a marked uptick in what Ben-Yahuda calls a “deliberate, continued, and public denial of the church’s doctrine by baptized Christians.”¹⁶ This denial was carried out by heretical (by the standards of the Church) Christian movements like the Waldenses and Cathari.¹⁷¹⁸ For most likely the same reason, power consolidation, there was an increase in witch trials in areas where the Church’s hold had been weakened.¹⁹ The Inquisition however committed a grave error: they were too successful, and they worked themselves out of a job. By 1250 both religious sects had been largely dealt with and the others were small fries by comparison; that meant finding new targets, so the Inquisition expanded to deal with “infidel Jews and the Moors of Spain”.²⁰ It also “set about to introduce and develop the parallel heresy of witchcraft, thereby widening its scope.”²¹ As time went on the increased changes in European society continued and with those changes came a great deal of anxiety.

Who Were Targeted as Witches?

The people most intimately involved with the outcomes of these witch trials were the accused. Bearing the brunt of their neighbors' concerns and failures, accused witches were often poorer, older women who no longer had a traditional family structure. But this was by no means always the case, like in the Innsbruck trials, where married women

¹⁶ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. “The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist’s Perspective.” *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 1–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778849>.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Notably both movements were ascetic, preaching that poverty and abstinence brought one closer to God. The Cathari or Cathars in particular angered many by claiming that Jesus was “merely” an angel and that the human suffering he endured was an illusion. It was not unusual for breakaway sects to rebel against the gluttony and excesses of the Catholic Church, but the Cathari engendered enough hate that they were targeted by a crusade.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Robbins, R. H. “The Encyclopaedia of Witchcraft and Demonology”. (1959) New York: Crown. pp. 207-08.

were vulnerable to accusation, as were prominent citizens. It was just generally less likely for those people to be singled out as a witch during the early days of the witch craze, and the types of women targeted throughout shifted.²² There were also men accused, tried and executed for witchcraft, though the proportion of women to men is extreme. It is estimated that 75 to 80% of all accused witches were women, with some regional trials experiencing an even higher proportion.²³ The biggest commonality was their gender since most of them were women. The underlying reasons were also not always “pure,” meaning there was a political or economic benefit to labelling certain types of women witches.

Amoral Alewives & Demonic Brewsters

One of the groups that ended up being singled out were alewives and brewsters who supplied their neighbors with ale using small scale brewing practices in their homes. These were not rich women, but when compared to their single or widowed counterparts who didn't produce ale they were typically in a much better position.²⁴ Married brewsters who assisted their husbands' brewing business were the most well off, with bachelors making up the next tier, then single or widowed women and those living apart from their husbands.²⁵ We know this because of tax records, and notes on who did and did not have servants. In her work *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England : Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600*, Judith Bennet outlines exactly this stating that unmarried or

²² Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. “The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist’s Perspective.” *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 1–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778849>.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Bennett, Judith M.. *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England : Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1996. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=270942>.

²⁵ Ibid.

widowed or separated women brewsters “often lived independently, they pursued a relatively more skilled occupation, and they enjoyed a higher standard of living”.²⁶ That did not mean that their lives were without hardship, but the work was better than the work other single and widowed women did in “dependent and unskilled positions, as servants or general laborers”.²⁷ Over time as brewing ale actually became beer making with the addition of hops, women were pushed out of the business, and “[o]ver the course of the late fourteenth, fifteenth, and in some places sixteenth centuries, single and widowed brewsters slowly disappeared from the trade.”²⁸ Alewives and brewsters were not well regarded by the clergy, and are often associated with if not outright tied to witchcraft and the devil in art and poetry of the time. In fairness those that supplied beer of any gender were seen as a necessary evil, but women bore the brunt of the animosity. There are depictions of alewives in Doooms, paintings of the Last Judgement, in churches featuring women “waving their jugs, exposing their breasts, drawing foul brews, and embracing demons.”²⁹ Their apparent delight in being cast into the Pit reveals their true nature as scheming, untrustworthy business women that use their sexuality for profit. There were quite a few writers of the times that couldn’t get over the fact that an alewife would flirt with a man while serving him beer and then not sleep with him. In another 15th century play, *The Harrowing of Hell*, Jesus goes about saving souls from Hell, but he leaves behind the alewife. She laments her poor business practices, and “[a]s the play closes, Satan welcomes the brewster, one devil rejoices in her addition to their entourage,

²⁶ Bennett, Judith M.. *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England : Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1996. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=270942>.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

and another gleefully promises to marry her.”³⁰ According to the powers that be in the 15th and 16th century there was quite literally a special place in hell for alewives.

It was a commonly held belief that women were more duplicitous than men and therefore weren't to be trusted in trade. It was also the case that men who wished to corner the growing and profitable brewing market instituted stricter food safety practices and rules that shut out small home brewsters.³¹ Hops were harder to get than just malt, but the beer it produced was gaining popularity, and that too made homebrewing less likely.³² An interesting question is whether or not the modern idea of what a witch looks like is tied to female brewsters: tall hats, cauldrons, broomsticks and cats. Some argue it is, and it is true that cats cut down on mice that eat your grain and that the vats they used for brewing were called cauldrons.³³ Some even wore tall hats to stand out in a crowded marketplace.³⁴ The evidence is not concrete and it's entirely possible that the associations were made later and not during the witch craze. What is certain is that women were pushed out of the field, and part of that involved tying alewives and brewsters in art and popular culture to the Devil, and associating them with undesirables like witches and Jewish people. One such example is the widely praised poem by priest John Skelton sometime around 1517, *The Tunning of Elynour Rummyng*. In it Elynour, an alewife, is

³⁰ Bennett, Judith M.. *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England : Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1996. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=270942>.

³¹ Rotondo, Christie. 2021. “Meet the ‘Witches’ Who Pioneered Brewing Beer.” Thrillist. Thrillist. October 1, 2021. <https://www.thrillist.com/drink/nation/why-the-first-female-brewers-look-a-lot-like-witches>.

³² Ibid.

³³ Brooks, Laken. 2021. “Why Did Women Stop Dominating the Beer Industry?” Smithsonian Magazine. Smithsonian Magazine . March 8, 2021. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/women-used-dominate-beer-industry-until-witch-accusations-started-pouring-180977171/>.

³⁴ Ibid.

not only a grotesque old hag whose shoddy business practices involve letting her hens defecate into her brew, but she also learned “brewing secrets from a Jew,” and at one point has no qualms serving a witch.³⁵ So even if alewives weren’t witches, they were friendly with them and prone to lewd and decidedly Unchristian-like behavior, and guilt by association was how many Inquisitors did business. And as the witch trials ramped up it became more and more dangerous to do anything outside of the norm lest you be accused of witchcraft.

Midwives

Healers of all kinds were at risk of being accused of witchcraft. The primary exception being midwives, who oversaw one of the most important aspects of a society: the production of the next generation of laborers. To be a midwife you generally had to be a respectable person, and most respectable people weren’t accused of being witches.³⁶ Though it would certainly make sense for witches to be midwives given that one of the more common, if disgusting, charges levied against witches was the consumption of infants. As I noted earlier it was explicitly stated in demonological anti-witch texts like the *Flagellum haereticorum facinariourum* that witches were cannibals that “feasted on roasted unbaptized infants”.³⁷ Midwives were in a unique position; their knowledge could save a mother and baby’s life, but there was sometimes nothing that could be done for either. In those cases, the belief outlined by Kramer in the *Malleus Maleficarum* could’ve

³⁵ Bennett, Judith M.. *Ale, Beer, and Brewsters in England : Women's Work in a Changing World, 1300-1600*, Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 1996. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=270942>.

³⁶Harley, David. 2001. “Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife Witch.” In *Witchcraft, Healing, and Popular Diseases : New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, 49–74. Taylor & Francis Group.

³⁷ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. “The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist’s Perspective.” *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 1–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778849>.

come into play: where there are witches there are tragedies, and tragedies a witch. It should also be said that though there is evidence few midwives were actually accused of witchcraft outside the pages of the inflammatory *Malleus*, midwife-witches are described as extremely dangerous by Kramer and Sprenger.³⁸ They write that these witches “exceed all other witches in their villainy,” and can be found everywhere to point where, “there is not the smallest hamlet where a witch of this kind may not be found”.³⁹ They insist that midwife-witches are especially heinous “for they kill infants both in the womb and at birth, and are even in the habit of stealing, vampire-like, into homes to drink the blood of children,” and that when they do successfully deliver a baby they “devote them to the devil” in lieu of a Christian baptism.⁴⁰ However, the lower proportion of midwives among the accused does not mean they were everyone’s favorite people; there were still a lot of anxieties surrounding their potential power and the birthing process in general. Instead of this leading to their demise the Church and local governments chose to regulate midwifery, perhaps because they were such a necessary aspect of society. Midwives were examined and essentially licensed to practice, and in 1567 English midwives began reciting an oath promising that they “will not use any kind of sorcery or incantation in the time of the travail of any women; and that (they) will not destroy the child born of any woman.”⁴¹ That didn’t mean that no midwife was ever tried or executed for being a witch; there were cases of midwives going on trial for witchcraft. This was

³⁸ Broedel, Hans. *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft : Theology and Popular Belief*, Manchester University Press, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=589314>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Horsley, Ritta, and Richard A. Horsley. 2001. “On the Trail of the Witches: Wise Women, Midwives and the European Witch Hunts.” In *Witchcraft, Healing, and Popular Diseases : New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, 95–125. Taylor & Francis Group.

usually due to overzealous magistrates or officials rather than the general townsfolk, and convictions often came down to the use of torture to illicit a confession or the midwife being disliked by the community for other reasons unrelated to her work.⁴² Other non-midwife healers though had to be much more careful.

Healers, Herbalists & Wise Women

Wise women practiced white magic, and when asked during their trials if they were a witch they drew a clear line of distinction between what they did and the evil witches wrought.⁴³ This did not often save them. For their jurors and judges all magic users were suspicious and susceptible to the Devil's influence. Horsley et al write in their article, "On the Trail of the Witches: Wise Women, Midwives and the European Witch Hunts", that "[i]n European towns and ages the people consulted experts not only in maleficent magic, but also in helpful magic, who were known variously as devins-guerisseurs (diviners-healers), cunning folk, wizards, white witches, and wise women and men."⁴⁴ These cunning folk or wise people were a very important part of society, they provided assistance in many matter of life including health and fertility, love and weather. This meant that they were sometimes viewed as responsible for helping one person while hurting another, just by the very nature of their work, like when "weather spirits are conjured to avoid striking one field and strike another instead."⁴⁵ According to Horsley et al, in direct comparison to the Church's doctrine, most commonfolk "held wisewomen and sorceresses to belong to different categories," and that this is confirmed

⁴² Horsley, Ritta, and Richard A. Horsley. 2001. "On the Trail of the Witches: Wise Women, Midwives and the European Witch Hunts." In *Witchcraft, Healing, and Popular Diseases : New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, 95–125. Taylor & Francis Group.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid. 7

in “European documents” detailing witch trials.⁴⁶ Due to the influence of the Church and clergy in regards to these witch hunts this did not matter, and many wise women and healers were called up as witches to be tried. In these cases I choose to say wise women instead of wise women and men because, generally, male healers weren’t tried as witches alongside their colleagues and instead sometimes even served as witnesses for the prosecution. In one case “from 1543, two healers worked together to attempt to heal Peter Krumenacher’s impotence; the male healer, Uli Schultheis, who suggested using sacred palms and vesper candles,” and the female healer, “Els Adams” who called for the patients’s shirt to be sprinkled with Holy water in a church.”⁴⁷ Despite her suggestion being reliant on the power of Christian belief Els was tried as a witch while her partner Uli “does not appear to have been accused or prosecuted.”⁴⁸

It was also true that when the services of wise women had gone awry, like the charm they made did not help, they were at particular risk. In what is now modern Germany there seemed to have been a dedicated push to label wise women as witches, and this often “began with the failure of magical healing--which was then interpreted by the officials as the evil work of Satan.”⁴⁹ Once it was labelled as such they were subject to a witch trial during which they would be tortured, and “[brought] before the Ducal courts, these magicians almost invariably began by admitting that they were diviners and healers, but not witches, concepts which to them were mutually exclusive,” but after they

⁴⁶ Horsley, Ritta, and Richard A. Horsley. 2001. “On the Trail of the Witches: Wise Women, Midwives and the European Witch Hunts.” In *Witchcraft, Healing, and Popular Diseases : New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, 95–125. Taylor & Francis Group. 7

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 9

“had been tortured and harassed by their judges did they finish, almost inevitably by admitting that they were slaves of Satan.”⁵⁰

The Creation & Impact of the *Malleus Maleficarum*

It should be noted that most other Inquisitors didn't like Heinrich Kramer and they thought his ideas about witches were sometimes too much even for them.⁵¹ That in no way meant that Inquisitors believed witches weren't real though—they absolutely did—or that they believed witches were innocents, because they also believed witches were very evil, instead it meant Kramer was a unique individual who didn't play well with others. Kramer was determined, or perhaps just obsessed, with revealing the existence of witches and creating a manual for people to use to find and execute them. This could have been because he truly believed that witches were the earthly servants of the Devil, but Kramer was still a human man and he had lived experiences that shaded his view of reality. Heinrich Kramer was particularly impacted by a witch trial he participated in, and also ruined. Kramer, an Inquisitor himself, was known by another name as a member of the Dominican Order, Henry Institoris. He participated as an Inquisitor under this name during a witch trial in the town of Innsbruck in what is now modern-day Germany, and to say it went poorly is perhaps an understatement. This was by no means his first foray into preaching against heresy and witchcraft—Kramer was at this time considered an old man at over 50—nor was it his first time acting as Inquisitor,

⁵⁰ Horsley, Ritta, and Richard A. Horsley. 2001. “On the Trail of the Witches: Wise Women, Midwives and the European Witch Hunts.” In *Witchcraft, Healing, and Popular Diseases: New Perspectives on Witchcraft, Magic, and Demonology*, 95–125. Taylor & Francis Group. 8-9

⁵¹ Ibid. 6

but it was his last.⁵² His initial arrival to the town was marked by a local woman cursing and spitting at him, “fie on you, you bad monk, may the falling evil take you.”⁵³ That local, Helena Scheuberin, was Kramer’s least favorite type of woman: loud, outspoken, potentially adulterous, and unwilling to attend his sermons.⁵⁴ Through his investigation of witchcraft in the town she and 13 others were accused by him and put on trial, a list that had apparently been whittled down from 50 individuals.⁵⁵ Scheuberin was accused of causing another woman to fall ill and the separate murder of a potential lover, a knight.⁵⁶ Murder is a very serious charge, and Scheuberin was a prominent woman in society due to her marriage to a successful burger, thus the trial was overseen by local dignitaries including the Bishop of Brixen, notaries, Dominican priests, and at least one “doctor of theology and canon law.”⁵⁷ It was also attended and conducted by Henry Institoris, a.k.a Heinrich Kramer, as the Inquisitor under full authority of the Church and Pope. When it came time to question the accused, Institoris sidestepped most of the existing beliefs on sorcery and instead focused on Scheuberin’s alleged moral failings, namely that she was sexually depraved and had likely had sexual intercourse not only outside of her marriage but also with a demon. This didn’t go over well with the Bishop, who ordered Institoris to stop asking Scheuberin questions about her virginity and sexual proclivities that made everyone else uncomfortable, and to instead focus on the matter at hand. Despite

⁵² Broedel, Hans. *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft : Theology and Popular Belief*, Manchester University Press, 2004. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=589314>.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid. 2, 9, Scheuberin was a known herbalist in Innsbruck and created medicine for townsfolk, including the knight who died.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 1

Institoris mostly doing this after the Bishop's request, his actions had poisoned the trial. The court reconvened the next day with a new attendee, Johann Merwais, who was acting for the defense and questioning the validity of the trial based on Institoris' actions.⁵⁸ The trial was dismissed following a brief investigation and after some months making himself a nuisance in Innsbruck and receiving a number of letters from the diocese asking him to leave, Institoris slunk back to Cologne, humiliated, and began writing the *Malleus Maleficarum*.⁵⁹ The text acted both as a defense of himself and his worldview as well as a witch hunting manual, complete with a papal bull, or witch-bull, at the beginning of the text.⁶⁰ Notably the *Malleus* and the bull were only tangentially related, as he had received the bull some years prior to the writing of the *Malleus* and his scandalous handling of Schueberin's case. But nonetheless he and his co-author Jacob Sprenger, a fellow Dominican priest Kramer enlisted to add credence to his claims, cloaked themselves in the legitimacy of the church. Because of the absolute authority that Kramer and Sprenger projected, the *Malleus Maleficarum* had eight printed editions by 1500 and another five editions by 1520, becoming one of the most, if not the most, popular and influential witch hunting manuals of Early Modern Europe.⁶¹

The impact of the *Malleus Maleficarum* was extreme and it was buoyed by its perceived authority. When it was first published there was considerable debate over witches among theologians; some thought that witches could fly and others thought they

⁵⁸Broedel, Hans. *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft : Theology and Popular Belief*, Manchester University Press, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=589314>.

