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**Death by 'Divelishe
Demonstracion' - Witchcraft
Beliefs, Gender and Popular
Religion in the Early Modern
Midlands and North of England**

by

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Abstract

The last thirty years has witnessed a revival of scholarly debate surrounding the early modern witch trials. Despite this, there still remains a necessity for a gender history of the English witch trials, since those interpretations which address the question of gender in sufficient depth consist mainly of literary criticism approaches based on literary or pamphlet sources. This indicates a secondary need, for a study which examines non-pamphlet as well as pamphlet material, which establishes a wider picture of community witchcraft beliefs and demonstrates the effectiveness of gender theories by examining previously unresearched cases. This thesis examines an unprecedented range of pamphlet and non-pamphlet sources from the Midlands and the North of England, demonstrating the importance of examining material from under-researched cases and geographical areas, and presents a valuable contribution to existing knowledge of the subject.

This theoretical and methodological approach has involved the challenging and developing of various interpretations of witchcraft beliefs. It is argued that social tension theories do not take sufficient account of the specifically female context of these tensions, or of the overriding importance of reputation in the community. The feminist emphasis on sexual elements of witchcraft beliefs is also questioned, demonstrating that a focus on the role of the body is more effective in understanding witchcraft beliefs. The effectiveness of gender analysis is further demonstrated through an examination of theories positioning the witch as an evil mother figure or antithesis of the ideal woman. Furthermore, it is argued that whilst witchcraft beliefs and accusations involved issues of power for all concerned, that the nature of this power was clearly gendered.

Finally, it is argued that witchcraft beliefs must be understood in the context of popular culture and religion, where the early modern mentality of a supernatural world was polarised into powers of good and evil. The necessity of examining the role of cunning people and folk magic is demonstrated, in order to understand the wider context of community witchcraft beliefs. The use of gender analysis and the examination of new material in this thesis confirms that witchcraft beliefs were much more than a question of 'death by divelische demonstracion', but rather that these beliefs were part of a complex context of popular culture and intra-gender relations.

Contents

<u>Acknowledgements</u>	iii
<u>Conventions and abbreviations</u>	iv
<u>Chapter One</u>	1
<u>Chapter Two - Reputation and Neighbourly Behaviour</u>	68
<u>Chapter Three - Sexuality and the Body</u>	132
<u>Chapter Four - The Evil Mother</u>	194
<u>Chapter Five - Desiring Power</u>	242
<u>Chapter Six - Popular Religion and Counter-magic</u>	293
<u>Conclusion</u>	349
<u>Bibliography</u>	358

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Conventions and abbreviations

Contracted words have been extended where necessary to aid comprehension, and 'i's have been silently replaced by 'j's, and 'u's for 'v's where appropriate. Explanations of archaic words have been placed in square brackets or in a footnote. Where pamphlets were not paginated the signature reference has been used, where available. Spellings of places and names have only been modernised in my text, in quotations they remain as in the original source.

The following abbreviations have been used to denote the locations and types of primary source evidence:

D.R.O. - Derbyshire Record Office.

L.R.O. - Lancashire Record Office.

Le.R.O. - Leicestershire Record Office.

L.J.R.O. - Lichfield Joint Record Office.

L.A. - Lincolnshire Archives.

N.A.R. - Nottinghamshire Archives, Nottingham Archdeaconry Registers, and Hodgkinson, R.F.B., Transcriptions of Proceedings of the Court of the Archdeaconry of Nottingham, 1565-1675, M461-3.

N.Q.S.M. - Nottinghamshire Archives, Nottinghamshire Quarter Session Minute Books, 1603-1736.

N.Y.R.O. - North Yorkshire Record Office.

S.Q.S.R. - Staffordshire Record Office, Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1633 - 1736.

W.S.Q.S.R. - William Salt Library, Stafford, Staffordshire Quarter Sessions Rolls, 1609 - 1633.

References of primary sources most frequently cited in the notes have been abbreviated, after their first citation, as follows.

A Detection of damnable driftes (1579) - A Detection of damnable driftes, practized by three Witches arraigned at Chelmissforde in Essex, at the laste Assises there holden, which were executed in Aprill 1579, (London, 1579).

A true and exact Relation (1645) - A true and exact Relation of the severall Informations, Examinations, and Confessions of the late Witches, arraigned and executed in the County of Essex, (London, 1645).

Cal.St.Pap.D. - Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1547-1704, (London, 1856-1972).

Darrell,J., A Detection (1600) - A detection of That Sinnful, Shamful, Lying and Ridiculous Discours of Samuel Harshnet, (1600).

- Darrell,J., A Survey (1602)** - A Survey of Certain Dialogical Discourses, (1602).
- Darrell,J., A True Narration (1600)** - A True Narration of the Strange and Grevous Vexation by the Devil, of 7. Persons in Lancashire, and William Somers of Nottingham, (London, 1600).
- Fairfax,E., Daemonologia (1621)** - E.Fairfax, Daemonologia: A Discourse on Witchcraft as it was acted in the family of Mr Edward Fairfax of Fuystone, in the county of York (1621), (Harrogate, 1882).
- Harsnett,S., A Discovery (1599)** - A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practises of John Darrel Bachelor of Artes, (London, 1599).
- Hutchinson,F., An Historical Essay (1718)** - An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft, (London, 1718).
- More,G., A True Discourse (1600)** - A True Discourse Concerning the Certain Possession and Dispossessio[n] of 7 persons in one familie in Lancashire, (1600).
- Most wonderfull and true storie (1597)** - The most wonderfull and true storie, of a certaine Witch Named Alse Gooderige of Stapenhill, (London, 1597).
- Potts,T., The Wonderfull Discoverie (1613)** - T.Potts, The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster, (London, 1613), in Remains Historical & Literary Connected with the Palatine Counties of Lancaster and Chester, vol.VI, (London, 1845).
- Taylor,Z., The Surey Impostor (1697)** - The Surey Impostor: Being an Answer to a Late Fanatical Pamphlet Entituled The Surey Demoniack, (London, 1697).
- The Apprehension and confession (1589)** - The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches. Arreigned and by Justice condemned and executed at Chelmes-forde, in the Countye of Essex, the 5. Day of Julye, last past. 1589., (London, 1589).
- The examination and confession (1566)** - The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex before the Quenes majesties Judges, the XXVI daye of Julye Anno 1566., (London, 1566).
- The Lawes Against Witches (1645)** - The Lawes Against Witches and Conjuraton and Some Brief Notes and Observations for the Discovery of Witches, (London, 1645).
- The Surey Demoniack (1697)** - The Surey Demoniack: or, an Account of Satans Strange and Dreadful Actings, In an about the Body of Richard Dugdale of Surey, near Whalley in Lancashire, (London, 1697).

The Wonderful Discoverie (1619) - The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Joan Flower neere Bever Castle, (London, 1619, reprint Hertford, 1970).

Triall of Maist Dorrell (1599) - Triall of Maist Dorrell, or A Collection of Defences, (London, 1599).

Witches of Warboys (1593) - The most strange and admirable discoverie of three Witches of Warboys, (London, 1593).

W.W., A true and just Recorde (1582) - W.W., A true and just Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S.Oses in the countie of Essex, (London, 1582).

Chapter One

Introduction

This introductory chapter will consist of a survey of the major relevant historiography of the early modern witch trials. This will focus upon three main areas pertinent to this study - religion, community, and gender. Within each of these sections the major theories, interpretations and models will be assessed, and a statement made as to how this thesis constitutes a progression in the knowledge and understanding of these areas. This historiographical survey will also involve discussion of methodological approaches adopted by the historians and writers examined, and those to be utilised throughout this study. This will be followed by a discussion of the sources used in the study, and a note on the geographical area under consideration. Finally, it will be stated how the main arguments and themes of the thesis will be structured through the chapters.

Despite the rising interest in women's and gender history over the last thirty years, much work remains to be carried out on the early modern period. Wiesner shows how the early modern period is generally accepted and seen to consist of a series of intellectual movements such as the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation.¹ Yet:

If a particular development had little, or indeed a negative, effect on women, can we still call a period a 'golden age', a 'Renaissance', or an 'Enlightenment'? Can we continue to view the seventeenth century, during which hundreds or perhaps thousands of women were burned as witches on the European continent, as the period of 'the spread of rational thought'?²

¹ Crawford, P., 'The Challenges to Patriarchalism - How Did the Revolution Affect Women?', in J. Morrill, Revolution and Restoration - England in the 1650s, (London, 1992), 112; Wiesner, M., Women and Gender in Early Modern Europe, (Cambridge, 1993), 3-4. Kelly also questioned this accepted periodization of history in 'Did Women Have a Renaissance?', in Women. History and Theory - The Essays of Joan Kelly, (London, 1984), 19-50.

² Roper, L., Oedipus and the Devil - Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe, (London, 1994), 5.

This is an extremely pertinent point as the witch-hunts of the early modern period cannot be regarded as a mad, irrational hiccup in the age of the birth and growth of modern 'rationality'.

This emphasises the problematic nature of the term 'witch-craze'. The witch trials were, far from being a 'craze', a central feature of early modern society and thought. In fact, elite discussions surrounding witchcraft and demonology, it can be argued, can almost be seen as a separate phenomenon to the trials themselves, being seated within deep religious, political and philosophical issues fundamental to early modern thought.³ Thus, throughout this study the term 'witch-craze' has been avoided, except where it has been used in relation to the work of other historians. The term 'witch-hunt' is also problematic since it infers a consistent, homogenous and organised movement, whereas, as it will be argued, the experience of the witch trials differed across regions, let alone countries. With a few notable exceptions, these trials consisted of sporadic accusations which arose from community based disputes.

The use of three further terms should also be noted here. Firstly, witches; this term is taken to refer to those accused or suspected of witchcraft activities at the time, and does not infer a belief that those accused were all actually practitioners of witchcraft. Neither does it negate the contemporary belief in the reality of witchcraft. The terms bewitchment and possession also need some clarification. A bewitched person was one who believed themselves, or was believed by others, to have been affected by witchcraft in some way. A possessed person was one who was believed to have a demon within them, sent either by a witch or, in some cases, by the devil. Thus not all possession cases were thought to involve the actions of witches, although all of the possession cases examined in this study did involve discussions of witches as the

³ Clark, S., Thinking With Demons - The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, (Oxford, 1997). Briggs also notes that the term 'witch-craze' should be reserved for exceptional, epidemic cases. Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours - The Social and Cultural Context of European Witchcraft, (London, 1996), 401.

guilty party. Since witches were believed to have caused the possession of the individuals referred to in this study, the terms bewitchment and possession have been used to describe possessed persons, whilst the term bewitchment has been used alone to define those affected by witchcraft in other ways.

It is necessary to analyse the historiography of the early modern witch trials, in order to locate the main theories used to explore this issue, and thus the areas that this research will be developing. The belief in witchcraft is probably as ancient as the human race. Therefore it is essential to understand why it was in this particular era that the biblical verse 'Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live' (Exodus 22:18) was carried out so literally, and why this movement appears to have surrounded women in particular. In comparison with the continental figures of around 50,000 executions, the estimated figure of 1,000 witches killed in England is relatively low, and witchcraft remained an exceptional crime throughout the period. Nevertheless, as Thomas states, 'the volume of prosecution is large enough to call for some explanation'.⁴

Religion - Elite and Popular Beliefs

The witch trials were inherently connected with religious concerns, since witches were felt by learned contemporaries to pose a direct threat to both the church and godly society. Beliefs about witchcraft were also firmly embedded in both elite and popular systems of thought and belief.⁵ Thus many theories have focused upon

⁴ Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England, (London, 1971), 451; Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness - Witchcraft in England 1550-1750, (London, 1996), 5.

⁵ It could be argued that the elite/popular distinction is somewhat artificial regarding witchcraft beliefs which were arguably universal. There was no consensus even among elite writers on the issue of witchcraft. Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines in Early Modern England', in Kaplan, S.L., (ed.), Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century, (Mouton Publishers, 1984), 90. The terms elite and popular have been used to ascertain whether we can see a difference between learned and popular beliefs through a variety of sources.

religious issues to attempt to explain why the persecution of witches occurred in this period.

One of the first major twentieth-century interpretations of the early modern witch hunts, termed by Macfarlane as 'The most radical attempt to provide an explanation of the history of witchcraft prosecutions', was that of Margaret Murray. Through Murray's two major works - *The Witch-Cult of Western Europe* (1921), and *The God of Witches* (1931), she presented anthropological studies which claimed that the witches prosecuted were surviving members of a pre-Christian cult based on fertility rites. This cult was thus alien to the new Christian religion's ideal of monastic celibacy. This theory (which remained very influential until the 1960s) was itself influenced by nineteenth-century works by the German writers Jarcke and Mone, and the French historian Michelet, author of *La Sorciere*. However, as Hutton states: 'None of these authors was a good historian...None carried out any systematic research'.⁶ As we shall see, this failure to carry out systematic primary research has doomed various other, potentially useful, theories to endless criticism, particularly in the field of feminist and gender theories.

Murray's first work on the subject, *The Witch-Cult of Western Europe*, claimed that this 'cult' was the ancient religion of Western Europe which had remained pagan although the ruling classes had converted to Christianity. She argued that in the fifteenth-century the Christian church attacked the old religion accusing it of heresy and witchcraft, which resulted in the witch-hunts of the early modern period. The cult worshipped non-Christian gods such as Dianus (often in the female form of

⁶ Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England - A Regional and Comparative Study*, (London, 1970), 10; Gardiner, T., *Broomstick Over Essex and East Anglia*, (Essex, 1981), 21; Cohn, N., *Europe's Inner Demons - An Inquiry Inspired by the Great Witch-hunt*, (London, 1975); Hutton, R., *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles - Their Nature and Legacy*, (Oxford, 1991), 301. The links between witchcraft, the Old Religion, and a pre-Christian matriarchy put forward in Murray's work continue to be made. As recently as 1987, Rowan claimed that these beliefs were symbolised by the 'Great Goddess'. Hole, C., *Witchcraft in England*, (London, 1979), 48; Shinner, J., 'Gréat Goddess', *The Guardian*, (3/2/1987), 10. Thus, despite the widespread historical criticism of Murray's work, it still retains a certain vogue amongst particular groups even today.

Diana) or Cerunnos the Horned God. Murray also claimed that the cult was organised into local covens of thirteen; twelve members and the god. The covens were engaged in sexual rituals for fertility, which Murray saw as being focused upon heavily in the trials, as well as feasts and dances which also tie in with the idea of a demonic sabbat. Murray claimed that these rituals: 'show that it was a joyous religion: and as such it must have been quite incomprehensible to the gloomy Inquisitors and Reformers who suppressed it'.⁷

In her later work *The God of Witches*, Murray suggested that various kings of England had been adherents of what she now termed the 'Old Religion', and were in fact Divine Kings granted a seven year reign. This reign could be extended if a 'Divine Victim' went through the death ritual in their place, Murray arguing that Thomas Beckett, Joan of Arc and Gilles de Rais were such victims. The 'Old Religion' then fell into disrepute with the rise of Christianity, which asserted that any non-Christian deity was a devil. Thus, she argued that 'this passionate clinging to their own religion and their own god was regarded by the Christian recorders as blasphemy and devilish obstinacy'. Murray saw the fact that some women were prepared to confess voluntarily as proof that they were defending their religion, seeing them as rushing 'headlong on to their fate, determined to die for their faith and their God'. Furthermore, explaining why witches were predominantly women, she claimed that 'the Old Religion held its place longer among the women than among the men'. This theory has been supported by anthropologists and historians such as Hughes, Harrison, and Holmes, the latter of whom sees witchcraft as 'the

⁷ Murray, M.A., *The God of Witches*, (London, 1931), 13; Ginzburg, C., also sees popular magical beliefs and customs as having palaeolithic origins, see Couliano, I.P., 'Invitation to the Sabbath', *Times Literary Supplement*, (15/12/1989), 14; Tucker, E., argues that the roots of contemporary witchcraft can be seen in the Middle Ages, in 'Antecedents of Contemporary Witchcraft in the Middle Ages', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 14, (Summer 1980), 70-78; Hutton, R., *Pagan Religions*, 307; Murray, M.A., *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, (Oxford, 1921), 15.

remnant of pagan practices which the Christian Church did not, or could not supersede'.⁸

This theory accounted for many factors such as uniformity of confessions, accounts of organised covens and regular sabbats, refusal to repent even in the face of death, and even 'witch's marks' or insensitive blemishes often taken as proof of guilt. It has, nevertheless, been highly criticised. Larner stated that 'we have now reached a stage when it is possible to ignore altogether the once influential view of Murray', whereas Ewen dismissed it as 'vapid balderdash'. There is little evidence of any organised witchcraft apart from perhaps the witch trials of 1582 at St. Osyth, Essex, of thirteen witches, the 1612 Pendle witch trials at Lancaster and a 1673 case of witchcraft in Northumberland, where a witness spoke of witches being organised into 'coveys' of thirteen. As Quaife states 'they did not attack the Old Religion simply because it did not exist'.⁹ Regarding elements such as the demonic sabbat, Cohn has since argued that these were features of an ancient stereotype of deviance applied to various groups, real or imaginary, seen as posing a threat to wider society.¹⁰

⁸ Harrison, M., The Roots of Witchcraft, (London, 1975), 48, 192-3; Murray, M.A., The God of Witches, 14, 69, 71; Murray, M.A., The Witch Cult in Western Europe, 16; Holmes, R., Witchcraft in British History, (London, 1974), 13; Hughes, P., Witchcraft, (Middlesex, 1965). G.B. Harrison also supports the notion of a witch-cult, seeing the Pendle witchcraft trial of 1612 as a good example; Harrison, G.B., The Trial of the Lancaster Witches, (London, 1929), vii-xlvi.

⁹ Hughes, P., Witchcraft, 101; C. Larner, Witchcraft and Religion - The Politics of Popular Belief, (Oxford, 1984), 47; Harrison, M., The Roots of Witchcraft, 191; Hole, C., Witchcraft in England, 100; Raine, J., 'Depositions from York Castle', Surtees Society, (1860), vol. 40, 191, 195; Quaife, G.R., Godly Zeal and Furious Rage - The Witch in Early Modern Europe, (Kent, 1987), 69.

¹⁰ Cohn, N., Europe's Inner Demons. Ginzburg developed Cohn's analysis, arguing that the image of the sabbat was a compromise between learned and popular beliefs. Ginzburg, C., 'The Witches' Sabbat: Popular Culture or Inquisitional Stereotype?', in Kaplan, S.L., (ed.), Understanding Popular Culture, 39-51. For further discussion of the origins of the sabbat stereotype, and some of the misinterpretations of the evidence upon which it has been based, see Cohn, N., 'Was there ever a society of Witches? Myths & Hoaxes of European Demonology (I)', Encounter, (Dec. 1974), 43, 26-41 and Cohn, N., 'Three Forgeries - Myths & Hoaxes of European Demonology (II)', Encounter, (Jan. 1975), 44, 11-24. Sharpe discusses the notion of persecuting societies in Sharpe, J.A., 'Witches and Persecuting Societies', Journal of Historical Sociology, (1990), vol. 3, 75-86; and Instruments of Darkness, 16.

It has been argued that Murray confused the remnants of paganism with the mythology of demonology constructed by European Inquisitors. For instance, her 'ignorance of ancient paganism in Western Europe prevented her from realising that the rituals imputed to early modern witches were not antique rites but parodies of contemporary Christian ceremonies and social mores'. By relying upon pamphlet accounts, European demonology and confessions of the accused witches, often given under torture, it can also be argued that she 'mistook what people thought to be happening for what actually did happen'.¹¹ Indeed, Horsley claims that by the end of the fifteenth-century:

the ecclesiastical and secular ruling groups had come to believe that Christendom was threatened by a massive witch cult...However, most people in Europe at that time, not enjoying much contact with the theologians and demonologists, perhaps not even with the parish clergy, apparently did not share these recently developed ideas at all.

He further claims that, perhaps in reaction to Murray's theories, more recent works on early modern witchcraft have neglected the role of European popular religion and its role in understanding the witch-hunt.¹²

Finally, Quaife claims that the argument that witches were members of an alternative pre-Christian society, with different values (such as matriarchy) to those of patriarchal Europe, is 'little more than a backward projection by extreme feminists of their idealised future'.¹³ This offers an example of how feminist and gender theories of the witch trials have been criticised and dismissed. It should not be forgotten, however, that Murray at least attempted to find some explanation for the

¹¹ Horsley regards these sources as 'inferior', compared to 'superior' documents in which people speak for themselves, Horsley, R., 'Further Reflections on Witchcraft and European Folk Religion', *History of Religions*, 19, (1979), 73. More recent studies, such as that by Roper, argue that we can read people's views through confessions, Roper, L., *Oedipus and the Devil*, 227.

¹² Trevor-Roper, H.R., 'The European Witch Craze of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries', in *Religion, the Reformation and Social Change*, (London, 1956), 116; Hutton, R., *The Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, 303; Horsley, R., 'Further Reflections on Witchcraft', 73; Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 10. The role of popular religion will be discussed further in Chapter Six.

¹³ Quaife, G.R., *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage*, 109; Hole, C., *Witchcraft in England*, 47; Hutton, R., *Pagan Religions*, 331.

overwhelming predominance of women as accused witches; a feature which was to be found lacking in studies of the witch trials for the next fifty years. Importantly, she also explored religion in terms of the beliefs of the people.

Trevor-Roper claimed that the belief in witches was not 'a lingering ancient superstition, only waiting to dissolve', but that it was 'a new explosive force, constantly and fearfully expanding with the passage of time'. As such he argued that the witch-craze is not separable from the intellectual and spiritual thought encouraged by the leading religious spokesmen of the early modern period.¹⁴ It is thus argued that religious factors were inevitably involved in the history of the witch trials, since it was during the early modern period that the religious authorities created a new system of demonology, which defined witchcraft as heresy against the Christian church.

In pre-Christian society, a distinction was made between 'white' witchcraft or healing, and 'black' witchcraft or 'maleficium'. Churchmen and lawyers defined a third type of witchcraft in this period which gave the idea of a demonic pact a central role. As Lerner stated: 'The witch became a witch by virtue of a personal arrangement with the Devil who appeared to his potential recruit in some physical form...the development of this theory had a drastic effect on the rate of prosecutions'. This was important as the increasing belief that witches existed in an organised form working against the church led to more prosecutions in Europe. Furthermore, the idea of a pact with the Devil being the source of all magic power reduced the distinction between black and white witchcraft - both being perceived as evil in source whether used for harming or healing. Witchcraft was thus seen as a religious crime, witches becoming heretics and enemies of God and Christendom, leading to a campaign to search out and destroy them. Indeed, elite thinkers sometimes saw good witches in a worse light than malefic ones. The contemporary

¹⁴ Trevor-Roper, H.R., 'The European Witch Craze', 91.

William Perkins thought that the injuries caused by evil witches merely led them to seek help from white witches who did 'a thousandfold more harm then the former' and were 'the more horrible and detestable Monster'.¹⁵

As Thomas suggests, this is an important theory as during this period witchcraft beliefs did appear to involve a new element with no precedent. However, it does not explain the gap in time between the formulation of these demonological beliefs in the fourteenth and fifteenth-centuries, particularly with the Papal Bull *Summis Desiderantes Affectibus* issued in December 1484 condemning the spread of witchcraft in Germany, and the publication of the *Malleus Maleficarum* in 1486, and the massive rise in persecution of witches which occurred during the sixteenth-century.¹⁶

However, in England, it has been argued, 'the distinction between black and white witchcraft was largely maintained', especially at a popular level. The majority of indictments were for acts of maleficium, or malicious witchcraft, and the demonic pact was rarely mentioned, except in the more sensational trials such as those instigated by the self-styled 'Witchfinder General' Matthew Hopkins in Essex and East Anglia in 1645-7.¹⁷ Participation in a demonic pact did not become a formal crime in England until 1604, when the majority of witch trials had already taken place. Even the 1604 Witchcraft Act, which alluded to the notion of witchcraft deriving from a demonic pact, defined the crime of witchcraft as a crime against people and property, and not as heresy; a fact which was bemoaned by the clergy.¹⁸ This has been used as one of the bases for the argument that the English witchcraft persecution should be regarded as something separate and very different to the

¹⁵ Lerner, C., *Witchcraft and Religion*, 3; Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 438; Clark, S., 'Protestant Demonology: Sin, Superstition and Society', in Ankarloo, B. & Henningsen, G., (eds.), *Early Modern Witchcraft - Centres and Peripheries*, (Oxford, 1993), 65; Cohn, N., *Europe's Inner Demons*, chapter 12.

¹⁶ Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 456.

¹⁷ Stearne, J., *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft*, (1648, reprint, Yorkshire, 1973).

¹⁸ Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 87.

Continental experience of the same phenomenon, perhaps based on more popular conceptions of what witchcraft entailed.¹⁹

Clark argues that in England a 'Protestant demonology' 'arose at the intersection of clerical and popular culture, with the result that 'witchcraft' came to include a very wide range of proscribed behaviour, much of it far removed from the classic stereotype of devil-worship'. He further argues that at the centre of Protestant attitudes towards witchcraft was 'the origin, nature, and significance of everyday misfortunes. So important were these issues that they may almost be said to underlie the whole of Protestant demonology'.²⁰ This supports theories of declining community ethics and rising neighbourly disputes, examined further below.

This brings us to the crucial issue of popular belief, which, it has been argued, played an important part in perpetuating the witch trials. This theory is linked to the argument that a new demonology was crucial in forming the intellectual justification for the mass witch trials of the early modern period. Kieckhefer argued that by 1500 some of these learned beliefs had spread down to the lower orders of society, beliefs which were dynamic, not static, and which varied regionally. As Thomas states, 'at a popular level every kind of magical activity, including any acceptable brand of religion, might be lumped together under the blanket title of 'witchcraft' and there was no special term to indicate maleficent magicians'. Belief in witchcraft was almost universal across the social hierarchy, respected local learned men were frequently called in to pass judgement, such as Sir Thomas Browne who took part in the trial and condemnation of Amy Dunny and Rose Cullender of Bury St Edmunds in Norfolk in 1664.²¹

¹⁹ The distinction between black and white magic can be seen in cases where people resort to 'cunning men' or women to counteract the malefic magic of a witch, for example the case of Jane Clarke tried at Leicester assizes in 1717, Le.R.O., QS 113. For comparative work on European witchcraft prosecutions see Ankarloo, B. & Henningsen, G. (eds.), Early Modern Witchcraft.

²⁰ Clark, S., 'Protestant Demonology: Sin, Superstition and Society', 62, 59.

²¹ Larner, C., Witchcraft and Religion, 53.

Belief in witchcraft provided an alternative to the Protestant belief that God had direct intervention in everyday life and that therefore misfortune was punishment for sin. It was easier for the individual to attribute these misfortunes to a witch as it 'provided an explanation for otherwise inexplicable personal losses and sufferings, for disease and the inefficacy of seventeenth century medicine'. As Quaife states, this also had an immediate advantage as it 'enabled action to be taken against the personal source of misfortune. God could not be dealt with, the witch neighbour could'. Thomas echoes this point, suggesting that popular witch belief covered up the inadequacies of early modern medicine. However, Macfarlane refutes this theory, arguing that witchcraft was cited in only a small proportion of accidents, and rather that the determining factor was the relationship between the witch and the victim, and that it was this social context which determined the accusation of witchcraft.²²

The idea of popular beliefs echoing the beliefs of the learned classes has been attacked, particularly by Horsley, who has argued that the majority of early modern people did not share these newly developed ideas. As Sharpe states, 'the concern of the lower orders was with maleficium rather than with those demonological aspects of witchcraft which so exercised learned writers'. Horsley claimed that the early modern psyche differentiated between wise women or cunning folk, witches and sorcerers.²³ Holmes, however, convincingly argues that the acceptance or adaptation of elite and popular beliefs about witchcraft was more of a two-way process. Learned and popular conceptions agreed that maleficent witches were predominantly female, and that this power was frequently passed down through female kinship ties.

²² Quaife, G.R., Godly Zeal and Furious Rage, 182; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 536-7; Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 196. The social context of accusations is discussed below. Further discussion of the attribution of illnesses to witchcraft by physicians can be found in Deetjen, C., 'Witchcraft and Medicine', Bulletin of the Institute of the History of Medicine, (1934), vol.2, 164-75.

²³ Horsley, R., 'Further Reflections on Witchcraft', 73; Sharpe, J.A., 'Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth Century England - Some Northern Evidence', Continuity and Change, 6, (Aug, 1991), 10; Horsley, R., 'Who Were the Witches: Social Roles of the Accused in the European Witch Trials', Journal of Interdisciplinary History, 9, (1979), 698.

The popular belief in the use of animal familiars by witches to carry out their evil deeds was, it is argued, incorporated by the clergy, who argued that the familiar was given to the witch as part of the demonic pact.