⁵⁹ The Bishop was shocked that Kramer hadn't left after months of harassing the residents of Innsbruck, to the point where he told Kramer to leave before the husbands of the women he was questioning, and sometimes taking into custody of his own accord, took up arms against him. Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

spoke directly to demons, but everyone agreed witches were evil in different ways. There was not a solidified, actionable concept of what a witch was. Within 50 years of the *Malleus*' publication there was, and it directly aligned with the definitions detailed in Kramer and Sprenger's manual. So, what did the *Malleus* even say, and why did it gain such popularity? In his translated edition of the *Malleus*, *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft : Theology and Popular Belief*, Hans Peter Broedel explains:

The simple presence of a comprehensive, authoritative guidebook created a certain uniformity of discourse in subsequent witchcraft debate. Almost immediately, authors of witch-treatises began to refer to Institoris and Sprenger as accepted authorities on the subject. In an extensive treatise written in the early sixteenth century, the Dominican Inquisitor Sylvester Prieras treats the *Malleus* throughout as the authoritative witchcraft text, and refers to Institoris as a *vir magnus*.⁶²

The witchcraft detailed in the *Malleus* was also the people's witchcraft, and it focused on words and deeds as the witch's "tell". This is likely due to Sprenger and Kramer's own experiences as Inquisitors in small towns; the *maleficium* or evil magic done by the witches they tried was rooted in digestible actions like killing livestock and causing illness. The witches were literal devils and servants of evil, but they weren't usually trying to destroy the world. The longevity of the *Malleus*' popularity is also unusual, as it was not the only witch hunting or anti-witch treatise to be produced during the 300 years witch trials took place in Europe. Over 30 editions of the *Malleus Maleficarum* were published, which translated to the continent wide distribution of as

⁶² Broedel, Hans. *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief*, Manchester University Press, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=589314>. Also, *Vir Magnus* is Latin for "great man"

many as 50,000 copies.⁶³ Broedel notes that by the time this was happening, in part due to its age and in part due to it being the acceptable starting point of witch studies, the *Malleus Maleficarum* was considered a “classic.”⁶⁴ It was even used by other scholars as the first section of their own treatises on the topic, and that “for generations of scholars, investigations into the problem of witchcraft began quite literally with Institoris and Sprenger’s famous text.”⁶⁵

During the same time that the *Malleus* was published, in the 15th century, 15 other similar texts had been published, but the one that broke through was the *Malleus*. One earlier text was Jaquier’s *Flagellum haereticorum facinariourum* published in 1458. It focused on witches as evil heretics that “were organized and used to fly to the atrocious Sabbath ceremonies, where they indulged in sexual orgies with the devil and feasted on roasted unbaptized infants”.⁶⁶ It could be said that *Flagellum*, which stood in the face of the Church’s *canon episcopi* doctrine on witches by claiming they were a true threat rather than an illusion, walked so that the *Malleus Maleficarum* could run.

The rise of witch trials was not uniform, occurring at different levels of intensity across Europe and the United Kingdom at varying times, and they were not carried out by the same types of people. The Catholic Church and the Protestant Church both participated in witch trials, as did the comparatively secular criminal courts. The ramp up of witch trials occurred after the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* and reached its

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴ Broedel, Hans. *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft: Theology and Popular Belief*, Manchester University Press, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=589314>.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 8

⁶⁶Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. “The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist’s Perspective.” *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 1–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778849>.

peak between 1550 and 1650.⁶⁷ Some witch trials were exceedingly large, conducted by elite Inquisitors on behalf of the Christian sect they followed, others small and rural. Some of the most violent trials occurred in Germany, namely those in Trier between 1581 and 1593, in Fulda between 1603 to 1606, in Würzburg between 1625-1631, and in Bamberg between 1626–1631.⁶⁸ All four trials were conducted by Catholic Bishops and Inquisitors. Scotland too had a large anti-witch surge, largely due to their King's paranoia; King James IV of Scotland claimed to be personally responsible for the deaths of over 300 witches and believed a cabal of witches had conspired to kill him at least once.⁶⁹ Trials also occurred across Europe including in the Netherlands, Switzerland, France, Spain, England and Italy.⁷⁰ A large point of contention among scholars studying the history and impact of witchcraft is the number of people tried and executed during this time. A number that is still bandied about but is most certainly created out of whole cloth is 9 million, and most if not all scholars agree that this number is a false claim. Once you exit the realm of the unimaginable you are still left with a pretty wide range. The likely total is no greater than 50,000 people. Some scholars do say that with inconsistent record keeping the number may be as high as 100,000, but based on the evidence we do have available most scholars have placed it at around 40,000-50,000 people executed for witchcraft across Europe.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Burns, William E., *Witch hunts in Europe and America: an encyclopedia*, Greenwood, Westport, Conn., 2003

⁶⁹ Normand, Lawrence, and Gareth Roberts. "History, Witchcraft, Texts." In *Witchcraft in Early Modern Scotland: James' VI's Demonology and the North Berwick Witches*. Liverpool University Press, 2000. Liverpool Scholarship Online, 2014. doi: 10.5949/liverpool/9780859896801.003.0001.

⁷⁰ Ben-Yehuda, Nachman. "The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th Centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective." *American Journal of Sociology* 86, no. 1 (1980): 1–31. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2778849>.

⁷¹ Kors, Alan Charles; Peters, Edward (2001). *Witchcraft in Europe, 400–1700: a documentary history*. University of Pennsylvania Press. p. 17. ISBN 0-8122-1751-9., Barstow, Anne Llewellyn (1994). *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*. Pandora. ISBN 0-06-250049-X.

Content Analysis of the *Malleus Maleficarum*

“Every evil is small compared to the evil of a woman”

Ecclesiasticus 25[:22–23]

“A witch is always a woman.”

Roald Dahl, *The Witches*

In many ways the *Malleus Maleficarum* was a small snowball rolled down a hill, gathering momentum until the Witch Craze of the mid-1500’s crashed like an avalanche over Europe. It is my goal to examine this text closely in order to understand what is actually being argued by the authors, the ways in which these arguments are made, and the style of the writing itself. Published in 1487 under the name of Jacob Sprenger, only to have Heinrich Kramer’s name added as second author, there was a reasonable expectation that this treatise would spread due to the advances made in printing technology. The Gutenberg press had been conceived and implemented approximately 30 years earlier, and moveable typeface revolutionized the dissemination of paper materials across Europe. In fact, we know the *Malleus* enjoyed success, from its publication until 1520 twenty editions were issued, and between 1576 and 1670 sixteen additional editions were printed.⁷² There is some argument as to why this happened when there were other treatises on the topic being produced, but I would argue a large part of what made the

⁷² Russell, Jeffrey Burton. 1972. *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press. 79

Malleus a desirable product was the inclusion of Kramer and Sprenger's Apostolic Bull. This Apostolic, or Papal, Bull was permission issued by Pope Innocent VIII for Kramer and Sprenger to find and hunt witches, and declared the threat of sorcery to be immense. It should be noted that this Bull made no note of the two writing what amounted to a witch hunting manual, but the inclusion of it in the text cloaked their work in the direct authority of the Church. It was also formally approved for publication by the University of Cologne, though there are some members of the board who signed off on the book that later stated they had not read it, and further whisperings that their signatures may have been forged. Though no direct evidence of this forgery exists, the mere mention of it helps to show the consequences of the *Malleus* and its critical reception. The *Malleus* makes numerous claims that at the time were anathema to the common thought regarding witches and witchcraft, specifically an obsessive fixation on the deviant sexuality Kramer ascribed to witches. It also expanded greatly on the Satanist aspect of sorcery, stating that the act of being a witch required in all cases a renunciation of the True Faith and worship of the Devil. This was not common thought amongst other Catholic Inquisitors, and Kramer specifically was not well liked as a person by his fellow clergy. Despite this, and Kramer's blunder in Innsbruck, he and Sprenger were able to produce and disseminate an incredibly influential text. To understand these men is to understand the *Malleus*, so that is where we will begin.

The Men Behind the *Malleus*

Heinrich Kramer (a.k.a. Henry Institorus, a.k.a Henricus Institor) and all combinations therein, was an old man when the *Malleus* was written. To be fair so was Jacob Sprenger. They were 57 and 51 respectively when the *Malleus* was originally

published, an age range you didn't often reach during medieval times. Remarkably Kramer lived to 75, only dying in 1505, while Sprenger preceded him by 10 years dying in 1495 at the age of 59.⁷³ Kramer was born in lower Alsace, a region in what is now France on the German border, in 1430 and joined the Dominican order early in life.⁷⁴ He was by all accounts a fiery speaker known for passionate public sermons, and was a huge proponent of Papal supremacy.⁷⁵ Sprenger was born around 1436 in Basle or Rheinfelden in what was then considered Further Austria but is now Switzerland.⁷⁶ Both men were tasked by Pope Innocent VIII to eliminate witches in Northern Germany, but also had a substantial connection to Western Germany by way of the University of Cologne where their treatise was originally published and where Sprenger taught as the Dean of the faculty of Theology after being elected to the position in 1480.⁷⁷ This no doubt helped get the *Malleus* published as Sprenger would have been a known commodity to his peers at the University, and it might explain why some members who signed off on the text later said they had not read it before doing so.

An Explanation of Structure

I used the Christopher S. Mackay translated text from 2009, and I must make a special mention that he explicitly translates witches and witchcraft as sorcerers and sorcery to avoid the modern connotations of "witch." The *Malleus* is broken up into three distinct sections, called here and in the book Part 1, 2, and 3. Part 1 is credited to Jacob Sprenger, while 2 and 3 are Kramer's. Upon reading the text it becomes clear that these

⁷³ Rothman, David J., Stephen Marcus, and Stephanie A. Kiceluk. 1995. *Medicine and Western Civilization*. Rutgers University Press. 274.

⁷⁴ Ibid. 274

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

two men have a very different way of communicating, and the stylistic difference between Part 1 and its fellows is stark. Part 1 follows what I would describe as a very traditional, formal debate style: first, a question is presented; second, an argument or series of arguments is made that attempts to answer the question; third, counter arguments to these are provided; and fourth, the author's own thoughts are provided and given as the "true answer." The text is dense, assuming extensive ecclesiastical knowledge of the reader, and meandering. Despite that, the strict structure is consistently followed. This section of the book directly deals with and answers the question of whether or not witches are real, with the clear position of the author being that witches are very real and very dangerous. Parts 2 and 3 deviate from the structure of Part 1, and though there are points at which questions are clearly marked and laid out, the overall feeling of the text is far less academic. One could even describe it as conversational when compared to the rigidity found in Part 1, and Kramer has a clear preference for storytelling and advice giving. Both quote heavily from other texts, especially the Bible, with particular attention paid to the works of Thomas Aquinas, Aristotle, and German theologian Johannes Nider.

Both men use fear as a huge motivator in their writing, after all it was necessary for the *Malleus* to explain how dangerous witches were to the Faith and by extension Good Christians. They lean heavily into the everyday threat witches present and that they are in every village. They say that the witches are responsible for a host of bad things such as hailstorms, blight, the death of livestock, and sterility that, while naturally occurring, could devastate a community. They offer potential relief and hope to women who had lost children, assuring them that it is not their fault but the actions of a witch,

and that they could be innocent and still tested in this way; God could allow this to happen even if you were a most devoted servant. This would be presented to them through their parish priest, as women could not read, but the words presented would still be said as a comfort. Sprenger's section is exceedingly academic though it still attempts to convey how dangerous, and disgusting, witches are. Kramer uses his penchant for storytelling to give compelling, albeit vague, examples of what happens when witches are allowed to roam freely. The authors are unified in their desire to see witchcraft stamped out and agree on how that should be done: witch hunts, trials, and executions.

Part 1 focuses on arguing that witches are real. Part 2 is split into two sections, one that discusses the afflictions witches can produce and the reasons they would do this with the aid of demons, and another that provides potential remedies for the afflictions. Among the list of remedies are holy sacraments and exorcisms, fasting and prayer. Though there is an acknowledgement that some diseases and curses can be cured with the use of further sorcery, such actions are sinful and are condemned. The second half of Part 2 also goes into more depth on how some of the curses are brought about, such as the specific animals used or places that the offending items and animal parts are placed to incite disease and affliction. Part 3 explains the way in which official witch trials should commence and be carried out in order to find those truly guilty of witchcraft and purge them from the Earth.

The Arguments Made

The greatest and most overarching arguments in the *Malleus* are that witchcraft is real, that witches are real, that they pose a huge risk to everyone and their souls, that they make pacts with demons and the Devil in order to perform dark magics, and that they are

as virulent as a plague. There are of course facets to this argument, such as who these people were, what they did, how to identify them, how to persecute them successfully, and why God allowed any of this to happen in the first place. It is important to understand that during this time, although we were squarely in the New Testament version of Biblical understanding where a merciful Father had sent His son to die for all man's sins, God was still a rather hands-off deity, great architect who allowed His creations the freedom to choose damnation or salvation for themselves, only granting His Grace to those select, pure few. Philosophically speaking this was a point in history where science had begun to degrade men's faith, calling things previously assumed into question. We were some ways off, for instance, from the controversial Copernican solar-centric model of the galaxy of the mid 1500's, but the *Malleus* was written well into the Renaissance. That meant that there were a number of changes happening, cultural and otherwise, and the greatest fear men in power had was that they would lose everything to the tides of change. The Church especially, an institution monarchies relied upon for their legitimacy and not the other way around, was full of men now plagued by doubt: What if angels and demons weren't real? What if the Devil wasn't? What if God didn't exist? These thoughts, albeit blasphemous, were becoming more common, and some decided that they should prove the existence of God. Perversely this meant proving true Evil existed, and to do that one had to find evidence of the Devil; what better way to do that than by identifying his earthly minions? For if witches existed, and to exist they had to sign a contract with a demon, and those demons were ruled by Satan, then Lucifer had fallen from Heaven into Hell, and that meant that Heaven was real and so was God.

Witches and witchcraft were not of particular concern at the beginning of the 15th century and neither was the belief that anyone would worship Satan. By the time the European Witch Craze had truly set off around 1550, those were topics of grave concern. There wasn't debate as to whether or not witches existed anymore. A large part of this had to do with how influential the *Malleus* was and the ways in which its authors explicitly tied witchcraft to Satanism. For authors and theologians in the 16th century the *Malleus* was a reputable text, and it seems as though time had both eliminated all its original detractors and given it a position as a foundational text in witch-hunting circles.

What Makes a Witch?

A fundamental part of the *Malleus'* definition of sorcery and its practitioners is that a contract must be made with a demon in order for a witch to gain power, and although demons could act without witches in many regards, they choose to use humans to compound the insult made to God. There were three critical ingredients in making a witch: "namely the demon, the sorceress and God's permission".⁷⁸ Because in the Catholic understanding of the world, which itself was one of God's creations, no action by a demon that could affect humans could come about without God allowing it to happen. This begs the question as to why God grants this permission and the answer is provided that, "He permits evil things for the sake of good things," to maintain celestial balance.⁷⁹ God also allows this "[b]ecause the demons have been delegated by God to train humans and to punish the damned," which is a pretty way of saying that God enjoys testing mortals.⁸⁰ Now it could be argued that this version of God is rather malicious,

⁷⁸ Mackay, Christopher S. *The Hammer of Witches: A Complete Translation of the Malleus Maleficarum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009. doi:10.1017/CBO9780511626746. (119).

⁷⁹ Ibid. 155

⁸⁰ Ibid. 135

since what he's gambling with is someone else's eternal damnation, but this shouldn't necessarily come as a surprise to those who know the story of Job. In short, Job, who appears to be an ever faithful man, is tested by God and the Devil in a battle to see if his faith is true. Job endures torturous misfortunes that befall him and his family, including the death of all of his children, and yet throughout he remains steadfastly loyal in his love for God. Because of this, at the end of the test his family, property, and ability to exist without the threat of imminent danger is restored to him due to his piety. There is no reading of Job's story, if you believe that the Bible is a literal and true document as these men did, where God seems like a great and benevolent power who wouldn't do this again on a smaller scale. To believe in God's predilection for testing his followers is to be consistent with established precedent. Of course he would let demons and the Devil tempt you; he routinely asked for unreasonable things from even his most devoted servants.

The Role of Demons

The Devil, and by extension demons, also despise humans. They seek to cause them pain and misfortune. According to the *Malleus* cooperating with God in this way "is also in accordance with their evil. Since they oppose the human race, when they attack it in an orderly manner, they think that they cause humans more harm, as in fact they do".⁸¹ Because, as celestial or higher bodies, demons retain no corporeal form and instead exist as air, they require in some instances the help of sorceresses to commit their evil acts. As per the *Malleus*, "[l]et us merely rely on the words of the Saints and conclude the Catholic Truth, that for the effects caused by sorcery, which is the matter about which we are speaking at present, sorcerers always co-operate with the demons, and the one can

⁸¹ Ibid. 135

achieve nothing without the other”.⁸² Though it is certain that in this understanding demons can act independently in order to cause illusions, such as a person appearing as a beast, they cannot in fact truly invade a human’s mind or the seat of their soul as that territory is held solely by God. They can also make for themselves a humanlike husk, shaped by the air and earth, that they can inhabit for the purpose of leading others to commit carnal sins, in particular to collect semen for the purpose of impregnating women. It is said that when they don this form it appears to have working eyes and a mouth, but this too is an illusion. For a demon cannot truly speak or see and instead moves the air in a way that creates a facsimile of sound and with his other senses as a celestial being is able to perceive what surrounds him. In addition, there is no pleasure derived by demons during sexual intercourse, and in fact the *Malleus* states that some demons abhor the act. Instead of every demon acting as an incubus or succubus “certain very low demons do perpetrate some filthy acts from which the higher ones are excluded because of the nobility of their nature,” and some demons pull double duty “[f]or the same demon who is a succubus in terms of the man becomes an incubus in terms of the woman,” thus allowing those higher demons who find the act disgusting and abstain from it.⁸³ As to why this is done at all by demons is explained thusly, “so that in this way [the demon] may use a foul act like this to taint the body and soul in each person (both the man’s and the woman’s)”.⁸⁴ To say that there is a sexual obsession present in the *Malleus* would be correct, as this is not the only instance where the topic of carnal acts and sins is

⁸²Ibid. 119

⁸³ Ibid. 129, 135

⁸⁴ Ibid. 129

discussed at length. They explain some of the finer technical points, like who the potential child's sire is as follows:

First, such demons practice the most revolting sexual acts, not for the sake of pleasure but in order to taint the soul and body of those under or on whom they lie. Second, through such an act women can conceive perfectly and give life to the extent that in the suitable part of the woman's womb the demons can apply a human seed to the proportionate matter that already exists there. This method is analogous to the way that they can also gather the seeds for other things to bring about certain effects. Third, in the begetting of such offspring, only the aspect of movement in location is ascribed to the demons but not the begetting itself, which takes its start not from the virtue of the demon or of the body assumed by him, but from the virtue of the man whose seed it was. Therefore, the child begotten is not the demon's but the other man's.⁸⁵

Demonic Possession and Trickery

In some cases, a person is affected by demonic forces in the absence of witchcraft, though this is unusual as it is much more advantageous to taint one soul while harassing another. Kramer lays out a number of these as he examines whether or not demonic possession is real, and, if it is, to what degree the demon controls the person. The demonic possession is also somewhat different from our modern understanding as it has a broader spectrum of possible symptoms. Some people are considered to be inhabited by the Devil, especially those "with any given mortal sin," because their actions are believed to have invited the Devil.⁸⁶ If they had not sinned and left the state of Grace, they could not have been inhabited in such a way. Since "any mortal sin results in a human being sentenced to serve the Devil," that means that, at any time, the Devil can tempt the human who is then "moved at any urging of temptation".⁸⁷ The type of possession that

⁸⁵ Ibid. 132

⁸⁶ Ibid. 343

⁸⁷ Ibid. 344

we would consider typical is what Kramer refers to as being “seized” by the Devil.⁸⁸ In these cases, the demons can cause myriad problems for the person like causing them to “harm people,” removing from the person the “use of reason temporarily,” or making them act “like unreasoning wild beasts”.⁸⁹ The reason why God would allow someone to be possessed is as follows, “[s]ometimes a person is possessed for his greater merit, sometimes for someone else’s trivial misdeed, sometimes for his own venial sin, sometimes for someone else’s serious sin, and sometimes for his own great crime”.⁹⁰ With so many potential causes, the only way to determine why someone is possessed would be to investigate the matter further.

As to why anyone would be possessed “for his greater merit,” one must understand that Catholicism at this time blended together both a feeling of superiority over others and an inclination towards self-suffering and martyrdom. It was important that no one got too full of themselves, for pride was a sin, and to have performative humility so everyone knew how pious you were. Because of this some people asked to be possessed. Kramer describes one such man, “a certain Father of a most holy way of life,” who asked God “with all his heart that he should be possessed by a demon” (345).⁹¹ As to why he did this the Father was allegedly “so endowed with the grace of driving out demons that they were put to flight not only by this Father’s own words but even by his letters and shirt of goat hair,” and had become “very famous in the world” for his deeds (345).⁹² He felt himself tempted by “vainglory,” and “he stood up to this vice like a

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid. 344

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid. 345

⁹² Ibid.

man,” asking God to let the Devil possess him “in order that he should be further humbled” (345).⁹³ Kramer states the possession did in fact happen, though no specific details are given, and the Father had to “be tied up” during his possession (345).⁹⁴ The possession suddenly ended after five months, after “[a]ll the common remedies for those possessed by demons had to be used on him,” though it is unclear as to whether or not these remedies helped or if instead God decided the Father had humbled himself.⁹⁵ Either way at the end of the possession he “was instantly freed from the vainglory and the demon” and presumably returned to his work as a priest.⁹⁶

It was also possible to be possessed because of someone else’s sins, or misdeeds, or one’s own incredibly minor actions. Kramer tells the story of a man called St. Eleutherius the Abbot who was staying at a monastery when the nuns there “without his knowledge... ordered a small boy who was being harassed every night by a demon to be placed by his cell” in the hopes that his Holy presence would free the boy.⁹⁷ It did, much to the Abbot’s delight, but in his euphoria he bragged about it to his brothers. Upon hearing this the Devil once again set about to harass the boy and “with difficulty he was freed (the same day) through the tears and fasting of the holy man and his fellow brothers”.⁹⁸ Another story is about a man named Moses, described in one of the texts Kramer cites, who, after uttering “a rather harsh statement” when he lost an argument, “was immediately surrendered to a fearsome demon” who forced him to put “human

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 345

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

excrement in his mouth” as a punishment.⁹⁹ This is said to have happened for the “sake of cleansing, so that the stain of even a moment’s misdeed should not remain on him,” and the man was freed after the prayer of another Abbot.¹⁰⁰ Other possessions happened for what seem like exceedingly petty reasons, like a poor nun who was possessed after eating lettuce “without first protecting herself with the Sign of the Cross.”¹⁰¹

A Hatred for Women

It should be noted that the sexual obsession of Sprenger and Kramer is focused mainly on women, a group of people for whom they had a particularly high level of disdain.

The misogyny present in the *Malleus* was not uncommon for its time, though by modern standards many of the passages seem shocking; they would have been received well by the treatise’s intended recipients. That a woman was less than a man, in all ways, was considered a very reasonable belief to hold. Societally speaking during this time in Europe women held no legal rights; they were the property first of their fathers, then their husbands. If they were old widows, they had little perceived value. Their main job was to produce and raise children, and in doing so create the next generation of laborers. That they could not read and were often completely uneducated was a non-issue, in part because many men at this time were also illiterate and uneducated, but also because educating women was seen as pointless and dangerous. As to why it would be so, one must understand how very little women were trusted with even their own minds, and that an outspoken woman knew herself to be a target. To blend in was to live, as much as

⁹⁹ Ibid. 346

¹⁰⁰ Ibid

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 346

living in this time could be called that and not just the most basic form of survival. Disease was rampant, as was famine, war was an ever-present threat, infant and maternal mortality rates were incredibly high, and people still had to worry over the state of their souls. Sprenger and Kramer both believed that women were generally foul, untrustworthy creatures, and that this stemmed from their very creation, that “[t]hese defects can also be noticed in the original shaping of woman, since she was formed from a curved rib, that is, from the rib of the chest that is twisted and contrary, so to speak, to man. From this defect there also arises the fact that since she is an imperfect animal, she is always deceiving, and for this reason she is always deceptive.”¹⁰² Sprenger even goes so far as to say that the Latin word for woman reveals this as well, “[f]or the word “femina” [the Latin word for woman] is spoken as “fe” and “minus,” because she has and keeps less [Latin “minus”] faith [Latin “fidem”].”¹⁰³ This is of course an absurd twisting of etymology, but the fact remains that he did publish this as the truth.

It is possible that the authors wanted to appear more reasonable or validated in their feelings towards women because they quoted a number of other writers and texts when describing the ways in which women were terrible. From Matthew [19:10]:

What else is a woman but the enemy of friendship, an inescapable punishment, a necessary evil, a natural temptation, a desirable disaster, a danger in the home, a delightful detriment, an evil of nature, painted with nice color? Therefore, if it is a sin to send her away, then since it is appropriate to keep her, now there is truly an obligatory sort of torture in that we are either to commit acts of adultery in sending her away or have daily quarrels.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Ibid. 165

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 162

Sprenger quoted who he said was Seneca, but was actually Publilius Syrus, as saying “[a] woman either loves or hates. No third thing has been given. For a woman to cry is a lie. Two kinds of tears are kept in the eyes of women, one of true grief and one of treachery. When a woman thinks alone, she thinks evil thoughts.”¹⁰⁵ From both Apocalypse 6[:8] and Ecclesiastes 7[:27]: “and about whom the Church now laments because of the huge number of sorceresses: ‘I have found woman more bitter than death. She is a hunters’ snare, her heart is bait, and her hands are chains. He who pleases God will shun her. He who is a sinner will be captured by her.’ She is more bitter than death, that is, than the Devil: ‘His name was Death’.”¹⁰⁶ They fully believed that marriage was a trap for men, where they would be tied to an evil, amoral woman who would drain them. They believed in rare, good women but insisted that in order to be one women had to reject all carnal temptation, something they thought most women couldn’t do.¹⁰⁷ In fact, they said, as to why women sin more than men, “[t]here is a natural explanation, namely that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear in connection with many filthy carnal acts.”¹⁰⁸ If it were not for the presence of the Virgin Mary in Christian belief, I don’t know that these men would have had a positive female role model for all the evil women they believe existed. They thought women were tainted because of Eve, not only because of her coming from Adam’s “curved” rib but also her actions, “[i]t is also clear in connection with the first woman that they have less faith by nature.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. 163

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. 169-70

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. 164

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 165

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

Essentially women were all that was wrong with humanity: greedy, petty, sordid and base. This made them prime targets for demons who wanted to corrupt human souls. In reference to why there were so many evil women the authors wrote, “that there are three elements in the world that do not know how to maintain a middle course in terms of goodness or evil, and instead attain a certain pinnacle in goodness or evil when they pass over the boundaries of their condition, these three things being a tongue, a churchman and a woman.”¹¹⁰ Women were thought to only sin for one essential reason when compared to men who may be drawn to a demonic pact for many reasons, “[f]or the basis of all the vices of women is greed.”¹¹¹ When given a push women could simply not help themselves; they fell into evil and committed evil deeds, and according to the authors that push usually involved being spurned. In fact, there are numerous stories conveyed by Kramer where women fight over a man, presented usually as some great prize, and when they lose fly into a fit of rage and seek to condemn their opponent. They are evil “since they are defective in all the powers of both soul and body,” but they also “cause more acts of sorcery to happen against those for whom they feel jealousy,” because they are petty and vain.¹¹² Sprenger goes so far as to say “the principal cause contributing to the increase of sorceresses is the grievous war between married and unmarried men and women,” implying that a woman’s inability to win a husband, either outright or away from his wife, was enough to compel a woman to sign away her soul.¹¹³ In fact, it was believed she would do it for even less than that; she would sign it all away simply to have

¹¹⁰ Ibid. 160

¹¹¹ Ibid. 163

¹¹² Ibid. 164

¹¹³ Ibid. 166

her lust satiated because “[e]verything is governed by carnal lusting, which is insatiable in them...and for this reason they even cavort with demons to satisfy their lust.”¹¹⁴

Women were portrayed in the *Malleus* as completely unhinged, unable to control themselves and their impulses, and extremely dangerous when given any measure of power. This was described generally as being in flux or prone to fluctuations in temperament, and this caused a myriad of troubles. It made them more superstitious because the fluctuations created a “nature more easily impressed upon to receive revelations through the impression of the disembodied spirits,” which sometimes led to good things but more often than not led to destruction.¹¹⁵ This destruction sometimes took the form of human sacrifice, as witches were believed to give babies to demons. Apparently being prone to mood swings made it so “they can more quickly offer children to the demons, as in fact they do.”¹¹⁶ Additionally, they were unable to keep secrets because “they have loose tongues and can hardly conceal from their female companions the things that they know through evil art.”¹¹⁷ Perhaps those loose tongues contributed to the authors’ view of those women in history, including Biblical history, that had been given power only to abuse it such as Jezebel and Cleopatra, about whom they wrote “it is no wonder if the world now suffers on account of the evil of women.”¹¹⁸ It should be noted that somehow, according to the authors, it was true all at once that women were

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* 170

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* 164

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* 168

devious masterminds and at the same time exceedingly stupid: “[w]omen are generally like children, possessing trivial views.”¹¹⁹

An Issue of Class

Throughout the *Malleus* it becomes clear that there is a very different set of rules and expectations depending on your place in society, and that in some cases you are immune from a certain level of scrutiny and retribution if your station is high enough. This is in part demonstrated in Kramer’s use of language. He makes a note of saying, when giving his anecdotal evidence of witchcraft, that there are some people he cannot discuss by name or locations that he cannot mention because to do so would embarrass a public official or noble. He makes no such considerations for the witches he discusses, women that were typically much less powerful and rich than their tormenters. They were given no anonymity even in death. The level of vitriol was also quite different, as were the number of chances given to repent and change your ways. If you were found to have been using the services of a magician, who in these instances was always male, it meant you were rich enough to hire one into your entourage or court. In these cases, you were given a year once the accusations were made public to denounce them and repent, to end your crimes as a heretic and resume a life of faithful service to God. No such room was given to witches, regardless of their gender. If you were found to have committed witchcraft, your only redemption lay in confessing your sins and asking for forgiveness before you were executed. No second chances were available due to the heinousness of the crime, but also because the people committing these acts had little or no political power as individuals.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 165

As an example, when Kramer is discussing the confession of a condemned witch, he writes that she “lead astray a certain devout maiden who was the daughter of a certain very rich man (there is no need to name him, since she is dead, it having been arranged by divine mercy that evil should not make her heart depraved).”¹²⁰ In another case Kramer says “a certain knight was killed by acts of sorcery, as were many others whom I refrain from mentioning. Among these is a certain nobleman’s son,” clearly showing a preference towards preserving the anonymity of the nobles impacted by sorcery.¹²¹ By comparison you have a named sorcerer, Stadlin, who worked in the diocese of Lausanne making trouble until he was captured, tortured and killed. In his case both a name and place are given. In some instances, Kramer’s lack of information is still telling, and if you had been in the know and in the area at this time you could have probably found out who he meant by “[a] certain high-born count of the land of Westrich, within the territory of the diocese of Strasburg.”¹²² Even in this case the name of the count is protected, at least on the surface level.

In the case of holy men, saints and other religious individuals, names are sometimes given, though not always. Saints are routinely named, likely because they were beyond reproach as canonized figures within Catholicism, and also to add credibility and weight to stories involving them. Other Inquisitors are sometimes named, like Nider, and praised for their work in the field. This again is probably a way to legitimize the information Kramer and Sprenger cite from their written works and stories. Minor religious figures, like priests and Abbots, are not important enough to be named.

¹²⁰ Ibid. 277

¹²¹ Ibid. 365

¹²² Ibid. 280

Merely by existing, they enable a story to be told; the specifics of who they were could actually undermine the overall moral, especially if someone went and found them in the wild to discuss their star turn in the *Malleus*.

The Crimes of Witchcraft

Witch Midwives, Child Sacrifice & Maternal Sorcery

One of the greatest contradictions present in the *Malleus*, when compared to the lived experiences of people at this time, is certainly the hatred and distrust Sprenger and Kramer held for midwives. As a group they were in fact well trusted, and one would hope they were since they were responsible for the safe delivery of children and the survival of mothers. There are multiple mentions in the *Malleus* of the evil of midwives including this opinion given almost offhandedly by Sprenger about “midwives, who surpass all others in evil.”¹²³ They viewed midwifery as a baby-to-Devil pipeline, and believed that even if the child survived, they were condemned by whoever delivered them. These witch-midwives remanded unto the Devil the souls of the babies they delivered. They did so surreptitiously, like when they attend the birth of a non-witch and take “the baby out of the room as if to do something to revive him” but instead verbally sacrifice them “to the Prince of the Demons (Lucifer) and to the other demons (in the kitchen above the fire).”¹²⁴ Children who survived but were offered in this way fell, according to *Malleus*, into two camps: the truly innocent, and the thoroughly damned. Kramer writes,

Speaking of the innocent, who are not offered to the demons by sorceress mothers but are secretly snatched away by midwives...from the embrace and womb of a respectable mother, it should be the pious belief that such innocent children are

¹²³ Ibid.160

¹²⁴ Ibid. 369

not delivered to such a degree that they are rendered imitators of such great crimes but instead imitate their father's virtues.¹²⁵

Midwives specifically were also accused of murder and cannibalism since they had the power to kill a child in the womb with magic or once it was born. Following this they would take the dead child either to a witch's Sabbat where they would consume it alongside other witches and demons, or use its body to make potions. Kramer alleges one such woman was discovered only after the parcel she was carrying came undone, dropping a baby's arm, and the passersby who saw it were able to testify to this. They had, apparently, some extensive anatomy knowledge and were able to tell "by the joints that it was not a piece of meat but the arm of a child."¹²⁶ They then contacted the authorities, an investigation revealed a baby had died "before baptism and was lacking an arm," and the witch was arrested.¹²⁷ She was "[e]xposed to questioning under torture" and confessed to this crime and "she confessed that she had killed babies without number."¹²⁸

Other witch-midwives were executed after torture induced confessions, confessions that were seen as exceedingly credible by the Inquisitors. According to Kramer, "greater losses are inflicted on the Faith by midwives in connection with this Heresy of Sorceresses, and this has also been proven by the confession of certain others who were later burned to ashes", and that "one midwife who was burned to ashes confessed to having killed more than forty children," while yet another "confessed that she had killed countless children."¹²⁹ The midwife who had confessed to killing forty

¹²⁵ Ibid. 362

¹²⁶ Ibid. 368

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

babies said she did so by stabbing them with “a pin into their heads through the crown straight down into the brain,” immediately after birth.¹³⁰

The reason why a witch-midwife would kill a baby before Baptism was to condemn it eternally, “[f]or the Devil knows that such children are excluded from entering the Kingdom of Heaven because of the penalty of loss or original sin.”¹³¹ This would cause the baby to not be brought to Heaven during the Final Judgment and instead be “consigned to eternal torments.”¹³²

You then have the second group of children described by Kramer, ones that were sacrificed so wholly by their mothers that there is nothing that could save them except some miracle. So, in addition to evil midwives, you had mothers whose actions negatively impacted their child’s soul, either on purpose or with seemingly minor actions. This can happen even from off-handed comments, like when a woman who does not wish to sleep with her husband does so, and when the husband “says, ‘I hope fruit results from that,’ she replies, ‘May that fruit be given to the Devil.’”¹³³ Children of witches are particularly predisposed to sorcery since they are of the mother’s bloodline, and “it is not inappropriate to say that children of this kind are disposed to commit acts of sorcery until the end of their lives.”¹³⁴ Kramer confirms this further, “[e]xperience shows that the daughters of sorceresses always have a bad reputation in similar regards, being imitators of their mothers’ crimes, and that in fact virtually the entire progeny is tainted,” though

¹³⁰ Ibid. 368

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid. 373

¹³⁴ Ibid.

little mention is made of sons, they are also addressed.”¹³⁵ Kramer writes about those men who are able to use magic without directly making a pact with the Devil: “he made use of the Devil’s support, because he had been offered and dedicated to the Devil with a curse by his mother or a midwife.”¹³⁶ He also states that witch mothers teach their daughters their dark secrets because “as a result of the agreement entered into with the demon they must always leave behind a successor and strive with the greatest effort to increase this breach of the Faith,” and presumably if no daughters exist she might teach magic to a son.¹³⁷ It is because of this that there are small children who are able to summon storms and hail, even though they are too young to understand why they can do this or to have renounced the Faith, the fact that their souls were given over to the Devil by their mothers give them the power to perform such feats.