On the other hand, learned beliefs concerning witchcraft were imposed on the populace, notably the belief in the demonic pact. Holmes states that the imposition of this belief was temporarily successful since by the mid seventeenth-century 'a conflation of the roles of Satan and the familiar is far less evident' in popular accounts. However, learned arguments about the demonic origin of the power of cunning people did not deter people from resorting to them, nor did the opprobrium of elite groups targeted at the practice of 'swimming' witches appear to deter this popular practice, which continued well after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1736.²⁴ These arguments indicate that there was a discourse between elite and popular understandings of witchcraft. There is much need for more work on popular belief in this period to gain a fuller picture of witchcraft beliefs at a community level, and this is one area that this study will be seeking to redress. Throughout this study, the issues of how different sources represent elite and popular beliefs in witchcraft will be examined, and the role of witchcraft in popular belief in discussed at length in Chapter Six. Elite and popular beliefs were not polarised, but involved interplay and interaction between the two.

The final religious explanation for early modern witchcraft persecution to be noted here is that it took place in response to deep seated problems within the church framework and major religious changes in society. Hughes argued that we can see three major peaks in the prosecution of witches, and that each marked a period when new ideas were threatening the authoritarian structure of the church. The third, and major, peak occurred during the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries when the

²⁴ Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 85-111; Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 71-5, 136-9, 163; Willis, Malevolent Nurture - Witch-hunting and Maternal Power in early Modern England, (London, 1995), 88-9.

Renaissance and Protestant Reformation had disrupted Catholic Europe, closely followed by the Catholic Counter-Reformation forces desperately crusading against heresy. As Muchembled stated:

theologians revived stereotypes that had no popular basis, in order to demonstrate the existence and progress of a huge satanic plot designed to make the powers of evil triumph upon earth. Such ideas unquestionably reflected the disarray of authority and especially that of churchmen; confronted with the fissures that portended the disruption of Christianity in the sixteenth century.²⁵

Roper has recently argued further to this that 'the Reformation seems to mark some kind of transition towards a newly resurgent patriarchalism in society'. This is important as it has a bearing on the role of women in this period, particularly in the light of the witch trials.²⁶

Although England was arguably less violently affected by the Reformation and Counter-Reformation than the Continent, it has been argued that the return of the Marian exiles from Europe upon the accession of Elizabeth I in 1558 brought the European fears of witchcraft back with them, leading to a rise in prosecutions. Trevor-Roper, one of the most influential exponents of this theory, related the history of the witch-hunts to the rise and fall of religious zeal, and conquest then reconquest by Reformation and then Counter-Reformation forces. Although he stressed the role of social factors, particularly internal social unrest in causing the witch-hunts and external warfare in reducing them, he nonetheless claimed that the witch-craze was 'directly connected with the return of religious war' and that 'almost every local outbreak can be related to the aggression of one religion upon another'.²⁷

²⁵ Hughes, P., *Witchcraft*, 163-4; Muchembled, R., 'Satanic Myths & Cultural Reality', in Ankarloo, B. & Henningsen, G., (eds.), *Early Modern Witchcraft*, 140, Macfarlane found no correlation between religious tensions and the prevalence of witchcraft accusations in Essex, Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 189.

²⁶ Roper, L., *Oedipus and the Devil*, 38, 98.

²⁷ Gardiner, T., *Broomstick Over Essex and East Anglia*, 22; H.R. Trevor Roper, 'The European Witch Craze', 143, 145.

In an age of great religious upheaval and change, and rising threats to the established church framework in the form of Protestantism, and later sectarianism, it can be argued that the witch-hunts were used as a means of social control by the religious establishment. As Hughes succinctly stated, 'the panic measures to stamp out witchcraft came not from strength but from an establishment facing despair'.²⁸ It is important to remember that both Catholics and Protestants were involved in maintaining the witch-hunts. Arguably, the Catholic authorities formulated the new demonology through the aforementioned 1484 Papal Bull, and the *Malleus Maleficarum* of 1486. However, Thomas suggests that it was the Protestant Reformation that led to the increased witchcraft prosecutions in England. He argues that since the Protestant clergy prohibited recourse to counter magic and denied the intercessionary power of the Devil, 'such defencelessness led inexorably to the final remedy - the execution of the witch, as the only certain way by which the maleficium of the sorcerer could assuredly and legitimately be brought to an end'.²⁹

To summarise, this section has outlined the importance of religion to theories of witchcraft persecution in the early modern period. Religion played an pivotal role in witchcraft beliefs and this is echoed in explanations for the witch trials in the twentieth-century. This can be seen from Murray's assertion that the witches were part of a pre-Christian cult, to discussions of the importance of demonology, popular religion, and religious change, and the effect that each of these had on the rates of prosecution. As stated above, this thesis aims to examine elite and popular beliefs through a variety of sources, and the importance of witchcraft beliefs in popular religion is discussed at length in Chapter Six in particular. Thus this study will extend our knowledge of witchcraft and popular belief, an area which has been

²⁸ Hughes, P., Preface to Sprenger, J. & Kramer, H., *Malleus Maleficarum - The Hammer of Witchcraft*, (1486; London, 1968), 15.

²⁹ Gardiner, T., *Broomstick Over Essex and East Anglia*, 21; Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 497. This element is discussed further in Chapter 6.

sidelined to a certain extent due to the recent overwhelming focus on witchcraft persecution.

Community Factors- social, political, economic

Until relatively recently, explanations for early modern witchcraft persecution were derived from a history 'from above' approach, focusing upon the actions of elite groups. This included theories focusing upon the role of the monarch in encouraging prosecution, particularly James I.³⁰ James was interested in the intellectual subject of witchcraft, writing *Daemonologie* in 1597 in response to the works of sceptics such as Reginald Scot and Friedrich von Spee. However, it has been argued that his Witchcraft Act of 1604, which is generally regarded as much more severe than that of Elizabeth I in 1563, was scarcely so since the sentence of life imprisonment under the latter was almost equivalent to the capital punishment enforced under James I, since gaol fever and appalling conditions killed hundreds every year. The 1604 Act's major difference was the imposition of the death penalty for a first conviction for conjuring up evil spirits, a clause that was not enforced until 1645, well after the reign of James I. Finally, as Ewen demonstrated in his work on the records of the Home Circuit in particular, 'there were more trials in forty-two years of the reign of Elizabeth than during the entire [seventeenth] century'. Indeed the prevalence of cases of children faking fits and bewitchment led to the king taking an active role in helping to acquit obviously innocent women, such as in 1616 in Leicester. The contemporary Dr Fuller stressed the importance of cases such as these, claiming that: 'the frequency of such forged Possessions wrought such an alteration upon the judgement of King James that he, receding from what he had written in his *Daemonologie*, grew first diffident of, and then flatly to deny the workings of

³⁰ Notestein, W., *A History of Witchcraft in England from 1558 to 1718*, (Washington, 1911), 113, 219; G.M. Trevelyan, Preface to R. Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, (1584; New York, 1972), xviii; Hole, C., *Witchcraft in England*, 15; Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 142.

Witches and Devils, as all but Falsehoods and Delusions'.³¹ Although this may be somewhat of an exaggeration, as there is no proof that James abandoned his belief in witchcraft, it does bring into question the role children played in accusations against witches, which will be examined in Chapter Five in particular.

Other theories 'from above' have argued that the witch trials were used as a form of social control by ruling elites in response to social, economic and religious changes. Thus, it has been argued, states became 'obsessed with deviance'.³² Harris claimed that witch-hunts were used by the ruling classes to distract the lower orders from their revolutionary purpose, by directing their dissatisfactions upon their neighbours. In this way the fear of witchcraft represented the ruling class's fear of social disorder, and their attempt to blame it upon another source. The witch was thus transformed from a localised enemy of her neighbours, to a public enemy of God and the godly society, in the courts. The witch-hunts were thus described by Larnier as 'a seventeenth century law and order panic'.³³

Finally, social control theories have discussed witchcraft persecution as a moral panic in response to non-conformity. Witches have thus been seen as scapegoats persecuted by elites to portray a semblance of order in a time of social upheaval, in a similar fashion to the persecution of Jews in Nazi Germany or Communists in 1950s America. Witches were perceived as being particularly deviant. Clark suggests that the stereotypes of inversion used in the mythology and language of witchcraft and demonology (the Black Mass for example), represented disobedience, disorder and the growing fear of 'a world turned upside-down'. As Quaife states 'the early modern witch was not guilty of diabolism. She was in the view of the village

³¹ Larnier, C., Witchcraft and Religion, 19; Ewen, C.L., in Preface to Scot, R., The Discoverie of Witchcraft, xxiii; Hole, C., Witchcraft in England, 15. These sensational cases arguably led to the rise of scepticism towards witch trials, especially amongst elite groups.

³² Morris, T., Deviance and Control - The Secular Heresy, (London, 1976), 13, 19.

³³ Larnier, C., Witchcraft and Religion, 56, 127; Harris, M., Cows, Pigs, Wars and Witches, (London, 1975), 237-8; Gregory, A., 'Witchcraft, Politics and Good Neighbourhood', Past and Present, 133, (Nov, 1991), 31. Theories pertaining to neighbourly relations are expanded upon below.

consensus an unpleasant person guilty of social disruption'.³⁴ This study will argue further that the language of witchcraft represented the inversion of the ideal woman in particular.

The motivation of the ruling elites in promoting the early modern witch trials should certainly not be ignored. Yet these strongly functionalist arguments look at society in terms of the privileged classes' viewpoint, and thus the viewpoint of men. It is necessary to examine history 'from below', to consider the social and economic forces which affected the experience of the lower orders of society, in order to understand why the witch hunts became a central feature of this period.

The most influential exponents of examining the witch hunts 'from below', and those credited with beginning the reappraisal of the witch trials in the 1970s are Macfarlane and Thomas. They argued that the witch trials must be examined in the context of the social tensions and local disagreements that frequently formed the basis of accusations of witchcraft. As Sharpe states, they 'revolutionised our understanding of early modern witchcraft by suggesting that accusations were not something crudely imposed on the peasantry by their social superiors, but were essentially the product of disputes among the lower orders'. This social context, they argued, involved tension within the community caused mainly by the rising capitalist and individualist ethic, and the corresponding reduction in the notion of 'neighbourliness' and charity. An important factor was the rapid demographic rise

³⁴ Trevor-Roper, H.R., 'The European Witch Craze', 127, 110; Larner, C., Witchcraft and Religion, 65; Harrison, M., The Roots of Witchcraft, 45; Clark, S., 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', Past and Present, 87, (May, 1980), 87; Quaipe, G.R., Godly Zeal and Furious Rage, 208. For witch hunts as social control see also Szasz, T.S., The Manufacture of Madness - A Comparative Study of the Inquisition and the Mental Health Movement, (London, 1971), 95-110; Lehman, H., 'The Persecution of Witches as Restoration of Social Order: The Case of Germany, 1590s-1650s', Central European History, 21, (June, 1988). For further discussion of the stereotype of deviance applied to witches, and its origins, see Cohn, N., Europe's Inner Demons

during this period, which led to social tension that was directed towards the more vulnerable groups in society who became seen as a burden.³⁵

One of the most common pieces of evidence cited in witch trials was that a quarrel had occurred between neighbours, usually concerning borrowing or lending which, when followed by a specific misfortune, had led to an accusation of maleficium.³⁶ These were previously accepted neighbourly acts which, significantly it will be argued, were predominantly carried out by women. As Thomas argued:

Witch beliefs...upheld the conventions of charity and neighbourliness, but once these conventions had broken down they justified the breach and made it possible for the uncharitable to divert attention from their own guilt by focusing attention on that of the witch. Meanwhile she would be deterred from knocking on any more unfriendly doors.

This demonstrates that the acts of witchcraft were not thought to be motiveless as they involved already existing enmity and that, paradoxically, it was usually the 'witch' who was in the right. The court records appear to support this view heavily. Of over two hundred people known to have been convicted of witchcraft in the Home Circuit between 1558 and 1736 (excepting the extraordinary trials initiated by Matthew Hopkins), only seven or eight were not accused of inflicting damage upon their neighbours or their neighbours' property.³⁷

Accused witches, Macfarlane and Thomas argued, were typically female, older and poorer than their accusing neighbours, thus more economically vulnerable in a time

³⁵ Sharpe, J.A., 'Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth Century England', 183; Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 147, 161, 197, Sharpe, J.A., Crime in Seventeenth-Century England - A county study, (Cambridge University Press, 1983), 160; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, chapter 8.

³⁶ Macfarlane cites this as the evidence for the emphasis on neighbourly relations, Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 173. Pollock has argued that the social and economic context of disputes in Kent was more general than the emphasis laid on begging and borrowing by Thomas and Macfarlane, Pollock, A., Regions of Evil: A Geography of Witchcraft and Social Change in Early Modern England, PhD thesis, (University of Michigan, 1977), 52, 164-166.

³⁷ Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 447, 553-5, 561-4; this theory is supported by later work carried out in Kent, Pollock, A., Regions of Evil. The importance of property as the basis for disputes has not been fully acknowledged, this is discussed in Chapter Two.

of a time of social upheaval and declining charity. During this period, economic changes led to wealth for some people, but many others declined into permanent poverty. Witchcraft accusations can thus be seen to have occurred due to feelings of guilt in local communities which refused, or were unable, to maintain charity for the poor. As Macfarlane has argued, the accused witch was not the very poorest in the village community, but usually one of the moderately poor who felt they were entitled to relief but were refused it.³⁸ The explanation given for the predominance of women accused was that they were more likely to be economically vulnerable.³⁹

Both Thomas and Macfarlane highlight the importance of conflicts over the traditional obligations of charity as epitomised in Proverbs 28:27 - 'He that giveth to the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse'. These tensions arose between those made richer and poorer by the declining ideals of mutual interdependence. As Macfarlane states, 'there is no doubt that witchcraft accusations were made between people who knew each other intimately' - the vast majority living in the same village as their accuser. Thus, the social relationship between the two parties was a crucial factor. The court records again support this point, especially in cases where groups of women counter-accused each other. Thus, Thomas adds, 'the fact that a witch should be accused of witchcraft, by the very people who had failed to fulfil their accepted social obligations to her, illustrates the essential conflict between neighbourliness and individualism'. He further argued that in some cases a reputation for witchcraft could have been used as a means of improving an individual's position, by frightening people into giving aid.⁴⁰

³⁸ Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 150; Macfarlane, A.D.J., 'Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex', in Cockburn, J.S., (ed.), Crime in England 1550-1800, (Methuen & Co., 1977), 80; Sharpe argues that more prosperous groups in society feared that poorer groups would attempt to redress the balance of society through magic, Sharpe, J.A., Crime in Seventeenth-Century England, 160.

³⁹ Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 568.

⁴⁰ Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 151, 168; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 565; Quaipe, G.R., Godly Zeal and Furious Rage, 190, Macfarlane, A.D.G., 'Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex', 82-5; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 137-56.

The arguments of Macfarlane and Thomas have been criticised, largely over their use of anthropological studies of African communities in their interpretations of early modern Essex. Rowland argues that they have been 'led astray by the undoubted similarities between what is the general situation in African witch-believing societies and what is, in the European context, a problematic special case'. This also raises the question of whether English witchcraft persecution was, as Macfarlane and Thomas argued, an exception to the experience of the remainder of Europe. Recent work refutes this anglocentric viewpoint, finding similarities between England and large areas of Northern Europe.⁴¹ A further criticism is that Thomas did not acknowledge that popular beliefs could constitute a separate belief system, seeing popular practices as merely short-term solutions to specific problems. Holmes sees a more complex interaction between elite and popular belief systems regarding witchcraft.⁴²

Finally, although this is a crucial argument for the understanding of the early modern witch trials, as social and economic factors were undoubtedly major causational features of the witch hunts, it is true to say that 'the scholarly study of witchcraft in early modern England has more or less stagnated since the appearance, now more than twenty years ago, of [these] two major works'. Gaskill argues that evidence from other areas 'demonstrates the varied and complex human reality of witchcraft accusations, often stretching any stereotype beyond the limits of its usefulness'.⁴³ It is necessary to examine the experience of witchcraft within regions other than the

⁴¹ Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 6; see especially Rowland, R., 'Fantasticall and Devilishe Persons', in Ankarloo, B. & Henningsen, G., (eds.), Early Modern Witchcraft, 173; Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 32; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 12; Sharpe, J., 'Witchcraft in Early Modern England: A Subject Worth Re-opening?', Social History Newsletter, (Autumn 1991), vol. 16, no. 2, 3-5. Andreski further criticises Thomas's theories on the relation between rising capitalism and the witch trials, arguing that areas where capitalism was developing, such as Italy, the Low Countries and England, had relatively low rates of persecution. Andreski, S., 'The Syphilitic Shock', Encounter, (May, 1982), 9.

⁴² Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 85-6.

⁴³ Sharpe, J. A., 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Yorkshire: Accusations and Counter Measures', Borthwick Papers, 81, (York, 1992), 1; Gaskill, M. J., Attitudes to Crime in Early Modern England with Special Reference to Witchcraft, Coining and Murder, PhD. thesis, (Cambridge University, 1994), 33; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 7.

stereotypical example of Essex, and to examine other questions, not the least of which being why the majority of those both accused and indicted were women.

This study will attempt to rectify these two areas by focusing upon gender centred theories to examine the records of the Midlands and the North of England, which have not previously been researched in this way. This study thus provides a progression from the work of Thomas and Macfarlane since, although the politics of the community rather than that of the elite will be focused upon, particularly in Chapter Two, this will be from a gendered framework of analysis. This will demonstrate that the foci of disputes were somewhat broader than Macfarlane and Thomas have indicated, and that, importantly, these issues were centred within a female social context. Furthermore, it will be argued that reputation, rather than the nature of the dispute, was the crucial element leading to accusation. This has more to do with intra-gender relations than with social change. This will enable us to conclude whether gender, as a tool of analysis, can tell us more about the social context of accusations.

Feminist and Gender Perspectives

Research in the fields of women's and gender history has necessarily altered the interpretation of our past, as Miles has argued 'history is also without meaning for men if the centrality of women is denied. Like racist myths these one sided accounts of the human past are no longer acceptable'. Women's history and feminist history aimed to challenge and reconstruct history, not merely to add women onto existing historical knowledge. From the development of women's history, which shows how historical change affects women as well as men although often in very different ways, an increasing interest in gender history has arisen which emphasises the socially constructed, rather than biological, basis of gender. This is essential since it underlines the view that gender should be seen as as crucial as class and race in

historical analysis, and raises new questions about relations between the two sexes in history, rather than concentrating upon women as a separate entity, for which women's history has been criticised. The concept of gender enables us to examine the relative power held by men and women, which is a major concern of this study. Furthermore, the term 'gender' does not presuppose the homogeneity of women's experience, allowing for the examination of intra- as well as inter-gender relations.⁴⁴

Scott noted how the category of gender could be used in two ways in historical writing, as an 'object of analytic attention' as well as 'a method of analysis'. This is useful in writing about the history of the witch trials, as gender relations in the early modern period, and their influence on the trials can be explored, as well as constructions of gender in witchcraft accusations. It is important to recognise that gender relations are not static, nor should women be assumed to be the passive victims of patriarchy throughout history.⁴⁵ Theories of the social construction of gender have been attacked recently by Roper, who claims that feminist history has been based on a 'denial of the body' and that 'far from being an incidental matter, sexual difference, both as physiological and psychological fact and as social construction, is part of the very stuff of culture'.⁴⁶ This study aims to provide a fusion of these ideas, using the concept of gender as the framework of historical analysis whilst accepting the biological reality of womanhood (in essence the use of

⁴⁴ Miles, R., The Women's History of the World, (London, 1989), 13; Wiesner, M., Women and Gender, 3; Bourdillon, H & Bartley, P., 'Controversial Women', Teaching History, (July 1988), 10-11; Bock, G., 'Women's History and Gender History: Aspects of an International Debate', Gender and History, 1, (Spring, 1989); Carroll, B.A. (ed.), Liberating Women's History - Theoretical and Critical Essays, (London, 1976); Kelly, J., Women, History and Theory, 7-30; Kermode, J & Walker, G., Women, Crime and the Courts in Early Modern England, (London, 1994), 20-1; Zemon-Davis, N., 'Women's History in transition: the European case', Feminist Studies, (1976), vol. 3, 83-4, 90, 93.

⁴⁵ Scott, J.W., Gender and the Politics of History, (New York, 1988), 3; Walby, S., Theorizing Patriarchy, (Oxford, 1990), 200.

⁴⁶ Roper, L., Oedipus and the Devil, 4. Rublack further argues that 'a history of the body has to ask how early modern people gave meaning to their physicality and their needs in social reaction'. Rublack, U., 'Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body in Early Modern Germany', Past and Present, (Feb. 1996), no. 150, 110.

a history of the body) and the importance of this to early modern thought and inter-sex relations.⁴⁷

There has been much debate over whether we should examine women in history in terms of continuities, that is the continuity of women's oppression in a patriarchal hierarchy, or in terms of historical change. As Hill and Roper argue, to focus exclusively on the nature of patriarchal oppression can result in women in history being seen solely as victims, thus denying them any agency or power.⁴⁸ It is thus important to explore the witch trials in terms not only of who was prosecuted, but also in terms of how women were involved in the constructions of the notion of the witch through local accusations. Women were involved in constructing the image of the witch through both accusations and confessions, as accusers, witnesses and accused. As Karlsen states 'The story of witchcraft is primarily the story of women...witchcraft presents us with ideas about women, with fears about women, with the place of women in society, and with the women themselves'.⁴⁹

So far this historiographical survey has concentrated upon religious, social and economic causational theories for early modern witchcraft persecution, which demonstrate the impossibility of accepting a mono-causal interpretation of this historical phenomenon. As Briggs notes, there can be no single explanation as there

⁴⁷ For further discussion of the history of the body see Porter, R., 'History of the Body', in Burke, P. (ed.), New Perspectives on Historical Writing, (Cambridge, 1991); Riley, D., Am I that Name? Feminism and the Category of 'Women' in History, (Hampshire, 1988), 96-107; Fissell, M., 'Gender and Generation: Representing Reproduction in Early Modern England', Gender and History, (Nov. 1995), vol. 7, no. 3, 433-56.

⁴⁸ Bennett, J.M., 'Feminism and History', Gender and History, 1, (1989), 251-72; Bennett, J.M., 'Women's History: A Study in Continuity and Change', Women's History Review, 2/2, (1993) 173-84; Hill, B., 'Women's History: A Study in Change, Continuity or Standing Still?', Women's History Review, 2/1, (1993), 18; Giele, J.Z., 'Centuries of Womanhood: An Evolutionary Perspective on the feminine role', Women's Studies, (1972), vol. 1, 97-110; Millar, S., 'Report - Women's History Seminar', Teaching History, (June 1986), no. 45, 22.

⁴⁹ Karlsen, C.F., The Devil in the Shape of a Woman - Witchcraft in Colonial New England, (London, 1987), xii.

is no single thing to explain.⁵⁰ However, each of these arguments is inadequate in explaining why the vast majority of the victims of these trials were women. As Sharpe states: 'in almost every sample of cases for which we have evidence, the majority of those accused and condemned were women...Surprisingly, even allowing for a general blindness to gender issues, historians before the 1970s pondered little on the implications of these statistics'.⁵¹

Writers since the 1970s who have focused upon the women and witchcraft debate, have examined such issues as sexism and ageism in witch trials, the role of anthropology in witchcraft studies, witchcraft accusations and definitions of witches, and even women as witches in science fiction writing. These works built upon those of Macfarlane and Thomas, which analysed the social context of witchcraft accusations in the community, and expanded the focus on women as victims in the witch trials. This movement towards a direct focus upon women as victims can be seen in Shuttle and Redgrove's work, which terms the witch trials 'nine million menstrual murders'. This theme has been carried on by Barstow in her book *Witchcraze*, subtitled *Our Legacy of Violence Against Women*.⁵²

It is necessary then to examine the reasons why a perceived need for control may have been targeted at women in this period. Early modern society was fundamentally patriarchal with the basis for all gender relations firmly rooted within the family. This was reinforced through sermons, homilies and conduct books. As William Perkins stated in 1590, the husband was 'he that hath authority over the wife' and the wife was 'the other married person, who being subject to her husband yieldeth obedience to him'. William Gouge stated in 1622 that 'a wife must yield a

⁵⁰ Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 397. It should be noted that any mono-causal explanation is problematic, since this ignores both the complexity of popular beliefs concerning witchcraft, and the often unpredictable and random nature of witchcraft accusations.

⁵¹ Sharpe, J.A., 'Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth Century England', 179.

⁵² Shuttle, P. & Redgrove, P., *The Wise Wound - Menstruation and Everwoman*, (New York, 1978); Barstow, A.L., *Witchcraze - A New History of the European Witch Hunts*, (London, 1994).

chaste, faithfull, matrimoniall subjection to her husband', as the husband was effectively the wife's head. Despite these traditional ideals of men and women as dominant and subordinate however, women were generally recognised as a partner in married relationships, spiritually and economically.⁵³

There was much debate in the early modern period over the 'ideal woman', and what constituted acceptable and desirable behaviour for a woman.⁵⁴ This is significant, since the figure of the witch was represented as the opposite to all that defined the ideal woman. The witch was the antithesis of womanhood; an anti-wife, housewife and mother. Robert Cleaver noted in 1612 that the good woman should 'shake off slouth, and love of ease: she must avoid gosseping, further then the law of neighbourhood doth require...Towards her neighbours she is not sowre; but courteous, not disdainfull to the basest, but affable with modestie'. Furthermore, 'let her not be gawish in apparell, but sober and modest: not nice nor coy, but handsome and huswifelike'.⁵⁵ Importantly, this description of the good woman situates her behaviour within the neighbourhood; therefore the good woman was not only one

⁵³ Wrightson, K., English Society 1580-1680, (London, 1982), 82; Gouge, W., Of Domesticall Duties, (1622), 28; Manning, B., 1649 The Crisis of the English Revolution, (London, 1992), chapter 4, 135-8; Amussen, S.D., 'Gender, Family and the Social Order, 1560-1725', in Fletcher, A. & Stevenson, J. (eds.), Order and Disorder in Early Modern England, (Cambridge, 1985), 196-205. For further discussion of women's role in early modern society, please refer to Amussen, S., An Ordered Society - Gender and Class in Early Modern Society, (Oxford, 1988), Wiesner, M., Women and Gender; Keeble, N.H., (ed.), The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman - A Reader, (London, 1994); Hufton, O., The Prospect Before Her - A History of Women in Western Europe, (London, 1995), Laurence, A., Women in England 1500-1760. A Social History, (London, 1996), Sim, A., The Tudor Housewife, (Stroud, 1998). It has been argued that England had a lower rate of witchcraft prosecution due to the higher status of women, Anderson, A. & Gordon, R., 'Witchcraft and the status of women - the case of England', British Journal of Sociology, (June 1978), vol.29, no.2, 171-84, and 'The uniqueness of English witchcraft: a matter of numbers', British Journal of Sociology, (Sept. 1979), vol.30, no.3, 359-61. This interpretation has been questioned by Swales, J.K. & McLachlan, H.V., 'Witchcraft and the status of women: a comment', British Journal of Sociology, (Sept. 1979), vol.30, no.3, 349-58.

⁵⁴ See Kelly, J., 'Early Feminist theory and the Querrelle des Femmes, 1400-1789', in Women. History and Theory, 65-109; O'Faolain, J. & Martines, L. (eds.), Not in God's Image, (London, 1973), 181-6; Aughterson, K. (ed.), Renaissance Woman - Constructions of Femininity in England, (London, 1995), 1-5, 261-90; Hull, S., Chaste. Silent and Obedient - English Books for Women 1475-1640, (San Marino, 1982), 106-25; Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches - A Study of the Dynamics of Male Domination, (London, 1992), 150-5.

⁵⁵ Cleaver, R., A Godly Forme of Household Government, (1612), 93-5. Another conduct book of 1607 urged women to avoid the company of women with bad reputations, which may explain the refusal of goods to certain women. Noted in Gowing, L., 'Gender and the Language of Insult in Early Modern London', History Workshop Journal, (Spring 1993), no.35, 17.

who was modest and deferent to her husband, but one who exhibited good neighbourly behaviour.⁵⁶

Although women were generally accepted as partners within most relationships, there was nevertheless an undercurrent of unease about women's general insubordination to men. It could be argued that this was connected partly to the emergence of a number of female monarchs in the early modern period, including Mary I and Elizabeth I of England, Mary Queen of Scots and Catherine de Medici in France. Although Miles claims that the 'Age of Queens' undermined the idea of female inferiority, contemporary literature such as John Knox's *First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regiment of Women* (1558) argued that gynecocracy was both 'repugnant to nature' and 'the subversion of good order'.⁵⁷ This image of insubordinate women acting against nature is echoed in the images of the inversion of the ideal that were connected with witches and their supposed activities. Indeed the images of female power and witchcraft were explicitly linked; William Morgan, a schoolmaster and minister from Somerset, was charged in 1624 with calling the late Elizabeth I 'a whore and a witch'.⁵⁸ However the contemporary reactions to female power of this sort have perhaps been exaggerated, most attacks on the notion of female rule being of a religious or political nature, rather than an attack primarily on their gender. Furthermore, far from encouraging female power, it has been argued that the rule of Elizabeth I, at least, did nothing to advance women's rights.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Significantly, Monter has argued that the image of the witch rose in opposition to the idealisation of women in the courtly love tradition, thus emphasising the binary perceptions of womanhood as ideal or evil. Monter, E.W., 'The Pedestal and the Stake: Courtly Love and Witchcraft', in Bridenthall, R. & Koonz, C. (eds.), *Becoming Visible - Women in European History*, (Boston, 1977), 119-35. Clark argues that women were thought more likely to be witches because of this system of binary classification which typified early modern thought. Men were good, therefore women must be evil. Clark, S., *Thinking with Demons*, 106-33.