I feel it necessary to explain another peculiar power witches had: the ability to remove the pain of torture. Odd that you would torture someone who couldn’t feel it, or that every witch you questioned chose to endure it rather than save themselves agony. The point could be made then that torturing them at all is pointless, but that doesn’t seem to have stopped them from trying. It is so frequent in the *Malleus* for the words “under torture” to accompany a confession that even in its absence I assume some foul play.

The Killing of Livestock & Destruction of Property

Weather events and healthy cattle were of particular concern to people since it was only through those things that they would have enough food to survive. It was also the case that people believed weather was decided by God. God chose the weather and

¹³⁵ Ibid. 374

¹³⁶ Ibid. 377

¹³⁷ Ibid. 374

gave permission to demons to change it, and those demons then partnered with sorceresses to create mayhem. Kramer writes that demons act as “His torturers,” and that through them God “justly inflicts the evils that are done in the world, as our sins demand.”¹³⁸ That demons were occasionally allowed to “cause fire to fall from heaven or lightning bolts to strike,” if God permitted it, and that even though the demons could do this independent of sorceresses they yet again chose to enlist them in order to corrupt their souls.¹³⁹

Weather Events

As he was wont to do Kramer cites a story from Nider, about a sorcerer named Stadlin who was responsible for adverse weather. When Stadlin was questioned, most likely under torture, how he summoned hail and rain and if the process was an easy one he said, “[i]t is easy for us to cause hailstorms, but we are not able to inflict harm at will,” and that sorcerers and sorceresses can “harm only those who are bereft of God’s help.”¹⁴⁰ The content of his confession very much feels like lip service, Stadlin was giving the Inquisitors what they wanted knowing that no matter what he did or said he was already condemned to die. I am convinced of this by his statement, “we cannot harm those who protect themselves with the Sign of the Cross,” and his explanation that the demon he called on “does not always cast the hailstorms and lightning bolts into the places intended by us, but does so according to the permission of the Living God.”¹⁴¹ There is no real reason why he would know something that so closely aligned with the accepted truth of the Inquisitors on his own, and demonic summoning for the purpose of weather control

¹³⁸ Ibid. 381

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. 382

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

was among the topics Kramer discouraged discussing in sermons “to the congregation because of the danger of giving instruction.”¹⁴² His confession was also incredibly vague as we will see in the explanation of his method of summoning.

As to how Stadlin summoned a storm, he said that he and other practitioners go to a field and “use certain words to beseech the Prince of All Demons to send one of his subordinates to strike the person indicated by us,” presumably with lightning.¹⁴³ In his case he claimed that they then had to sacrifice “a black rooster” to the demon the Devil chose to send “at a crossroads by casting [the rooster] up into the air.”¹⁴⁴ Though it is certainly possible that Stadlin’s entire confession has been simplified for brevity and to save the authors from having to write out unholy chants, it is also possible it was taken at face value without details because it suited the needs of his Inquisitors. It was also achieved only after the fourth round of torture had been applied. Kramer defends his claim that sorceresses can cause lightning, saying that if anyone had ever had any uncertainty about whether or not sorceresses were the cause of lightning strikes, “all uncertainty is removed,” due to a number of “unprompted confessions that sorceresses have caused them.”¹⁴⁵

Kramer goes on to further state that Stadlin was a leader of heretics, or “heresiarch,” having inherited the title from another sorcerer, Stafus, that “God’s justice” wanted dead.¹⁴⁶ Kramer actually says “to put an end to his evil,” but the manner by which this was achieved was God preventing the man from magically hiding himself as he often

¹⁴² Ibid. 376

¹⁴³ Ibid. 382

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. 386

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

did which allowed his enemies to find him and “the assassins unexpectedly stabbed him with swords and spears.”¹⁴⁷ Thus he “died a wretched death,” and his disciple Hoppo sought Stadlin as a new master.¹⁴⁸ I think it necessary to note Stadlin’s position because of the list of crimes he was accused of being able to perform alongside his disciples is incredibly long and varied, and this very well could have been because he was considered a leader of other sorcerers and therefore more capable. Hoppo and Stadlin allegedly knew how to do the following:

[B]ring dung, hay or grain or anything at all from a neighbor’s field to their own without anyone seeing, how to cause very strong hailstorms and harmful breezes as well as lightning bolts, how to cast toddlers walking along water in the sight of their parents into the water without anyone seeing, how to bring about barrenness in humans and domestic animals, how to reveal concealed things to others, how to cause harm in objects and bodies in any way at all, sometimes how to kill whomever they wished with a strike of lightning and to cause many other baneful things, where and when God’s justice permitted these things to happen.¹⁴⁹

In his own time as an Inquisitor Kramer also carried out a two-week long inquisition that he details in the text. There had apparently been a particularly nasty hailstorm that “for a distance of one mile... crushed the produce, crops and vineyards to such an extent that two years later the harvest in the vineyards was hardly judged to be plentiful.”¹⁵⁰ It is not clear if the inquisition took place immediately after and the harvest information was relayed to them afterwards, or began two years after the hailstorm when the harvest was assessed. It was started on the request of the townspeople. The investigation led to two women, “though the number of other suspects was not small,” named Anna of Mindelheim and Agnes the bathkeeper, whose full name was likely

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid. 382

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 383

Agnes Baderin.¹⁵¹ The dispositions of these women were apparently quite different and Kramer uses this to make a lesson of their experiences, namely that there is a right way and a wrong way to confess to witchcraft.

Held separately at different locations, so that they could not conspire, both women were tortured. Despite Kramer's insistence that it was "the lightest torture," the fact remains that torture was applied.¹⁵² They were questioned on different days, and Agnes was first. The torture was applied "in the presence of the notary by the ruler or leader of the citizens," a "great zealot for the Faith called Gehler," the magistrates Gehler had enlisted to help, and, by this account, Heinrich Kramer.¹⁵³ Her initial declarations of innocence were seen as proof that she had made herself immune to pain, or the "sorcery of silence," and proclaimed her innocence with "the spirit not of a woman but of a man."¹⁵⁴ In order to help avoid the sorceress in question to have "on her person the sorcery of silence," those who arrested her were told not to let her touch the ground and they were also told to cut all her hair off.¹⁵⁵ Not crying was seen as definitive proof you had hexed yourself numb. However, when the torture ceased and she "freely" gave a full account of her crimes, in order to achieve a satisfactory confession Agnes was questioned very specifically based on witness testimony. Now typically that is where her interrogation would have ended, but she had not yet confessed to two things; renouncing the Faith, and sleeping with demons. Since Kramer was carrying out this investigation, and he was absolutely obsessed with sex, this was unacceptable. After further

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. 383

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. 384

interrogation her story included her declaration “that for more than eighteen years she had submitted sexually to that incubus in addition to renouncing the Faith in every way.”¹⁵⁶

In comparison to Stadlin’s account, Agnes confessed to summoning the hailstorm after a demon summoned her. She also didn’t have to sacrifice anything for the demon to create a storm. The demon instructed her to bring him water, and when she walked to the area he had designated for their meeting, she found him standing under a tree waiting for her. Upon her arrival he instructed her “to dig a small hole and pour the water into it,” and while she sat and waited with the demon, she stirred the water with her finger “in the name of that devil and all the other demons.”¹⁵⁷ According to her it then “disappeared, and the Devil took it up into the air,” and that the hailstorm didn’t start until she was safely home.¹⁵⁸ When she was asked if she had any associates she said she did, a woman gathered across the field under the opposite tree: Anna of Mindelheim.

At this point, if there had ever been a chance for Anna to get out of this alive, that chance was gone. With the added accusation against her from Agnes she was damned. Because her “associate” had confessed to a certain timeline and series of events, Anna was encouraged, again under the “lightest torture” to do the same.¹⁵⁹ Kramer calls their matching confessions a “wondrous event,” and that there “was not the least discrepancy with what the first had confessed, in the location (claiming that she had been under such-and-such a tree and the other under another tree), or in the time (at noon), or in the

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid. 385

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

method (moving water put into a hole in the name of the Devil and all the demons), or in the interval of time (claiming that after the Devil had taken the water and raised it up, the hailstorm ensued after her return home).¹⁶⁰ With this they were judged to be guilty and “burned to ashes.”¹⁶¹ Kramer makes a note to describe how Agnes accepted her fate, describing her as “contrite,” and that she “earnestly commended herself to God, claiming that she was eager to die in order to escape the Devil’s injuries and holding the Cross in the embrace of her arms.”¹⁶² The same could not be said for Anna, who had every right to be furious at the situation she found herself in, and Anna “rejected the Cross.”¹⁶³

Women could also be accused of causing rainstorms through the use of brooms, specifically when women dip their brooms “in the water to cause rain by splattering the water into the air.”¹⁶⁴ For some reason Kramer feels the need to let readers know that they should not blame the broom and that “it does not by itself cause the rain.”¹⁶⁵ Of course the same cannot be said for the woman holding the broom, who cannot cause rain without the help of a devil, and “when she does such things as a sorceress as a result of an agreement entered into with a demon, she is rightly blamed, even though it is the demon who causes the rain.”¹⁶⁶ This is because it relates back to the initial agreement with the demon in which she gained power “because with her bad faith and work she serves the Devil, handing herself over to his allegiance.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid. 356

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

Sterility & Sickness Among Livestock

The *Malleus* very clearly state that “since domestic animals and the fruits of the earth are likewise part of the property of humans, clearly no one would presume to doubt that with the co-operation of God’s permission sorceresses can inflict various forms of harm on them too.”¹⁶⁸ This harm can take many forms, and typically involved sorceresses causing each other’s cattle to produce less milk or become sick. Though it should be noted that Kramer insists this happens among women generally, and not just sorceresses, and is very widespread. He says that even in “the smallest village...women do not cease to taint each other’s cows, to deprive them of milk and very often to kill them,” and like other types of crime begins slowly and on a small scale.¹⁶⁹ The sorceress wouldn’t start by outright killing an animal, she instead would slowly work up to that over a period of time. He also makes a claim, similar to the flux of women, that “any animal milk works on a monthly cycle like any other flow in a woman,” and that though there are natural reasons for milk production to drop, if there is no obvious reason the cause is sorcery.¹⁷⁰

As to how the milk flow could be impeded, one method involved mimicry being used to invoke a demon. Kramer writes that “some women take a position in any corner of their house, holding a pitcher between their thighs,” as if they were going to milk a cow and, sticking “a knife or some tool into the wall or a pillar,” call upon “their devil.”¹⁷¹ The devil then reroutes the milk of a healthy cow, one that the sorceress covets and is better than her own, and it pours out of the knife or tool like a font into the pitcher

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 375

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 375

¹⁷¹ Ibid. 376

being held by the sorceress. This redirection was vital to the successful invocation of demons, because though demons could not conjure something out of thin air that did not otherwise exist, they could steal it from somewhere and deliver it to a sorceress. In one such case Kramer says that he personally knew “certain people who belonged to a certain association,” whose identities are never given, wished to consume May butter.¹⁷² No clear definition is given for what makes this butter different, but I believe it is simply regular butter shaped “the way that village women sell it in May time.”¹⁷³ One among them said he could acquire some via a pact he had made with a demon, which seems extremely unusual given that these people were known to Kramer, and he “immediately took off his clothes and entered the flowing stream” they were resting beside.¹⁷⁴ Standing with his back to the current he “uttered certain words and moved the water with his hands behind his back,” and returned to his party with a large amount of “excellent butter.”¹⁷⁵ The demon in question that had given him the butter either did so by taking “butter hidden elsewhere,” or by “taking it from natural milk (from a natural cow) and suddenly (so to speak) congealing it into the nature of butter,” because the demon has knowledge of how to make butter “in a very short time.”¹⁷⁶ Kramer says this can happen with other goods as well, such as wine, and that “certain superstitious people who do not have wine or other necessities take a bottle or other container at night-time and by walking down some road suddenly have a jar full of wine,” because a demon will fill it with wine he has stolen from others.¹⁷⁷ Oddly this practice, of a person walking with a jug in the hopes that

¹⁷² Ibid. 377

¹⁷³ Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid. 378

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

it will be filled, is not attributed to sorceresses but instead to superstitious people who are not explicitly stated to have made a demonic pact.

As for the sickness and death of livestock, once the sorceress has tired of merely stealing milk, she can kill them “by touch and glance or by glance alone,” and by placing “some sorcery (device for sorcery) underneath the threshold of the door of the barn or in a place where they are regularly watered.”¹⁷⁸ The two women mentioned earlier who were executed, Anna of Mindelheim and Agnes the bathkeeper, both confessed to killing livestock by placing items near them and invoking a demon. In Agnes’ case she said she placed “bones of various varieties of animals” under “the threshold of the door of the barn,” and that she did this “[i]n the name of the Devil and the other demons.”¹⁷⁹ No clear indication is given for how many animals this killed. Anna was allegedly responsible for the deaths of twenty-three horses, all owned by the same man, and only stopped killing them after he threatened to murder her. According to her confession “she had done nothing other than dig a hole, and after it was dug, the Devil put into it certain things unknown to her,” thereby causing the death of the horses one-by-one.¹⁸⁰

It is certain that the deaths of these animals were misattributed cases of illness or disease, but were not obvious so the deaths were instead blamed on sorcery. In some cases, the claims made by people regarding their livestock were absurd. Kramer claims that “[s]hepherds have very often seen certain animals, after jumping three or four times into the air, suddenly fall to the ground and die.”¹⁸¹ That “a certain very rich man stated

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. 378-79

¹⁸⁰ Ibid. 379

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

that he and others had had more than forty domestic animals (oxen and cows)” cursed within a year and “at a time when no plague or other illness preceded.”¹⁸² The rich man said he knew it to be sorcery because instead of dying slowly as if with plague, “this act of sorcery removed all their vigor all of a sudden.”¹⁸³ The presence of sorcery effecting livestock was “a kind of sorcery that is in fact known to be widespread,” and frequently found in the areas Kramer worked but “especially in the Alps.”¹⁸⁴

Gangster Sorceresses

Reminiscent of the mafia, sorceresses had a peculiar business strategy: the creation and execution of what amounted to magical protection rackets. Though not quite so explicit as your local wise woman saying, “nice cow, be a shame if anything happened to it,” sorceresses nonetheless created and then profited from causing and then fixing problems. Sometimes they used sorcery not to gain monetarily, but to teach a lesson to someone they believed had disrespected them, which I believe also falls within the scope of gangster activities.

A sorceress offered her services as a healer to a woman with a severe headache, which among other things involved pouring “water into a dish,” and was accused by her servant of “merely doing superstitious things, for [the sorceress’] own benefit.”¹⁸⁵ In fairness to the servant she had seen no improvement in her mistress’ condition, which considering the methods being applied and the general state of Medieval healing practices made sense, but she nonetheless had offended the sorceress who she had accused of being

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid. 362

a grifter. The sorceress then threatened the woman saying, “[t]hree days from now, you will tell whether or not they are superstitious.”¹⁸⁶ The servant experienced extremely painful symptoms on the third day after this threat, which Kramer and the servant say proves the sorceress had indeed cursed her. She claimed that she felt “great pain suddenly...first in the internal areas, so that there was no part of the body on which [she] did not feel terrible jabbings,” and that this was followed by the feeling of “burning coals” being poured over her head.¹⁸⁷ The servant then found herself covered in boils saying, “on the skin of the body from the top of my head to the soles of my feet there would not have been the space of a needle point where there wasn’t a blister filled with white pus.”¹⁸⁸ On the fourth day of this ordeal she found herself “wailing amidst these pains and hoping only for death,” until her employer’s husband was told to have the servant “enter a certain barn.”¹⁸⁹ Above the barndoor was a piece of white cloth, and the servant was told, “[t]o the best of your abilities, take it away, because you will perhaps feel better,” and did so.¹⁹⁰ Inside the bundle she claimed there were “many things wrapped up in it, in particular certain white kernels,” that resembled her boils, “seeds and peas, the likes of which [she] couldn’t even have eaten or looked at,” and animal bones.¹⁹¹ It should be noted that this does not align with the woman’s eventual deposition in which she instead claimed the parcel held “the bundle contained a yellowish dust like a child’s excrement or pus, human hair, and various kernels of grain,” and that it appears that a number of other story elements were also changed.¹⁹² Instructed by her employer’s

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid. 364

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Ibid.

husband to throw the parcel into the fire the servant claimed that after doing so “all of a sudden, not after the passage of an hour or a quarter hour but the very instant that those things were thrown into the fire, I fully regained my prior health.”¹⁹³ Based on these series of events the servant’s employer was initially suspected of helping the sorceress but was found not to be at fault, though it is likely that the suspected sorceress was tried and executed based on the testimony of the servant. Far less than that was required in regards to the judgment of those accused of sorcery.

In fact, the town this occurred in, according to Kramer, had such a glut of blighted peasants that a book could have been written simply about their goings-on. He wrote that many of the “people who were blind, lame, barren and stricken with various illnesses” had received a warning about their illnesses from sorceresses.¹⁹⁴ This information was gathered through “testimony according to the legal requirement on the basis of a strong suspicion about sorceresses who foretold illnesses of this kind to them in general or particular!”¹⁹⁵ According to the peasant’s retelling the sorceresses were exceedingly accurate in their predictions, and “everything turned out according to the information from the sorcerers, in terms of either the specified illness or death of others.”¹⁹⁶ It would have been in their best interest of course to say this, both in order to show they were devout witch-haters and so that they could tell themselves there was a reason for how they felt that could potentially be cured.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. 364

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

In another case a man who was involved with a sorceress offered his services to a woman she had cursed. This was after the sorceress was impugned by the “respectable married woman,” who said the sorceress had trampled through her garden.¹⁹⁷ The boyfriend “sympathized with [her] illness” and said he could determine whether or not she had been cursed by pouring “some molten lead,” into a dish over the woman’s body and reading the lead.¹⁹⁸ Once a certain “image and the shapes of various things appeared from the hardened lead” he proclaimed she was a victim of sorcery and that there were “devices for sorcery...underneath the threshold of the door of the house.”¹⁹⁹ There was a parcel there containing, “a wax image a palm’s length long...pierced through everywhere,” with needles in the places the woman had felt stomach pains, and “various pieces of cloth containing very many things consisting of kernels as well as seeds and bones.”²⁰⁰ When these things were thrown into the fire the woman felt better but not fully healed, the helpful man said this was because he wasn’t able to find all of the devices. Instead she should be happy he had helped at all, and that he knew of the devices because of his girlfriend.

Sexual Depravity

The *Malleus* states that women are often led astray by their carnal lusts, and that this is one of the principal ways in which demons convince women to make contracts with them and surrender their souls. This is effective especially against younger women because they “are more given over to ambition and the pleasures of the body.”²⁰¹ Since

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 363

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid. 364

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ Ibid. 277

demons often disguise themselves as young men and wait for women to come near them, it is possible for women to be charmed by them during these interactions. One woman, a companion of a witch whose story Kramer heard about prior to her execution, was walking down the road “intending to visit her boyfriend to fornicate.”²⁰² Presumably her already lower moral character was known to demons, and she was approached by one who “asked whether she recognized him,” and when she said she did not know him said, “I am a demon, and if you wish, I will always be ready for your desire, and I won’t abandon you in any dire straits.”²⁰³ Upon hearing this the woman made a pact with the demon and “dedicated herself to those filthy acts of the Devil (with a complete renunciation of the Faith)” for the “next eighteen years until the end of her life.”²⁰⁴ It is likely she did this, by Kramer’s estimation, because of her undying lusts. I would argue it was also because the demon promised to never leave her and kept that promise unlike human men. Many women, after coerced confessions, admitted to being in long-term relationships with demons. In fact, bad men were a contributing factor to the number of sorceresses. Because “[y]oung girls are sometimes corrupted by lovers with whom they have shamelessly copulated for the sake of marriage,” but are then abandoned by them “and consider themselves to be disgraced in every regard” they become despondent.²⁰⁵ When that happens demons can use the situation and manipulate their “sadness and poverty” and desire for revenge.²⁰⁶ The women in exchange for assistance subject “themselves to all filthy acts,” in order to enact this vengeance against “their lover or the

²⁰² Ibid. 278

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid. 278

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

woman to whom he has joined himself.”²⁰⁷ Kramer states that, “[t]here is no counting the number of such young women, as experience unfortunately teaches, and, there is likewise no counting the number of sorceresses who rear up from among them.”²⁰⁸ Of course, despite these women’s sad circumstances, their ready acceptance of a pact with a demon means they are still subject to both God’s and the Inquisitor’s judgement.

Multiple chapters are dedicated to the examination of the ways in which women “subordinate themselves to incubus demons,” and one lays out six topics related to this that are then examined by Kramer.²⁰⁹ They are as follows: first, “the point of view of the demon and the body assumed by him,” and “the element from which it is formed”; second, “whether [the sexual act] is always carried out with the infusion of a seed received from someone else”; third, “whether the demon acts at one time rather than another;” fourth, “whether he acts visibly from the point of view of the woman, and whether only those women who are begotten from filthy acts of this kind are visited regularly by demons;” fifth, “whether those women who are offered by midwives to the demons at the time of birth are so visited;” and sixth, “whether the sexual pleasure is lesser or greater in such women” when compared to women who have regular human sex with their husbands.²¹⁰

The first few considerations deal with the physical or incorporeal forms demons take when partaking in carnal acts with sorceresses, since they have no true physical form and have to construct them. The second relates to one of the more frequently discussed

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 279

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 302

²¹⁰ Ibid. 302

topics in the *Malleus*, the creation of children, and a topic that has already been discussed in this paper, demons stealing and then using semen. It is believed that not every encounter with an incubus results in them releasing the seed of another man, in part because the witches are sometimes infertile. Demons do not give semen to witches who are “aged and barren,” because it would be “pointless, and in his works the demon avoids what is redundant to the extent that he can.”²¹¹ Though this does not stop the demon from sleeping with the sorceress since the carnal act is the main goal and the principal way he corrupts them further. If a sorceress is already pregnant, and the authors presume in this case she is married and the child is her husband’s, the demon “can taint the conception through mixing in another man’s seed.”²¹²

The third question is awkwardly worded but asks whether or not there are certain times that demons prefer to engage in carnal acts with sorceresses, and the answer is yes. Demons prefer “more sacred times of the year, like the solemn rites of Christ’s Nativity, Easter, Pentecost and the other Holy Days,” because it causes the sorceress to “incur not only the vice of breach of the Faith with their apostasy from the Faith but also that of sacrilege, things in which the demons delight.”²¹³ It is also more offensive to God. It is also easier on these days to find new women to corrupt, specifically “young women, who are the more easily led astray by old women sorceresses on Holy Days, since they indulge more in leisure and novel forms of amusement,” and the old woman will provide the incubus with an introduction to the young women in these cases.²¹⁴

²¹¹ Ibid. 310

²¹² Ibid. 311

²¹³ Ibid. 311

²¹⁴ Ibid. 312

Since incubus demons are invisible to begin with, they remain invisible in most cases except to the person they are sleeping with. This led to a number of eyewitness reports of partially naked women “lying on their backs in fields or woods,” and “gesticulating with their forearms and thighs,” with “their limbs in an arrangement suitable for that filthy act.”²¹⁵ Some then claimed that when this concluded “a very black vapor would (very rarely) rise up from the sorceress into the air up to the height of a human.”²¹⁶ Interestingly husbands seemed to have the sight other people did not when it came to their witchy wives and “visibly perceived the incubus demons performing such acts with their wives,” and because they could see them “thought them to be not demons but men.”²¹⁷ In cases where the husband then became violent and grabbed “weapons and attempted to stab them, the demons suddenly disappeared by making themselves invisible,” leaving the witch behind to explain herself.²¹⁸ It was apparently common for wives to mock their husbands “asking in rebuke if they had eyes or if they were possessed by demons” themselves.²¹⁹

In the final section of Kramer’s six factors relating to incubus demons his structure collapses and the last three questions are combined. He concludes that though women who had been offered up as babies by midwives or their mothers certainly would be harassed by demons, demons generally desired holy virgins and widows. Women burned as witches in Ravensburg prior to their death admitted “that their masters had enjoined them to strive with their entire effort to overthrow the holy virgins and widows”

²¹⁵ Ibid. 313

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Ibid.

²¹⁸ Ibid. 314

²¹⁹ Ibid.

in the town.²²⁰ As to whether or not greater sexual pleasure was derived by women who fornicated with demons rather than men, Kramer says that logically “the natural order gives it that much less excuse not to be greater when like plays with like,” meaning that humans being with humans is natural and therefore best.²²¹ Since the Devil is a trickster, however, he concedes that a demon “clearly rouses no lesser feeling of lust” in women.²²²

The Bewitching of Men

It was believed that witches were especially prone to jealousy and vengeance, partly due to their being women and partly due to the circumstances that drove them to seek out the power of demons. Because of this jealousy, men they had been with previously or had issue with were targets. Because “free time breeds vices,” in this case lust, and Kramer believed many men to have a lot of free time on their hands, there were many who “wooed women and then decided to abandon the ones they had wooed and marry respectable women” instead.²²³ When the women realized what had happened, which one assumed would be rather quickly unless the man absconded with his bride, “the bed of marriage seldom lasted without the exaction of vengeance through the infliction of sorcery on the husband or wife.”²²⁴ By this Kramer means that the couple were prevented from having sex or perhaps made barren. According to him “conjecture would be that the reason for this is that once the wives have been killed or rendered barren, the men would have to woo their prior girlfriends.”²²⁵

²²⁰ Ibid. 314

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid. 364

²²⁴ Ibid. 364

²²⁵ Ibid. 365

Women were also believed to generally be covetous, so powerful or important men were especially desirable targets of sorcery in order to bewitch and use them. It also could have been for general amusement. Sorceresses, Kramer writes, “so inflame the minds of humans with unlawful desirings that they must necessarily run over long stretches of the earth to their girlfriends, even at night-time, being greatly ensnared through the poison of carnal love.”²²⁶ It is telling that Kramer calls carnal love a poison, his general disdain for recreational fornication is yet again present in his wording. As someone who himself was supposed to be abstinent, and as a member of the clergy who believed sex should only happen between married people, he believed extra- or pre-marital sex to be both dangerous and disgusting. By referring to the sorceresses as “girlfriends” and not as wives, Kramer makes it clear that the women were sleeping with men outside the bounds of marriage and were less respectable people.

One man who had been ensorcelled, in the town of Meersburg in the diocese of Constance, claimed he was unable to sleep but with one woman. Though this does not seem on its face to be an issue, it was for this man. The man said “that it was very often the case that when he tried to reject her and to take flight and live in other lands, sometimes during the night-time he would get up and return quickly with the swiftest running” to go back to this woman “over the earth” and “through the air as if flying.”²²⁷ If this prevented him from sleeping with his wife this would make more sense, as his complaint would then align more closely with Kramer’s worldview, but no such

²²⁶ Ibid. 351

²²⁷ Ibid. 322

information is given. It is only implied that the connection with this woman is both unpleasant and unwanted, but that because of magic he has no choice but to be with her.

Sometimes the sorceress girlfriend proved especially dangerous and not just controlling. When a “certain noblemen’s” son’s girlfriend asked him to spend the night, “but he did not want to and indicated to her through his servant that he could not spend that night with her because he was held up by certain business affairs,” she was furious and said, “Tell the young nobleman, he will not distress me for long.”²²⁸ He then fell ill and died some days later, proving her words correct, though for some men death may be preferable to the next flavor of witchcraft.

The Impact of Witchcraft on Male Sexual Organs

Though related to the bewitching of men, the ways in which witches prevented procreation went beyond creating wayward husbands or befouling their wives. Instead, it had to do with the removal of penises and making men ostensibly impotent. In all cases the removal of the man’s penis was an illusion conjured by sorcery that impacted the victim’s vision and sense of touch, so that a man who had been cursed in this way “could not see or feel his body as anything but smooth.”²²⁹ In one such case Kramer explains that “a certain young man” in Ravensburg had been dating a woman but wanted to break up with her, and when he did this lost his penis.²³⁰ In this particular case, the man went and got drunk and ended up talking to a strange woman, who surprisingly Kramer describes as clever, and she “asked whether he considered any woman suspect.”²³¹ He did,

²²⁸ Ibid. 365

²²⁹ Ibid. 323

²³⁰ Ibid. 323

²³¹ Ibid.

namely his ex-girlfriend. The strange woman then advised the man to action saying, “[w]hen benevolence does you no good, it would be best to prevail upon her with violence in order to regain your health.”²³² Perhaps Kramer thought her clever because she readily gave advice that led to violence against other women. The man sought out the woman he suspected and “watched the path where the sorceress would regularly pass by” at dusk, and when he saw her “pleaded with her to return to him the health of his body, but she claimed that she was innocent and knew nothing.”²³³ So, instead of bargaining with her further he “attacked her” by “tying a handkerchief tight around her throat” and said, “unless you restore my health to me, you will die at my hands.”²³⁴ The sorceress’ face was now apparently turning black, but she was able to say, “release me and I will make you healthy.”²³⁵ Upon hearing this the young man “loosened the knot (noose)” and “the sorceress touched him with her hand between the thighs (hips), saying, “You now have what you want,” and restored to him his penis.”²³⁶ In another case a man who lost his penis and sought the advice of a priest was advised to go and find the woman he thought responsible and to “soften her with promises and enticing words.”²³⁷ In this case, like the other, the man had ended a relationship and lost his penis. By making promises to the woman and making it seem as if he was once again interested in their relationship, he got his penis back. This does not seem like a viable long-term strategy, but nonetheless was effective.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Ibid.

²³⁷ Ibid. 324

This act in particular, the removal of genitalia, was one that seemed to concern Kramer greatly, to the point where he believed absolutely ludicrous stories about it. This also could have been from his general lack of humor or how sheltered he was from the outside world, but he included in the *Malleus* a story that was clearly only told for comedic purposes. Instead of realizing this, Kramer uses the story to yet again prove that witches steal penises, some of whom he then claims “sometimes keep large numbers of these members (twenty or thirty at once) in a bird’s nest or in some cabinet, where the members move as if alive or eat a stalk or fodder.”²³⁸ The penises, somehow, were all at once only removed by illusion (and still there though unseen) and living in some cabinet, animated by magic or unholy arts and eating grain. The story he got this idea from was apparently as follows:

A certain man reported that when he had lost his member and gone to a certain sorceress to regain his well-being, she told the sick man that he should climb a certain tree and granted that he could take whichever one he wanted from the nest, in which there were very many members. When he tried to take a particular large one, the sorceress said, “You shouldn’t take that one,” adding that it belonged to one of the parish priests.²³⁹

The translator’s notes actually explain this story further, proving it was told only as a joke, mocking “the lechery of parish priests, who often kept illegitimate ‘wives’ in violation of their ostensible celibacy and begot children,” due to the euphemistic use of the word ‘bird’ and ‘penis’ in the original text.²⁴⁰ He says that in “the Romance languages, words meaning ‘bird’ are frequently used as

²³⁸ Ibid. 328

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

euphemisms for ‘penis.’”²⁴¹ As a native speaker and person who was alive at the time, Kramer should have realized this, but for whatever reason chose to ignore it or never caught on that he was a victim of misinformation.

As for perceived impotence Kramer makes a point to say “it should not be believed that a man is rendered impotent through the virtue of” sorcery and that anything resembling it instead is an impediment to procreation.²⁴² This seems in many ways a distinction without a difference that was included to make impotent men feel better or perhaps provide them with hope that their ailment could be cured. Kramer states that witches can impede procreation, in this case the lawful and allowed procreation between married people, in two ways as it relates to men. The first way is that they “directly suppress the hardness of the member appropriate for propagation (this should not be viewed as impossible, since in other ways they are able to impede the natural motion in any limb),” while the second involves preventing “the sending of spirits to the limbs in which the power of motion resides, by cutting off the seed’s paths, as it were, so that it cannot descend to the vessels of procreation or be separated out or sent forth.”²⁴³ This apparently could be achieved by creating a magical item or parcel containing items “like the testicles of roosters,” but could also be caused by the sorceress’ “eating of plants.”²⁴⁴ Though there seems to be a direct correlation between the genitalia of an animal and that of a man (sympathetic magic), the fact that a witch

²⁴¹ Ibid. 328

²⁴² Ibid. 321

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

could achieve these results by eating certain plants is not explained further in the text.

Both injuries, the removal of genitals and impotence, are clearly used as a way to motivate men through fear. This is true for many of the threats sorcery posed, but when you consider that the people who would be reading this book were men, the people who would preach about the Heresy of Sorceresses were men, and the judges, Inquisitors, and executioners would be men, it makes sense that a threat to their manhood would be a strong motivator. I believe that is why, in part, it bothered the authors so much. Although, if they were following their vows and living godly lives, they shouldn't have had much use for that particular part of their anatomy.

Punishing Women for Men's Sins

As was stated above, if a man was hated or it was advantageous to hurt him, his wife would sometimes instead be injured by sorcery. It was believed that even when sorcery could be used against either the man or woman, the injury "does not happen to the husbands so much as it does to the wives."²⁴⁵ This sometimes took the form of bodily injury or the loss of control over her limbs but could also take the form of sterility and miscarriages. In Nider's text, which Kramer cites in the *Malleus*, a sorcerer named Stadlin was captured in the diocese of Lausanne. He was also the sorcerer responsible for a number of weather events in the previous section. Under torture he confessed that he had "used sorcery to inflict barrenness on the inhabitants of a certain house, affecting both the humans and the domestic animals" and had done so by killing "seven babies one

²⁴⁵ Ibid. 364

after the other in the womb of the man's wife," causing her to miscarry many times.²⁴⁶ Stadlin also said he "did a similar thing to all the pregnant herding and domestic animals in the same house, none of them bringing forth a live birth during those same years."²⁴⁷ Under torture he also explained how he had done this, namely by placing a snake under their threshold, but when Inquisitors went to the house to find the snake, there was nothing there. They claim it was because the snake had "been reduced to dust," perhaps because the enchantment had been in place for so many years.²⁴⁸ I would argue they found no snake because there was never a snake there, and instead you had a desperate man confessing anything and everything to make them stop torturing him. It is claimed in the same year that the snake was "removed," fertility returned "to the wife and all the domestic animals."²⁴⁹ There was no explanation given as to why Stadlin had targeted this couple, but it seems appropriate that both he and the author classified the losses as similar and equal given the fact that women were considered chattel and property of their husbands, just like livestock.

Kramer writes of another situation that arose four years prior to the *Malleus*' publication in the town of Reichshofen, where a "certain sorceress was very notorious for knowing how to affect with sorcery and how to cause a miscarriage by touch alone at any hour."²⁵⁰ There was a pregnant wife of a Count who had "taken to herself a certain midwife for protection" and been "advised by this midwife not to leave the castle and in particular to avoid conversing and interacting with that sorceress."²⁵¹ This advice was

²⁴⁶ Ibid. 321

²⁴⁷ Ibid.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. 322

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

ignored. The woman went to a banquet the sorceress also attended, and “when the sorceress touched the lady on the belly with both hands as if in greeting, the woman suddenly felt the child moving with pain.”²⁵² Fearful for herself and her baby, the Count’s wife “fled back home from there, and when she told the midwife what had happened, the midwife cried out, ‘Oh, no! You have now lost your child!’”²⁵³ Kramer claims that the wife then gave birth “not to an intact miscarriage but to pieces” of the fetus, and that this was all due to some malfeasance on the Count’s part.²⁵⁴ Apparently, according to Kramer, God had seen fit to punish him through his wife.