⁵⁷ Jordan, C., 'Woman's Rule in Sixteenth Century British Political Thought', *Renaissance Quarterly*, (1987), vol.40, no.3, 432; Scalingi, P.L., 'The Scepter or the Distaff: The Question of Female Sovereignty, 1516-1607', *The Historian (USA)*, (1978), vol.42, 59-75.

⁵⁸ Woolf, D.F., 'Two Elizabeths? James I and the Late Queen's Famous Memory', *Canadian Journal of History*, (1985), vol.20, no.2, 179.

⁵⁹ Heisch, A., 'Queen Elizabeth I and the Persistence of Patriarchy', *Feminist Review*, (1980), 45-56; Collins, R., 'A Conflict Theory of Sexual Stratification', *Social Problems*, (1971), vol.19, 12; Plowden, A., *Tudor Women - Commoners and Queens*, (Stroud, 1998), 164. Shapiro, on the other

A more plausible reason for, or effect of, fear of female insubordination, and the need for more control over women, was the increasing criminalisation of the female sex in this period. The early modern period was typified by intense and increasing fears that the social order was falling apart. The instability of a rapidly rising population, inflation, land shortage, poverty and vagrancy, and the perceived increasing number of women prominent in society intensified the feelings of contemporaries that they were living in a world turned upside-down, a world in which the natural order of the patriarchy appeared to be threatened. As Underdown states, 'the flood of Jacobean anti-feminist literature and the concurrent public obsession with scolding women, domineering and unfaithful wives, clearly suggest that patriarchy could no longer be taken for granted.' Household manuals stressing a wife's obedience to her husband warned of what might happen if this fell short. In 1620 Thomas Gataker warned that, 'where the wife maketh head against the husband; there is nothing but doing and undoing, and so all things go backward, and the whole house runneth to ruin.' The play *The Late Lancashire Witches* (1634) pictured a community in chaos due to the inversion of social and familial norms, including women ruling their husbands, one character exclaiming 'This is quite upside-down...sure they are all bewitched'.⁶⁰ These views demonstrate the assumed link between strong women and disorderliness, even going so far as to make a connection between female independence and witchcraft.

Amussen has highlighted the fact that the 'skimmington' or 'charivari' ritual demonstrates the importance of women in early modern pastoral economies. These were directed against women who had violated gender norms by defying their

hand, sees Elizabeth's example as an impetus for women's resistance to submission, Shapiro, S., 'Feminists in Elizabethan England', *History Today*, (1977), vol.27, 703-711.

⁶⁰ Underdown, D.E., *Revel, Riot and Rebellion*, (Oxford, 1985), 116-7; Amussen, S., *An Ordered Society*, 42; Underdown, D.E., 'The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England', in Fletcher, A. & Stevenson, J., (eds.), *Order and Disorder*; Jones, K. & Zell, M., 'Bad Conversation? Gender and Social Control in a Kentish borough, c1450-1570', *Continuity and Change*, vol.13, no.1, 11-31. Heywood, T. & Broome, R., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (London, 1634).

husband's authority or even beating them, or women who had been unfaithful or cuckolded their husbands. The skimmington often involved a re-enactment of the husband's beating with the skimming ladle used in cheese making as the weapon. As Amussen claims, 'implicit in the ritual was the assumption that cheese production was a source of female independence and insubordination'.⁶¹ The fear of women acting out of their ideal role can also be seen clearly in contemporary popular ballads; the major theme of which appears to be marital discord caused by domineering and insubordinate women. Foyster, in her study of popular ballads, argues that by laughing at these stories of marital discord, contemporaries were both masking the underlying fears about dominant women, and reinforcing ideal gender roles by ridiculing the 'abnormal'. She argues further that ballads are excellent evidence of early modern views of gender relations since contemporaries were far more likely to come into contact with ballads than conduct books or charivari. As she states, 'in this way the laughter triggered by ballads had a unique regulatory effect'.⁶²

Women were traditionally kept out of the courts as their father or husband was seen as responsible in law for them. Yet the early modern period witnessed both increasing numbers of women indicted in the courts, and an increasing number of crimes regarded as being associated primarily with women, such as infanticide, scolding and witchcraft. These crimes often overlapped with 'deviant' women being accused more than once, once they had developed a reputation locally. For instance, Elizabeth Busher of Somerset was accused of being 'of lewd life and conversation...the continual disturber of her neighbours quietness...and lastly both reputed and feared to be a dangerous witch'. This accusation highlights key areas in

⁶¹ Amussen, S., *An Ordered Society*, 69; Fletcher, A., *Reform in the Provinces - The Governemtn of Stuart England*, (London, 1986), 70-2; Thompson, E.P., 'Rough Music: Le Charivari Anglais', *Annales*, (March/April 1972), pt.27, 285-312; Ingram, M., *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1987), 144, 163-5; Underdown, D.E., 'The Taming of the Scold', 127-36.

⁶² Foyster, E., 'A Laughing Matter? Marital Discord and Gender Control in Seventeenth Century England', *Rural History* 4/1 (1993): 5-7.

witchcraft accusations such as sexuality and disrupting the order of the neighbourhood. As Reginald Scot noted in 1584 'If more ridiculous or abominable crimes could have been invented, these poore women (whose chief fault is that they are scolds) should have been charged with them'. A 1678 pamphlet referred to the scolding woman as 'a Devil of the Feminine gender'. Like witches, the 'virulent scold is her Neighbours perpetual Disquiet, her Families Evil Genius, her Husbands Ruine, and her own dayly Tormentor'.⁶³ Several women indicted for witchcraft were also accused of being scolds or brawlers, and some had illegitimate children. Notestein described such accused witches as being 'of low character'.⁶⁴ The links between scolding and witchcraft focus on the perceived power of words, which, it has been argued, was emphasised in this largely illiterate society.⁶⁵ The notion of female crime also raises questions about female space and power. As Dolan notes, it 'suggests the frightening possibility of an alternative social space dominated by women'.⁶⁶

Towns and pasture or textiles areas appear to have been the most preoccupied with disorderly women as these were the areas affected most by the destabilising economic changes and moves towards a more capitalist individualism. This came into conflict with the traditions of good neighbourliness, as highlighted by the theories of Macfarlane. Amussen claims that the focus should not be on the behaviour itself but rather upon those who reacted against it, arguing that 'the fear of disorder...not only reflected real disorder; it also reflected the anxiety of those in authority about the potential for disorder'. Thus the behaviour had already existed, but only became seen as a problem and a threat to patriarchal society in response to

⁶³ Poor Robins True Character of a Scold, (1678).

⁶⁴ Larner, C., Witchcraft and Religion, 60; Underdown, D.E., 'The Taming of the Scold', 120; Scot, R., The Discoverie of Witchcraft, (1584), 19; Notestein, W., A History of Witchcraft in England, 40; Barbour-Mercer, S.A., Prosecution and Process: Crime and the Criminal Law in Late Seventeenth-Century Yorkshire, DPhil, (University of York, 1988), 183-5 notes the links between scolding and other forms of 'anti-patriarchal behaviour'.

⁶⁵ Sharpe, J.A., Crime in Seventeenth-Century England, 56.

⁶⁶ Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700, (London, 1995), 14.

the social and economic upheaval. Amussen further argued that by insisting on the 'proper' gender order, the social order was re-affirmed; and that with the return of a more secure social hierarchy, with the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, there was a decline in gender related offences as the patriarchy was no longer threatened.⁶⁷

It has been argued that the worst affected women in this process of female criminalisation were independent, particularly single and widowed, women, regarded as a higher threat to patriarchy than married women. It has been estimated that around 10% of women remained unmarried; and with the high death rate many marriages were broken within a few years by early death. Although remarriage was common, often within a year of the spouse's death, many women did remain widows. Since the ideal in patriarchal society was a family under a male householder, single women were thus held to be outside patriarchal control, constituting a threat or danger to order. Single women were not recognised in the law; the *Lawes Resolutions* of 1632 noted that 'All of them [women] are understood either married or to be married'. As female independence was seen as deviance, it has been argued that proportionately more single women were prosecuted than married women for offences such as scolding, recusancy, witchcraft and sexual offences like bastardy.⁶⁸

Independent women did not fit into the prescribed order of society. Karlsen argued that such women were accused as witches because they had left their assigned role in society by being too active in politics or religion or by remaining unmarried. Daly further claimed that the witch-hunts were aimed at controlling women who did not

⁶⁷ Amussen, S., *An Ordered Society*, 122; Amussen, S., 'Gender, Family and the Social Order 1560-1725', in Fletcher, A. & Stevenson, J., *Order and Disorder*, 216, 219; Underdown, D.E., 'The Taming of the Scold', 135-6.

⁶⁸ Wrightson, K., *English Society*, 68, 103. The proportion of single women arguably increased over the early modern period, Watkins, S.C., 'Spinsters', *Journal of Family History*, (Winter, 1984), 316; Fraser, A., *The Weaker Vessel - A Woman's Lot in Seventeenth Century England*, (London, 1985), 89-90, 5; see also Prest, W.R., 'Law and Women's Rights in Early Modern England', *The Seventeenth Century*, 6/2, (Aut, 1991).

marry, or those who survived marriage, because they were seen as a threat to male supremacy. As Quaife stated, 'a woman's failure to keep her place was critical in witch labelling'. The victimisation of independent women also had an economic feature. Economic changes, including the rising mobility of younger people as they moved to towns in search of work, led to the decline of localised extended families. This left older relatives, particularly widows, without protection and dependent on charity. These groups were among the most economically vulnerable, and were thus seen as the most burdensome within the community.⁶⁹

The stereotypical image of witches and women played an important part in linking the two, even making them interchangeable to some. As Lerner argued, 'the case that the witch-hunt was a woman-hunt is a strong one...the stereotype of a witch in Christian Europe has always been that of a woman'. The labelling process is a primary feature in the development of moral panics, and was no less so in the early modern witch-hunts. Miles states 'from the earliest stirrings of the first witches in the black lagoon of unconscious male fears, there was a general unanimity that witches were female'. Thus, it has been argued, the association of evil with women was an ancient feature of popular belief.⁷⁰ The stereotypical, now fairytale, image of the witch was that of an old woman living alone, with perhaps a cat for some company, usually infirm or disfigured in some form, and often short tempered, particularly towards her neighbours. As Reginald Scot noted in 1584, those 'said to be witches, are women which be commonly old, lame, bleare-eyed, pale, fowle, and full of wrinkles'. Although Macfarlane claims that actions and personality were more important in determining accusations than physical factors, stereotypical images of witches were nonetheless pervasive and influential in popular belief.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Karlsen, C.F., *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, 149-150; Daly, M., *Gyn/Ecology - The Meta-ethics of Radical Feminism*, (London, 1979), 185; Quaife, G.R., *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage*, 174, 88.

⁷⁰ Lerner, C., *Witchcraft and Religion*, 85; Miles, R., *The Women's History of the World*, 134; Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 94-5.

⁷¹ Scot, R., *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, (1584), 4; the perceived ugliness of witches can be attributed to the popular equation of beauty and ugliness with good and evil, Geyer-Kordesch, J., 'Whose

Feminists have argued that the stereotype of women as witches, reinforced by witch-hunters such as John Stearne, was linked to the ahistorical beliefs that women are inherently wicked and evil, due to their moral weakness, and thus constituted a threat to both church and state.⁷² Contemporaries were almost unanimous in this view. Sprenger and Kramer claimed in 1486 that 'the woman is...mentally and spiritually weaker...they are ungovernable, and follow their impulses without restraint...the guilt of women is proven', and Alexander Roberts, writing in 1616, saw women as 'unplacable, possessed with insatiable desire for revenge'. These beliefs were based partly on Biblical images of women such as Lilith, Delilah and Jezebel, and passages such as the Testament of the XII Patriarchs which proclaimed that: 'Women are evil, my children: and since they have no [natural] power or strength over man, they use wiles by outward attractions...and him whom they cannot bewitch by outward attractions, they overcome by craft'.⁷³ Psychoanalysts argue that a man's longing for the female is inextricably bound up with his dread of her; this demonstrates the dual images of women as both giver of life and, conversely, bringer of death which are so prevalent in images of witches. As Noddings notes, 'Woman has been regarded...as the "devil's gateway"'. These images were accepted into mainstream belief and thus, as Ussher states, 'The witch has become a personification of the discourse, which positions woman as evil'. This is important as it demonstrates the influence of the belief that women should be controlled throughout history.⁷⁴

Enlightenment? Witchcraft, Melancholia and Pathology' in Porter, R., (ed.), Medicine in the Enlightenment, (Atlanta, 1995), 116.

⁷² Stearne, J., A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft, (1648), 11-12. The belief that women's moral weakness made them more likely to become witches can be seen in nineteenth-century India, Skaria, A., 'Women, Witchcraft and Gratuitous Violence in Colonial Western India', Past and Present, (May 1997), no. 155, 117, 131. This weaker nature meant that they need to be controlled, Collins, R., 'A Conflict Theory of Stratification', 12.

⁷³ Holmes, R., Witchcraft in British History, 49; Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 127; Sprenger, J. & Kramer, H., Malleus Maleficarum, (1486), 28-30; Roberts, A., 'A Treatise of Witchcraft', (1616), in Green, A.E., Witches and Witch-hunters, (Wakefield, 1971), 43; Wagner, W.H., 'The Demonization of Women', Religion in Life, (Spring 1973), 63; Dworkin, A., Woman Hating, (New York, 1974), 171.

⁷⁴ Horney, K., 'Dread of Women', International Journal of Psychoanalysis, 13, (1932), 348-60; King, F., Sexuality, Magic and Perversion, (London, 1971), 53; Noddings, N., Women and Evil, (California, 1989), 35; Ussher, J., Women's Madness - Mysogyny or Mental Illness?, (Hemel Hempstead, 1991), 44.

A major feminist theory is that the witch-hunts involved a strong sexual element both in the accusation and condemnation of women, since in connection to the stereotype of women as inherently wicked, they were also perceived as oversexual. The *Malleus Maleficarum* of 1486 claimed that 'all witchcraft comes from carnal lust which is in women insatiable'. Ussher argues that the scapegoating of women in this period of social and economic disruption was linked to sexuality, as all sinfulness has been connected to female sexuality since the fall of Adam, and thus all mankind, at Eve's hands. As Shuttle and Redgrove stated, 'all women could be witches - their sexuality and fecundity made this so'. Quaife argued that in this period, the breakdown in sexual standards and the spread of syphilis from the fifteenth century were attributed to women, increasing misogyny and fear of sex, and thus women. Thus 'together they looked for an expiatory victim, a witch - a woman that is, the very symbol of sexuality'.⁷⁵

This image of the oversexed, depraved woman comes over strongly in feminists' accounts of witches' confessions, which Savramis and Ussher see as male fantasies fulfilled. It is argued that women were tortured, stripped and raped, then forced to confess to sadistic and phallogocentric sexual rituals. Ussher claims that this 'exemplifies the combination of fear of women's supposedly uncontrolled sexuality, and the salacious pleasure men obtained from fantasising about the degradation of women through that same sexuality'.⁷⁶ Fantasies surrounding the anatomy of the devil in contemporary demonology should also be noted here. The devil was said to have a 'member made of horne' and semen that was as cold as ice, yet the witches continued to worship him although this caused them great pain, in what Hays terms

⁷⁵ Sprenger, J. & Kramer, H., *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1486), 29; Ussher, J., *Women's Madness*, 49; Quaife, G.R., *Godly Zeal and Furious Rage*, 92. See also Andreski, S., 'The Syphilitic Shock', 14-26 and Foa, A., 'The New and the Old: The Spread of Syphilis (1494-1530)', in Muir, E. & Ruggiero, G. (ed.), *Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective*, 26-45. Riley argues that the increasing secularisation of this period was accompanied by the increasing sexualisation of women, Riley, D., *Am I that Name?*, chapter 2.

⁷⁶ Savramis, D., *The Satanizing of Woman - Religion versus Sexuality*, (New York, 1974), 63; Ussher, J., *Women's Madness*, 48-54; Daly, M., *Gyn/Ecology*, 180-1; Dworkin, A., *Woman Hating*, 134-6.

'blatant phallic sadism'. The devil was also described frequently as appearing as a 'black man', which symbolises his role as the 'other', and the image of inversion in the forces of darkness and light.⁷⁷

Although Macfarlane argued that there was little sexual content in the Essex trial confessions, and formal torture was officially not used in England, female sexuality has nonetheless been regarded by feminist scholars as a central element in the early modern witch trials. It has been argued that the belief in witchcraft declined with the rising belief in female sexual passivity.⁷⁸ This question over the importance of the sexual in images of witchcraft will be discussed in depth in Chapter Three, which emphasises the importance of the female body in the witch trials, the role of which in both witchcraft accusations and punishments cannot be ignored. Therefore, gender history which incorporates a history of the body is a more effective framework for re-analysing the witch trials. Thus this study represents an advance in feminist and gender discussions of the witch trials. By applying gender-based theories to previously unresearched geographical areas, the effectiveness of gender as a tool of analysis in examining witchcraft beliefs will be elicited.

'Feminists thus argued that the theme of female sexuality was central in popular witch beliefs, particularly female control over procreation and birth. From primitive times men feared the natural mysteries of menstruation and childbirth, thus 'what was not understood had to be degraded in order to be controlled'. Menstruation became linked with pollution, and childbirth was seen as a time of disgrace. Menstruation, and perhaps the not then recognised pre-menstrual syndrome, was

⁷⁷ Quaife, G.R., Godly Zeal and Furious Rage, 99; Hays, H.R., The Dangerous Sex - The Myth of Feminine Evil, (London, 1966), 79; Masters, R.E.L., Eros and Evil - The Sexual Pathology of Witchcraft, (New York, 1962), 15.

⁷⁸ Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 161, 206; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 569; Bever, E., 'Old Age and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe', in Stearns, P.N., Old Age in Pre-Industrial Society, (London, 1982), 150-90. For discussion of early modern sexuality and procreation see Maclaren, A., 'The pleasures of procreation: traditional and biomedical theories of conception', in Bynum, W.F. & Porter, R., (ed.), William Hunter and the Eighteenth-Century Medical World, 323-41.

feared in particular, and menstrual taboos have been connected to myths of feminine evil. In a study of menstruation folklore, Novak found that menstruation is mentioned frequently in the Bible; and that the word 'menstruous' was used 'always in the sense of unclean and repellent'. Fear that a menstruating woman could destroy crops, curdle milk and harm manhood demonstrates fear both of women's mysteries and of women's power over life. Menstruation was regarded as women's way of expelling the 'evil humours' of the body, thus, as Reginald Scot noted, 'women are...filled full of superfluous humors, and with them the melancholike blood boileth'.⁷⁹

Shuttle and Redgrove argue that menstruation is the power incarnate, seeing the witch trials as 'nine million menstrual murders' and claiming that intercourse during menstruation symbolised castration for men. Roper also claimed that witch beliefs were based on an 'economy of bodily fluids', again emphasising the importance of the history of the body. Post-menopausal women were suspected as they were perceived as sexually ravenous, yet dry and barren as they could not menstruate or suckle children. As Walker argued,

Women after menopause no longer served the purposes of the patrilineal family system, which viewed women as breeding machines and even made 'barrenness' a legal reason for a man to abandon his wife...Consequently, the old woman was an ideal scapegoat: too expendable to be missed, too weak to fight back, too poor to matter.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Quaipe, G.R., Godly Zeal and Furious Rage, 82; Noddings, N., Women and Evil; Hays, H.R., The Dangerous Sex; Montagu, A., The Natural Superiority of Women, (New York, 1973); J. Delaney et al, The Curse - A Cultural History of Menstruation, (New York, 1976); Novak, E., 'The Superstition and Folklore of Menstruation', Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin, 27, (1916), 271; Scot, R., The Discoverie of Witchcraft, (1584), 158; Smith, H., 'Gynecology and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England', in Carroll, B.A., (ed.), Liberating Women's History, 99-100; Nodding, N., Women and Evil, 36-8.

⁸⁰ Shuttle, P. & Redgrove, P., The Wise Wound, (Middlesex, 1978); Roper, L., 'Witchcraft and Fantasy in Early Modern Germany', History Workshop, 32, (Autumn 1991), 27-8; Walker, B.G., The Crone - Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power, (San Francisco, 1985), 137; Ruether, R., 'The Persecution of Witches: A Case of Sexism and Agism', Christianity and Crisis, (Dec. 1974), vol.34, 291-5; Karlson, C.F., The Devil in the Shape of a Woman, 63-71.

'They were also more evil as they no longer expelled evil humours through menstruation. Scot described these women as 'old women, in whom the ordinarie course of nature faileth in the office of purging their monethlie humours'. Women were generally perceived as being more subject to their anatomy, especially the womb; a view which justified their subordination to the stronger, more healthy, male. These old widows, though feared, were increasingly seen by sceptics as suffering from melancholy, making them ready to confess to amazing acts. This belief in the power of women's blood may have lain behind the popular practice of scratching suspected witches until their blood ran to break their magic. Thus the issue of female sexuality (in all of its stages) has been seen as central to the explanations for the witch-hunts.^{81/}

Recent attempts to explain the role of women witnesses and accusers in witch trials have used gender analysis. The fact that many accusers of witches were women has been used to negate the theories that witch-hunting was directed against women. Yet these theories have often assumed a rigid male versus female sex war. The evidence of the prevalence of female witnesses has thus been used by other historians to refute the importance of the role of gender. Even arguments that patriarchy divides women and that thus women were attacking non-conformity to safeguard their own position, assumes that these women were, as Willis states, 'doing little more than mouthing a male script'. A more complex strategy of gender analysis is required to understand relations within genders, as well as between them. Recent work by Willis and Purkiss suggests that accusations by women were located very much within the female psyche, and that the image of the witch as a malevolent mother figure can be used to understand the issues behind these accusations.⁸²

⁸¹ Scot, R., *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, (1584), 30-3, 282. The issue of age in the witch trials is explored in depth in Bever, E., 'Old Age and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe'.

⁸² Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 12; Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories of Witchcraft in Early Modern England - The House, The Body, The Child', *Gender and History*, 7/3, (Nov, 1995), 408-32; Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Interpretations*, (London, 1994), 91-2.; Macfarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 160. For further discussion of

The image of the malevolent maternal figure is bound up with images of inversion, in parallel to those examined by Clark. Whilst Willis locates this image in opposition to the figure of the 'gossip' in early modern society, Chapter Four demonstrates that we can see this evil 'mother' in direct opposition to the more general 'ideal' of early modern womanhood. Rather than being modest, obedient and nurturing, the witch was sexually insatiable, insubordinate and killed children, often using food in her evil practices. This dualistic image of womanhood is very revealing; firstly, because it reflects theories of the 'earthmother', who has the power to give life and, conversely, to take it away. Secondly, by concentrating on what was perceived as 'abnormal' behaviour, theories of the 'ideal' were reinforced. The use of food in accusations is also revealing as the poisoning of people, particularly children, is in direct contrast to the traditional role of the mother nourishing others. The witch was someone who invaded, and presented a danger to, other women's households through harming their children, crops and livestock. Jackson has also highlighted how accused women's confessions involve judgements of their role as a wife and mother.⁸³ These important new theories will be explored at length in Chapter Four in relation to contemporary material from the Midlands and the North of England.

A further gender centred explanation has argued that many of the accused women were suffering from neurosis or hysteria. Contemporary sceptics such as Johann Weyer and Reginald Scot claimed that witches were mentally ill and melancholic, and should thus be put into the care of doctors, not persecuted. Hemphill argued that during the witch trials: 'thousands of mental patients were sacrificed, and probably every manifestation of witchcraft can be explained by psychological mechanisms,

female witnesses see Holmes, C., 'Women: Witnesses and Witches', *Past and Present*, (Aug, 1993), no.140, 45-78.

⁸³ Clark, S., 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', 98-127; Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*; Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories'; Willis and Purkiss both utilise literary sources in their arguments, whereas this study is based primarily upon court records and contemporary pamphlet material. Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers: Witchcraft Persecution and Women's Confessions in Seventeenth Century England', *Women's History Review*, 4/1, (1995).

mental illness, or the action of deliriant drugs'. The charge of hysteria has also been levelled against children who claimed bewitchment; Caulfield attributes the claims of children in Salem to mental distress.⁸⁴

However, although this theory has been widely accepted, particularly in the field of psychiatric history, as Ussher states, 'it allows the focus of guilt to shift from the inquisitors, the oppressors...and it passes the focus of attention and the blame, however unintentionally, onto the women themselves'. She rightly sees this as a parallel form of labelling in order to control women alongside the label of 'witch', claiming that these processes demonstrate the misogyny behind the witch-hunts. Thus, 'the witch and the madwoman share analogous positions within misogynistic discourse, and must be seen in the context of other misogynistic practices used to control women'. Szasz also criticises this psychiatric interpretation which 'debases' the innocent victims of the witch trials as insane, while exonerating the religious authorities who perpetuated them.⁸⁵ This theory could also be criticised since, like many of the general feminist theories, by focusing upon women solely as victims, it denies women any agency.

A feminist theory which gained much influence in the later 1970s was that of Ehrenreich and English, that the witch-hunts were an attempt by men to take over and control healing. Local wise women were responsible for the health of the community. Gardiner describes them as 'the forerunner to the midwife, health visitor, gynaecologist, obstetrician, paediatrician, developmental psychiatrist and baby-sitter'. The fear of women healers, particularly midwives, stemmed in part from the stories in the *Malleus Maleficarum* of injuries done to children by witch

⁸⁴ Scot,R., The Discoverie of Witchcraft, (1584), 30-3; Hemphill,R.E., 'Historical Witchcraft and Psychiatric Illness in Western Europe', *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 59, (1966), 891; Caulfield,E., in Mappen,M., *Witches and Historians - Interpretations of Salem*, (New York, 1980). See also Geyer-Kordesch,J., 'Whose Enlightenment? Medicine, Witchcraft, Melancholia and Pathology', in Porter,R., *A Social History of Madness*, 112-3; Bever,E., 'Old Age and Witchcraft', 154-5, 167-8.

⁸⁵ Ussher,J., *Women's Madness*, 55, 61; Szasz,T.S., *The Manufacture of Madness*, 110.

midwives, first by killing them, and secondly by blasphemously offering them to devils. The authors claimed that midwives 'surpass all other witches in their crimes'.⁸⁶ That there was some fear of midwives using charms is testified by the midwives' licences of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The license typically stated, 'ITEM that ye shall not in any wise use or exercise anye manner witchcraft charme Sorcerye invocatons or other prayers then may seeme withe godes Lawes and the Queenes'. The oath taken before a midwife was licensed also referred to witchcraft; Eleanor Pead in 1576 stated 'I will not use any kind of sorcery or incantation in the travail of any woman'. Ultimately, however, the fear of midwives' association with witchcraft fostered by the *Malleus Maleficarum* does not appear to have been accepted into popular belief.⁸⁷

Ehrenreich and English saw the rise of male dominated medicine not as a 'natural process' but as 'an active take-over by male professionals'. This was both a sex and class struggle as those attacked were female healers who served the ordinary local community. As they stated, 'Witch-healers were often the only general medical practitioners for a people who had no doctors and no hospitals and who were bitterly affected with poverty and disease'. As medicine became a profession requiring university qualifications it was easier to exclude women who lacked, and were excluded from, this type of education, thus immediately condemning female healers. Healers threatened both the authority of the church by interfering in God's will, and the authority of patriarchy by providing abortion and contraception services. As

⁸⁶ Gardiner, T., *Broomstick over Essex and East Anglia*, 11; Sprenger, J., & Kramer, H., *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1486), Chapters 11, 13 and 36, quote, 269. For further discussion of this point see Green, M., 'Women's Medical Practice and Health Care in Medieval Europe', *Signs*, (Winter 1989), vol. 14, no. 2, 451-2; Towler, J. & Bramall, J., *Midwives in History and Society*, (London, 1986), 33-9.

⁸⁷ Hitchcock, J., 'A Sixteenth Century Midwife's Licence', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 41, (1967), 75-6; Barnes, H., 'On the Bishop's Licence', *Transactions of the Cumberland and Westmoreland Antiquarian Archaeological Society*, 3, (1903), 67-68; Forbes, T.R., *The Midwife and the Witch*, (London, 1966), 145; Frith, B., 'Some Aspects of the History of Medicine in Gloucestershire, 1500-1800', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 108, (1990), 5-6; Harley, D., 'Historians as Demonologists: The Myth of the Midwife witch', *Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine*, (1990), vol. 3, 25; Towler, J. & Bramall, J., *Midwives in History and Society*, 55-62.