There was also “a cook of the Archduke,” who had “taken a respectable foreign woman as his wife,” but “his sorceress girlfriend foretold sorcery and death for the young girl in the hearing of many respectable people on a public street.”²⁵⁵ “Stretching forth her hand,” the sorceress allegedly said, “You will not rejoice in your husband for long.”²⁵⁶ After hearing this the foreign bride fell ill and died “a few days later, bearing witness in her final moment, ‘Behold, I die stating that that woman is killing me through her acts of sorcery with God’s permission.’”²⁵⁷ Kramer then claims that “God clearly arranged another wedding for her, a wedding for the better in heaven,” though the reason for this sudden spurt of sentimentality from him is unclear.²⁵⁸

²⁵² Ibid. 322

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid. 365

²⁵⁶ Ibid.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Ibid.

Male Witches

Male witches do exist, but their motivations for wanting and using magic are vastly different than their female counterparts, and they also have different rituals they participate in. The greatest similarity is that they still need to make a pact with a demon in order to use magic, and that this is yet again permitted by God. Their main magical arts generally concern martial accomplishments, like the enchanting of weaponry and armor or the ability to have preternatural archery skills. It is actually quite humorous that being good at something was suspicious enough to warrant being suspected of witchcraft, like those men who are able to perform archery trick shots or those that are accurate even in battle. According to the *Malleus*, these archer witches “shoot at the most holy image of the Crucifix with an arrow” in order to desecrate, and also can guarantee a certain number of deaths in their next battle by making “three or four bull’s eyes in so many shots, and as a consequence they will be able to kill the same number of men on a given day.”²⁵⁹ They are also able to, if they have a clear line of sight on someone, “turn the will of their heart entirely to killing him” and as such the intended victim “will not be able to protect himself from being struck with the arrow once it is released and the Devil sticks it in him.”²⁶⁰ As with anything to do with magic and witches, in order “to achieve these effects, they must render such homage to the Devil along with the damnation of their body and soul.”²⁶¹

Powerful men are also accused of harboring and supporting court magicians and male witches, something that is frowned upon by these Inquisitors. Kramer writes that in

²⁵⁹ Ibid. 387

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Ibid.

“the courts of noblemen everywhere, it is said, such men are supported, being allowed to boast and preen about their crimes in public, which results in contempt for the Faith and in serious offense to God’s majesty.”²⁶² This is not something that is ever discussed about female witches; they were not on retainer at court. They were older, poorer, folk healers and herbalists, people who didn’t know how to cast a spell to make your armor deflect sword blows. The authors would likely have said this was due to women’s temperament, mainly that they were too petty and jealous to see that far outside themselves and their small worlds. Either way those “Catholic Princes” that harbored these criminals were encouraged to repent, though they would still be punished because “such men and those who harbor them should everywhere be judged to be protectors and abettors not merely of heretics but of apostates from the Faith.”²⁶³ This first involved being excommunicated “and abetting clerics [being] removed from and deprived of every office and benefice, which will be restored to them only by a specific indulgence of the Holy See” but could ultimately culminate in their death if after one year they “obstinately persist...after the status is made public” that they have been excommunicated as they are then considered heretics.²⁶⁴ And the only solution available when dealing with heretics is death, or repentance *and* death.

Though there is mention of men who cavort with succubi, that doesn’t seem to be a requirement for male witches. Apparently, succubi steal semen from everyday men and not just male witches. It is even stated in the *Malleus* that men who sleep with succubi do so against their will, “since the natural strength of reason by which men surpass women

²⁶² Ibid. 389

²⁶³ Ibid. 389

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

leads men to shrink from such things to a greater degree.”²⁶⁵ By comparison, sex with incubi is featured heavily in the discussions and confessions of female witches. This is of course only one of the many discrepancies between men and women, witch or otherwise, during this time. But it was a firmly held belief than when compared to women, men were the less lustful, more logical, and faithful sex; and so it follows that even those men that had rejected the Faith would still resist having sex with the demons they bartered away their souls to.

Defending Against Witches & Curing Curses

It is mentioned repeatedly in the *Malleus* that the best way to protect oneself from demonic interference or witchy meddling, on a day-to-day basis, was to use the Sign of the Cross. It was believed the Sign warded the user from evil, and in some cases potential victims were explicitly warned against Crossing themselves. They of course, in these stories, chose to do the Faithful thing and used the Sign thereby protecting themselves and foiling the evil plans of the witch that had been planning on harming or beguiling them. In one such case a girl was told by an old woman to come to a house and to go upstairs with her, and that there would be eligible men waiting for her on the top floor. When she followed her but crossed herself, at the top of the stairs the old woman whirled around with a “fearsome expression and angry demeanor” and said, ““Hey, curse you! Why did you cross yourself with the Sign of the Cross? In the name of the Devil, get out of here!””²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Ibid. 414

²⁶⁶ Ibid. 278

Another case involved the potential theft of an infant, but the steps taken to protect it were much more elaborate. A woman had argued with a suspected sorceress earlier in the day and at night was concerned that her actions put her infant child in danger. So to protect him she placed “blessed plants under him, sprinkled him with Holy Water, put a little exorcized salt in his mouth, protected him with the Sign of the Cross and tied him carefully to the crib,” and when later in the night she heard him cry out but could not find him in his crib she looked for him and found him under the bed, unharmed.²⁶⁷ She believed that had she not taken those precautions, the boy would have been lost to her. There are certain blessed or holy plants that are believed to help when placed around a person or used to “fumigate” a space, as this woman did by placing plants underneath the child.²⁶⁸ It is also common to sprinkle holy water and recite a chant like the “Most Holy Trinity” and “the Lord’s Prayer,” though this comes with its own set of criteria to make it acceptable as we will see below in the cases of exorcism.

Lawful Exorcism

It is also explicitly stated that though there are a number of different methods by which one can be cured of witchcraft, exorcism is among the most commonly prescribed in the *Malleus*. In this case the exorcism could be conducted officially or unofficially by multiple types of people, but the common thread is that the person or persons performing the exorcism does so with Holy words and chants in order to drive out the demon causing the victim harm. Kramer notes that for illnesses caused by sorcery, exorcism served “as a general cure” because those illnesses could be cured by words, and exorcism fell under

²⁶⁷ Ibid. 266

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

this category and “considered to be among the remedies consisting of words.”²⁶⁹ This meant exorcisms could be used to try and cure “any illnesses” mentioned in the *Malleus* as well as those “not expressly mentioned in the [text].”²⁷⁰ That is an incredibly broad belief, and surprisingly there was also an understanding that laymen could act as exorcists, though this came with some guidelines. Lawful exorcisms, and Kramer notes that there are both lawful and unlawful exorcisms performed, by laypeople require those laypeople to be “of outstanding way of life and proven discretion,” and for these people to utter “lawful prayer over the sick person, not over an apple or belt or the such like but over the sick people according to the passage of the Evangelist, ‘Upon the sick will they lay on their hands . . . ‘ [Mark 16:18].”²⁷¹ It is possible that if these people attempted to exorcise an individual by praying over an item representing them, rather than the person themselves, that this would be a form of idolatry and cause the exorcism to become unlawful. Kramer states that clergy should allow these virtuous individuals to continue their work unless “there happens to be some fear that after their example, other people, who are indiscreet and superstitious, might adopt a misuse of chanting.”²⁷²

In all situations there are seven rules that must be followed or the exorcism becomes unlawful, or tainted, regardless of who is performing the ceremony. First, the chants and phrases associated with the exorcism “should contain nothing that relates to the express or implicit invocation of demons,” because it would corrupt the process.²⁷³ It is noted that this might be done by an exorcist who doesn’t care which power helps him,

²⁶⁹ Ibid. 443

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid. 445

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid. 446

that of God or the Devil. Second, any and all “blessings (chants) should not contain any unknown words,” because with those foreign words “some superstition may lurk in them.”²⁷⁴ Third, the words said must “contain no falsehood, because in that case no effect from it could be expected from God, since He is not a witness to falsehood.”²⁷⁵ You must keep a special eye on old women in these cases, as they sometimes rhyme, and rhymes apparently invite the Devil. Fourth, “no inscribed vanities or characters should be included there apart from the Sign of the Cross.”²⁷⁶ Fifth, you should not place faith in amulets or other “such vanity that has nothing to do with reverence for God” and is worn on one’s person for this is superstitious.²⁷⁷ Sixth, “when the divine Words or Holy Scripture are tied on and uttered, the only thing that is respected are the sacred Words themselves and their meaning and the reverence for God.”²⁷⁸ Seventh, “is that the effect that is expected should be entrusted to the will of God,” and not to any other outside forces, and that God will decide if He is to help you or not.²⁷⁹ If all of these guidelines are followed then the exorcism is lawful, but if any “of these conditions taints the work” it is unlawful.²⁸⁰

Defense Against Incubi & Succubi

According to the Malleus “there are three kinds of humans affected by sorcery in terms of incubus or succubus demons:” first, those who “voluntarily submit to incubus demons;” second, “those whom sorcerers caused to become involved with incubi or

²⁷⁴ Ibid. 447

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid. 447

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ Ibid.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

succubi against their will;” and third, “certain virgins who are harassed by incubus demons completely against their will.”²⁸¹ The first category references sorceresses who sometimes enter into demonic pacts solely to satiate their carnal lusts. The other two categories are, for the most part, otherwise innocent people.

In some cases, women are harassed by incubi on God’s orders. It seems to be believed “that incubi seem to harass woman and girls with beautiful hair more” than other women, and this is because of a few factors one of which is God’s permission.²⁸² It is possible that such women are subjected to harassment more “because it is their wish or habit to inflame men with their hair or because they vainly glory in it or because the goodness of God permits this so that women will be deterred from inflaming men by the means by which the demons too wish men to be inflamed.”²⁸³

As with many other illnesses and oddities that are blamed on sorcery but have a natural cause, like sterility or hail storms, it seems that in an attempt to separate themselves from sin people often blamed sexual issues on demons and sorceresses. One such “poor” man was allegedly “so affected by sorcery that in the presence of his wife he repeatedly performs every sexual act by himself in the way that men perform it with women,” and did not stop despite his wife’s “insistence and wailing.”²⁸⁴ Once he climaxes, he merely begins again until, “the poor man is dashed to the ground, completely exhausted” and unable to continue.²⁸⁵ According to witnesses there is no one beneath him and even according to the man “he sees nothing but is so enthralled in his

²⁸¹ Ibid. 414

²⁸² Ibid. 417

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid. 414

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

mind that he absolutely cannot stop.”²⁸⁶ Instead of admitting that he has a problem himself “a certain woman is very much suspected of having [this sorcery] on him”, especially “since she threatened that poor man with insulting words to the effect that she would pay him back because of some displeasure he had caused her.”²⁸⁷

In the case of virgin maidens, they were instead harassed because the demons sought to corrupt them through carnal acts. In one case Kramer believes that a virgin in a nun’s habit was punished by a demon by being forced to fornicate with it because her mind had been corrupted. She “said that she had never agreed to sex, thereby letting it be understood that she had been known,” and tearfully confessed to her harassment by the incubus.²⁸⁸ Though many remedies were attempted to free her of this torment, not even “by the Sign of the Cross or Holy Water, things specifically ordained for putting demons to flight, or by the Sacrament of the Body of Christ, which is terrifying even for the angels themselves,” and after many years what finally freed her was the “praying and fasting of pious Lutgardis.”²⁸⁹ Perhaps this Lutgardis was known to the Medieval world, but his presence here is not expanded upon. Kramer makes a note to say that even though the typical remedies did not work in her case, that they could very well work in others and should be attempted; “it does not follow that just because a remedy helps one person, it helps another, and the converse.”²⁹⁰ There were five of these remedies, and some overlap with other remedies for different maladies caused by sorcery. It is listed that “girls and men can be freed with five methods: Sacramental Confession; [second,] the

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid. 415

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid. 416

holy practice of making the Sign of the Cross or of saying the Hail Mary; third, the use of exorcisms; fourth, a change in a specific location; and [fifth,] cautious excommunication on the part of saintly men.”²⁹¹ In the case of a concubine whose partner, a priest, had hanged himself, she was plagued by an incubus after entering a convent. When “[s]he warded him off through making the Sign of the Cross and sprinkling Holy Water... he immediately returned,” and when she said the Hail Mary “he disappeared and withdrew far off like an arrow.”²⁹² Despite this he sometimes returned but no longer approached her as he once did. In order to fully rid herself of him she had to give a Sacramental Confession, “after this concubine made a genuine confession, she was completely abandoned by the incubus.”²⁹³ Another woman, this time a nun, was harassed until she said “Bless you” to the demon, once she did this, he flew off never to return.²⁹⁴ As to the changing of location, though the examples provided by Kramer show the method “works,” it is questionable as to how beneficial it is. For example, when a priest’s daughter, “who had been violated by an incubus and gone insane with grief, was dispatched across the Rhine,” she was freed of him, but the demon then attached himself to her father instead who had stayed behind.²⁹⁵ Because he had been the one to send the girl away, he “was stricken by the demon, so that he died within three days,”²⁹⁶ When a woman who had been harassed had her friend sleep in her bed, “she felt certain very serious disturbances throughout the night and the other woman was peaceful.”²⁹⁷

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid. 416

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Ibid. 417

²⁹⁵ Ibid.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

The fifth method is called excommunication but is instead more similar to a minor or unofficial exorcism, which are different from the lawful exorcisms previously explained. It involves excommunicating the demon, not the demon's victim, and can be brought about by a group of people. A woman who had "in Aquitaine... been harassed by a demon for six years with incredibly perverse wantonness," was threatened by the incubus not to consult the holy man who was to arrive soon to town.²⁹⁸ She did so anyway and the holy man, St. Bernard, gave her his staff that she affixed to her bed, and this provided a temporary relief from the incubus' attentions. Despite the incubus' proclamation that "when he leaves, I, though until now your lover, will be your most cruel persecutor," he could not enter the bedroom, and instead cursed at her from outside.²⁹⁹ When he heard about this, St. Bernard returned and "convened the whole populace, ordering them all to carry lit candles in their hands," and "with the entire crowd that was present he excommunicated the demon and forbade him to approach her or any other woman afterwards."³⁰⁰

It was also considered possible for a woman to wholly contrive being harassed by an incubus, though these women would likely not be sorceresses. Kramer claims "this is particularly the case with woman and not men," that they would believe themselves to be harassed but not be in reality, "because in other respects women are more fearful and susceptible to miraculous forms in the imagination."³⁰¹ He further cites from another theologian, the "reason for this is, as physicians know, the very nature of female souls, because their souls are more susceptible to lighter impression than are men's" and that

²⁹⁸ Ibid.

²⁹⁹ Ibid. 417

³⁰⁰ Ibid. 418

³⁰¹ Ibid. 420

women can even believe themselves to be pregnant by incubi but “when the birthing time arrives, they deflate through the mere expulsion of a great deal of windiness.”³⁰² So, in all cases Kramer suggests men see for themselves if such things are true and not “very readily place credence in what womenfolk say.”³⁰³

Catching & Killing a Witch

It is important to note that there were multiple ways in which a witch could be judged and sentenced and by whose authority this would be done. Kramer makes a note that sorceresses were a unique breed amongst heretics, as they had been singled out by the Pope, but generally speaking heretics were dealt with by Inquisitors and bishops. Bishop refers to the person in charge of a defined area and its religious needs while Inquisitors were specific “questioners” that came in for cases involving heretics. If a crime was found and the perpetrator was not a heretic, then Inquisitors were not interested in participating in any trials involving them. The bishops could deal with their own people, as could the courts, unless that person’s crimes rose to the level of heresy. In those cases, it was necessary to have both types of people present, bishops and Inquisitors, to properly deal with the investigation and then any subsequent sentences. Exceptions were made if in 7 days one could not come and join the other, either because the Inquisitor was unable or unwilling.

To be a heretic involved meeting a number of criteria, and because of this even some people whose actions alone would mark them as witches were instead deemed to

³⁰² Ibid.

³⁰³ Ibid.

merely be sinners because they lacked one of the required elements of heresy. This meant they would be punished but not necessarily killed for their crimes, and they were then referred to as fortune-tellers rather than witches or sorceresses. The five requirements are as follows: first, there must be “an error in reasoning”; second, this error “should concern matters of the Faith and be contrary to the truth of the Church’s determination in matters pertaining to the Faith or morality or the necessities for attaining eternal life”; third, the person in question must be Catholic; fourth, the person must still believe in God and must “still [avow] some truth about Christ concerning His divinity or humanity,” otherwise they are a non-believer and apostate rather than a heretic; fifth, the person in question “should chose and follow this error with a determined and obstinate will.”³⁰⁴ If all elements are present the person is a heretic and subject to the authority of the Church and it’s Inquisitors. Kramer goes on to note that the error in understanding is the first and most critical bar to pass, and that witches who possess “a wicked opinion about the demon’s power or knowledge” that they seek aid from do have an error of understanding and if other elements of heresy are present are indeed heretics themselves.³⁰⁵

Kramer then explains one of the methods by which an investigation into witchcraft should be started, and like a lot of things involving religion during this time it involved nailing a flyer to a church door. Kramer provided a draft of a contents, literally using the phrase “such and such” as his equivalent of “insert name here” when describing the name of the town this would take place in: “We, the representative of the Bishop Such-and-Such (or judge of Lord Such-and-Such).”³⁰⁶ He also gives modifications based

³⁰⁴ Ibid. 487

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 488

³⁰⁶ Ibid. 503

on some common issues, like if the investigation was being led by a secular court versus a priest. The flyer was an official declaration and request for assistance by the local clergy in the hunt for witches and heretics, and though I suppose there was some carrot in being well regarded by your priest the proclamation was mostly stick: excommunication. The summons states that anyone who does not “effectively obey our warnings and advice by not providing information about the foregoing within the limit established, let him know that he” will be “stricken with the sword of excommunication,” or any legal penalties if the judge is secular or not ecclesiastical.³⁰⁷ As has been noted previously excommunication was considered one of the most serious threats, short of death itself, that could be levied against your average peasant. Common people during this time were exceedingly God-fearing, and a lot of importance was placed on the immortal soul and its path to Heaven, and being allowed entrance through the Pearly Gates required you to be Catholic. Excommunication is the formal severing of the bond between a person and the Church, and a lot of life revolved around or was in proximity to religion. Being excluded from taking communion or the sacraments was bad, but being a social outcast ostracized in your town was worse. No one wants to get the stink of an excommunicated person on them, the fear of reprisal for associating with them would be high. In order to avoid this fate folks were encouraged to report anything they may have seen or heard before a set date, and the people they were reporting were their neighbors. Now to be fair not all of the investigations started this way, but this was the recommended method as it both gave the clergy running it even more power over the beginning of the process and also provided a lot of “tips” from the locals.