Heinsohn and Steiger state, 'the witch massacres are attributable to the political determination to eradicate the medieval knowledge of birth control in order to force women to conceive and raise more children than they needed for the economic reproduction of their own families'.⁸⁸ Forbes argued that midwives were drawn from the lower sections of society, and that witchcraft could have offered them some kind of prestige, stating 'it is well established that witchcraft was widely practised in Europe, and we can be sure that the midwife was tempted to enjoy its forbidden delights'. He sees the evidence for this in the wording of the midwives' licences.⁸⁹

This theory is limited as few accused witches in England can be definitively identified as healers, and the main challenge to female healers by the professionalisation of medicine developed later, in the eighteenth-century. It is also important to distinguish between female healers and midwives. While there is evidence that some female healers were suspected, the evidence concerning suspicion of midwives in particular is negligible.⁹⁰ Harley has argued convincingly that the 'midwife-witch' was primarily a demonological myth, and that 'a few spectacular cases have been mistaken for a general pattern and midwife-witches have been seen where none exist'. As he argues, 'the practice of midwifery required

⁸⁸ Ehrenreich, B. & English, D., Witches, Midwives and Nurses - A History of Women Healers, (New York, 1973), 13; Szasz, T.S., The Manufacture of Madness, 82-94; Ussher, J., Women's Madness, 56-8; Heinsohn, G. & Steiger, O., 'The Elimination of Medieval Birth Control and the Witch Trials of Modern Times', International Journal of Women's Studies, 3, (May/June 1982), 204; Dworkin, A., Woman Hating, 140; Barstow, A., Witchcraze, 109-27. For further discussion of birth control see Schnucker, R. V., 'Elizabethan Birth Control and Puritan Attitudes', Journal of Interdisciplinary History, (Spring 1975), vol. 4, 655-67.

⁸⁹ Forbes, T. R., 'Midwifery and Witchcraft', Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, 17, (1962), 280; Forbes, T. R., 'Perrette the Midwife: A Fifteenth Century Witchcraft Case', Bulletin of the History of Medicine, 36, (1962), 124-9.

⁹⁰ Green, M., 'Women's Medical Practice', 434, 451, 454. Exceptions where midwives were suspected include Mistress Pepper of Newcastle, indicted in 1664 for using charms. However, Harley notes that her occupation was, in fact, incidental to the case which rested not upon her midwifery skills, but upon the failure of magical medical techniques. Raine, J., 'Depositions from York Castle', 127; Harley, D., 'Historians as Demonologists', 12. For discussion of the rise of male midwives and the reduction of female medical roles see Smith, H., 'Gynecology and Ideology', 108-13; Towler, J. & Bramall, J., Midwives in History and Society, 71-81, Chapter 6; Wilson, A., 'William Hunter and the Varieties of man-midwifery', in W. F. Bynum & R. Porter, William Hunter and the Eighteenth-Century Medical World, 343-69; Beier, L. M., Sufferers and Healers - The Experience of Illness in Seventeenth Century England, (London, 1987), 33-49.

them to be respectable and trustworthy'. This is borne out by the importance of midwives' testimonies in bastardy, rape and infanticide cases in the courts, and their role in juries of matrons.⁹¹ Early regulations for midwives focused on their reputations and moral character. The example of women such as Jane Sharp, Louise Bourgeois, Sarah Stone and Elizabeth Cellier also demonstrates the acute medical knowledge that these women gained with years of experience.⁹² Nevertheless this is a useful explanation highlighting pertinent issues such as control over women, the role of female agency and power in this period, and the relationship between women and children which played a central role in many witch trials. Therefore, the suspicion of unlicensed healers should not be totally dismissed. The reliance upon, and ambiguous reputation of, healers of this type is discussed further in Chapter Six.

As a result of the discussion of feminist ideas, a debate developed over whether the witch hunts should be viewed as sex-specific to women, or merely sex-related. Whereas Larner argued that witchcraft was essentially sex-related to women, works by Ehrenreich and English, Karlsen, Hester and Barstow, see them as sex-specific.⁹³ By using the phrase 'sex-related', Larner argued that she perceived the role of gender in the witch trials in Scotland as having merely an indirect role. Thus, she concluded that witch-hunting was not necessarily woman-hunting. Karlsen, Hester and

⁹¹ Harley, D., 'Historians as Demonologists', 1; Ackernecht, E.H., 'Midwives as Experts in Court', Bulletin of the New York Academy of Medicine, 3, (1976), 1224-8; Jackson, M., 'Developing Medical Expertise: Medical Practitioners and the Suspected Murder of New-Born Children', in Porter, R., (ed.), Medicine in the Enlightenment; Forbes, T.R., 'A Jury of Matrons', Medical History, (1988), vol.32, no.1, 23-33; Green, M., 'Women's Medical Practice', 449-50; Beier, L.M., Sufferers and Healers, 15-19, 44, 211-7.

⁹² Sharp, J., The Midwives Book, (1671; London 1985); Keller, E., 'Mrs Jane Sharp: Midwifery and the Critique of Medical Knowledge in Seventeenth-Century England', Women's Writing, 2/2, (1995), 101-10; Perkins, W., 'Midwives versus Doctors: The Case of Louise Bourgeois', The Seventeenth Century, 3/2, (Autumn 1988), 135-57; Grundy, I., 'Sarah Stone: Enlightenment Midwife', in Porter, R., (ed.), Medicine in the Enlightenment, 128-44; Towler, J. & Bramall, J., Midwives in History and Society, 91-7.

⁹³ Larner, C., Witchcraft and Religion, 84-125; Ehrenreich and English, Witches Midwives and Nurses; Karlsen, C.F., The Devil in the Shape of a Woman; Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, especially 111-23; Hester, M., 'The Dynamics of Male Domination Using the Witch Craze in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England as a Case Study', Women's Studies International Forum, (1990), vol.13, 9-19; Hester, M., 'The Witch-craze in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth- Century England as Social Control of women', in Radford, J. & Russell, D.E.H. (eds.), Femicide - The Politics of Woman Killing, (Buckingham, 1992); Barstow, A.L., 'On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History', Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, 4, (1988), 7-19; Barstow, A.L., Witchcraze.

Barstow, however, see witch-hunting as a direct attack on women; Hester viewing the witch-hunts as a 'dynamic of male domination' in the early modern period. In England over 90 per cent of accused witches were female, and accused men were frequently connected in some way to these women, appearing jointly with, or being married or related to an accused woman. This would appear to reinforce the argument that the witch-hunts were essentially a sex-specific issue, that is to say a specific attack by male society on the female gender. The sex-related standpoint of Larner has been attacked for glossing over the main issues, as Barstow argues: 'Once again women as a gender are seen not to matter and the questions of women's history are considered too narrow'.⁹⁴

Thus the work of feminist writers since the late 1970s on the witch trial experience of the early modern period has re-opened the crucial debate surrounding this phenomenon based on the fact that the majority of its victims were women; a fact which has been either glossed over or ignored in earlier works on the subject.⁹⁵ It has been shown that through using a variety of theories, feminist and gender theorists have shifted the focus of witchcraft studies to the important question of why witches were perceived predominantly to be women. Yet, while discussion of the role of gender in the early modern witch trials was both long overdue and necessary, these feminist theses can themselves be seen to be creating another stereotypical image of the witch trial experience.

The major deficiency with the feminist reappraisal of the witch-hunts is that little primary research has been carried out to investigate and to test these theories. Hester's *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches* for example, presents an examination of material produced by Notestein, Ewen, Macfarlane and Cockburn, as well as using

⁹⁴ Barstow, A.L., 'On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History', 7-19.

⁹⁵ As Daly rightly notes, there was 'a general reluctance' to address this issue, particularly up to the mid 1970s. Daly, M., *Gyn/Ecology*, 203-16; Barstow, A.L., 'On Studying Witchcraft as Women's History', 7-19; Karlsen, C.F., *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman*, xii-xiii.

contemporary pamphlet material which, while useful, is often somewhat sensationalised.⁹⁶ Daly and Dworkin both rely on secondary sources, with reference to contemporary demonology such as *Malleus Maleficarum*, which is, again, rather sensational. Both Daly and Dworkin have been accused of being ahistorical.⁹⁷ Limitations can also be highlighted in Shuttle and Redgrove's work which locates the witch trials wrongly in the Middle Ages, and vastly exaggerates the numbers executed; whilst Ehrenreich and English's pamphlet portrays the witch trials as a movement by professional male practitioners of medicine to discredit female healers and midwives, although few accused women can be definitively identified as either.⁹⁸ Many of these works, such as those by Daly, Dworkin, and Barstow, also present a broad analysis encompassing the whole of Europe, which, while useful in developing ideas, means that regional subtleties are lost. This gives the view of a homogenous movement across Europe, which is misleading. Recent work by Barstow even argues that: 'The problem in witchcraft studies at present is not a lack of primary material to work with...but an incomplete analysis of what is available'.⁹⁹

Whilst reassessments are useful, it is necessary that further primary research is carried out into witchcraft accusations in previously unresearched areas in order to

⁹⁶ Hester, M., *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*; Notestein, W., *A History of Witchcraft in England*; Ewen, C.L., *Witch-hunting and Witch Trials*, (London, 1929); Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*; Cockburn, J., *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I*, (London, 1978); Cockburn, J., *Calendar of Assize Records: Essex Indictments, James I*, (London, 1982).

⁹⁷ Daly, M., *Gyn/ecology*, (London, 1979); Dworkin, A., *Our Blood: Prophecies and Discourses on Sexual Politics*, (London, 1982). Dworkin claims that the figure of nine million executions in Europe is the 'most reasonable' estimate, Dworkin, A., *Woman Hating*, 130. The dangers of anachronism attached to an overriding focus on the oppression of women is elucidated by Harrison, B. & McMillan, J., 'Some Feminist Betrayals of Women's History', *Historical Journal*, (1983), vol.26, no.2, 380-1.

⁹⁸ Shuttle, P. & Redgrove, P., *The Wise Wound*; Ehrenreich, B. & English, D., *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*. The rise of the professionalisation of medicine is now accepted to have taken place in the eighteenth century rather than the seventeenth, and only a few accused women in England have been definitively identified as either midwives or healers although most women in seventeenth century society would almost certainly have been connected with these activities in some way, even if it was just attending a neighbour's giving birth.

⁹⁹ Barstow, A.L., *Witchcraze*, 2. Willis criticises studies such as these for generalising about the European witch hunts as a whole, and for attempting to 'portray the witch as a heroic protofeminist resisting patriarchal oppression'. Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 12; Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*, Chapter 1.

present a fuller picture of witchcraft beliefs, and thus develop a deeper understanding of them. The need for regionally based examinations of the witch trials in order to develop our knowledge of the phenomenon, and to compare with the studies of Essex (particularly Macfarlane's work), has been emphasised by Sharpe.¹⁰⁰ It is crucial that we gain a wider understanding of the witch trials on a local basis before we can attempt to make more universal statements on the nature of their occurrence. The research carried out in the Midlands and the North of England for this study will be used to assess the effectiveness of feminist and gender theories which have been formulated using predominantly elite forms of evidence, such as demonology, drama literature and pamphlets, and which also tend to focus upon Essex.

Recent work on women and witches has included more works that are based upon primary research, such as those by Sharpe on Yorkshire, Roper on Germany, Jackson on Suffolk and Briggs on Lorraine in France. These works also examine the active role of women in the witch trials, rather than seeing them merely as passive victims; examining the importance of women's confessions and their role as witnesses and accusers as well as the accused. These are both important developments as there is a great need for more studies based on primary research to deepen our knowledge of this subject; and a need to see women as agents of power as well as victims throughout history.¹⁰¹ Despite this, there still remains an 'absence of full-length feminist work on English witchcraft'.¹⁰² This study constitutes a further development of both of these important trends, using primary evidence from the Midlands and the North of England to assess the effectiveness of gender in

¹⁰⁰ Sharpe, J.A., Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Yorkshire; Ingram, M., Church Courts. Sex and Marriage, 96.

¹⁰¹ Sharpe, J.A., 'Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth Century England', 179-99; Sharpe, J.A., Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Yorkshire; Sharpe, J., 'Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process', in Kermode, J. & Walker, G. (eds.), Women, Crime and the Courts, 112-3; Roper, L., Oedipus and the Devil; Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 63-83; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, (London, 1996). The importance of recognizing the agency of women is stressed in Kermode, J. & Walker, G., Women, Crime and the Courts, introduction.

¹⁰² Purkiss, The Witch in History, 83.

examining early modern witchcraft beliefs. The importance of gender and the body are underlying themes throughout the entire thesis, and are explored more explicitly in Chapters Three and Four.

This study will take the form of an experiential study. The problems with quantification in history have been noted increasingly, particularly with reference to women and crime, since women are marginalised in studies of crime due to their more infrequent appearance in the courts than men. Thus here numbers of witches are used solely to demonstrate the necessity of examining unresearched areas and to throw light on the widespread nature of witchcraft beliefs. The use of a qualitative framework, as well as using quantitative methods, enables the historian to obtain a greater understanding and empathy with the individuals involved. As Kermode and Walker note, a qualitative methodology can tell us much more about the behaviour and attitudes of ordinary people than a merely quantitative approach.¹⁰³ In an example of this type of research, Roper concentrated not on the numbers of witches accused, but on their experience as told through confessions and court records.¹⁰⁴ Although there are drawbacks with using suspected witches' confessions since these were often produced through interrogation, and court records and pamphlets are obviously mediated by the male writers, nevertheless these sources give us valuable insight into how witchcraft beliefs, accusations and confessions were constructed by women as well as men.

This thesis seeks then to examine the early modern witch trials from 1563 to 1736 in the East Midlands and the North of England in the light of developments in both gender history and witchcraft history. The area of study encompasses eight counties:

¹⁰³ Kermode, J. & Walker, G., Women, Crime and the Courts, 4-5; Sharpe, J.A., Crime in Seventeenth-Century England, 6-7, 182; Sharpe, J.A., 'Quantification and the History of Crime in Early Modern England: Problems and Results', Historical Social Research, 15/4, (1990), 17-32; Walker, G.M., Crime, Gender and Social Order in Early Modern Cheshire, PhD, (Liverpool University, 1994); Barbour-Mercer, S.A., Prosecution and Process, 15; Wiener, C.Z., 'Sex Roles and Crime in Late Elizabethan Hertfordshire', Journal of Social History, (1975), no.8, 39-40.

¹⁰⁴ Roper, L., Oedipus and the Devil.

Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lancashire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire and Yorkshire, and utilises various forms of primary source documents which have been divided into two categories, pamphlet and non-pamphlet sources, which are discussed in further detail below. As the map on the subsequent page shows, these counties constitute a broad band encompassing central England, spanning the country from the Wash in the east to the Welsh border in the west, to the border or frontier region in the north. This area has been, for the purposes of this study, categorised as the Midlands and the North of England. The region was chosen as the majority of it has not previously been examined for evidence of witchcraft beliefs, especially the Midlands counties which are relatively untouched, thus this research is original and constitutes an important addition to existing knowledge of witchcraft beliefs in England.¹⁰⁵

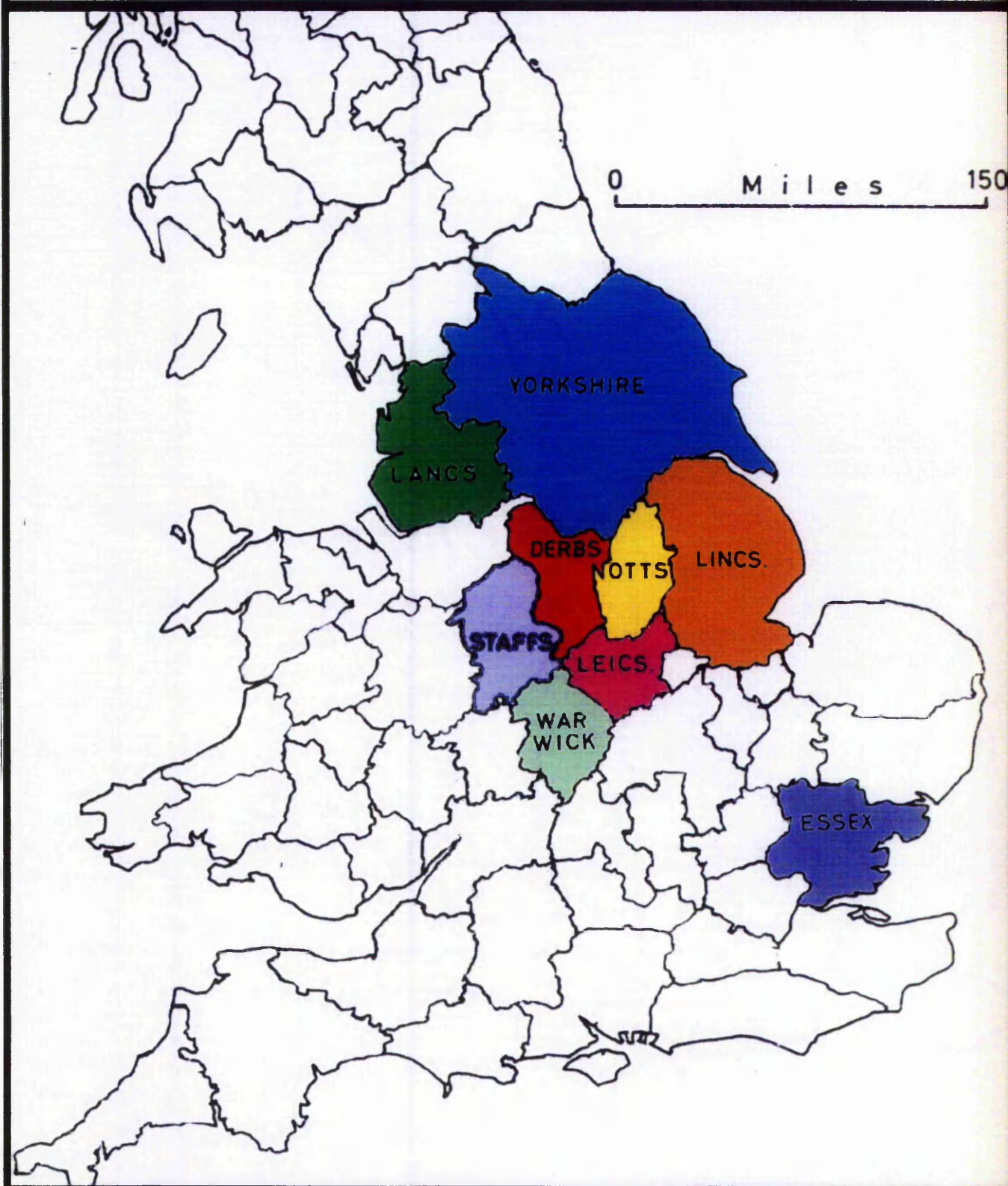
Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire were chosen originally since they both have good sets of surviving quarter session records. The area of study was then expanded to cover the majority of the Midlands due to the limited number of cases in those two counties. Finally, Lancashire and Yorkshire were added to the study since these two counties have more substantial records which provided more material to base an analysis of non-pamphlet material upon. There is some history of the Midlands and North being treated as a distinct region also, since the Midlands counties were joined with the Northern counties as part of the Northern Assize Circuit from the twelfth to the early fourteenth-century. Furthermore, in the late nineteenth-century Yorkshire became part of the Midland Circuit.¹⁰⁶

The eight counties form a diverse group socially, politically and religiously. Lincolnshire was relatively isolated socially and politically, and Lancashire and

¹⁰⁵ The importance of focusing on new material from other counties has been emphasised by other studies, for instance Barbour-Mercer emphasises differences between Yorkshire and counties closer to London, Barbour-Mercer, S.A., *Prosecution and Process*, 307, 407.

¹⁰⁶ Cockburn, J.S., 'The Northern Assize Circuit', *Northern History*, (1968), vol.3, 120, 129.

Counties Researched in this Study



Yorkshire were also further from the central government. Catholicism remained latent throughout much of Lancashire, as well as significant parts of Staffordshire and Yorkshire, whilst non-conformity also added to the religious diversity of other counties.¹⁰⁷ The question of whether each county had a different experience of witchcraft prosecution is impossible to answer due to the different survival of records across the counties, this problem is discussed below.¹⁰⁸ However, just by comparing Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire, which have roughly comparable sets of records, the rates of accusation in court seem very different. The question of whether beliefs about witchcraft changed over the period examined by this study is also difficult to determine due to the scarcity and scattered nature of these sources. It is important to state that witchcraft remained an unusual crime throughout the period, however, it was an issue which raised much popular as well as elite interest. During the period of John Darrell's exorcising of William Somers of Nottingham in 1597, it was stated that 'the town became to be extraordinarily devided, one rayling upon an other, at their meeting in the streets, as they were affected in that cause. The pulpits also rang of nothing but Divels, and witches'.¹⁰⁹ Tentative conclusions from documents in Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire suggest that these did fit the national pattern of rising prosecutions from the 1560s and 1620s, which fell after the 1630s apart from sporadic epidemic outbreaks.¹¹⁰ Nationally, crime levels increased during the 1660s and 1670s, falling again towards the end of the seventeenth century.¹¹¹

Whilst some work has been carried out in Lancashire and Yorkshire,¹¹² little of this has been carried out within a gender based framework of analysis apart from some

¹⁰⁷ Barbour-Mercer, S.A., Prosecution and Process, 87.

¹⁰⁸ More localised studies of witchcraft have not been conclusive in relating witchcraft beliefs to local contexts, Pollock, A., Regions of Evil, 178.

¹⁰⁹ Harsnet, S., A Discovery of the Fraudulent Practises of John Darrel, (London, 1599), 8.

¹¹⁰ Barbour-Mercer, S.A., Prosecution and Process, 37.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 42.

¹¹² Tyler, P., 'The Church Courts at York and Witchcraft Prosecutions 1567-1640', Northern History, (1985), vol.4, 84-109; Sharpe, J., 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth Century Yorkshire: Accusations and Counter Measures', Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness.

work on the Pendle witches of Lancashire.¹¹³ Sharpe himself stated that further research was necessary into what these sources can tell us about community beliefs about witchcraft, the way that these were raised through conflict between women in particular, and the concern with female power being related to 'socially isolated women'.¹¹⁴ This thesis aims to do just this. A further important issue is highlighted here since, in Lancashire in particular, the more extreme, infamous, epidemic cases have been focused upon, excluding discussion of lesser-known or unknown cases, with few exceptions.¹¹⁵ This is the case in the counties of the Midlands also, where discussion has focused on the epidemic type trials such as those surrounding the exorcist John Darrell, the case of the bewitching of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth in 1616 and the case of the Flower witches of Bottesford in 1618. The emphasis on such cases distorts our understanding of endemic witchcraft beliefs in society.¹¹⁶ This indicates the great necessity of examining lesser-known or unknown cases in order to gain a fuller picture of witchcraft beliefs in this period. This thesis examines these cases in unprecedented depth.

In order to assess the recent feminist theses and gender theories of the witch trials, this study will contrast the findings of this new research in the Midlands and the North with Essex, where the stereotype of the English witch accusation has been established. This will demonstrate the need to study new areas of England to determine a deeper understanding of witchcraft beliefs. The efficacy of this is demonstrated by work on crime in Yorkshire, where it was found that this county, further from central government, experienced different rate of prosecution to counties such as Essex.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Hasted, R., 'The New Myth of the Witch', *Trouble and Strife*, (Spring, 1982), vol. 2, 9-17.

¹¹⁴ Sharpe, J., 'Witchcraft in Seventeenth-Century Yorkshire', 18.

¹¹⁵ Exception are, Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*; and Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*.

¹¹⁶ Scribner has noted this feature in relation to Germany, Scribner, B., 'Witchcraft and Judgement in Reformation Germany', *History Today*, (April 1990), vol. 40, 12-19.

¹¹⁷ Barbour-Mercer, S.A., *Prosecution and Process*, 307, 407-8, 416-18. Essex appears to have had an exceptionally high rate of prosecution, with nearly as many indicted in the county between 1560 and 1700, as in the other four counties of the Home Circuit added together. Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in*

Sources

Each chapter is divided into three sections, examining Essex pamphlet material, pamphlet material from the Midlands and the North, and non-pamphlet material from the Midlands and the North. It is necessary to discuss pamphlet and non-pamphlet sources to indicate their usefulness and significance.

Pamphlet material

Gibson argues that 'witchcraft pamphlets - defined as reports of witchcraft and witchcraft trials using both transcripts of legal documents and/or narration - must be seen as representations of witchcraft rather than as historical data'. She claims therefore that pamphlets are problematic sources since they were created collaboratively; witchcraft stories being reshaped several times between the teller and the pamphleteer(s) and because they frequently constituted a work of propaganda rather than news.¹¹⁸

This thesis aims to discuss representations of witchcraft put forward in pamphlets, to ascertain whether they support a gendered reading of witchcraft beliefs. The five Essex pamphlets examined have been included for three major reasons. Firstly, Essex material has formed the backbone of witchcraft studies in England due to its survival and extent.¹¹⁹ Secondly, Essex material has been used particularly by feminist writers and scholars using gender analysis, the main theories of whom are explored throughout this study. Thirdly, feminist writers have tended to concentrate upon pamphlet material and demonology since these works are more accessible and

Tudor and Stuart England, 61. The typicality of Essex has also been questioned by Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 63, 110.

¹¹⁸ Gibson, M.H., Taken as Read? A Study of the Literary, Historical and Legal Aspects of English Witchcraft Pamphlets 1566-1621, Exeter University PhD. Thesis, (1997), 1.

¹¹⁹ Especially with the influence of Macfarlane's work in Essex, Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England.

more likely to have survived.¹²⁰ Thus a reading of these Essex pamphlets is necessary to establish the evidence used to support the theories examined, and challenged, in this thesis.

This study involves the close examination of an unprecedented volume of material from the Midlands and the North of England, which is used to support the re-assessment of various elements of witchcraft belief. Twenty-one pamphlets relating to witchcraft trials in the region under discussion have been examined. A considerable number of pamphlets pertaining to witchcraft trials in other regions of England have also been consulted both to gain a wider perspective of English witchcraft beliefs and to establish the prevalence of common motifs in witchcraft narratives, and to lend support for the arguments made.

These pamphlets fall into three main categories; those which claim to reproduce witchcraft trial records *verbatim*, such as Thomas Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie* (1613); those which present a narration of a case of witchcraft, such as John Darrell's *A True Narration* (1600); and those which present a mixture of the two, for instance *The Wonderfull Discoverie* (1619). Gibson argues that the different types of pamphlet are no more problematic than the original trial documents, since they too were produced collaboratively, and shaped according to the requirements of the law.¹²¹ Further to this, a number of learned treatises on the subject of witchcraft, and contemporary plays focusing on the Lancashire witches in particular, have been consulted to establish a wider understanding of contemporary debates surrounding witchcraft.

¹²⁰ For instance the work of Hester, M., *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*; Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture* and Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*. The overriding emphasis on pamphlet material is also typified by a predominant focus on the Essex pamphlets.

¹²¹ Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 10, 21-9, 63.

Witchcraft pamphlets provided a mixture of news, entertainment and propaganda. As Macfarlane notes, pamphlets' 'titles suggest that they were written for the sensation-loving London literary market'.¹²² The titles of the witchcraft pamphlets emphasise the validity and truthfulness of the evidence presented within; for instance, *A true and just recorde* (1582), John Darrell's *A True Narration* (1600), George More's *A True Discourse* (1600) and *A true and exact relation* (1645). Witchcraft pamphlets presented the suspects as guilty, and for whom trial and execution was inevitable and 'the natural conclusion'.¹²³ Determining the authorial intention behind pamphlets is also problematic, since the majority are anonymous. However, it is possible to infer intention from the prefaces which were appended to witchcraft pamphlets. These prefaces generally relate religious reasons for publishing, notably to convince those of an atheistic turn of mind that witches truly existed, thus reinforcing the necessity of Godly behaviour.¹²⁴ For instance, the author of *The Wonderfull Discoverie* (1619) asserted in his preface that the Devil was God's instrument of vengeance and that therefore the people should quietly accept God's will. He presented the story of the Flower family's descent into witchcraft as a warning to others of the dangers of becoming involved with witchcraft.¹²⁵ The other major reason for publishing accounts of witchcraft was to provide propaganda for one religious persuasion over another.

Possession narratives appear to have lent themselves to this purpose particularly well. A pamphlet controversy arose surrounding the activities of the Puritan John Darrell's exorcising activities across the Midlands and in Lancashire, which entered the debate over whether the age of miracles had passed, thus negating the power of exorcism, and discussion over the importance of exorcism for supporting the true

¹²² Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 80; Hester, M., *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*, 125.

¹²³ Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 7, 60.

¹²⁴ *The Witches of Northamptonshire*, (London, 1612, reprint, Northampton, 1867); *Strange News from Arpington near Bexly in Kent*, (1681), *Great News from the West of England*, (1689).

¹²⁵ *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1619), 7, 26.

religion. This debate, in the late sixteenth- to early seventeenth-century, continued through pamphlets such as *The Boy of Bilson* (1622) and *The Surey Impostor* (1697). It has been argued that the amount of debate surrounding apparent cases of possession added to the rising judicial scepticism of the seventeenth-century; not least because of James I's personal involvement in uncovering several impostures.¹²⁶

The authors of all of these pamphlets were evidently learned, those named include a clerk of the assize court (Thomas Potts), a writer (Edward Fairfax) and several members of the clergy, of varying persuasions from Catholic to Puritan. This raises the question of whether these sources may then present a learned, or elite, view of witchcraft beliefs.¹²⁷ As Gibson notes, 'it might be impossible to deduce any unquestionably 'popular' beliefs...because the representations have been filtered through so many literate, educated minds'.¹²⁸

There are various pros and cons involved in the use of pamphlet sources. Pamphlets are an advantageous source as they give much more background information about a case than most court records, and are generally more detailed throughout.¹²⁹ Some pamphlets included visual evidence, in the form of woodcuts, which could help determine the early modern perception of witches and witchcraft. Due to their widespread distribution, pamphlets are more likely to have survived than more individual court records. Pamphlets were very influential in the early modern period since they helped to shape the images people held regarding witches, witchcraft and possession. They were quite cheap, costing from under a penny to around a shilling,

¹²⁶ For further discussion of possession narratives used as propaganda see Walker, D.P., *Unclean Spirits*, 4-8, 66-73, 78-79; Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, 32-5, 227-9; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 80, 213; Gibson, M., 'Now the Witch is Dead', 17.