³⁰⁷ Ibid. 504

It is actually in the section where Kramer describes the flyers' contents, where we see an example of how absolutely disconnected he is from the reality around him. He states that when someone comes in to accuse their local herbalist of consorting with demons, that the person should write down their own account of what they saw or heard. This is the 15th century in Europe. No one knew how to write much beyond their own name, and even that was a stretch. His assumption, and allowance that an oral dictation would suffice, if necessary, shows how very little he understood about the people he had power over. He was surrounded by other clergy, some of the most educated people in this part of the world, people who ran Universities and wrote tomes. Similar to how isolated he was from women was his isolation from commoners; he only saw them while performing a sermon or taking confession. He would have, by the nature of his work as an Inquisitor, been somewhat nomadic and whenever he was in a town not at all focused on creating deep and lasting friendships. He was there to find heretics; he was there to burn people alive.

Even though that "general summons" was the recommended method, it was not the most common one. The most common way in which an investigation was started was that there would be a "general rumor in some city or place" and the person running it, "the judge wishes to institute proceedings on the basis of his office without a general summons... because this constant clamor has reached his ears."³⁰⁸

In any case, the judge will work alongside a notary and "two respectable persons, whether clerics or laymen," unless no notary is available and then you can substitute for

³⁰⁸ Ibid. 507

them two more respectable men.³⁰⁹ This is meant to create an environment where you proceed “with great caution, so that there will be no error in pronouncing against the guilty the severity of harsh and due punishment.”³¹⁰ It also provides the judge with a staff of literate people to write down the testimonies of accusers, since very few of them will be literate. When a denouncer comes in, the “judge will immediately make the denouncer swear an oath in the customary way,” which is “by the four Gospels of God or on the Cross, with three fingers raised and two pushed down, by the testimony of the Holy Trinity” with the penalty for lying being “the damnation of [the denouncer’s] soul and body.”³¹¹ It is very similar to our modern oath system in a court of law, but an earlier version with more than one oath taking system available. That is, however, where the similarities between our modern legal system and this one end. Regardless of one’s feelings towards our current justice system, I assure you the one presented in the *Malleus* is much, much worse.

Witnesses for the Prosecution

As the crime of sorcery was considered extremely serious, since it could result in death, there had to be enough witnesses willing to swear an oath and testify that they had knowledge of the accused. This meant that there had to be more than three witnesses, and ideally there could be as many as ten. So “although two witnesses seem to be sufficient” based on how many witnesses were needed for other, lesser crimes, “two are not enough in connection with this charge.”³¹² There was however a rather gigantic loophole: if a judge could not rustle up more than three, or perhaps had only found one or two, the

³⁰⁹ Ibid. 504

³¹⁰ Ibid. 505

³¹¹ Ibid. 506

³¹² Ibid. 508

decision to convict was left up to him and “the burden is placed on the judge’s conscience.”³¹³ Basically, if you had a bad reputation to begin with and the judge didn’t like you, you were as good as dead.

As to how much authority a judge had in these cases, it was considerable. As previously stated, judges could essentially make a summary judgement and condemn the accused to death. Judges could also force people to testify under oath, “especially an ecclesiastical judge,” and that, if necessary, he can force “the whole vicinity” to swear an oath and be available to testify.³¹⁴ If you refused to do so it was considered extremely suspicious, to the point where “[i]f any of [the witnesses] with damnable obstinacy spurn the religious obligation of the oath and are unwilling to swear, from this very fact they should be considered to be heretics.”³¹⁵ As with all things during this time, any form of extremism was suspect, so an overly zealous witness was also considered less trustworthy than their peers. In fact, there is an explicit note made that “mortal enemies” cannot testify against the accused, as they are not credible or objective in these cases.³¹⁶ Because such an enemy could foist “upon [the accused] the crime of heresy,” in order to “take away his reputation” if not their life because they hate them.³¹⁷ It could also be possible that someone would lie under oath because of their “zeal for the Orthodox Faith” and their desired to see a suspected heretic executed. In these cases, the religious zealot should be allowed to “correct their statement and to reveal now what they previously

³¹³ Ibid. 510

³¹⁴ Ibid. 510

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Ibid. 512

³¹⁷ Ibid.

concealed” and because of their faith “their attestations should be upheld, both against themselves and the others.”³¹⁸

Curiously other sorcerers were considered extremely credible witnesses against other sorcerers, this may have been because they were perceived to have some greater insider information or an ability to tell when someone was a magic user because they themselves were magic users. Kramer writes, “a sorcerer is allowed to give testimony against a sorcerer in the same way that a heretic is allowed to do so against a heretic,” but that this testimony is only supposed to be against the accused and should never be in support of them.³¹⁹ I find it interesting that Kramer defaults back to the male form of the word here; he likely would find the testimony of a man more credible anyway, rather than the female form he has been using thus far. It is possible that such a situation, where one witch testifies against another, could happen when more than one person in an area has been accused and in an effort to appear penitent the condemned witch willingly testifies against a suspected witch. This would not have saved her from death. Other heavily weighted testimony came from the accused’s family and close friends. For all of these groups, other witches, children, family, friends, their testimonies held more weight because the Inquisitors saw no reason why they would lie.

Kramer gives a few different scripts for Inquisitors to follow when interviewing witnesses, and during all interviews “at least five persons should be present: the Inquisitorial judge, the respondent (the witness or the denouncer or the denounced person, who appears later), the third is the notary...and two respectable men as witnesses

³¹⁸ Ibid. 511

³¹⁹ Ibid. 511

to the depositions being given.”³²⁰ Most of the questions involved explaining the accusation and the alleged events they witnessed, but some were designed to reveal how credible the witness was. One asked, “as to whether any of those related to him by blood had in the past been burned to ashes because of acts of sorcery or been considered suspect,” likely because family members of dead witches were seen as less trustworthy and also prone to sorcery themselves.³²¹ The Inquisitor should also ask if it seemed as if, when the accused made derogatory remarks about the Faith, if they were joking or not. The witness would be asked “whether he thought that Such-and-Such said or did these things in jest or in mimicry or unwittingly or, on the other hand, assertively and wittingly,” though Kramer makes a note to say that even if it seemed to truly be in jest this could in and of itself be subterfuge where the witch is encouraged by their demon to chip away at the faith of others and to create an environment where heretical views could be stated openly.³²²

The Accused

People accused of the Heresy of Sorceresses had very few legal rights, and though they were at least granted a legal advocate this person was not always helpful. This had to do with the criteria one had to meet in order to be considered for legal advocacy on behalf of an accused heretic and that in itself was viewed through the lens of Kramer’s distaste for other forms of Medieval and Early Modern court proceedings. Kramer writes that the proceedings that will find heretics and witches will be “straightforward and informal, without the screeching and posturing of advocates in courtrooms.”³²³ Judges

³²⁰ Ibid. 516-17

³²¹ Ibid. 516

³²² Ibid. 516

³²³ Ibid. 513

were tasked with deciding for themselves whether or not an advocate would be appropriate, or if they had to continue looking for a suitable person. They were meant to take steps that prevented “granting a litigious, evil-spirited person, who could easily be corrupted by money” a position and instead find “an upright person who is not suspected of being fussy about legal niceties,” presumably because though witch trials wore the veneer of court proceedings, they absolutely did not believe in giving the accused any real recourse.³²⁴ To any real lawyer of this time that stumbled into a witch trial the entire procedure would likely have seemed rigged, and in many ways it was, for if you made it to the point where you were being held and questioned your odds weren’t great for getting out alive. If you did realize this, you could actually decline the assignment if he believes it to be “unjust and hopeless,” and is also allowed to return any fees taken and bail out in the middle if he didn’t know this and has not told his client it is hopeless.³²⁵ If, however, he does notify his client of the hopelessness of the case the advocate can, as they say, take the money and run.

Because of who they were defending advocates also had to be very careful about how they supported their client, as too much support could be seen as suspicious. The advocate “is not defending the error,” of witchcraft, “since in that case he would be more damnable than the sorceresses themselves,” but if he is seen as improperly defending his client “he makes himself similar to an abettor of heresy, being not merely lightly but seriously suspected because of the defense that he has mounted.”³²⁶ This would result in

³²⁴ Ibid. 530

³²⁵ Ibid. 530

³²⁶ Ibid. 531

the advocate needing to condemn the heresy of witchcraft under oath, also known as a “public abjuration before the bishop,” in order to rid himself of further suspicion.³²⁷

If that wasn't enough of a disadvantage, advocates, and by extension the accused witch, were not allowed to know the names of the people who had accused their client or the names of witnesses for the prosecution. This was in the hopes of protecting them from the sorceress' scorn, but even Kramer admits that based on the content of their depositions their identities could probably be discerned. Then the sorceress could say the witnesses only said these things because of enmity towards her, and her advocate along with the judge would investigate this. However, the judges in these cases “should first take care not to be ready to believe the advocate in a situation where the denounced woman alleges mortal enmity, because it is very seldom the case with such a charge that someone makes a deposition without enmity, since sorceresses are always considered loathsome by everyone.” This is a circular argument and speaks to how biased these prosecutions were, because unless you were able to prove someone had lied in a statement about you because of personal prejudice you were likely to be found guilty and executed, and judges were not inclined to believe the accused. There were only four things that could be used to convict a sorceress anyway: “by witnesses, by the evidence of the deed, by the indications of the deed, and by [the sorceress'] own confession.”³²⁸ So, witness statements were deemed to be extremely important and weighty.

Witches were also subjected to torture, and all confessions gained during torture were seen as credible and accurate. It is expressly stated in the *Malleus* that the

³²⁷ Ibid.

³²⁸ Ibid. 535

“denounced woman is sentenced to the penalty of blood only if convicted by her own confession.”³²⁹ That meant that a woman could not be executed unless she confessed, and thus any denounced woman “will be exposed to questioning under torture to make her confess her crimes.”³³⁰ Now as previously mentioned the sorcery of silence was power granted to sorceresses to endure torture without pain, and many including Kramer believed it to be frequently used. Because of this, women were stripped naked, their heads shaved, and their bodies inspected to ensure there were no devices or magical implements on their person that would trigger the sorcery of silence. Though in other areas of the world women’s entire bodies were shaved “[i]n the regions of Germany, this sort of shaving, especially around the secret places, is considered very degrading,” and was not used by German Inquisitors.³³¹ This was not a guarantee that the woman was free of the sorcery of silence since “sometimes when they do not keep on their person devices for sorcery that are sewn in or attached, they are still affected with sorcery by other sorceresses, however distant.”³³² Once that has been done and the torture begins those questioning the woman must be very careful not to touch her, as she could hex them into believing or loving her and setting her free. During this it was also required for the judge to see if during of after torture the woman cried, because “if she is a sorceress she does not have this ability (to shed tears).”³³³ This was such a closely held belief that if a woman was able to cry and did so in a manner that seemed genuine, and there were no good witnesses against her, she could be set free. But of course, women had to go up

³²⁹ Ibid. 541

³³⁰ Ibid.

³³¹ Ibid. 554

³³² Ibid. 553

³³³ Ibid. 549

against those that said “women are...characterized by crying, spinning and deceiving,” and so a woman’s performance would have to be a standout one to work.³³⁴ It is even written that women “vigorously goad themselves to cry and dampen their cheeks with spit,” in order to appear convincing.³³⁵

The most common method of torture applied was the *strappado*, which involved tying the victim’s arms behind their back and hoisting them into the air. The weight of their body applied pressure which dislocated their shoulders. It was extremely painful, as torture was intended to be, but also considered among the lighter forms available to Inquisitors. If a person had been tortured previously via *strappado* it was possible that the Inquisitor would choose another means, “since their arms quickly bend in the way that they are pulled,” and it would be less effective if it was less painful.³³⁶ It was also understood that torture was not a reliable means of garnering a confession, and so should be brought to a secondary location after confession “so that he will confess anew and will not merely have confessed under the force of the torture.”³³⁷ And it was also understood that some people “are so soft in the heart or crazed, that under light torture they grant anything at all, even any lies” while others have a natural mental hardness so “that however much they may be tormented, the truth cannot be got from them.”³³⁸ Despite all of this torture was routinely applied. Judges could even lie during questioning and say that the accused, if they confessed now versus later, would be allowed to live; the judge should “advise the denounced person to confess the truth in the manner mentioned above,

³³⁴ Ibid. 550

³³⁵ Ibid.

³³⁶ Ibid. 553

³³⁷ Ibid. 547

³³⁸ Ibid. 553

with a guarantee of his life, if this seems expedient.”³³⁹ After a confession the judge would also have the woman watched so she could not commit suicide, since she could “be visited by a demon to make her kill herself.”³⁴⁰

If somehow a woman had resisted all previous torture the judge would then begin the next and last scheme in which he would attempt to make her confess. This involved moving locations yet again, and “he should first see to it that she should be treated humanely in terms of food and drink,” while also ensuring there are respectable people about to lull her into a false sense of security “that she should confess the truth... that the judge will grant her grace.”³⁴¹ If this does not succeed, her accomplices, if she has any, should be used against her. And if that is impossible, she should be brought “to some castle and put in detention there for a few days,” and the “castellan should then pretend that he will be traveling far away.”³⁴² Her friends will then “visit her and promise her that they are by all means willing to let her go free, provided that she informs them about certain *experimenta*,” or magic she has performed.³⁴³ This is still entirely a ruse, meant to have someone confess because they have no rights to protect them from such devious machinations, and if the woman confesses she will be sentenced to death.

Bad Reputation

Special considerations were made based on the reputation of the woman being tried. If someone had a good reputation and the charges could not otherwise be proven they were set free, but would have to live very carefully from then on. That is because

³³⁹ Ibid. 548

³⁴⁰ Ibid.

³⁴¹ Ibid. 557

³⁴² Ibid. 559

³⁴³ Ibid. 559

though no sentence was passed, the lack of conviction was not considered the same thing as being innocent and if a woman was “again denounced afterwards in the course of time and the charge is then legally proven, [s]he can be condemned regardless of the sentence that absolved [her].”³⁴⁴ If however, the woman had a bad reputation from the start the situation is much more complicated.

For women with a bad reputation but no other proof against them the judgement would be to participate in purgation. This is a process by which the accused goes to the “the place where [s]he is known to have the bad reputation,” places their hand over a book containing the Gospels and swears, ““I swear over these four Holy Gospels of God that such-and-such heresy” – [s]he names it – “for which I have a bad reputation I have never held or believed or taught, nor do I now hold or believe it.”³⁴⁵ Then some number of people from her class or station, nuns for nuns, peasants for peasants, does the same and affirms they believe the person to be free of heresy. If for some reason they refuse to do so the accused person is condemned as a heretic. If the accused refuses to purge themselves they are excommunicated, and after one year if they have not righted themselves in the eyes of the Church they are condemned as a heretic. In the case where a woman of bad reputation is deemed to have “inconsistencies” in her statements she can be subjected to torture in order “for the truth to be wrenched from [her] mouth.”³⁴⁶ Most people did not make it through the gauntlet that followed, which included different levels of torture over many days and coercion, but if they did they could be set free.

³⁴⁴ Ibid. 579

³⁴⁵ Ibid. 582

³⁴⁶ Ibid. 585

Levels of Suspicion

There are three levels of suspicion that can be applied to suspected sorceresses, “moderate” or light suspicion, “vehement” or strong suspicion, and “violent” suspicion.³⁴⁷ The three levels basically describe the degree by which the judge has already decided on the sorceress’ guilt and if he can be convinced of her innocence. In the case of moderate suspicion, it is possible for the accused to defend themselves, so long as there were no witnesses, proof of the deed, or torture-induced confession. If for some reason they had been brought in solely because the judge suspected them, they would only have to perform an abjuration, and do penance for acting in a way that made anyone suspect them in the first place. For vehement suspicion, such a state can occur when the suspected sorceress “is not found to be legally caught by her own confession or by evidence of the fact or by the lawful production of witnesses,” but she has “great and serious indications proven against her,” and these indications are “ones that are judged by the panel to be such that they render her vehemently suspected of heretical depravity.”³⁴⁸ In those cases the sentence is again abjuration and penance, sometimes with the addition of jail time or a strong recommendation to go on a Holy pilgrimage, but if the sorceress relapses into heresy “[s]he will be handed over to the secular arm to be stricken with the death penalty.”³⁴⁹ This is a more severe punishment than those suspected lightly.

Finally, we have those violently suspected of committing the Heresy of Sorceresses. This final category was for those who basically had no possible recourse and were most likely to be found guilty of the highest forms of heresy and sorcery and

³⁴⁷ Ibid. 569-71

³⁴⁸ Ibid. 590

³⁴⁹ Ibid. 591

subsequently executed. One would think that meant there was a great burden of proof placed upon the panel judging the suspected sorceress, but this was not the case. As with all things regarding the Heresy of Sorceresses it was on the accused to prove a negative, that they are not practicing magic, and this is impossible. You could be violently suspected of sorcery merely for speaking harshly with someone who then got sick or had an accident at some later date. Kramer writes that violence suspicion can be had against those who are believed to have said “threatening words or [performed] deeds through sight or touch.”³⁵⁰ If the woman denies wrongdoing, “claiming, as they do, that she did not utter those words in such a spirit but as a result of the vehement emotion to which women are subject,” and there is no other proof that can be used to “sentence her to the flames,” the judge will start an inquisition.³⁵¹ If the woman is found to have a bad reputation during this inquisition, “[o]n this basis he can advance the proceedings, so that she should above all be exposed to questioning under torture.”³⁵² Then the standard methods of torture and coercion are followed in the hopes that the woman will confess, and if she is confesses she will, at best, be sentenced to life imprisonment. If for some reason she does not confess and remains steadfast in her declarations of innocence she will be “relegated for at least a year to the miseries of prison and its torments,” and regularly inspected.³⁵³ Then two things can happen, because being released is realistically off the table: first if the judge deemed her to have a bad reputation he can, completely by himself, decide that she be sentenced to death by burning; second, if he wishes the judge can demand she participate in a purgation with “twenty or thirty compurgators” or people

³⁵⁰ Ibid. 596

³⁵¹ Ibid. 597

³⁵² Ibid.

³⁵³ Ibid. 597

willing to vouch for the sorceress.³⁵⁴ Knowing that the sorceress is almost guaranteed to be unable to find that many compurgators the judge is able to condemn her in a roundabout way that absolves him of choosing on his own to execute her, because “if she fails in the purgation, then she will be sentenced to the flames as a guilty person.”³⁵⁵

Execution

As it turns out, ecclesiastical courts didn’t love having blood on their hands, and so they would foist the final judgement of a convicted sorceress onto the secular arm of the law.³⁵⁶ They would be guilty in the secular courts for the “temporal losses” they inflicted, i.e. the death of livestock, after being found guilty of heresy in the religious courts. This was still however, very disingenuous of the ecclesiastical courts, as they did want heretics to be executed while maintaining the veneer of moral superiority. In fact, when they turned over a heretic, or in their words “abandoned them to the secular arm,” the ecclesiastical judge would state in their declaration against them that they hoped for “that court to moderate its sentence against you to avoid shedding your blood and endangering your life when it has you in its power.”³⁵⁷ This was said with full knowledge that the person in question would be taken by the secular court to be burned alive.

The Impact of the *Malleus*

The impact of the *Malleus Maleficarum* is incredibly far reaching. As an artifact and information object it was used as the basis for tens of thousands of horrific deaths, to terrorize entire communities, and to erode the trust between neighbors. The purpose of all

³⁵⁴ Ibid.

³⁵⁵ Ibid.

³⁵⁶ It should be noted that though they regularly used torture, they attempted to seem as if they did not enjoy it, and that they used methods expressly designed to horribly injure people without breaking the skin and making the victims bleed.

³⁵⁷ Ibid. 632

of these actions was to gain, consolidate, and maintain power over the lower classes. Though witch hunts occurred over a long period of time, and in different countries, the reasoning was consistent as were the methods. This was due to the *Malleus*. During the next 120 years, after its initial publication, at least 26 editions were printed, totaling over 50,000 copies.³⁵⁸ It was used as a foundational and fundamentally true text in the field of theology, demonology, and witch hunting. Writers in later decades used parts of it and mentioned it in their own texts to prove their own work was legitimate.

Women's Suffering

Women were, undoubtably, the largest group to be victimized by the *Malleus*. They were demonized on a society-wide scale and people were encouraged to believe women to be flawed and evil. Women were designated as Other, characterized by how lacking they were when compared to men. By the standards set out in the *Malleus*, women were closer to their animal instincts, ruled primarily by lust and greed, unable to regulate their emotions, prone to jealousy, manipulative, stupid, illogical, and burdensome. By comparison men were uplifted as everything women weren't: smart, strong-willed, chaste, faithful, level-headed, and a gift to the world. It is easy to see how a culture that has such extreme gender disparity and a hatred for women could use them as a tool and scapegoat. Did your crops die? A woman did that. Did a child die? Probably a midwife. Impotent? It's not your fault, it's because your ex-girlfriend is a witch.

³⁵⁸ Russell, Jeffrey Burton. 1972. *Witchcraft in the Middle Ages*. Cornell University Press. 79, Broedel, Hans. *The 'Malleus Maleficarum' and the Construction of Witchcraft : Theology and Popular Belief*, Manchester University Press, 2004. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/unc/detail.action?docID=589314>.

In every circumstance bad luck and tragedy was blamed on witches, and when that was impossible it was instead blamed on demons. Even when women were accused of perpetrating crimes, their agency was still not theirs. Instead, their power was given to them by a male-coded demon. Witches served Satan, who despite being an angel and not human is also understood to be male. Women at all times had to be someone else's property, someone else's responsibility, someone else's puppet. If it wasn't their father, it was their husband. When they made demonic pacts, they gave over ownership of their soul. When they had no obvious master was when they were the most vulnerable, and the most dangerous. It was in the best interest of the ruling class to make it so women were unable to be independent. When one was, she violated the social norms and made herself a target. What would have once been a case of a social outcast making their neighbors uneasy became a far larger problem through the *Malleus*. That woman was no longer a widow who wished to live peacefully alone, she was a witch and she was a threat to the community's safety. It also worked in the other direction. Despite the adoration of the Virgin Mary and the professed desire for women to be more faithful servants, women who actual did make the extra effort, for instance a particularly devout maiden or wife, were viewed with suspicion. If a woman stood out in any way she was in danger, even if what she stood out for was positive. Women had to fit themselves into extremely narrow definitions of what was acceptable, limiting themselves so as not to cause trouble and endanger themselves in the process.

One of the greatest accusations to come out of the *Malleus* was that women were sexual deviants, willing to relinquish their eternal soul to a demon for sex. Their depravity was treated like a powerful addiction, but was also inescapable due to their

nature. Women were forced to confess to this during torture, giving elaborate stories about their years-long demonic affairs, orgies they attended, and men they ensorcelled. The focus on how witches were sexual deviants in later witch trials was *entirely* because of the *Malleus*. So was the belief that witches worshipped Satan. Before it was published neither of these things was considered mainstream, and they were not ever considered when interrogating witches. After its publication these became a mainstay of witch hunts. It literally changed how women were perceived and what they were accused of.

Dissolution of Community Ties

Witch hunting, as is clear based on Sprenger and Kramer's own experiences, involved outsiders coming to villages and stirring up trouble. A critical part of witch hunting was the willingness of locals to condemn their neighbors to torture and death. This was done in two ways: first, people were threatened with excommunication if they were found to have protected a witch, thereby encouraging them to find one and turn them in; second, the very nature of having witch hunters show up meant that something bad had happened, and people wanted someone to blame for that even if it was someone they knew. Having a tangible target was much easier than believing God didn't care about your fields, despite your fervent prayer, or was for some reason testing the entire town through starvation. Not that it was outside the realm of possibility for God to test someone this way, or to punish them, but it was better if instead there was a demonic, and therefore evil, force at play. Evil can be identified, demons can be sent back to the pits of Hell, and they can pretend everything is safe again. People during the Medieval and Early Modern period were uneducated, which meant they didn't understand why things like disease happened, and were exceedingly willing to believe. The modern concept of

atheism was not tolerated, you believed because if you didn't, they would kill you. It was not up for debate. From birth you were raised by people who believed, in a society that believed, and so you did too.

It's important to understand this religiosity because the actions of villagers and average citizens were very different than what modern audiences would believe they would do in the same situation. Now, in my opinion, people absolutely would do the same things, for the same reasons, because we only pretend to be better. It's simply human nature. Push someone hard enough, long enough, and they'll violate all the bonds they've ever held sacred. Scare someone badly enough and then tell them how to fix it, and they will give you anything to make them feel secure again. If this means someone has to die, then someone is going to. That is what allowed people to turn in their friends, family members, and even their wives to Inquisitors. And it was not as if they didn't understand the consequences of that action, but the consequences of inaction were perceived to be greater. By placing the witch firmly within the realm of the living the *Malleus* fostered paranoia and encouraged betrayal within communities. This suited the needs of the ruling class. If people didn't trust each other they were far, far less likely to band together and demand better conditions from their liege lords. It allowed Kings and clergy to create a cottage industry of inquisitions while maintaining a tight hold on people.

Echoes Throughout History

Undeniably the *Malleus Maleficarum* changed the course of history. It impacted European society in a way that changed people's day-to-day life and their perception of the world. Kramer and Sprenger's work, though at times controversial, rose to become

the accepted view of the Church in regards to witches and the danger they presented to Christendom. In the 16th C, when Germany held the largest and deadliest witch hunts in the country's history, it was the work of their countrymen, the *Malleus*, that instructed them in how to find, try and execute their witches. The trials, in Trier, Bamberg, Würzburg and Fulda, all had body counts of over 200 individuals killed, with the most violent claiming as many as 1,000 victims over the course of the event. It was, as ever, an expression of both true faith and performative superiority, just on a massive scale. By creating a clear path to follow and establishing a standard of practice Kramer and Sprenger caused witch hunts to become much more efficient.

The distrust and condemnation of women, so emblematic of the *Malleus*, found an audience ready and willing to run with the idea that women were the root of the world's ills, since the fall of Eve, and they should be punished for their very existence. In a culture that already undervalued and abused an entire population, this was fuel for the proverbial fire, as well as the pyres on which the women they vilified would burn. Women would continue to be suspected of witchcraft and malice for the next few hundred years, with the last witch in Europe being executed at the end of the 18th C in 1782. That is 300 years of death.

The concept of witches being real was so ingrained within the European population that they brought it with them to America. The Salem witch trials may be famous, but they are pretty *de rigueur* when compared to their European counterparts. The biggest twist was that they hanged and pressed their witches instead of burning them, but that actually makes sense when you consider they were British ex-pats and that in England hanging was the preferred method of execution. It was on the continent where

burning people alive was the norm. The only reason why they were such believers in witchcraft was because the *Malleus* had been successfully disseminated to as far away as England and Scotland, an impressive feat when you consider the difficulty of travel during this time. The way in which the *Malleus* was written undoubtably contributed to its successful implementation as a witch hunting manual; as far as the authors were concerned witchcraft was real and obviously so. They outright stated that those that doubted them were fools. Then when they went and extracted confessions from victims, they presented it as proof of their oh-so-obvious claims. How could one argue that witchcraft wasn't real if there were so many witches confessing to the Heresy of Sorceresses? In the Catholic understanding of justice God did not allow lies to be uttered if you had sworn an oath on the Bible, and he also did not allow innocent people to be found guilty. So not only were these witches telling the truth, the very fact that God allowed them to be burned alive served as evidence of their crimes. The thoroughly unbalanced trial system given by the *Malleus* allowed for Inquisitors to kill at will, with very few negative consequences, and the built-in protection that questioning their actions could be seen as heretical. It is unsurprising that a process that appeared on the surface to be giving the accused a chance to defend themselves, but in reality was completely unfair, would appeal to so many men who wanted to prove their righteousness.

Despite being incredibly old, or perhaps because of it, the *Malleus* also enjoyed newfound relevance in the 20th C. and emerged as evidence of female magical ability alongside the rise of goddess worship and wicca practiced by 1st and 2nd wave feminists. For Matilda Joslyn Gage, an abolitionist, women's suffrage activist, and writer the historical treatment of witches was proof of deep misogyny and the inclination of the

patriarchy to stamp out female power. She writes in her 1893 article, “Woman, Church and State: a Historical Account of the Status of Woman through the Christian Ages: with Reminiscences of the Matriarchate”, that “the word ‘witch’ formerly signified a woman with superior knowledge.”³⁵⁹ The entire article is a lengthy and detailed accounting of information available at that time about historical Western and European witch hunts mixed with some broad speculations and conclusions. Gage, for example, did not have access to the actual number of people killed during the witch trials and used the inflated figure of 9 million that had been stated without proof by previous authors.³⁶⁰ She also claimed that many of the women killed during “the witch period” which she called a “holocaust,” were “natural psychics” and that their deaths, which were caused by the “ignorance and barbarity of the church...retarded civilization and delayed spiritual progress for many hundred years.”³⁶¹ She also claimed that the word witch, in many languages, was a derivation of those language’s own word for wise woman or priestess, and that witches were akin to pagan priestess who worshipped the old gods or healers. Her assertion that “women were excellent surgeons” in the “feudal age” follows this line of thinking, and Gage also claims that this level of skill made male physicians jealous and prompted them to eliminate their competition by claiming female healers were witches.³⁶² Whether or not this is the case is up for debate, but Gage’s strongly held

³⁵⁹ Gage, Matilda Joslyn. *Woman, Church and State: a Historical Account of the Status of Woman through the Christian Ages: with Reminiscences of the Matriarchate*. Chicago: C. H. Kerr & Company, 1893. Nineteenth Century Collections Online (accessed April 10, 2022).

https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/ASGLAX830399806/NCCO?u=unc_main&sid=bookmark-NCCO&xid=f7572f31&pg=224.

³⁶⁰ Hutton, Ronald (2017). *the witch: a history of fear, from ancient times to the present*. New Haven, London: Yale University Press. pp. 147–211.

³⁶¹ Gage, Matilda Joslyn. *Woman, Church and State: a Historical Account of the Status of Woman through the Christian Ages: with Reminiscences of the Matriarchate*. Chicago: C. H. Kerr & Company, 1893.

³⁶² *Ibid*.

belief in the magical ability of women and their fundamental predisposition towards nature helped pave the way for future claims that witches were persecuted priestesses.

In 2nd wave feminism this thread was picked up by Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English, authors of a pamphlet titled “Witches, Midwives, and Nurses,” in which they claim, “women have always been healers” and that was a threat to the status quo.³⁶³ Their pamphlet, though originally self-published in 1973, was popular enough to have an official reprinting in 2010. They write that “[m]edicine is part of our heritage as women, our history,” and that healers and midwives were especially targeted.³⁶⁴ They explicitly state that the “women’s health movement of today has ancient roots in the medieval covens, and its opponents have as their ancestors those who ruthlessly forced the elimination of witches.”³⁶⁵³⁶⁶ English and Ehrenreich use the existence of *Malleus Maleficarum* and quotes from the text itself to prove their claims and show how destructive witch hunts were for women. They write, “[f]or three centuries this sadistic book lay on the bench of every judge, every witch hunter,” and that for “Catholic and Protestant witch hunters alike, the unquestioned authority on how to conduct a witch hunt was *The Malleus Maleficarum*, or *Hammer of Witches*.”³⁶⁷

³⁶³ Ehrenreich, Barbara, and English, Deirdre. 2010. *Witches, Midwives, & Nurses (Second Edition) : A History of Women Healers*. New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY. Accessed April 10, 2022. ProQuest Ebook Central.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

³⁶⁶ Though the authors now feely admit, in their second edition, that their conclusions drawn in the first edition were based information that has since been discredited the fact remains that they did claim these things, such as the higher body counts and existence of witch covens. These pieces of information were not retracted until the second edition some forty years later and the initial document had wide success among 2nd wave feminists of the time. It is entirely reasonable to believe that their audience would still believe what they had initially read and that they may be unaware of these new corrections.

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

Methodology

I performed a qualitative content analysis of my text. This let me examine the contents of the *Malleus Maleficarum* as a foundational information object that catapulted the practice of witch-hunting into the stratosphere. It was used as justification for numerous terrible things and analyzing what it actually says and how it says it helped me to understand how it became popularized and found itself at the center of the witch-hunting spree.

Positionality / Researcher Role

I don't believe witches are real, I don't think that tens of thousands of women should have been hung or burnt at the stake for such a crime, and I think that the actions of leaders during this time (though explainable and not unusual) were mistakes. The prevalence of witch hunts makes sense given the social atmosphere of Early Modern Europe, but the unverifiable claims made against women, and their subsequent torture and deaths, aren't positive things we should be proud of. Misinformation kills people, and that's something we should acknowledge.

Sample / Research Participants

The most important portion of my sample has a very limited population: books discussing witches and witch hunting from 1450-1700 in Europe, specifically the *Malleus Maleficarum*. I used the Christopher Mackay translated edition.

Data Collection Methods

My data collection involved accessing a translated *Malleus Maleficarum*, since it is a very long and dense text and it is my main focus, it was the only text I analyzed the contents of.

Data Analysis Methods

I used both manifest and latent content analysis, I wanted to look at the number of times terms are used, and also the context in which they are employed. I also wanted to look at the tone of the text, the shifting styles between authors, and the ways in which the text builds on its definition of witches while justifying the actions it suggests (i.e., burning someone alive). There is to my knowledge no existing coding guide on my topic.

Research Quality and Ethical Considerations

To establish my credibility, I plan on explaining my own bias as it might relate to my topic, especially surrounding the modern misinformation and its consequences. My plan involves using direct quotes for more sensitive subjects and to avoid generalization and hyperbole where possible, to be transparent about my opinions and being honest about any issues I encounter. I can also include some of my coding and the samples in the appendix.

I will acknowledge that my sample size is small, and that it is not randomized. It is important to examine the text in its entirety to understand the context of the terms being used. There is not enough time or budget to have others code alongside me, so I will also acknowledge that any choices made are solely mine.

I will also make a point of examining the minority voices in existing witch scholarship and the positions they hold, namely the belief that certain populations were targeted and that the witch hunts were not a form of gendered violence.

In terms of ethics my subjects are long dead. The names of anyone mentioned are real historical figures who participated in, or were the victims of, these witch hunts. Because of this I will not redact or otherwise conceal their names as it helps to provide context if their names are present.

Impact & Limitations

I don't see my paper to be very far reaching, more that I am connecting the past to the present. By doing that we might better understand how similar situations and schemes are reproduced, how emotional manipulation isn't limited to any era, and that despite our belief that we are better educated than our "ye olde" counterparts human nature makes us susceptible to propaganda. People want to feel special, they want to feel powerful, and leaders will otherize a group in order to give the majority that sense of superiority and solidify their own power over an entire community/town/country.

I suppose my stakeholders would be people interested in that research, and other historians. Time is a significant limitation, as it always is, but I am also limited by the quality of my translated materials and the condition of contemporary sources, like scan quality of letters between Bishoprics and lesser clergy.

Conclusions

I believe it is clear in that the impact of the *Malleus Maleficarum* was incredibly far reaching, both in the influence the text had over future witch hunts as well as its actual distribution across Europe. It was popular for witch hunters and those serving in both Ecclesiastical and secular courts throughout the 15th C and into the 17th C. It then reemerged as proof of female divinity and persecution for 1st and 2nd wave feminists who

used the text when discussing their theories on these topics. It has throughout caused immense pain and suffering to women, divided and alienated people and communities, and remained relevant.

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