¹²⁷ Fairfax's *Daemonologia* of 1621 has been included in the pamphlet category since there is evidence that it was intended for publication.

¹²⁸ Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 17; Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 95-102.

¹²⁹ A comparison between cases found in both pamphlets and assize records in Essex indicates that pamphlets noted various other cases of witchcraft suspicion which did not reach the courts. Macfarlane, A.D.G., 'Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex', in Cockburn, J.S., *Crime in England*, 77-8.

thus the potential readership of the case would have been wide.¹³⁰ For instance, the *Witches of Warboys* pamphlet of 1593 appears to have been particularly influential, William Somers, a supposed demoniac, or possessed person, in Nottingham in 1597 was said to have read the pamphlet, as were fellow demoniacs Anne Gunter in 1604 and John Smith in 1616.¹³¹ Thus pamphlets added to the dissemination of witchcraft beliefs, and the interaction between elite and popular beliefs. Finally, pamphlets provide a useful indication of both elite and popular view of witchcraft beliefs, through the collaborative nature of the narrative as discussed above. The discontinuities between elite and popular beliefs are important, however, and require assessment.¹³²

Pamphlets can be problematic however, as they tend to be rather sensational and also focus more on extreme cases, often those involving children or possession cases. Nevertheless, the pamphlets that can be corroborated by surviving assize court records do appear to be accurate in the basic facts of the cases.¹³³ Furthermore, pamphlets represent only an exceptional minority of cases. 45 people were accused of witchcraft in the five Essex pamphlets consulted, whereas 299 were accused in the Essex Assizes alone in the early modern period.¹³⁴ These issues have, Gibson argues, led to a gulf between distrust of pamphlets and reliance upon them on the part of historians.¹³⁵ This study will thus be examining both pamphlet and non-pamphlet sources to establish whether there is a substantial difference in representations of witchcraft beliefs portrayed through the two types of evidence.

¹³⁰ Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 16; Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, 20; Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*, 2-3, 7-9, 12.

¹³¹ Harsnet, S., *A Discovery*, 93, 97; Walker, D.P., *Unclean Spirits - Possession and Exorcism in France and England in the late Sixteenth and early Seventeenth Centuries*, (Scolar Press, London, 1981), 81-2; Gibson, M., 'Now the Witch is Dead', 12.

¹³² Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 89.

¹³³ For further discussion of whether pamphlets can be seen as sensational, see Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 21-2; Harrison, G.B., *The Trial of the Lancaster Witches*, xxiv; Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, 20-1; Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 410; Gaskill, M.J., *Attitudes to Crime*, 46-7.

¹³⁴ Ewen, C.L., *Witch Hunting and Witch Trials*, (London, 1929), 99; Macfarlane has located over 1200 prosecutions and presentments for witchcraft in Essex between 1560 and 1700. Macfarlane, A.D.G., 'Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex'.

¹³⁵ Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 19.

Despite these problems, the fact that these pamphlets have been used to formulate feminist and gender theories is a major reason for their inclusion here. Pamphlet material, with its emphasis upon epidemic type witch trials, appears to involve more elements of deviant female sexuality, the demonic pact and demon familiars or imps, and have arguably become the stereotype of the witch trial as a persecution of women in many general feminist texts. Although it is difficult to determine changes in attitudes portrayed in pamphlets across time and geographical space due to their sporadic nature, it has been argued by Gibson that from the 1590s onwards pamphlets tended to focus more upon the victim of bewitchment, rather than the accused witch. Later pamphlets were also more literary in form than earlier pamphlets which were more likely to be based on transcribed court records.¹³⁶ An examination of the twenty-one pamphlets pertaining to witchcraft trials in the Midlands and North of England has resulted in the following figures:

Table 1: Distribution of Witchcraft Cases in Pamphlets by County and Gender.

	Men	Women	Total
Derbyshire	-	1	1
Lancashire	12	30	42
Leicestershire	-	6	6
Nottinghamshire	3	7	10
Staffordshire	-	3	3
Yorkshire	-	9	9
Total	15	56	71

¹³⁶ An example of this is the pamphlet *The most wonderfull and true storie, of a certaine Witch named Else Gooderige of Stapenhill* (1597) which, despite its title, focuses overwhelmingly on the fits of the victim Thomas Darling. Gibson, M., 'Now the Witch is Dead': A Study of a Narrative of Witchcraft on the Staffordshire-Derbyshire Border', *Staffordshire Studies*, (1997), vol.9, 15; Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 8. This follows on from the thoughts of Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, (Edward Arnold, 1969), 213. Rosen argued that from 1590 witchcraft pamphlets were increasingly written by amateurs or propagandists, as reporters of 'straight news' turned to other subjects.

As noted above, pamphlets do not give the full picture of witchcraft beliefs. Even those that present trial transcriptions have a more elite edge than court records in their commentaries. The author may have chosen particular elements of the case, such as the illnesses of the victims, to support their own view. Thus it is necessary to examine non-pamphlet evidence from the same region to see if this evidence provides a different view. Over the question of whether the view of witchcraft beliefs presented in these pamphlets changed over time, or was different across counties, it is impossible to conclude. A variety of different opinions about witchcraft were current at any time during the long period of witchcraft persecution examined in this study, on a continuum between scepticism and pro-persecution opinions.¹³⁷ This diversity of opinion continued throughout the period, and debates over witchcraft continued beyond the repeal of the witchcraft legislation in 1736, due to the relation of witchcraft issues to religious and political debates.¹³⁸

Non-pamphlet material

A wide range of material has been examined from a range of courts, thus it is necessary to look closer at the types of evidence used to constitute non-pamphlet evidence in this study. As with pamphlet material there are a number of advantages and disadvantages of non-pamphlet sources. On the positive side, these could be seen to give a clearer view of the beliefs of the populace, although, again, they were mediated through elite males and fitted into a legalistic, formulaic framework.¹³⁹ As Holmes indicates, an interaction between popular and elite beliefs was involved

¹³⁷ Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 89-91. The continuity of both popular and elite interest in witchcraft is demonstrated by the furore which surrounded the conviction of Jane Wenham of Hertfordshire in 1712, Guskin, P.J., 'The Context of Witchcraft: The Case of Jane Wenham (1712)', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, (Fall, 1981), vol. 15, 48-71.

¹³⁸ Bostridge, I., *Witchcraft and its Transformations*, c1650-c1750, (Oxford, 1997); Clark, S., *Thinking with Demons*; Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 288-92.

¹³⁹ Yet, as Jackson states, 'to ignore these would be to draw a complete blank which would serve little other function than perpetuating the exclusion of women from history', Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 64. See also Roper, L., *Oedipus and the Devil*, 227; Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*, 91-3; Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 408-9.

throughout the criminal process. He states that: 'popular beliefs and concerns are omnipresent throughout the trial procedures. But they set in motion, and were subsequently expressed through, a complex machinery staffed by members of the elite who might shape those concerns in the light of their own attitudes'. Thus popular and elite perceptions overlapped.¹⁴⁰ Non-pamphlet evidence also provides an indication of year to year endemic cases as well as panic, or epidemic cases, and so give a fuller perspective of witchcraft beliefs than pamphlets. On the negative side, the major problem is the extent of survival of court records in particular, which is very variable in both amount and type across the counties examined. In some counties records have been collected, transcribed and published, such as Staffordshire and Warwickshire, whereas in other counties, such as Leicestershire and Lincolnshire the survival of records is sporadic. Different types of records have survived in different counties, which makes a direct comparative or statistical study impossible.

Furthermore, it is impossible to quantify cases which did not reach the courts. People were generally reluctant to prosecute cases against members of their own community because it was perceived to be unneighbourly, as well as being a costly process in terms of time and money. Sir Edward Hext, a Somerset magistrate, estimated in 1596 that 80% of criminals escaped trial. In the case of witchcraft in particular, people may have been afraid to make a formal accusation for fear of the witch's retribution. In general, reconciliation or unofficial forms of negotiation were preferred. Witches could be the victims of communal violence or attempts at counter-magic as well as attempts at reconciliation, as explored in Chapter Six. Unofficial action of this type of course often went unrecorded.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, one of

¹⁴⁰ Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 87-92, quote 89; Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 69.

¹⁴¹ Fletcher, A., Reform in the Provinces, 62-83; Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 1-4, 105-6, 218-9, 281; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 449, 452-3, 582-3; Higgins, R., 'Popular Beliefs About Witches: The Evidence from East London, 1645-1660', East London Record, (1981), vol.4, 36-41. Evidence of the popular belief in 'swimming' witches to ascertain their guilt, or to punish them informally can be found in Witches of Warboys (1593), The Witches of Northamptonshire, (1612), C2; Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed (1613), and Great News from the West of England

the main aims of this study is to examine the records to determine whether they support gender theories as well as pamphlet material from either Essex or the Midlands and North. Material has been consulted from a range of different courts, this will now be considered.

The assize court was the higher secular court in England, which dealt with felonies and serious crimes. The assize court justices travelled each circuit twice a year under normal conditions. This was the court to which witchcraft crimes, as a felony, would be referred, and a guilty charge could warrant the death penalty of hanging.¹⁴² For the purposes of legal jurisdiction, England was divided into six circuits; Home, Norfolk, Midland, Oxford, Northern and Western. Middlesex and the Palatinates of Lancaster and Durham fell outside the jurisdiction of the assize court. The circuits involved in this study are the Oxford Circuit, including Staffordshire, the Midland Circuit, including Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Warwickshire, and the Northern Circuit, including Yorkshire.

The assize court records comprise a variety of documents including depositions, indictments, order books, gaol books and petitions. The main problem with the assize records is that very few survive for the region under study in this thesis. Aside from a few scattered documents from the Oxford circuit pertaining to Staffordshire, the main county served by the assize records for the purposes of this study is Yorkshire, for which several depositions referring to witchcraft survive in the Northern Circuit. Depositions were the written testimony of witnesses, in answer to questions, to which they had to swear. Depositions vary in length, some being brief

(1689). Holmes notes how this activity almost became a replacement for formal action against witches after the repeal of the Witchcraft Act in 1736, Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 104-5.

¹⁴² Suspected witches were only burned to death if they were found guilty of petty treason, killing a husband or master by witchcraft. Cases of this were extremely rare, however, several cases involve people threatening to burn witches. There were reports of witches being burned in Norfolk in 1590 and Leicestershire in 1679, Ewen, C.L., *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, 427, 459. For further discussion of the sentence of burning see Campbell, R., 'Sentence of Death by Burning for Women', *Journal of Legal History*, (1984), vol.5, 44-59.

accounts, others providing lengthy descriptions. These are extremely useful for providing an insight into the social context of witchcraft accusations.

The lack of survival of these records is problematic. Since the majority of witchcraft cases would have been sent to the assize courts for jurisdiction, and the majority of these records for this region do not survive, there is no way of determining the overall rate of prosecution in this area as has been done in the Home Circuit. However, the Yorkshire depositions in particular are very informative and thus provide a rich source of non-pamphlet evidence which has been invaluable in comparing attitudes and opinions portrayed in non-pamphlet as well as pamphlet evidence from this region.

The quarter sessions court dealt with secular crimes and civil and administrative business and normally met four times a year.¹⁴³ A variety of documents survive from this type of court for the different counties, namely quarter sessions court minute books, which contain a record of the work of the court, order books, a formal record of the orders made by the Justices of the Peace, and sessions rolls, containing a variety of depositions, indictments, presentments, recognisances and other business of the court, petitions and gaol delivery rolls.

The majority of relevant records available for the quarter sessions in this region consist of depositions and examinations of witnesses and accused, which were written statements made in response to questions; indictments, a formal written accusation which set out the exact nature of the crime, and recognisances for good behaviour, which were bonds used to guarantee the appearance of the accused at the

¹⁴³ Sessions were held in the weeks following Epiphany, Easter, the Translation of Thomas Becket or the Trinity and Michaelmas. This was laid down in the reign of Henry V and there was almost no variation. Sessions usually met in the county town, due to better communications and facilities. Some counties held several sessions in different towns, including Lancashire, Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and the West Riding of Yorkshire. For further discussion of the quarter sessions see Fletcher, A., *Reform in the Provinces*, 87-115.

next sessions of the court or to prevent them from carrying out certain acts¹⁴⁴ It has been argued that since examinations and depositions were recorded in response to questions, that they represent a collaborative view.¹⁴⁵ Indictments and recognisances are very formulaic in nature and thus give little information except for the name of the accused, the crime, and frequently the names of witnesses.¹⁴⁶ As cases of witchcraft that were deemed serious were referred to the higher assize court, we do not have a record of the culmination of each case. The records of these courts are, however, a useful indication of localised ideas about witchcraft.

The ecclesiastical court dealt with crimes of a moral nature, as well as those that involved religious transgressions. Cases of suspected sorcery, divination and fortune telling were heard in this court, as well as for resorting to, or practising as, cunning people. Indications of localised ideas about witchcraft are again evident here, particularly in references to witchcraft in defamation cases, which came under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical court as well as the assize and quarter sessions courts. Since the ecclesiastical courts did not deal with serious cases of witchcraft involving the death of individuals, the majority of cases resulted in dismissal or punishment by penance or excommunication. In several cases, where a defendant pleaded not guilty to an offence, they were required to produce a certain number of compurgators, or witnesses, to swear to their good name. This attests to the crucial

¹⁴⁴ Shoemaker, R.B., Prosecution and Punishment - Petty Crime and the Law in London and Rural Middlesex, c.1660-1725, (Cambridge, 1991), 25, 28; Sharpe, J.A., Crime in Seventeenth-Century England, 9-12; Fletcher, A., Reform in the Provinces, 81; Baker, J.H., The Legal Profession and the Common Law - Historical Essays, (London, 1986), chapter 16 on 'Criminal Courts and Procedure 1500-1800'; Cockburn, J.A., 'Trial by the Book? - Fact and Theory in the Criminal Process 1558-1625', in Baker, J.H.(ed.), Legal Records and the Historian, (London, 1978), 60-79..

¹⁴⁵ Examinations and depositions were rewritten by a clerk, thus we do not know the exact questions asked to produce the document, except in very rare cases. The legal system dictated the documents to a certain extent, since what was required in court was a coherent account of why the accused was guilty. Gibson, M.H., Taken as Read?, 23-9, 45.

¹⁴⁶ Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 114. Indictments are regarded as unreliable by some historians as frequently errors or generalisations were made as to the social status of offenders below the rank of gentry or the parish where they lived. These considerations have little impact on this study, where the content of accusations and confessions is focused upon. Further discussion of the reliability of indictments can be found in Sharpe, J.A., Crime in Seventeenth-Century England, 9-11.

importance of reputation in the community, which will be explored in the next chapter.¹⁴⁷

The final court examined is the Borough court, which dealt with civil affairs. A few references to witchcraft exist in the records of these courts, as well as references to the financial expenditure incurred in such cases. The latter includes payments to women searching for witch's marks or expenditure incurred in housing the accused prior to their trials. Again, this information is useful both in examining local attitudes towards witchcraft, and also the processes involved in these cases.

Finally, other miscellaneous non-pamphlet records that have been consulted include letters, diaries and the Calendar of State Papers. Letters, such as the very detailed letter by Roger Smith detailing the bewitching of his son in 1616, can provide much background information relating to a case which may not be found in the more formulaic court records.¹⁴⁸ These sources tend to be derived from the upper echelons of educated society, thus, they present somewhat similar viewpoints to the pamphlets examined above.

Cases referred to in the Calendar of State Papers may also be included in pamphlets, for instance the 1634 Pendle case surrounding the accusations of Edmund Robinson, which appears in both the Calendar of State Papers and is also considered in the work of Webster.¹⁴⁹ This highlights one of the possible problems with the pamphlet/non-pamphlet distinction in that an individual case could appear in both groups. For the purposes of this study, this distinction has been introduced to allow the possibility of determining a difference in attitudes between more elite forms of

¹⁴⁷ Macfarlane, A.D.G., 'Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart Essex', 76; Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 125. Extended discussion of the workings and effectiveness of the church courts in the early modern period can be found in Ingram, M., Church Courts, Sex and Marriage, particularly Chapters 1, 11, 12, and introduction; and Tarver, A., Church Court Records - An Introduction for Family and Local Historians, (Sussex, 1995), especially chapter 1.

¹⁴⁸ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith, R., A brief declaration of the bewitchinge of Mr John Smith.

¹⁴⁹ Cal.St.Pap.D., 1634-5; Webster, J., The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft, (London, 1677).

opinion, which may appear in pamphlets, and localised views, which may be more prevalent in non-pamphlet accounts of witchcraft. The interaction between elite and popular beliefs has already been noted in relation to the two types of evidence, thus we may see more a blurring of distinctions between the two.

As a point of reference, the table below gives an indication of the numbers associated with witchcraft in each of the counties examined in this study referred to in the non-pamphlet evidence consulted. This is purely for reference, since, as discussed above, a comparative exercise would be impossible due to the extent of record survival across this region. Neither would a statistical account be essentially desirable since the aim of this study is to examine attitudes to witchcraft, and to examine the effectiveness of certain theories relating to those attitudes, which cannot be quantified.

Table 2: Distribution of Witchcraft Cases in Non-pamphlet Sources by County and Gender.¹⁵⁰

	Men	Women	Unknown	Total
Derbyshire	1	4	-	5
Lancashire	16	57	4	77
Leicestershire	2	13	-	15
Lincolnshire	2	1	3	6
Nottinghamshire	6	38	-	44
Staffordshire	4	9	-	13
Warwickshire	4	1	-	5
Yorkshire	17	51	-	68
Total	52	174	7	233

¹⁵⁰ These figures indicate the number of cases involving witchcraft or magical practices, and includes those specifically defamed as witches. Cases for which no firm evidence is available have been omitted.

It will be noticed that these figures are significantly lower than the numbers prosecuted in the Home Circuit, especially Essex. Since the assize records do not survive for much of this region it is impossible to compare the figures. However, work carried out in other counties with a similar survival of records, such as Sussex or Cheshire or Kent, where prosecution was not as high as Essex, indicates that Essex is indeed, as suggested earlier, an untypical example of witchcraft prosecution in England. It should be stressed again that, primarily due to the sporadic survival of court material in particular, and the impossibility of assessing cases which did not reach the court, these figures represent the tip of the iceberg where accusations and suspicions of witchcraft are concerned in these regions. Nevertheless, they provide us with an invaluable indication of popular beliefs about witchcraft, which can then be assessed in the light of feminist and gender theories. Non-pamphlet material is useful as it highlights the endemic year to year witch trials. These show the continuance of witch beliefs and accusations, and how this reflects conflicts in the community. These conflicts highlight the female role, with concerns emphasising the household, food, children and livestock. These cases also involve cases of petty sorcery such as fortune telling or finding stolen goods, and cases of people prosecuted for going to sorcerers which are rarely mentioned in pamphlet sources. Thus, the use of non-pamphlet sources is necessary to establish a broader and deeper understanding of witchcraft beliefs in the English community.

In conclusion to the discussion of the sources utilised in this study, various points should be stressed. These cases possibly constitute only the tip of the iceberg of witchcraft suspicions and accusations in the community. Vast amounts of records have been lost, and we cannot account for the numbers of people suspected for many years who never ended up before the courts. The impossibility of statistical analysis and comparison has been noted, along with the problems with a quantitative view. The difficulties with determining change in beliefs about witchcraft over time and between counties have also been discussed. Due to this the sources have been

analysed as a group, which constitutes one of three areas of study - Essex pamphlets, Midlands and the North Pamphlet material, and Midlands and the North non-pamphlet material.

Although the sources within each category do not always represent a consensual viewpoint, for the purposes of this study, due to the problems noted above, they have been examined in this way to allow for the consideration of how the sources highlight the five major areas debated throughout the thesis. These sources will be examined to determine whether they support a gender-based framework of analysis or not. In each chapter the Essex material will be used primarily to define the main debate. This is useful since, as discussed, the Essex sample has been focused upon more than any other, especially by feminist and gender theorists. Although direct comparisons between the groups of sources may be problematic, some useful conclusions will be possible. The five main debates will now be considered.

This introductory chapter has established the aims of the thesis and has discussed the relevant historiography of the witch trials, noting how this thesis represents a continuation of, and contribution to, important debates surrounding religion, the social community and gender. The geographical area under consideration and the nature of the sources utilised have also been examined. Finally, it is necessary to discuss how the thesis will be structured.

The five foci of this study; issues of reputation and un-neighbourly behaviour, sexuality and the body, theories of the witch as the antithesis of the ideal woman, gender and power and concerns relating to popular belief in the community, will form the succeeding chapters. After outlining the main debate within each chapter, three sections will highlight how these themes can be demonstrated by firstly the Essex trial pamphlets, secondly, pamphlet sources from the Midlands and the North, and thirdly, non-pamphlet sources from the latter region. The conclusion to each

chapter will present a discussion of how the debate examined in that chapter relates to the wider issue of the importance of gender as a tool of analysis in examining the early modern witch trials, as well as synthesising the main arguments made in relation to each group of sources.

Chapter Two develops the discussion of the importance of social and community relationships earlier in this chapter. The Thomas and Macfarlane model of witchcraft accusations resulting from neighbourly conflict will be debated, and the specifically female context of these conflicts will be asserted. This chapter will argue that reputation, rather than the nature of the dispute, was the crucial factor leading to accusation. Cases involving a lost or damaged reputation through insult, reputation for witchcraft or other disorderly behaviour will be discussed, alongside the question of how this left some more vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft. By discussing this issue the importance of maintaining a good reputation and good neighbourly relations, for women in particular, will be established.

Chapter Three focuses upon a discussion of sexuality and the body, and thus constitutes a progression from the discussion of feminist theories above. It will be debated whether the feminist concentration on the sexual elements of witchcraft beliefs is a valid one, through discussion of elements of deviant sexuality such as the belief that witches suckled demonic familiars. The chapter will argue that a focus on elements pertaining to the body is more effective. That the body was central to witchcraft beliefs will be demonstrated in three main ways; as the site for searches for evidence on the suspected witch, as the site of attempts at counter-magic through scratching the witch, and as the site over which bewitchment and possession took place.

This leads onto a discussion of the more recent gender theories in Chapter Four, notably the assertion that the figure of the witch can be seen as an 'evil mother

figure', embodying the antithesis to the ideal of womanhood. Various aspects pertaining to this theory will be examined, including the nurturing of demonic familiars, the tendency of witches to poison rather than nourish through food, and the danger that witches were felt to pose to other women's households and children. These ideas will be assessed using the range of sources outlined above to determine their effectiveness.

One of the underlying themes integral to witchcraft beliefs for all concerned is the notion of power, which will be discussed in Chapter Five. This chapter will examine how witchcraft beliefs and accusations raised the possibility of social power for all involved, the accused witch as well as the accuser. Ultimately, however, the nature of this power was clearly gendered as it was felt to lie in male hands, the law, the devil or God. Again this issue will be explored to determine the effectiveness of a gender framework of analysis for our understanding of witchcraft beliefs.

Finally, in Chapter Six, the crucial role of popular belief will be examined. Popular belief, as noted above, has been overlooked in the majority of studies due to the overriding focus upon the persecution of maleficent witches. To focus merely upon black witchcraft distorts our understanding of witchcraft beliefs in this period. This chapter will argue that the non-pamphlet sources in particular provide a rich source of information about popular belief practices, including belief in forms of counter-magic, and the reliance upon and resort to various kinds of cunning people, or white magic practitioners. This, importantly, will provide a recognition of the male involvement in witchcraft beliefs and practices. The debate over the association between healers and witchcraft, indicated in this chapter, will also be explored further. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that through examining popular beliefs we can gain an insight into religious tensions and confusion in the years following the Reformation.

In conclusion, these five themes will be synthesised to elicit the effectiveness of gender analysis in understanding witchcraft beliefs. The importance of examining new material from previously unresearched geographical areas, and of utilising non-pamphlet as well as pamphlet sources will also be established. Finally, the implications of this work for future research into witchcraft beliefs will be addressed.

Chapter Two - Reputation and Neighbourly Relations.

Introduction

As Chapter One has demonstrated, the work of Thomas and Macfarlane in the early 1970s was firmly located at the level of the community, as was the more recent work of Briggs, a factor which is stressed in the title of his book *Witches and Neighbours*. Gregory too argued that 'a failure to maintain an adequate level of neighbourliness, or disagreements about what that level should be could have led to witchcraft accusations'.¹ These studies, focusing upon witchcraft accusations within the context of the community and neighbourly relations, have done much to widen our understanding of witchcraft beliefs and fears at a popular level. It is now generally accepted that to fully explore witchcraft beliefs it is necessary to look beyond, though certainly not ignore, elite views. However, these analyses still do not accord a central role to the importance of gender. Indeed, gender is rather more explained away than explored. Chapter One also showed how feminist analyses have been criticised by many historians for exaggerating numbers, or for being ahistorical. Rather than dismissing gender analyses *per se* on the strength of these faults, this study seeks to examine the wider effectiveness of gender as a tool of analysis for understanding witchcraft accusations.

This chapter will assess the arguments put forward by these historians, on the neighbourly context of witchcraft accusations, in relation to a re-examination of Essex pamphlet material, as well as previously unresearched material from the Midlands and the North of England. The efficacy of gender as a tool of analysis will also be elicited, through the question of whether approaching the issue of

¹ Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic; Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours; Gregory, A., 'Witchcraft, Politics and 'Good Neighbourhood'', 34.

neighbourly relations from a gendered perspective is more useful than a solely social, political or economic viewpoint.

Pamphlet material surrounding the more sensational trials, and the court records of lesser known trials, both underline the importance of reputation, gossip and slander surrounding what was seen as unneighbourly behaviour. Fletcher notes how early modern rural society was 'oppressively public'; gossip was 'endemic' and everyone knew each other's business. The community observed strict rules about acceptable conduct which emphasised neighbourly behaviour, and which were reinforced through gossip.² As Briggs states, 'the popular image of the witch was that of a person motivated by ill-will and spite who lacked the proper sense of neighbourhood and community'.³ He also highlights how neighbours interacted through processes of exchange every day, and that these processes were predominantly within the female domain. Reputations were formed and developed within a gendered context.⁴ This demonstrates how witchcraft accusations occurred in a female context and goes some way to explaining why a large proportion of accusers were women. The issue of reputation raises two main points of importance which will be focused upon in this chapter; firstly, the effect of changing ideals of neighbourliness on women and, secondly, the importance for women of maintaining a good reputation in their community.

Concepts of good neighbourliness were central to witchcraft accusations and centred around the processes of exchange through borrowing, lending or begging. This economic context, surrounding what Briggs refers to as the 'refusal-guilt syndrome',

² It has been argued that gossip is used to aid the maintenance of community morals and values. See Gluckman, S., 'Gossip and Scandal', *Current Anthropology*, (1963), vol.5, 307-16; Paine, R., 'What is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis', *Man*, (1967), vol.2, 278-85; Wilson, P.J., 'Filcher of Good Names: An Enquiry into Anthropology and Gossip', *Man*, (1974), vol.9, 93-102; Bailey, F.G.(ed.), *Gifts and Poison - The Politics of Reputation*, (Oxford, 1971), especially 1-13, 122-4.

³ Fletcher, A., *Reform in the Provinces*, 70-8; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 23, and 137-54 on the economic context.

⁴ Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 14 and chapter 2 - '(Un)neighbourly Nurture'.

has been stressed by Macfarlane and Thomas. Pollock has argued that the economic context of disputes was wider than that emphasised by Thomas and Macfarlane, concerning other social actions as well as begging and borrowing.⁵ These historians have explained the predominance of women in witchcraft accusations by stressing their economic vulnerability. The stereotypical witchcraft accusation was outlined succinctly by Scot in 1584, thus it is worth quoting him at length on this important issue:

These miserable wretches are so odious unto all their neighbors, and so feared, as few dare offend them, or denie them anie thing they aske: whereby they take upon them; yea, and sometimes thinke, that they can doo such things as are beyond the abilitie of human nature. These go from house to house, and from doore to doore for a pot full of milke, yest, drinke, pottage, or some such releefe; without the which they could hardlie live:...It falleth out many times, that neither their necessities, not their expectation is answered or served, in those places where they beg or borrowe; but rather their lewdness is by their neighbours reprooved. And further, in tract of time the witch waxeth odious and tedious to hir neighbors; and they again are despised and despited of hir: so as sometimes she cursseth one, and sometimes another...Thus in processe of time they have all displeased hir, and she hath wished evill lucke unto them all...Doubtless (at length) some of hir neighbours die, or fall sicke; or some of their children are visited with diseases that vex them strangeli...Which by ignorant parents are supposed to be the vengeance of witches.⁶

Whilst locating accusations within local economic activities, these arguments do not include extended discussion of the role that gender may have played in these processes. People lived and worked in close proximity, and many female activities, such as washing, would have been done outside. Women, therefore, came into contact with each other constantly and concepts of good neighbourly behaviour would have been crucial. This close proximity also allowed for the spread of gossip,

⁵ Pollock, A., *Regions of Evil*, 166, this study presents a similar study to that of Macfarlane using the evidence of Kent. Like Pollock, Gregory also sees witchcraft accusations as taking place within a broader social context than Thomas and Macfarlane. See Chapter One for further discussion of this point.

⁶ Scot, R., *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, (1584), 4-5. Gibson has convincingly argued that this stereotypical view was onproduced through collaboration with the legal system, and was thus designed to be legally useful rather than factually correct, Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 99-101, 104-16.

rumour and hearsay focusing on issues of reputation; which in turn formed the basis of many accusations.⁷ It is important, therefore, to consider whether subjecting the material to a gender analysis will change this focus. The economic exchanges highlighted by Thomas and Macfarlane, usually involving food items, would have been carried out almost exclusively by women, thus women were the ones involved when a dispute broke out. This study will argue that although the economic context of disputes leading to accusations is important, it has perhaps been overemphasised, and that the crucial factor was the reputation and neighbourly relationships of the individual concerned. As Sharpe states, 'the witchcraft accusation was something which existed firmly within the wider context of relationships and interpersonal interaction within the local community'. Significantly, this sphere of gossip and reputation was essentially female.⁸

Chapter One discussed how the ideal of early modern womanhood, that is a woman who was silent, chaste and obedient, was reinforced through conduct literature, sermons, homilies and popular ballads. The paradoxical nature of womanhood, that women were supposed to practice these qualities whilst being believed to be inherently wicked, weak and evil, is central to the witch trials since we can see the figure of the witch as the direct opposite to the ideal woman. Therefore, it could be argued that through controlling these disorderly women, the ideals were further reinforced. Jackson sees the witch trials as a method of behavioural control over non-conforming women in her analysis of the witch trials in Suffolk. Citing the case of Anna Moats in 1645, she states 'branded a scold and a witch, Anna had been persecuted for her failure to conform to the accepted norms of female behaviour'. Thus the witch trials could be seen as a warning to women who stepped outside their

⁷ Witchcraft was a popular subject of discussion and gossip. Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 60; Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, chapter two; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 265-8.

⁸ Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 65-6, 182-4.

traditionally acceptable roles.⁹ Insult and rumour could also be seen as attempts to control disorderly women, or attempts by other women to control their social space.

The importance of female reputation in particular can be seen in witch trials where women were accused of a range of disorderly behaviour. Once a woman had damaged her reputation she was vulnerable to accusations of various seemingly unrelated crimes, such as lewdness, scolding or witchcraft, which were all seen as outside the ideal of feminine behaviour. This also included sexual misconduct. As female reputation was understood in terms of sexual behaviour, modesty was stressed as the appropriate behaviour for the good woman. There has been some dissension over this issue; Macfarlane argued that the sexual element of witchcraft belief was not generally important in Essex, however Hester included the sexual element of the Essex trial pamphlets as a central part of her discussion.¹⁰ Concepts of good reputation were particularly central for women not only because of the sexual double standard of the time, but also because women through gossip and slander appear to have controlled, or at the very least strongly influenced, the reputation of others in the community.¹¹ As Wilson noted,

a good name is...the most vital social possession of any given group of people as well as being its most vulnerable commodity...The vulnerability of a good name stems from the fact that it is held and conferred by people other than the person who is said to possess it, and that it has no tangible substance, it consists entirely of words.¹²

⁹ Jackson, J., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 63, 72; Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 199.

¹⁰ Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 160; Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 160-197. See Chapter Three for further discussion of this point.

¹¹ This double standard was increasingly questioned after the Reformation, but was not rejected. As Thomas argues, the double standard was one 'aspect of a whole code of social conduct for women which was in turn based entirely upon their place in society in relation to men'. Thomas, K., 'The Double Standard', Journal of the History of Ideas, (1959), vol.20, 195-216; Gowing, L., 'Gender and the Language of Insult', 2-3. It was extremely rare for men to be sexually defamed. Barbour-Mercer, S.A., Prosecution and Process, 19, 140; Kermode, J & Walker, G.(eds.), Women, Crime and the Courts, 13.

¹² Wilson, P.J., 'Filcher of Good Names', 101.

This also emphasises the power conferred on words which is evident throughout this study. The delineation between good and bad women is clearly shown in cases where women of good reputation were called upon to search the bodies of the accused women, primarily for witch's marks which would signify guilt of their participation in a pact with the Devil.¹³

Accusations of lewd behaviour and witchcraft were linked in many cases, particularly in pamphlet accounts, which underlines the importance of good reputation in the community. This supports the idea that accusations of witchcraft typically came as a result of many years of suspicion and disquiet, rather than as a spontaneous event and may be why some studies have focused on the age of the accused as a pertinent issue.¹⁴ In 1645, for instance, Anne West of Lawford, Essex, was said to have 'been suspected for a Witch many yeers since'.¹⁵ If formal witchcraft accusations arose after many years of festering suspicion then the defendants in these cases would clearly be older. Suspicions of witchcraft also seem to have lingered meaning that successive generations of a family, usually female, could be suspected by association. Issues relating to reputation could also be used as evidence to determine who was a witch. *The Lawes against Witches* (1645) noted that there may be 'other presumptions against these witches; as if they be given to usuall cursing, and bitter imprecations', and the common report of neighbours was important for determining whether the individual was suspected, and whether they had any kin who was a witch.¹⁶

¹³ See Chapter Three.

¹⁴ Matalene, C., 'Women as Witches', *International Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 1, no. 6, (1978), 583; Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 161-4; Ruether, R., 'The Persecution of Witches: A Case of Sexism and Agism?', 291-5, see Chapter One for further discussion.

¹⁵ *A true and exact Relation of the severall Informations, Examinations and Confessions of the late Witches, arraigned and executed in the County of Essex*, (London, 1645), 7.

¹⁶ *The Lawes against Witches and Conjurat[i]on and Some Brief Notes and Observations for the Discovery of Witches*, (London, 1645), 4-5.

The connection between suspicions of witchcraft and damaged reputations was clearly made by John Brinley in 1680. He deplored the fact that attributing misfortunes to witchcraft:

bringeth honest and innocent people into suspicion and Infamy, and the hatred of all the Neighbourhood: for thus if the Horse be sick, or the Cow dead, or the Plum-tree do not blossom kindly, some harmless old woman is suspected, all her words, postures and actions are most critically observed, and the most malicious reflections made of them...So the poor creatures comes to be hated and abused, and revil'd by all that know her, and that infamy shall never be wiped off her and her generation, even by her most Religious or innocent deportment of her whole life. Hence the poor woman is made miserable all her life, and her family Scandalous to succeeding Ages.¹⁷

Here Brinley emphasises the importance of reputation within the community and the long lasting consequences of a damaged reputation not only to the accused person, but also to succeeding generations of their family.¹⁸ Therefore, it is necessary to investigate how these concepts of reputation and good neighbourly behaviour are borne out in the three different sets of material examined throughout this study.

The Essex Context

Neighbourliness and Economic Conflict

The Essex pamphlet material clearly highlights the effects of changing ideals of neighbourliness on women. As the previous chapter indicated, Thomas and Macfarlane put forward the influential thesis that witch accusations typically resulted from local disputes between neighbours over neighbourly behaviour such as the borrowing and lending of household goods and food.¹⁹ Although neither study

¹⁷ Brinley, J., *A Discovery of the Impostures of Witches and Astrologers*, (London, 1680), 27-8.

¹⁸ See also Stearne, J., *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft*, (1648). Macfarlane notes that around 10% of those accused in Essex were thought to be related to another witch, Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 170; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 24-5, 247-8. The popular belief in the blood relationship of witches may, arguably, have led to the practice of scratching a suspected witch to draw their blood and thus break their power. Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 96.

¹⁹ Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 168-176; Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 527-9, 535-68. For witchcraft accusations as expression of community conflict see

included any sustained analysis of gender, it is clear to those using gender as a tool of analysis why this should affect women more than men, as borrowing and lending were typically female activities.²⁰

The Essex pamphlets highlight many cases of disputes between neighbours, almost exclusively women, over borrowing and lending which led to accusations of witchcraft after the disputes were followed by some kind of misfortune. Hester argues that over half of the cases in the Essex trial pamphlets involved some kind of 'economic conflict'.²¹ The most common of these cases involved denials of requests for food and drink. Joan Waterhouse (1566) sent her mother's familiar against Agnes Brown after she refused to give her bread and cheese; Elizabeth Francis, Ellen Smith and Mother Staunton (1579) bewitched their neighbours, their children and their animals after being denied a variety of goods including yeast, milk and leather; Ursula Kemp, Alice Newman, Alice Hunt, Alice Manfield and Margaret Grevell (1582) injured and killed their neighbours, their children and animals, and disrupted their household activities after being denied items including scouring sand, meat, milk, curds and yeast; and Joan Cunny (1589) bewitched the wife of Harry Finch after being denied drink. Finally, Elizabeth Gooding, Rose Hallybread, Joyce Boanes, Margaret Landish, Susan Cock and Anne Cate (1645) harmed others' animals and children after being refused credit and food items. In none of these cases did it appear to matter what the reason for the refusal was. However valid a reason given for denying these women's requests, it still seems to have resulted in discontentment on the part of the refused woman and guilt on the part of the refuser.

also Gregory, A., 'Witchcraft, Politics and "Good Neighbourhood"', 31-66; Gaskill, M., 'The Devil in the Shape of a Man: Witchcraft, Conflict and Belief in Jacobean England', Historical Research, (June 1988), vol. 71, no. 175, 142-171.

²⁰ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories of Witchcraft', 416; Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 176.

²¹ Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 195.

Contrary to Thomas's notion that some women may have cultivated a reputation for witchcraft in order to scare neighbours into fulfilling their requests, various people gave this as the reason for refusing requests. In 1579, for example, Robert Lathbury of Wimbish denied Mother Staunton's requests and 'dislikyng her dealyng, sent her home emptie'.²² This case is an indication of the belief that witches could gain power over an individual through the exchange of goods. Not surprisingly, most people gave very reasonable reasons for their denials, perhaps to justify their guilt for their lack of charity. Harry Finch's wife denied Joan Cunny drink because she was busy brewing, and Margaret Grevell was denied mutton by the butcher Nicholas Strickland as it was too hot to cut at that time. These disputes could be seen as a lack of charity, however it appears that many were fed up of complying with the seemingly endless demands of these women. For instance, Mother Staunton told in 1579 how her requests were usually fulfilled at John Hopwood's house but, after she was refused a leather thong, she bewitched a gelding in his stable.

Various depositions provide evidence of women begging for alms and being unhappy with the responses they received. Joan Prentice went to the house of Master Glascock for alms and, after being told that neither the Master nor the Mistress were at home, she sent her spirit to harm their daughter Sara. Johnson, the Collector for the Poor for St. Osyth, seems to have been a particular target for these discontented women. Joan Pechey was unhappy with the beef and bread that he had given her 'saying the bread was to hard baked for her...shee then seemed to bee in a great anger therewithall'. Elizabeth Bennett denied that she had bewitched Johnson and his wife, but accused Alice Newman of doing so, as Alice was angry when Johnson refused to give her twelve pence 'saying, he was a pore man, and hee, his wife and familie, might not want for the helping of her husband, saying that hee could not

²² A Detection of damnable driftes, practized by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex. at the laste Assise there holden, which were executed in Aprill 1579. (London, 1579), B1. Mother Samuel of Warboys was similarly turned away because her neighbours thought she was a witch, The most strange and admirable discoverie of three Witches of Warboys, (London, 1593), O2.

helpe her with any, untill he had collected more money'.²³ In a similar scenario in 1645, Susan Cock was believed to have killed six or seven of Mr Mannock's pigs with Margaret Landish because his wife refused to give her any poor relief as she was a young woman and thus should be able to earn her own living.

Quarrels also arose between neighbours over land, and promises of goods and animals which were not fulfilled. In 1582, Richard Ross of Little Clacton told how:

his wife finding Cylles his cattell in his grounde, did hunt them out therof, which Cylles his wife seeing, was thereat in a great anger, and gave her lewd speeches, & saith that presently after, many of his beaste were in a most straung taking: the which he doth say, to be wrought by some witchcraft, or sorcery by the said Henry or Cisly his wife.²⁴

In a similar situation, in 1582, Elizabeth Eustace fell out with Felice Okey after Felice drove her geese off her land and accidentally hurt one of them while doing so. Elizabeth subsequently threatened Felice's husband, Thomas Cross, and he died. Misunderstandings and broken promises also appear to have led to much bitterness. Agnes Herd was believed to have bewitched Andrew and Anne West's pigs and brewing in 1582 after they sold a pig, which she had been promised.

As Macfarlane and Matalene stress, witchcraft accusations arose from the personal closeness of neighbours. Matalene emphasises that 'the remarkable denominator in English witch confessions is that the accused witch was always wronged first. Initially, in each accusation she is the wronged party, and she is usually morally right'.²⁵ This does not necessarily mean that these women should be viewed as totally innocent victims however. Whether the women were able to carry out deeds of maleficium or not, many clearly wanted to harm their neighbours, thus from a psychological point of view they may have felt that they were guilty. They also may

²³ W.W., A true and just Recorde. of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S.Oses in the countie of Essex. (London, 1582), A4, A7.

²⁴ Ibid., C8.

²⁵ Matalene, C., 'Women as Witches', 581.

have felt that malevolent thoughts of this kind were justifiable since they had been provoked.²⁶ This goes some way to explaining their confessions. The accusers were also bound to stress the aspect of dispute since that was what provided the explanation for their misfortune.

Reputation, Suspicion and Disorderly Behaviour.

The importance of maintaining a good reputation for a woman in the community is clearly underlined in the five Essex pamphlets considered. Local disputes and suspicions were revealed as disorderly women were described in terms relating to sexual immorality in particular. Women also told of the brutality and increasing fear and mistrust with which they were regarded once the suspicion of witchcraft had been raised. In 1579, Mother Staunton of Wimbish claimed that she:

came to the house of one Thomas Prat of Broke Walden, Jhon Ferroure of Libleburie beeyng presente, and one Thomas Swallowe, and the saied Mother Staunton, beyng demaunded by one of them how she did, she aunswered, that a knave had beaten her: sayeing she was a Witche, then saied he again, in good faithe Mother Staunton, I thinke you bee no witche, no maister [quothe] she, I am none in deede, although I can tell what belongeth to that practise.²⁷

Here it is shown that suspicion of Mother Staunton had been raised and that although she denied it, she made a connection between herself and some knowledge of magical power. Later Mother Staunton was increasingly suspected by the community: every encounter with her resulted in a dispute, and was believed to end in some form of misfortune.²⁸ Mother Staunton's case indicates how reputation was spread across the community by rumour and word of mouth.

²⁶ See Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 63.

²⁷ *A Detection of damnable driffes*, (1579), A7.

²⁸ Of course only the more significant events were highlighted in the examinations, we do not hear of the many encounters which did not lead to suspicion. Briggs refers to the process of labelling whereby once suspicions had been raised, all interactions carried the possibility of increasing suspicion, Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 163.

The accusations and confessions of other women also reinforce this concern with reputation. In 1582 at St Osyth, Grace Thurlow warned Ursula Kemp to 'Take heed...Ursley, thou hast a naughtie name'.²⁹ Ursula, like Mother Staunton above, had a reputation for healing.³⁰ In the same year Alice Hunt claimed of Joan Pechey that 'she hath heard her mother say, that she the said Joan was skilfull and cunning in witcherie', an opinion backed up by Alice's sister Margery Sammon.³¹ At Chelmsford in 1645, Elizabeth Gooding was described as 'lewd', Anne Leech as 'naughtie', and Margaret Moone as being 'of bad fame'.

An additional example of a bad reputation spreading and escalating can be seen in the case of Mother (Elizabeth) Eustace in 1582. Robert Sannever claimed that both he and his brother were bewitched by Mother Eustace after he had threatened her daughter who was living with him as a servant 'for some lewd dealynges, and behaviour by her doone'. Later Mother Eustace, on seeing Sannever's neighbour going to his house, said 'naye goe not thyther, for he saith I am a witch...his wife is with Childe and lustie, but it will bee otherwise with her then hee looketh for'.³² After this his wife had a 'strange sickness' and the baby died soon after birth. This case raises an important issue. In many of cases, such as that noted above, the accused witch was believed to bewitch the wife after an argument with the husband, or the children after an argument with one of the parents, as if this crime, like that of rape, was expressed in terms of an attack on property. As Willis notes 'because a woman was almost always the property of some man...to attack another woman was

²⁹ W.W., *A true and iust Recorde*, (1582), A2.

³⁰ As Chapter One noted, convincing arguments have been made against theories expounding connections between women and healing by feminist writers, (especially Ehrenreich, B. and English, D., *Witches, Midwives and Nurses*), largely against their ahistorical character and limited uses in England. However a connection was made between unlicensed forms of healing in both epidemic and endemic trials. See Chapter Six for further discussion.

³¹ W.W., *A true and iust Recorde*, (1582), A4.

³² *Ibid.*, C7. This has clear similarities with the Flowers witchcraft case in Bottesford, Leicestershire, 1618. Like Joan Flower, Mother Eustace is believed to have bewitched her daughter's employer in anger and revenge after the dismissal of her daughter for some misdemeanour. This anger infers that witches were believed to protect their own children from others, while being a danger to other's children. *The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillip Flower, daughters of Joan Flower neere Bever Castle*, (London, 1619, reprint Leicestershire, 1970);

inevitably to attack her husband or father or master'. Thus 'quarrels between women extended to the men who had rights in those women'.³³ A similar situation was evident in the attack on people's servants. This concern with property is evident in several cases of witchcraft from the Midlands and the North discussed below.

In another case a woman appears to have unwittingly increased suspicion of herself. Agnes Herd of Little Oakley went to John Wad for support after she had been presented at the church court for a witch, but he said that he could not help her. Wad then claimed that many of his sheep had died as a result. It is cruelly ironic that the person to whom she turned for advice should have made the situation worse. Information given by witnesses against Agnes further highlights the danger of having a bad reputation in the community. Richard Harrison, the parson of Beaumont, claimed that his late wife 'did suspect one Annis Herd a light woman, and a common harlot to have stolen her duckelins' and that after his wife had questioned Agnes on the matter she believed herself to be bewitched and later died. Richard also tackled Agnes saying 'I am glad you are here you yieild strumpet...I do think you have bewitched my wife'.³⁴

In this case Agnes Herd, the epitome of the disorderly woman, was presented in direct opposition to the image of Richard's wife who was portrayed as the perfect godly wife and mother, the ideal of womanhood in fact. Agnes later acknowledged that she remembered Harrison's wife calling her 'harlot' and 'witch' but denied using witchcraft or having evil spirits. Agnes Herd was also told by Anne West 'thou saidest the other day thou hadst no skill in witcherie...I will say thou hast an unhappie tongue'.³⁵ Here Anne explicitly linked the problems of uttering curses and complaints and believed occurrences of witchcraft, indicating also the belief in the strong power of words. In 1589, Joan Upney of Dagenham claimed that she 'ran

³³ Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 80.

³⁴ W.W., *A true and just Recorde*, (1582), F2-3.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, F1.

away because she heard John Harrold and Richard Foster say she was a witch, and such other words'.³⁶ These depositions demonstrate that both accusers and accused were clearly aware of what the term 'witch' represented and the danger that such a reputation posed to their lives.

Insults against women for witchcraft were frequently couched in sexual terms, the terms 'witch' and 'whore' being standard forms of abuse.³⁷ In 1582, Ursula Kemp claimed that she sent her spirit Jack to kill her sister in law because she had called her 'whore' and 'witch'; and that she fell out with John Stratton after he 'called her whore & gave her other evill speeches.' Elizabeth Bennett told in 1582 how, after they had argued, William Byatt, her neighbour, had abused her in calling her 'olde Trot, old whore, and other lewde speaches' so she sent her spirit Suckin to 'plague' him to the death.³⁸ The use of insult was extremely important in altering people's reputations; indeed, as Briggs has noted, 'deprivation, insults and resentment...were the common currency of witchcraft'.³⁹

As well as being verbally insulted, several suspected witches claimed to have been personally wronged or offended in some way. In 1582, Grace Thurlow told how after she had given birth to a daughter that:

Ursley [Kemp] fell out with her, for that shee woulde not suffer her to have the nursing of that childe, at suche times as she the said Grace continued in woork at the Lord Darcies place: And saith, that shee the saide Grace nursing the said childe, within som short time after that falling out, the childe lying in the Cradle, and not above a quarter olde, fell out of the said Cradle and brake her necke, and dyed. The which the saide Ursley hearing to have happened, made answer it

³⁶ The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches. Arreigned and by Justice condemned and executed at Chelmesforde, in the Countye of Essex, the 5. Day of Julye. last past. 1589. (London, 1589), A4

³⁷ Purkiss, D., 'Desire and Its Deformities: Fantasies of Witchcraft in the English Civil War', Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies, vol.27, pt.1, (Winter 1997), 113, Rushton, P., 'Women, Witchcraft and Slander in Early Modern England: Cases from the Church Courts of Durham, 1560-1675', Northern History, 18, (1982), 116-32; Gowing, L., 'Gender and the Language of Insult'.

³⁸ W.W., A true and just Recorde, (1582), B2, C1.

³⁹ Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, (1996), 19.

maketh no matter. For shee might have suffered mee to have the keeping and nursing of it.

Grace also said that when she was lying-in Ursula was angry 'for that shee had not the keeping in of the saide Grace'.⁴⁰ Ursula was clearly insulted and upset by both her exclusion from both Grace's lying-in and the rejection of her offer to nurse the child, for which Grace possibly felt guilty. Childbirth was perceived as a time of especial vulnerability for the mother, who was seen as being on the boundary between life and death. The new mother was also vulnerable as she would not yet have been re-accepted in the church after the ritual of churching.⁴¹ In addition, the blaming of the child's accident on Ursula seems to parallel the blaming of failed household tasks on malicious witchcraft.⁴² The mother blamed the suspected woman because she felt that she herself had failed in her motherly duty to protect her child.⁴³

Similarly, Cicely Sellis was believed to have bewitched the children of Thomas Death after his wife was given the child of George Battle to nurse instead of Cicely. It was claimed that:

after he taking the said childe away from her and put the same to this examinate wife to be nursed & kept, whereupon at the next meeting of the sayde wives, the said Celles his wife chid and rayled at her, and saide thou shalt loose more by the having of it, then thou shalt have for the keeping of it.⁴⁴

The refusal of the right to nurse another's child would have been a great insult, implying mistrust in the person. Childbirth was a female occasion on which the women of the neighbourhood formed their own community, thus it would have been

⁴⁰ W.W., A true and just Recorde, (1582), A1-2. See Purkiss,D., 'Women's Stories', 420-422 for further discussion of this case.

⁴¹ Rublack,U., 'Pregnancy, Childbirth and the Female Body', 85-6, 103, 109; Purkiss,D., The Witch in History, 99-107; Briggs,R., Witches and Neighbours, 241-4.

⁴² See Chapter Four.

⁴³ The use of witchcraft beliefs as a coping strategy for parental grief can be seen in Fabrega,H. & Nutini,H., 'Witchcraft-Explained Childhood Tragedies in Tlaxcala, and their Medical Sequelae', Social Science and Medicine, (1993), vol.36, no.6, 793-805.

⁴⁴ W.W., A true and just Recorde, (1582), D8; see Purkiss,D., 'Women's Stories', 422, for further discussion of this case.

an insult to be excluded.⁴⁵ Roper and Purkiss show how the anxieties surrounding childbirth and maternity could lead to witchcraft accusations. Purkiss sees the women who try to take over the natural role of the mother and wife in another's household, women such as Ursula Kemp and Cicely Sellis, as being suspected because they showed too much interest in the other woman's household and thus attempted to usurp her role in it.⁴⁶

The Essex evidence, therefore, indicates that the changing ethics of neighbourliness, as well as the continuing condemnation of women who stepped outside the boundaries of the ideal, led to the suspicion of certain women. Due to the female context of gossip, slander and household borrowing and lending in which these disputes arose, it is clear why both accusers and accused in witchcraft cases tended to be women. However, as Purkiss emphasises, many of the disputes which took place over goods and food do not fit into Thomas and Macfarlane's thesis of a quarrel over refused alms. Mostly these disputes involve the exchange or transfer of goods, which then led to an accusation when followed by misfortune.⁴⁷ Furthermore, as has been demonstrated, reputation was a crucial element in forming ideas about who might be a witch. Thus a gender-centred analysis can help to develop our understanding much further than using a solely social and economic framework.

The Midlands and North - Pamphlet Accounts

The re-examination of the Essex pamphlet sources has indicated the effectiveness of incorporating a gendered analysis into our understanding of witchcraft accusations within a neighbourly context. It is necessary to extend this examination to examine

⁴⁵ Sim, A., *The Tudor Housewife*, 18; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 76, 270. Other social occasions cited as the cause of offence in witchcraft trials include christenings and wedding feasts, *Trial of Maist Dorrell*, (London, 1599), 100; Raine, J, 'Depositions From York Castle', 112.

⁴⁶ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 419-422, Roper, L., *Oedipus and the Devil*, 201. See Chapter Four for further discussion.

⁴⁷ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 412-3.

pamphlet sources from other geographical areas to elicit whether this approach is as effective in a different region, and to consider whether there are any differences between the witchcraft beliefs shown in different regions. The pamphlets examined for the region of the Midlands and the North also highlight concerns with concepts of good neighbourliness in the face of economic difficulties, reputation through insult and slander, long-term suspicions for witchcraft and disorderly behaviour.

Neighbourliness and Economic Conflict

Witchcraft accusations drew from the community's economic context, and thus many accusations involved the fundamental processes of exchange through borrowing and lending, as well as through begging. Even in cases which do not focus specifically upon accusations arising from begging disputes, the practice of begging is shown as a potentially dangerous practice for making the party noticeable and thus vulnerable to accusation. Thomas Darling, the Burton Boy, believed to have been possessed in 1596, claimed that when lost in the woods he came across an old woman of whom he said 'I have seene her begging at our doore, as for her name I knowit not, but by sight I can know her againe'.⁴⁸ People known for begging were undoubtedly considered a nuisance in the community, accentuated by the fear that the processes of exchanging and borrowing were opportunities for evil powers to gain control. Alice Gooderige, believed to be this woman, later confessed that she 'was sorie for him, for she mistooke him, thinking him to be Sherrats boy, thinking to have bin revenged on him for breaking her egges'.⁴⁹

The act of refusal was believed to be potentially dangerous, especially when faced with a stranger whose reputation was unknown. That this was a widely held belief can be demonstrated in that the politics of exchange and refusal are a predominant motif in witchcraft accusations. When William Somers started to suffer from fits in

⁴⁸ *Most wonderfull and true storie*, (1597), 4

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 25.

the 1590s he recalled that when travelling to Bromsgrove he had come across an old woman who requested a copper hat band he had found. He refused, 'wher upon she threatning him said that it had bene as good for him to have given it to her'.⁵⁰ That night he saw a strange light in his chamber, which scared him, and soon began having fits. He also spoke of meeting with an old woman on Blackwellmore Heath who asked him for a penny that she knew he had, and that if he did not give it to her she would break his neck.⁵¹

Economic disputes within a family were sometimes blamed for succeeding misfortunes. In the case of the seven possessed people in the Starkey household at Leigh, Lancashire, 1596-7, it was believed that their problems stemmed from family grievances over inheritance. George More claimed that 'Nicholas Starkie gentleman, who married a gentlewoman that was an inheretrix, and of whose kindred some were Papistes, of whom some part[l]ie for Religion, and partlie for that lande descended not to the heires male, wished & vowed still to pray for the perishing of her issue'. Four of her children 'pined away in a most strange maner' before someone told Mrs Starkey of the curse, after which she gave the land over to her husband and his heirs. She then had two children who were well until they became possessed in 1597.⁵² In a period of economic difficulty inheritance disputes were more likely to take place.⁵³ Again the concern over property is demonstrated.⁵⁴

The witchcraft accusations in the 1612 Pendle case support the Thomas and Macfarlane thesis in that they centred mainly around two families who appear to

⁵⁰ Darrell, J., A True Narration of the Strange and Grevous Vexation by the Devil, of 7. Persons in Lancashire, and William Somers of Nottingham, (London, 1600), 14.

⁵¹ Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 91.

⁵² More, G., A True Discourse Concerning the Certaine Possession and Dispossession of 7 persons in one familie in Lancashire, (1600), 11.

⁵³ For further discussion of the problems of inheritance see Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, (1996), 245-8. The religious context is explored further in Chapter Six.

⁵⁴ In an additional example of witchcraft accusations being associated with property disputes, Anne Redfearn and her mother were believed to have bewitched Robert Nutter to death after he threatened to evict Anne from her home, Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster, (London, 1613, reprint, London, 1845), E-E2, O-O2

have survived by begging and which were both headed by women in their eighties who had long-standing reputations for witchcraft. Accusations surrounding these families arose in the context of near poverty in an area affected by economic upheaval leading to financial difficulties for many. Many of the events in this case are situated specifically within the context of their begging activities. For instance, Alizon was persuaded to become a witch while begging with her grandmother Elizabeth Southern, alias Demdike, and her familiar, a black dog, came to her while she was begging, although she said that she did not talk to it.⁵⁵ This would appear to support the theories of Thomas and Macfarlane that accusations of witchcraft rose typically from disputes over begging and borrowing in an age of declining charity.⁵⁶ The families were in open competition with each other in both begging and witchcraft, and their reputation had been marred by suspicions of sorcery as well as some of them having had illegitimate children. There was also a famous enmity between the two heads of the families, an instance of which can be seen in the confession of Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, that she had killed one of Anthony Nutter's cows because she thought that he favoured Elizabeth Southern over her.⁵⁷

These society-based interpretations are supported by the implication that those in the local community were too afraid to turn Elizabeth Southern's or Anne Whittle's families away because of their reputations. It is interesting, considering her own family's reputation for witchcraft, that Alizon Device testified in 1612 that her father John was so afraid of Anne Whittle that he agreed to pay her a yearly allotment of meal.⁵⁸ Device had claimed on his deathbed eleven years earlier that Anne had bewitched him because he had not paid her the meal that year. The fear in which witches were held by their local communities was clearly underlined by Thomas

⁵⁵ Ibid., R3-4.

⁵⁶ Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic; Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England. The Pendle trials have been examined in the light of these theories in Swain, J.T., 'The Lancashire Witch Trials of 1612 and 1634 and the Economics of Witchcraft', Northern History, (1994), 64-85.

⁵⁷ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, D2, E2.

⁵⁸ Ibid., E4.

Potts. Of Margaret Pearson of Padiham, he stated that she was 'A very dangerous Witch of long continuance, generally suspected and feared in all parts of the Countrie, and of all good people neare her, and not without great cause: for whoever gave her any just occasion of offence, shee tormented with great miserie, or cut off their children, goods or friends'.⁵⁹

The danger inherent in refusal is also prevalent in the depositions of the witches themselves. Elizabeth Device and others were said to have killed Henry Mitton of Rough-Lee because he refused to give Elizabeth Southern a penny. Alizon Device was accused of bewitching and laming a peddler, Abraham Law, who refused to sell her some pins. Abraham told his son, John, that she had no money but he had given her some pins anyway. Jane Wilkinson testified that 'Isabel Robey asked her milke, and she denied to give her any: And afterwards shee met the said Isabel, whereupon this Examinee waxed afraid of her, and was then presently sick'. A common theme throughout Potts' *Discoverie* is that the motive for these crimes of witchcraft was 'revenge, bloud and mischief'.⁶⁰ The importance of the belief in the danger of refusal is evident as is reflected in the witchcraft literature of the time. In Thomas Shadwell's play *The Late Lancashire Witches*, the constable notes how Mother Demdike said she would revenged on him for refusing to give her some buttermilk.⁶¹

The reputation of Anne Baker of Bottesford, Leicestershire, was also damaged by economic disputes between herself and her neighbours. In 1618 she was accused of bewitching Elizabeth the wife of William Hough to death after she gave her alms of her 'second bread'. Anne confessed that she was angry with Elizabeth since she had often done errands for her and so would have expected some of her better bread.⁶² Clearly charity that was not good enough could offend as well as an outright refusal.

⁵⁹ Ibid., S3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., G2, R3, S, T4, H2.

⁶¹ Shadwell, T., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (London, 1681), 38.

⁶² *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 15.

Yet it is important to recognise that some people appeared to gain power through their reputations, either as witchfinders or witches. This power was based on fear. The economic context of these witchcraft accusations can be inferred from the quest of those involved for financial security. Elizabeth Fletcher, suspected of bewitching the Fairfax daughters of Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621, appeared to gain by her evil reputation. It was said that she 'had so powerful a hand over the wealthiest neighbours about her, that none of them refused to do anything she required; yea, unbesought they provided her with fire, and meat from their tables; and did what else they thought would please her'.⁶³ Women's reputations were spread through the community by rumour and gossip, underlining the danger in acquiring a bad reputation in the community. Although it may have been beneficial in the short term in gaining goods through fear, it was believed that the report of so many instances, gave rise to a belief in the woman's power to practice magic. Significantly, the evidence of hearsay or rumour was also accepted as proof in witchcraft trials.⁶⁴

Slander, Reputation and Suspicion

Insult and slander involving aspersions of witchcraft appear to have been endemic in disputes in community society, and evidently could escalate into full witchcraft accusations. The confession of Alice Gooderige of Stapenhill, Staffordshire, in 1596, recounted how she came across a boy in the woods who 'called me witch of Stapen hil: unto whom I said, Every boy doth call me witch, but did I ever make thy arse to itch'. When the devil subsequently appeared to her she requested him to torment the boy for calling her a witch.⁶⁵ Thomas Darling, the victim of her response, admitted that he 'let an escape...which shee taking to bee done in her

⁶³ Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: A Discourse on Witchcraft as it was acted in the family of Mr Edward Fairfax of Fuvstone, in the county of York. (1621, reprint, Harrogate, 1882), 34. See Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 155-6.

⁶⁴ William Perkins stated in his 'Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft', published in 1608, that 'Notorious defamation is a common report of the greater sort of people with whom the party dwelleth, that he or she is a witch. This yieldeth a strong suspicion'. Quoted in Robbins, R.H., The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology, (New York, 1959), 174.

⁶⁵ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 25-6.

contempt, used these words: *Gip with a mischiefe, and fart with a bell, I wil goe to Heaven, and thou shalt goe to Hell*', with which words her spirit possessed him.⁶⁶ This case demonstrates the power of rumour in the community, particularly amongst children in this scenario, as Alice was evidently thought ill of by many.⁶⁷ The belief in the danger of offending a suspected person in the community, either by words, or in this case an unfortunate bodily emission, is also indicated. The power of gossip is further shown when a rumour spread about Alice's familiar. The author of the pamphlet stated that 'whereas Alice Gooderige said her familiar was like one William Gregories dog of Stapenhill, there arose a rumor, his dog was her familiar: wherefore hee with his neighbour maister Coxo went the next day to examine her concerning this report'.⁶⁸ Evidently William would do all that he could to avoid being tainted by association. In a similar way to Thomas Darling above, William Perry, the Boy of Bilson, claimed to have been bewitched in 1621 after he offended a witch. He stated that when he was coming home from school to Bilson, Staffordshire, that:

an old woman, unknowne, met him, and taxed him, in that he did not give her good time of day, saying that he was a foule thing, and that it had been better for him if he had saluted her. At which words the Boy felt a thing to pricke him to the very heart.⁶⁹

Similarly, Margaret Thorpe was believed to have bewitched Maud Jeffray of Fewston, Yorkshire, in 1621, because 'the wench did anger her'.⁷⁰

The first Pendle witch trial of 1612 provides several instances of the accused reacting angrily to insults, particularly aspersions of witchcraft, which were used in evidence against them. Elizabeth Southern confessed that just before Christmas

⁶⁶ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 41.

⁶⁷ Children as well as adults evidently recognized a stereotype of witches. For instance, Jane Throckmorton of Warboys, when faced with the woman suspected of bewitching her, exclaimed 'did you ever see...one more like a witch than she is', *Witches of Warboys*, (1593), A3.

⁶⁸ *Most wonderfull and true storie*, (1597), 27.

⁶⁹ *The Boy of Bilson*, (London, 1622), 46.

⁷⁰ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia: 1621*, 70.

1611, she had gone to Richard Baldwin's house to receive payment for her daughter who had helped him at the mill. On nearing the house she and Alizon Device (who was leading her as she was blind), met Baldwin who exclaimed 'get out of my ground Whores and Witches, I will burne the one of you, and hang the other. To who this Examinee answered: I care not for thee, hang thy selfe'. Elizabeth's spirit, Tibb, then appeared to her 'To whom this Examinee sayd againe to the said Spirit. *Revenge thee eyther of him, or his*'. His daughter subsequently fell ill the next day and died a year later.⁷¹ The linking of female insults of sexuality and witchcraft is demonstrated here, and thus the importance of maintaining a good reputation in the community.

Alizon Device claimed that Anne Whittle bewitched to death Anne Nutter after she saw them laughing together, and assumed that they were laughing at her.⁷² Anne Whittle appears to have been particularly easy to offend since she was believed to have bewitched to death John the son of John Moore of Higham, by image magic when she was suspected of bewitching his drink. She also bewitched to death Hugh Moore of Pendle after he accused her of bewitching his cattle, and bewitched to death John Nutter's cow after he saw her churning milk with two sticks.⁷³ These accusations present a very clear image of the belief in witches harming people who had insulted them in some way. The focus upon the nature of the insult or offence, in a similar fashion to the emphasis upon a refusal of goods, also helped to explain the misfortune of the victim.

An additional example of the importance of insult in the depositions of the Pendle trial of 1612 is the confession of Elizabeth Device, who claimed that she had

⁷¹ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), B3; Hasted, R., The Pendle Witch-Trial 1612, (Lancashire; 1993); 14.

⁷² Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), F. Likewise, Margaret Wait was believed to have bewitched Edward Fairfax's daughters after the family laughed at her, Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: 1621, 42, 44

⁷³ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), F. It is not clear what exactly she was doing with the two sticks but it may have been some kind of divining magic.

bewitched John Robinson, alias Swyer, to death because he had 'chidden and becalled this Examinee, for having a Bastard-child with one *Seller*'. Peter Chaddock of Windle deposed on 12 July 1612 that he believed that Isabel Robey had bewitched him after he had had words with her and 'called her Witch, and said that hee did not care for her'. This conflict becomes more complicated when we learn that Peter's wife was, in fact, Isabel's goddaughter.⁷⁴ Thus the insult of witch was also used within family conflicts.

A final example of insult leading to the wish for revenge is the case of Ellen Greene of Stathern, Leicestershire, who confessed in March 1618 that she sent her spirits to bewitch to death two people, the baker of Waltham who had called her a witch and struck her, and Anne Dawse of the same town who had called her a witch, whore and jade. Both died within two weeks.⁷⁵ Again, the importance of gossip, slander and reputation is highlighted. Ellen clearly had a bad reputation as an evil liver in her neighbourhood, in both a spiritual and sexual way, and was angry enough about these accusations to want to kill these people. It is ironic, however, that she felt so angry about the insult of witchcraft when, by her own admission, she nurtured two demonic familiars.

Insult and slander do, therefore, appear to have been ways of expressing feelings about the reputations of others. Reputation was clearly very important in the community - people drew on suspicions in their disputes, and the object of these insults was usually angry enough to wish for revenge. As has been shown insults could take many forms, from an explicit verbal insult to the feeling that people were making fun of the person. This demonstrates the vulnerability of close neighbourly relations and emphasises that accusations did not arise solely from economic disputes. The linking of witchcraft with sexual misbehaviour in insults has also been

⁷⁴ Ibid., F4, T3-4.

⁷⁵ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 20.

indicated here, in the examples of Elizabeth Southernns, Elizabeth Device and Ellen Greene. This would appear to support a feminist assertion that witchcraft was linked with other forms of female misconduct.

Reputation and Disorderly Behaviour

One of the prevalent motifs in witchcraft accusations was that the accused had a long standing reputation for witchcraft, in many cases one which had passed through the family, thus the danger of having an ambiguous reputation in the community is evident. The process of finding a likely suspect appears to have been straightforward and well supported by neighbours, particularly in cases where people, especially children, fell sick. A reputation or suspicion for witchcraft could leave a person very vulnerable to accusation, particularly by supposedly possessed children. This can be demonstrated in the case of William Perry, the Bilson Boy of Staffordshire, who pretended to be possessed by spirits in 1621. He claimed to have been taught how to counterfeit fits by an old man whom he met not far from his father's house. William stated that 'hee willed mee...that I should be sicke: and that then I should accuse some on body or other (whom I had heard to be accounted a *Witch*) to have bewitched mee'. He accused Joan Cocke 'because she was a woman ill thought of and suspected for such like things'. Joan Cocke was known to be disorderly since she was also described as an 'obstinate *Recusant*'.⁷⁶ In Robert Plot's account of the story, written in 1686, Joan Cocke was described as a 'poore old neighboring woman' and 'of a *scolding humor*'.⁷⁷

This again highlights the proximity of accusers and accused within the neighbourhood, and the more likely suspicion of a woman known for being argumentative or unfriendly. Similarly in the case of William Somers of Nottingham, 1597, he claimed that he had been encouraged to name witches and that

⁷⁶ The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 62, 70.

⁷⁷ Plot, R., The Natural History of Stafford-shire, (Oxford, 1686), 281, 283.

he 'only named them, because I had knowne them before to have been commonly suspected to be Witches'.⁷⁸

In the case of the Burton Boy, Thomas Darling, who fell sick in 1595, Jesse Bee, a family friend, suggested possession. Darling then accused a woman he had encountered in the woods of bewitching him. From his description 'some judged it to be the Witch of Stapen-hill: others, because she was olde and went little abroad, rather thought it to be Alice Gooderige her daughter, who was had in great suspicion'.⁷⁹ Both Alice and her mother Elizabeth Wright had been suspected to be witches for many years, Elizabeth had appeared before the justices four or five times previously on suspicion of witchcraft. A further indication of the importance of family connections in suspicions can be seen when the women were brought to the boy, along with Alice's husband and daughter. Oliver Gooderige and his daughter were examined on April 14th, the day on which Alice was committed to gaol. These three cases involving accusations by children indicate the importance of rumour in forming reputations, and also the powerful position which children such as these attained through their pretended illnesses.⁸⁰

An additional case highlighting the importance of family connections is the Pendle witch trial of 1612. The two main protagonists in this case, Elizabeth Southernns and Anne Whittle were portrayed as the archetypal image of witches. Both were around eighty, widowed, poor, deformed by age, and well known for their begging and cursing. Furthermore, witchcraft was believed to have been passed down through both families, principally through the females. Elizabeth was said to have been a witch for fifty years, and to have 'brought up her owne Children, instructed her Graund-children, and tooke great care and paines to bring them to be Witches'. Alizon Device, claimed that two years previously, her grandmother 'did sundry

⁷⁸ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599) 102, 181.

⁷⁹ *Most wonderfull and true storie*, (1597), 4.

⁸⁰ See Chapter Five for further discussion.

times...as they went begging, perswade and advise this Examinee to let a Devill or Familiar appear unto her; and that shee this Examinee, would let him sucke at some part of her, and shee might have, and doe what she would'. Elizabeth Device was unfortunate also in that she had a deformity which added to other's fear of her, 'this odious Witch was branded with a preposterous marke in Nature, even from her birth, which was her left eye, standing lower then the other; the one looking downe, the other looking up'.⁸¹ At her appearance in the main trial, Potts described Anne as:

a very old withered spent and decreped creature, her sight almost gone: A dangerous Witch, of very long continuance; alwayes opposite to old *Demdike*: for whom the one favoured, the other hated deadly: and how they envie and accuse one an other, in their Examinations, may appeare. In her Witchcraft, alwayes more ready to doe mischiefe to mens goods, then themselves. Her lippes ever chattering and walking: but no man knew what. She lived in the Forrest of *Pendle*, amongst this wicked company of dangerous Witches.

James Robinson deposed that Anne Whittle and her daughter Anne Redfearne were 'commonly reputed and reported to bee Witches'.⁸² Accounts of these appearances are examples of the popular contemporary stereotype of the witch as an old mumbling and cursing woman.⁸³

Despite this discussion of the stereotypical images of witches in Thomas Potts' account, however, he appears to question the stereotype when discussing the accusations made by the fourteen year old Grace Sowerbutts against the nearby Salmesbury witches. He argues that the arraignment of the Pendle Witches was taken as an opportunity to accuse women in Salmesbury, 'for the wrinkles of an old wives face is good evidence to the Jurie against a Witch. And how often will the common people say (*Her eyes are sunke in her head, GOD blesse us from her.*)'⁸⁴

⁸¹ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), B-B2, C, R3, G

⁸² Ibid., E2.

⁸³ There has been some debate over whether the name Chattox relates to this passage, in referring to her chattering, or whether it was derived from the name Chadwick. Bennett, W., *The Pendle Witches*, (Preston, 1993), 7.

⁸⁴ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), M2

The power and persistence of witchcraft suspicions can be seen in cases where people were re-accused. Anne Redfearne was acquitted of the murder of Robert Nutter but brought to a second trial for the death of his brother Christopher Nutter. This was evidently due to pressure in the community; Potts explained how 'the innocent blood yet unsatisfied, and crying out unto GOD for satisfaction and revenge; the crie of his people (to deliver them from the danger of such horrible and bloudie executioners, and from her wicked and damnable practises) hath now againe brought her to a second Triall'. Jennet Preston of Gisburn, Yorkshire, was accused of killing Thomas Lister who had tried to prosecute her for witchcraft at the previous assizes at York but failed. Margaret Pearson of Padiham was also appearing before the courts for the third time on a witchcraft charge, having been indicted previously for murder by witchcraft and for bewitching a neighbour.⁸⁵ These examples demonstrate how an accusation of witchcraft, even if it were disproved, could still lead to lingering suspicions surrounding the accused.

Those found not guilty in the 1612 Pendle witch trial were not presumed completely innocent, and were required to enter into recognisances for good behaviour to appear before the next assize. Only one suspected witch appears to have had supporters attesting to her innocence. Potts spoke derisively about the efforts of family and friends of Jennet Preston who claimed that the charge of witchcraft against her was slander. He stated that his work should prove that she was indeed a dangerous witch who deserved to die. This underlined his argument that witches should not be treated leniently, since as soon as they were set at liberty they were plotting evil again.⁸⁶

Suspicions could damage family relationships, particularly, it seems, between in-laws. Jane Southworth, of Salmesbury, accused in 1612, was suspected by her

⁸⁵ Ibid., Y, S4, V4.

⁸⁶ Ibid., X, Z3.

husband's family. John Singleton deposed that his late master John Southworth said that she 'was an evill woman, and a Witch; and he said that he was sorie for her husband, that was his kinsman, for he thought she would kill him'. Furthermore, he claimed that he would do anything to avoid going near her house or meeting her. Similarly, Peter Chaddock of Windle avoided meeting his wife's godmother Isabel Robey, turning back when he saw her if he was alone. The fear and danger of having a reputation for witchcraft is evident here. This danger is apparent in the claim that many more people were at the meeting of witches apparently held at Malkin Tower than those arraigned, but that they 'since that time fled to save themselves'.⁸⁷

The bad reputations of the suspected parties were often strikingly juxtaposed against the good reputations of the accusers, witnesses and bystanders, as in the case of Agnes Herd discussed above. The author of *The most wonderfull and true storie, of a certaine Witch named Alse Gooderige of Stapenhill* claimed that 'a hundred more witnesses might be produced, than are here inserted, and divers of them of good woorth and credit'.⁸⁸ George More also recounted how during the dispossession of seven people in the Starkey household in Leigh, Lancashire in 1597 that there were 'diverse honest neighbors for the holding and tending of the possessed'.⁸⁹ The presence of godly and honest people was believed important to shield the victims from any influence of evil. Conversely, when 'a man of bad life' came into the parlour during one of Thomas Darling of Burton's fits in 1596, he was sent away.⁹⁰

The pervasiveness of witchcraft suspicions over time and through family connections has been indicated, as well as the connection of suspected people with stereotypical images of witches and disorderly behaviour. These factors are clearly demonstrated in the example of the Flower witches of Bottesford in 1618, which will serve as a

⁸⁷ Ibid., L4, T4, R2.

⁸⁸ *Most wonderfull and true storie*, (1597), A2.

⁸⁹ More, G., *A True Discourse* (1600), 57.

⁹⁰ *Most wonderfull and true storie*, (1597), 36.

useful case study. This case centred on the relationships between the Flower women, Joan and her daughters Margaret and Philippa, of Bottesford, Leicestershire, and the family of the 6th Earl of Rutland, Francis Manners, who lived in Belvoir Castle. Again, the image of the evil witches was juxtaposed with the godly victims under attack by witchcraft. *The Wonderful Discoverie* describes how the Earl and his Countess were popular with the local people and how the Castle was open to both rich and poor people. All three of the Flowers women frequented the Castle and were taken on as 'chairwomen', or cleaners, while Margaret was given a live-in post. The author presented the misfortunes of the Earl's family as a battle between good and evil:

By this time is the Earle and his family threatened, and must feele the burthen of a terrible tempest, which from these womens Divellish devises fell uppon him, he neither suspecting nor understanding the same: By this time both himself and his honourable Countesse, are many times subject to sicknesse and extraordinary convulsions, which they taking as gentle corrections from God, submit with quietnesse to his mercy, and study nothing more, then to glorifie their Creator in heaven, and beare his crosses on earth.⁹¹

This image serves to underline the contrast between the deceptive evil of the 'witches', and the godliness of the family.

There is a strong emphasis on the reputations of the three Flower women in this pamphlet. The mother Joan Flower was reported to be:

a monstrous malicious woman, full of oathes, curses, and imprecations irreligious, and for any thing they saw by her, a plaine Atheist; besides of late days her very countenance was estranged, her eyes were fiery and hollow, her speech fell and envious, her demeanour strange and exoticke, and her conversation sequestered; so that the whole course of her life gave great suspition that she was a notorious Witch, yea some of her neighbours dared to affirm that she dealt with familiar Spirits, and terrified them all with curses and

⁹¹ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 10. Gibson notes that victims of a higher social status were more likely to be portrayed as innocent victims of motiveless witchcraft than others in the community who accepted some blame for the breakdown in neighbourly relations between witch and accuser, Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*, 125-133.

threatning of revenge, if there were never so little cause of displeasure and unkindnesse.⁹²

This image of Joan supports Thomas and Macfarlane's view of communities who dared not cross suspected women for fear of reprisal by witchcraft, fitting in with their assertions that the majority of witchcraft accusations resulted from local disputes arising out of situations such as this.

It is clear that Joan Flower was very far from the 'ideal' of womanly behaviour in the early modern period. Far from being silent, chaste, obedient and pious, here was a family with no male householder to oversee the behaviour and religion of his family. Instead the family comprised three women, headed by a mother who was seen to be outspoken and openly disagreeable towards others in the community. Regarding the comments on Joan's recent altered physical appearance, there are various suppositions that may be made. Joan Flower may have been, as Reginald Scot and fellow contemporary sceptics asserted, suffering from melancholy as a result of approaching older age. A further possible explanation may be that she was menopausal, that she had reached the age at which she would fulfil the image of the dangerous witch, a dry and barren crone, who was not quite a woman now that she was past childbearing age.

The community had other reasons to be suspicious of Joan Flower's daughters. It was said of Margaret that:

she often resorted from the Castle to her Mother, bringing such provision as they thought unbefitting for a servant to purloine, and coming at such unseasonable houres, that they could not but conjecture some mischeife between them, and that their extraordinary ryot and expences tended both to rob the Lady, and to maintain certaine deboist and base company which frequented this *Ioane Flowers* house the mother, and especially her youngest Daughter.⁹³

⁹² *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 8.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

Of Philippa it was reported that 'she was lewdly transported with the love of one *Th: Simpson*, who presumed to say, that she had bewitched him: for hee had no power to leave, and was as he supposed marvellously altered both in minde and body, since her acquainted company'.⁹⁴ Margaret was clearly seen by the community to be abusing her position at the Castle by stealing expensive items from her popular employers. This again emphasises the concern with property highlighted above. Furthermore it was seen as suspicious that she wandered about at times when no respectable person should be abroad, and thus at a time when her activities cannot be seen openly, or be controlled, by the community.⁹⁵ The element of inversion can be seen here too as she provided items meant for the highest in the county, to the base and unsavoury elements of society said to frequent her mother's house.

The description of Philippa is interesting, as she seems to fit one of the main stereotypes of the witch as highlighted by feminist studies of witchcraft literature. Whereas Joan was the ageing and barren crone, Philippa was the bewitching and sexual witch who damaged the manhood of men.⁹⁶ Thomas Simpson appeared to be obsessed by Philippa, and from the author's suggestion that the base company who come to the house did so especially to visit her, it could be that she was either promiscuous, or a prostitute. As chastity was the only acceptable state before marriage the community would clearly frown upon this behaviour.

Accusations of lewd behaviour and witchcraft were linked in many other cases, which underlines the importance of good reputation in the community. As can be seen more clearly in cases of a more endemic nature, once a woman had damaged her reputation she was vulnerable to accusation of various seemingly unrelated

⁹⁴ Ibid., 9.

⁹⁵ Gowing notes that staying near the home was associated with chastity and modesty, thus to walk about alone, particularly at night, presented questions about that woman's reputation. This criticism, in theory, aimed to restrict women's sphere of movement. Gowing, L., 'Gender and the Language of Insult', 11-12.

⁹⁶ Sprenger, J. & Kramer, H., *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1486), Part One, chapters 7-9, Part Two, chapters 6-7; Bever, E., 'Old Age and Witchcraft', 155.

crimes, such as lewdness, scolding or witchcraft, which were all seen as outside the ideal of feminine behaviour. The author of *The Wonderful Discoverie* also reported that 'these complaints began many years before either their conviction, or publique apprehension'.⁹⁷ This supports the idea that accusations of witchcraft typically came as a result of many years of suspicion and disquiet, rather than as a spontaneous event.

Perhaps as a result of the rumours circulating which concerned the Flowers women, the Countess of Rutland discharged Margaret from service after 'discovering some undecencies both in her life and neglect of her business'. The conditions of this discharge appear to have been very generous in the circumstances, as Margaret was given '40s. a bolster, and a mattresse of wooll'.⁹⁸ However, Margaret's discharge was said to have enraged Joan who was criticised by her neighbours for her daughter's misbehaviour. The author of *The Wonderful Discoverie* claimed that 'she [Joan] grew past all shame and woman-hood, and many times cursed them all that were the cause of this discontentment, and made her so loathsome to her former familiar friends and beneficial acquaintance'.⁹⁹ The author's language here is important. It is implied that through her anger Joan became increasingly unwomanly and shameless, just as similarly a witch's behaviour was seen to be the complete inversion of acceptable female behaviour. Margaret admitted that she bewitched the earl's family after her dismissal which 'she not onely tooke in ill part, but grudged at it exceedingly, swearing in her heart to be revenged'.¹⁰⁰

This case study examined has indicated that as well as the danger of having a reputation for witchery, the accused were also frequently associated with other forms

⁹⁷ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9, Rosen suggests that the settlement was generous as Margaret's failing may have been that she was too friendly with the male members of the household, similar to the rumours about her sister, Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, 372.

⁹⁹ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 10.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 22.

of disorderly behaviour. An additional example of this link between witchcraft and disorderly behaviour is the case of Bessie Whittle of Pendle, who was believed to have broken into Elizabeth Southern's house, Malkin Tower, and stolen around twenty shillings worth of property including linen clothes, meal and oatmeal.¹⁰¹ This provides further evidence of concerns about property crime.

As a final instance of the centrality of reputation, the descriptions of the women accused of the possession of Edward Fairfax's daughters in Fewston, Yorkshire, in 1621, further highlight the belief in 'hereditary' witchcraft passing through families. Those suspected included Margaret Wait, described as a disorderly woman, whose husband had been executed for stealing; her daughter, also called Margaret, or Peg, Wait who 'added impudency and lewd behaviour; for she is young and not deformed', Jennit Dibble, described as 'a very old widow, reputed a witch for many years; and constant report confirmeth that her mother, two aunts, two sisters, her husband, and some of her children, have all been long esteemed witches, for that it seemeth hereditary to her family'; her daughter Margaret Thorpe, recently widowed, a fact which also served to identify her as a suspect and as having played a part; and Elizabeth Fletcher, 'notoriously famed for a witch'.¹⁰² Significantly, despite the image presented by Fairfax, of their widespread reputation for witchcraft, the women were acquitted because people attested to their good reputation.¹⁰³ The accused witches in the William Somers case in Nottingham 1597 were likewise dismissed because 'those whome *Somers* had named for witches, no man could justly blame'.¹⁰⁴

The different facets of these cases underline the importance of maintaining a good reputation in the community in order to avoid being vulnerable to accusations of

¹⁰¹ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), H3.

¹⁰² Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 32-34. The description of Peg Wait has similarities to that of Phillippa Flower above. Fewston was only 25 miles from Pendle Hill, so stories about the Pendle witches of 1612 would have been well known, Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 201-2.

¹⁰³ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 127.

¹⁰⁴ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, 142.

witchcraft. This was particularly crucial since witchcraft accusations took place within a neighbourly context, and thus concepts of reputation and good neighbourly relations were inherently linked. Witches were evidently believed to pose a particular problem to the neighbourhood in popular English witchcraft beliefs; rather than an organised threat to the church they posed a threat to harmony and stability at a community level. Witchcraft accusations took place within this local context. Accusations were made between people who knew each other well, and, in some cases, as demonstrated in these pamphlets, accusations were made between members of the same family.

The importance of reputation and good neighbourliness has been elicited in relation to the pamphlet material of the Midlands and the North, as well as that of Essex. It has been demonstrated that the majority of accusations appear to fit the stereotype of suspicion resulting from misfortune following a dispute, which was sometimes based in economic conflict. However, a gendered analysis reveals that there was more concern with reputation, especially for women, than with economic aspects. Slander and insult appear to have played a larger role than disputes over goods, and where economic disputes did arise, these were linked with people on the basis of their reputations in the community. Evidence has been presented here of both neighbourhood disputes and insults leading to witchcraft accusations, and how people clearly at the poorer end of the community were made vulnerable by the practice of seeking alms.

The Midlands and North - Non-Pamphlet Accounts

It is now necessary to examine non-pamphlet sources from the Midlands and North of England, and to ascertain whether there are any major differences between the representation of English witchcraft beliefs in the two types of material. Evidence has been provided which ascertains that concepts of good reputation and good

neighbourliness were crucial to women in the community in particular, if they were to avoid association with deviant behaviour such as scolding or witchcraft.

The majority of people presented in non-pamphlet material such as court records appeared on general charges of 'witchcraft' or 'sorcery' with usually very little other information noted. However, although little information is known about these cases, a survey of these general accusations of witchcraft and sorcery will serve both to demonstrate the widespread belief and fear of witchcraft at a local level, and to observe the attempts made at an official level to deal with this problem. The crimes for which people were indicted offer a useful insight into the witch trials and their function in society, as well as highlighting some of the difficulties in determining the difference between crimes described as 'witchcraft' and those described as 'sorcery', when often little detail is noted. This difficulty can be observed in the case against Alice Gorton in May 1574, when it was said 'for that of late she practised sorcerie against the wief of Drue', and similarly the case against Alice Saunderson 'for the like offence'. In this case it was noted that because the churchwardens of Gamston had not appeared to 'set forth the manner of the magic used (as believed) by the said Alice', both women were dismissed.¹⁰⁵

Many of the endemic cases occurring from year to year resulted in orders for penance, thus it is worth examining an example in more depth. On 3 June 1602, Isabel Murre of Headon, Nottinghamshire appeared before the Archdeaconry court 'suspected to be a witche'. Although she pleaded not guilty she was ordered to purge herself and was handed to the gaoler.¹⁰⁶ Isabel evidently failed to produce anyone to support her as compurgators, as she next appears in the records undertaking her punishment of penance. To do this she had to attend the morning prayers at the

¹⁰⁵ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/1 f156a, 159.

¹⁰⁶ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/7 f226d.

parish church dressed in a white sheet. After the reading of the homily against the use of witchcraft or sorcery she had to say:

Good people whereas I of late have been detected and presented to my Ordinarie for suspicion of witchcrafte and have beene called and examined aboute the matter and have been putt to my purgacon and have failed in the same, so that in the judgement of the lawe I am taken to be as one convicted of that crime, and judged to that punishment, now before God and you all I confesse that I am justlie dealt wth in this matter, and am hartelie sorie that it was my evill happe so much to forgett my duetie to God and the regard of my soules healthe as to give cause to be thus called in question, praying God to forgive and you also, and I desire you all to joyne wth me in heartie prayer saying as our Saviour Christe hath taught us OUR FATHER, etc...¹⁰⁷

As with other punishments for anti-social crimes such as witchcraft and scolding, doing penance, like being cucked, placed in the scold's bridle, or being stripped and whipped, was a punishment which was based on humiliating the offender in order to prevent them transgressing in the future. Penance represented an apology to the community for upsetting the order, and was also, in theory, a deterrent to others from committing crime.¹⁰⁸

Neighbourliness and Economic Conflict

Non-pamphlet evidence from this region further indicates an enduring concern with neighbourly behaviour. Cases involving slander, examined below, demonstrate that suspicion could lead to isolation in the community, but neighbourly tensions often attributed to the accusations being made in the first place. Anne Harrison of Ellel, Lancashire, deposed on 3 October 1629 that she believed that Jennet Wilkinson had bewitched her husband's goods after they had fallen out. She stated that Jennett 'takeinge some displeasure against this Informer and her husband, by reason she was debarred of dwellinge in a house of theires, she the said Jennet Wilkinson came to this Informers husbands house and curssed this Informer and her husband verie

¹⁰⁷ Wood, A.C. 'Nottinghamshire Penances 1590-1794', *Transactions of the Thoroton Society*, 1944, vol. XLVIII, p60

¹⁰⁸ Ingram, M., *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*, 3, 53-4.

bitterly'.¹⁰⁹ Robert Ouldfield of Preston, Lancashire, claimed on 8 October 1629 that James Brewerworth had been distracted after some tension between himself and his neighbours, which may have led to him claiming that he had been given a magic stone by a spirit.¹¹⁰ Neighbourly tensions in Pendle led to Margaret Johnson's claim in 1634 that she had become a witch because of the vexations of her neighbours.¹¹¹

Conflict between Thomas Leech of Ashton in Makerfield, and Thomas Baxster of Newton, Lancashire, in 1636 over the house in which the Baxster family were living led to the accusation of Joan Elderson, Thomas Leech's mother. Joan was believed to have bewitched to death the children of Thomas and Elizabeth Baxster so that after their death her son would inherit their house, as they would have no surviving heirs. There was open tension between Elizabeth Baxster and Joan Elderson who were observed arguing by various members of the community. Joan was heard to say to her son 'that if the said Elizabeth Baxter had twenty Children they should have none of them live to enioye the said Thomas Baxters howse'. Interestingly, Joan herself made a claim against Elizabeth Leadbeater, saying that she was afraid of her since they had fallen out after Joan refused to go with her to a friend, or to give her a flagon of ale.¹¹² This, again, emphasises the importance of property, and the prevalence with which concerns about property appear in witchcraft accusations.¹¹³

Joan Smith of Wolverhampton, Staffordshire, was the subject of various articles of complaint against her on 3 October 1609. It was stated that she 'is a woman of so unquiet behaviour that her husband refuseth to live with her but hath forsaken the contrey', that she stole her neighbours goods and when questioned about them cursed

¹⁰⁹ L.R.O., QSB 1/64/23

¹¹⁰ L.R.O., QSB 1/65/39

¹¹¹ Cal.St.Pap.D., 1634-5, 78.

¹¹² L.R.O., QSB 1/170/55-60, 64, 69.

¹¹³ Evidence of the concern with property issues is provided by overall crime figures. Property crime was one of the most commonest crimes which appeared in the courts, Barbour-Mercer, S.A., Prosecution and Process, 188; Curtis, T. & Sharpe, J.A., 'Crime in Tudor and Stuart England', History Today, (Feb. 1988), 25.

her neighbours after which 'many cattaille have myscarried', that she was a common scold, that she threatened to burn down her house endangering the town, and that she 'is notourislie suspected to be a wytche'. It was also alleged that she stabbed John Hanbury when he asked for her rent, and that she had previously been whipped from London as a rogue.¹¹⁴ Likewise Elizabeth Linton of King's Bromley, Staffordshire, was the subject of complaints by her neighbours in 1616 after she was violent towards her neighbours and their livestock, walked at night with fire in her hands, and was believed to have plotted to murder her husband.¹¹⁵

In a slight divergence from this, Bridget Farechild of Newborough, Staffordshire, was accused by her neighbours of misbehaviour when drunk. It was claimed in 1652 that she 'oftentymes disquietted her Neighbours', and that she had killed Anne Bottulphe by violently throwing her on the ground. Interestingly, like Elizabeth Linton, Bridget herself was not accused of witchcraft, but one of her unneighbourly acts reported was that she had accused 89 year old Joan Martin, a gentlewoman, of being a witch.¹¹⁶ Similarly, in the case against Ellen Bickerton of Cheadle, Staffordshire, in 1652, she was accused of violence, cursing her neighbours and their goods, and threatening arson. Again, she was seen as causing trouble by threatening 'to have the blood of Elizabeth Bickerton' of the same parish.¹¹⁷ These cases highlight the fear and disruption to the community caused by accusations of witchcraft, and also the particular fears of, and connections between disorderly behaviour and arson.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ W.S.Q.S.R., QS4, roll 16, no.51-53

¹¹⁵ W.S.Q.S.R., QS9, roll 52, no.36

¹¹⁶ S.Q.S.R., QS/SR/280

¹¹⁷ S.Q.S.R., Q/SR/276

¹¹⁸ Importantly, arson was, like witchcraft, associated predominantly with female disorderly behaviour, and was also connected with interpersonal tensions in the community. It has even been argued, by Thomas, that prosecutions for arson rose at around the same time as those for witchcraft fell. Barbour-Mercer, S.A., *Prosecution and Process*, 232; Sharpe, J.A., *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England*, 160-1; Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 531-4; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 319.

Economic concerns and conflicts were contributing factors leading to several accusations of witchcraft. The women accused of bewitching John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, in 1616 claimed that they 'did consent togeather in the bewitching of Master John Smith...because Mr Smithe father of the childe gave them noe furs for fewell to burne as he had given to others'.¹¹⁹ In addition to the issue of why these women were especially suspect, was the question of why John Smith was targeted by them. It was enquired 'whithr doe yw or yours give them or any of them just cause of discontent towards yw, and what was the cause and whithr doe they speake to any of their neighbors in discontented manner of your hard usage of them'.¹²⁰ This indicates that neighbourhood disputes were clearly recognised by contemporaries at a community level as leading to acts of witchcraft.

The concerns with the lending of, and begging for, economic goods are evident in non-pamphlet accounts. Henry Cockcroster of Heptonstall, Yorkshire, deposed in December 1646 that Elizabeth Crosley 'came to this Informers house begginge an Almes...and as it seemed by his wives relacon, displeased wth her reward departed thence'. After this their young child sickened and died about a month later. Richard Wood of the same town claimed that some of his milking cows had fallen sick after his wife had inadvertently upset Mary Midgley. He claimed that Mary 'came to her & begged wooll, whereupon she tould her shee hadd given her a good Almes of wooll three weeks before & would give her no more for they bought it, but did give her an almes of milke, wth wch she dep[ar]ted very angry'.¹²¹ Mary Moor of Clayton, Yorkshire reported in 1674 that she had heard Ann Shillitoe and Susan Hincliffe her mother speaking very suspiciously as she herself was 'goeing to borrow alms'.¹²² Her accusation could be understood in this economic context, as she may have been in rivalry with the two women for alms.

¹¹⁹ L.A., D&C Ciii 13/1, Smith,R., A Brief Declaration.

¹²⁰ L.A., D&C Ciii 13/1, A Piece of a Course to be Held in the Examinacon of Young John Smithes Counterfetting Himself to be Bewitched.

¹²¹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/1/5/38

¹²² P.R.O., ASSI 45/11/1/90-3.

On 26 and 28 June 1650 a number of inhabitants of Ilkeston, Derbyshire, appeared at the quarter sessions to give evidence against Ann Wagg who was suspected of being a witch and of having used enchantment to harm various people and their goods. William Smith deposed that two months previously he had been at John Elliot's house when Ann came to ask for some milk. He said that 'shee not being provided to give her went away Grumbling & the Infor[mant] said would you had given her some but before the next Morning they found a Calfe of theires dead wch was well overnight'. Elizabeth Gothard claimed that fifteen years before Ann had come to her to buy some wheat, but went away angry after being told that Elizabeth had promised it to her sister. Her child then fell ill suddenly 'with a Continuall Shakeing' but recovered after a fortnight. Ann then returned asking if she could buy some butter, but being refused was sent away and Elizabeth's child died the same night. Misfortunes could thus be linked to economic disputes such as these long after the event.

Economic issues were important in another Derbyshire case, which resulted in the execution of two Bakewell women following a dispute about a lodger's unpaid rent.¹²³ In 1662, Hellen Gray of Chorne, Yorkshire, was said to be 'gen[er]ally suspected to bee a witch by most of the Neighboures about her & she knoweth sev[er]all p[er]sons that have fallen out with her, who had afterwards mischances with their goods'.¹²⁴ Similarly, John Jonson of Reedness, Yorkshire, deposed in March 1692 that 'he heard other of his neighbours say, [that] they have received losse in their goodes, which they did conceive this Eliz Lamb to be the author of'.¹²⁵

¹²³ Simpson, R., A Collection of fragments Illustrative of the History and Antiquities of Derby, compiled from authentic sources, vol. I, (Derby, 1826), 90; Glover, S., The History of the County of Derby: Drawn up from Actual Observation, and from the Best Authorities, vol. II, (Derby, 1829), 606; Andrews, W. (ed.), Bygone Derbyshire, (Derby, 1892), 180-4.

¹²⁴ P.R.O., ASSI 45/6/1/69

¹²⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/16/3/55

Conversely, people of bad reputation could also be suspected for being too grateful in receipt of alms. In 1637, Isabell Anderson, servant to Lawrence Pearson of Appleton, Yorkshire, was ordered to give Elizabeth Lively alms 'att his doore'. After serving Elizabeth with the alms, Elizabeth 'tooke her [the] said Isabell by the hand & thankeinge her departed &...wthyn an houre after she the said Isabell fell sicke'.¹²⁶ This placing of the event emphasises the boundaries of the house, which the witch was believed able to transgress through this act of exchange.¹²⁷ In 1692, boundaries were emphasised again when Elizabeth Lamb of Reedness, Yorkshire, begged forgiveness of Thomas Rennerd's wife for bewitching their child 'at her own dore'.¹²⁸

Slander, Reputation and Suspicion

Several historians have noted the importance of the use of the ecclesiastical courts by women wishing to clear their name of an accusation of witchcraft or sexual misconduct. This is evidence of a pre-occupation with reputation which led to a rise of defamation cases in the seventeenth-century.¹²⁹ Various people sought to clear their name through the courts by bringing cases of slander or defamation against people who had called them a witch. On 15 June 1584 Cicely Smyth of East Markham, Nottinghamshire, brought a case of slander to the Ecclesiastical Court against Anne Walker who had called her a witch. She produced four women who attested to her honesty, and swore 'that she never comytted any withchery or

¹²⁶ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/109-11

¹²⁷ Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*, 187. This notion is discussed further in Chapter Four.

¹²⁸ The belief in touch as a way of bewitching is also indicated. P.R.O., ASSI 45/16/3/55

¹²⁹ Significantly, slander cases generally resulted from local gossip. The church courts enabled people to defend their good name and thus avoid prosecution before the courts. Haigh, C., 'Slander and the Church Courts in the Sixteenth Century', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, 78, (1975), 1-13; Rushton, P., 'Women, Witchcraft and Slander', 116-32; Sharpe, J., 'Defamation and Sexual Slander in Early Modern England: The Church Courts at York', *Borthwick Papers*, (1980), 58; Sharpe, J.A., *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England*, 157-8; Ingram, M., *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage*, 292-319; Gowing, L., 'Gender and the Language of Insult', 1-21; Wiener, C.Z., 'Sex Roles and Crime', 46-7; Tarver, A., *Church Court Records*, chapter 6; Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 40-1. A case involving Anne Hill of Wellington, Shropshire, in 1661 also highlights the use of the church courts by women trying to clear their name from a suspicion of witchcraft in the Midlands, L.J.R.O., B/C/5.

suchlyke matters'. Cicely was dismissed and Anne Walker was ordered 'to acknowledge her falt in the church upon sonday next'.¹³⁰ Likewise Agnes Burton of Littleborough, Nottinghamshire, brought a case of defamation to the Ecclesiastical Court on 6 July 1584 against Jone Rychrofte 'for callinge her wyche and sayd she was to [sic] yll to make gonne powder of'. In this case the two women came to an agreement and were dismissed.¹³¹

The fact that the majority of the cases involving accusations of witchcraft provide no further information may indicate that many of these cases did in fact arise from the term 'witch' being used a term of abuse, in the same way as 'whore' or 'drab'.¹³² Perhaps the accuser did not actually believe that the accused was a genuine witch, but had merely said the term as an insult in a dispute. This would also explain why so many of the cases were unsubstantiated and thus dismissed.

Use of the word 'witch' as a standard form of abuse could also indicate the need to express concerns and fears with female activities and roles in neighbourly disputes. On 12 December 1627, Dorothe Shawe of Skipool, Lancashire, complained to the quarter sessions court that William Wilkinson, alias Johnson, had 'called her Witch and Demdyke, and sayd THOU ARTE A WITCH AND DEMDYKE, GOD BLESSE ME FROM ALL WITCHES, I AM AFFRAYD OF MY WIFE, CHILDREN, AND GOODS, AND THOU SHALL KNOWE YT'.¹³³ It is not surprising that Dorothe went to the court to gain an order of good behaviour against him, since William made an explicit link between his fear of her and 'Demdyke', one of the most notorious of the accused women in the first Pendle trial of 1612.¹³⁴ This underlines the importance of slander, and the influence of pamphlets on perceptions of

¹³⁰ N.A.R., M461 f54-49/50

¹³¹ N.A.R., M461 f54-52

¹³² Purkiss, D., 'Desire and its Deformities', 113; Gowing, L., 'Gender and the Language of Insult'; Rushton, P., 'Women, Witchcraft and Slander', 116-32.

¹³³ L.R.O., QSB 1/33/16. (Capital letters used in original).

¹³⁴ There does not appear to be an alternative contemporary meaning for this word.

witchcraft in the community. This slander case also demonstrates the fear of witches in the community, and the range of destructive activities they were believed able to carry out against both people's families and goods. In an additional example, Timothy Waide of Firby, Yorkshire, was presented before the quarter sessions at Beedall on July 21, 1691, after a complaint by Alice Bovill that he had defamed her by 'uttering of false and scandalous words...viz.-'Thou bewitched my stot'.¹³⁵

Men, too, were concerned about clearing their names from the taint of witchery. On July 26, 1620 Gilbert Smyth, a minister from Swithland, Leicestershire, brought a complaint against Christopher Moncke for

sayeing that I am a Connier [dissembler] and have forsaken the true God. That I am a Sorcerer and the means of the breakinge of his wives Arme and of his sonns cuttinge of his owne throate. That I and my three sonns are fellows and perjured hee hath thereby much disgraced the Word of God in my mouth.

Gilbert claimed that by slandering him by petition to the King, to the circuit judges, the mayor of Leicester and the people of Leicester and London 'hee hath adventured my lyfe goods and reputation thereby and the undoinge of my wife and famylie which lyve by my breath'.¹³⁶ Clearly, by slandering a man of witchcraft his whole family's livelihood would be threatened since he was the main breadwinner. The outcome of this dispute is not known. Although men were not immune to accusations of witchcraft, it was not as common.

There are several instances of communities coming together to defend someone's good reputation. A certificate of good behaviour was produced by the clergymen of Mitton, Ribchester and Chipping, Lancashire, in April 1636 to support Giles Smith

¹³⁵ Atkinson, J.C. (ed.), The North Riding Record Society for the Publication of Original Documents Relating to the North Riding of the County of York. vol. IX - Quarter Sessions Records, (London, 1892), 6, a 'stot' is a bullock or heifer.

¹³⁶ Leicestershire Hall Papers VI, no 523 and no.490, in Stocks, H., (ed.), Records of the Borough of Leicester. Being a Series of Extracts from the Archives of the Corporation of Leicester, 1603-1688, (Cambridge, 1923), p193-4.

who, it claimed, was 'latelie traduced by some evill and slanderous Reports touchinge the practice of sorcerie and the magicke Art and of other foule exorbitant carriage and Misdemeanoures whereby hee is drawn into great trouble'.¹³⁷ In an additional example, in 1674, a petition bearing the names of fifty-one inhabitants of Denby was presented to the Justices of the Peace for the West Riding of Yorkshire to support Ann Shillitoe and her mother Susan Hincliffe who had been accused of witchcraft by Mary Moor. It is interesting how time is stressed in cases testifying to someone's good reputation as well as a bad one. The petition states that:

some of us have well knowne the said Susanna; and Anne, by the space of Twenty years, and upwards; Others of us Fifteene years, and upwards; Others of us Tenne years, and upwards: And have by the said space observed and knowne the life and Conversation of the said Susanna, to be not only very Sober, Orderly, and unblameable in every respect; but also of good example, and very Helpfull and usefull in the Neighborhood...we never heard, or had the least ground to suspect Her.

Mary Moor herself was not of unblemished reputation, 'some of us could say too much concerning her, of quite a different nature; but that we judge, Recrimination to be but an indirect way of Clearing the Innocent'.¹³⁸ The allusions to Susan's helpfulness may indicate that she was known for some kind of folk remedies in the community. This case also reveals the trauma of being accused of witchcraft all too clearly. Joseph Hincliffe, Susan's husband, hanged himself in a wood near their home, and Susan died soon afterwards.¹³⁹

Suspicious such as these could lead to extreme hardship and economic exclusion in the neighbourhood. No doubt these people were keen to put a stop to the rumours about them before they affected their position in the community to the same extent

¹³⁷ L.R.O., QSB 1/165/46.

¹³⁸ P.R.O., ASSI 45/11/1/93.

¹³⁹ Joseph Hincliffe was not alone in being driven to suicide by accusations of witchcraft. The mother of Arthur Bill of Northamptonshire cut her throat to avoid being hanged, *The Witches of Northamptonshire*, (1612), C3. Alice Elgar of Westport, Wiltshire, poisoned herself in 1643 after being mistreated by her neighbours and some soldiers. Ewen, C.L., *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, 406, 453.

as in another case involving slander. In 1657 Margery Greene, a widow from Ince-in-Makerfield, Lancashire, presented a petition complaining that seven named people of the same town 'have all accused, slaundered, said and reported your petitioner to be a witch...Insoemuch that your petitioner and her children are lykely to be famished by reason that noe one (through theise reports) will give them any releiffe but pack them from their dores'. Margery asked that as she was 'sore wronged and disgraced' that she could be 'viewed, proved and cleared' by the justices, and that action should be taken against those who had slandered her. Thus Margery was prepared to go through the ordeal of being searched if it would clear her name.¹⁴⁰

This petition demonstrates the economic problems that a suspicion of witchcraft could bring. Contrary to Thomas's assertion that people may have cultivated reputations for witchcraft to gain power, here we see a family whose poverty was accentuated by suspicion and fear. People would have been afraid to give or lend Margery anything in case she used these actions to gain magical power over them. The power of rumour in the community to destroy a reputation is also indicated here. In a parallel case, Thomas Hope of Aspull was said to have warned Margery Mullineux in 1638 about a number of witches in the area, including Isabell Hyton of whom he said that it would be dangerous to lend anything to her unless she put salt into it first.¹⁴¹

Cases of slander were also heard in the quarter sessions court. In Derbyshire Elizabeth Hole, alias Turner, of Wingerworth was accused of scandalous behaviour and defamation, for bringing unfounded charges of witchcraft against Sir Henry Hunloke and three others on 10 September 1680. She claimed that the four men were trying to kill her 'sayinge that they first went about to starve her & now goe about to Destroy her by conjuracon'. She was described before the quarter sessions

¹⁴⁰ L.R.O., QSP 151/21, See Chapter Three for further discussion of searching witches.

¹⁴¹ L.R.O., QSB 1/202/89, see Chapter Six for methods of counter-magic.

as being 'a very disorderly & dissolute person, & very troublesome, & dangerous to her neighbours' and it was said that if any of her neighbours 'thwart her humour' she threatened to get them imprisoned.¹⁴² This further highlights the social disruption which accusations of witchcraft could cause in the community. In this case, however, the accusations were unlikely to have gone far, as they were made by a woman, herself seen as disorderly, against four men who included a knight and a respected gentleman.

Cases involving slander and insult underline the importance of maintaining a good reputation in the community particularly for women who to an extent strongly influenced the reputation of others in the community. Although they did not always involve direct formal accusations of witchcraft, these cases do demonstrate the importance of reputation, gossip and insult in the community. Significantly, there was relatively little connection made between witchcraft and sexual misconduct. Those associated with witchcraft were more likely to be accused of verbal disorderly behaviour.¹⁴³

Accused witches in the ecclesiastical courts were frequently required to produce compurgators, or witnesses, who could attest to their good reputation as in the case of Cicely Smith above. Other women who produced people to testify to their innocence include Agnes Standley of Basford, Nottinghamshire, on 18 June 1588, Margaret Gelder of Hayton, Nottinghamshire, on 10 August 1588 and Joan Clerke of Farndon, Nottinghamshire, on 4 June 1595.¹⁴⁴ In each case each witness had to swear that they believed the accused was telling the truth. This usually resulted in the case being dismissed, although Margaret Gelder was ordered to give sixpence to the poor box at Hayton when she admitted her outspoken nature. This emphasises

¹⁴² D.R.O., Q/SB 2/1214.

¹⁴³ Verbal crime was perceived as a female means of expressing anger, instead of violence, Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*, 198-202. The association between witchcraft and sexual deviance emphasised by feminist scholars is debated in Chapter Three.

¹⁴⁴ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/2 f45d, 47; DDTS 14/26/3 f77, 77d; DDTS 14/26/5 f141, 144d.

the importance of a good reputation in the community, as the justices were prepared to throw out cases on the testimony of neighbours. For instance, Widow Preston of Carlton-in-Lindrick, Nottinghamshire, was presented to the ecclesiastical court on 27 November 1594 on suspicion of witchcraft. However, on 20 December 'the judge, learning of the integrity and honesty of the said Joan Preston, ordered her to be respited until something further should be brought against her'.¹⁴⁵ If a person was disliked by the community, and no-one came forward as a compurgator, or if people came forward to support the accusation, then these cases would probably have been taken further, underlining the importance of maintaining a good reputation locally.

Many people, women in particular, presented for accusations of witchcraft were said to have been 'suspected' for some time. As well as supporting the notion that accusations of witchcraft typically came as a result of many years of suspicion and disquiet, rather than as spontaneous events, this point also underlines the problematic nature of the crime of witchcraft since it was an invisible crime, and so largely undefined. Thus the closest anyone could get to a definitive accusation would have been a 'vehement suspicion'. Both Joan Bettyson, a widow from Bilsthorpe, Nottinghamshire, who appeared on 21 February 1594/5,¹⁴⁶ and Joan Clerke, wife of John, from Farndon, Nottinghamshire, who appeared on 21 May 1595 were said to be 'publicly infamed' for witchcraft. Joan Clerke claimed on oath that she was infamed without reason, stating 'that shée in this case is wrongfully presented and without any cause geven by her'.¹⁴⁷

Thomazyneh, the wife of Richard Perry, was the subject of complaint before the Staffordshire Justices in 1616, after she and her husband received into their home

¹⁴⁵ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/5 f88-96d.

¹⁴⁶ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/5 f110.

¹⁴⁷ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/5 f141. Briggs notes that people may have been too scared to make explicit accusations, thus they limited themselves to admitting 'suspicions', Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 67.

Thomas Smyth, a deaf and dumb wizard.¹⁴⁸ It was stated that others suspected her of harming; 'vehemently suspectinge her to be a wytche or to have rec[eived] some learninge from him [a wizard] to do harme by touchinge or sayinge some spells'.¹⁴⁹ The power of words and touch are shown here, as well as the notion that a suspicious reputation could be spread by associating with a suspected person. Further examples of long term suspicion include Elizabeth Crossley of Heptonstall, Yorkshire, who was held 'in an evill report for witchinge' in 1646, and Mary Midgeley who confessed that 'she could witch a litle'.¹⁵⁰ Ann Wagg of Ilkeston, Derbyshire was said to have been suspected for a witch for many years, and was believed to have caused illnesses up to fifteen years previously. Allice Carpenter deposed against Ann Wagg in June 1650, saying that after her child fell sick that Ann 'being ill reputed before did then call her a witch'.¹⁵¹ And John Johnson of Hetherfield, Yorkshire deposed on 23 January 1651 that 'the sayde Hester Fraunce hath beene reputed [a] witch for xxty yeares and upwards'.¹⁵²

Once suspicions had been aroused, it was difficult for a person to be trusted in the neighbourhood again. There are various documents relating to people afraid for their lives and goods because of a suspected witch in the neighbourhood; in many cases the suspected person was one who was seen as undesirable by many, and for various misdemeanours. A petition was presented in July 1634 by a woman called Margery against Sibill Farclough of Orrell, Lancashire, complaining that Sibill 'being a very wicked lewd & malicious woman hath dyvers and sundry Tymes wth violent & wicked speeches...threatned her...whereof yor poore peticoner is putt into a continuall & dayly feare both of her lyffe & goods by that wicked and malicious tonge of hers'. Four years later a warrant for the apprehension of Sibill was

¹⁴⁸ See Chapter Six.

¹⁴⁹ W.S.Q.S.R., QS9, roll 51, no.36.

¹⁵⁰ P.R.O., ASSI 45/1/5/38.

¹⁵¹ D.R.O., Q/SB 2/1213.

¹⁵² P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/2/14.

produced for suspicion of witchcraft, dealing with spirits and the murder of two people.¹⁵³

Agnes Hurst of Westhoughton, Lancashire, was also accused twice; in 1638 Thomas Hope of Aspull claimed that he knew of many witches in the area, of whom Agnes Hurst was the chief, and thirty years later Agnes and her daughter Margret Hurst were indicted for 'witchcrafts & horrid Inchantments'. Roger Gregory of Westhoughton presented a petition to the justices on 23 July 1668 claiming that there were a number of material witnesses to this case 'who deny and refuse to goe before any Justice of peace to give any Information agt them'.¹⁵⁴ Since anyone supporting the two would surely have come forward to help them, we can only assume that people refused to testify because they were so afraid of them.

These two cases indicate that even if an accusation of witchcraft was not followed up, suspicions frequently remained in the community surrounding the suspected individual. As can be seen in the case of Sibill Farclough in particular, these accusations appeared to centre upon people who were a nuisance to the community by arguing with and threatening people, and not engaging in good neighbourly behaviour. Again this also indicates the power of rumour in the community, and the notion that there was a common knowledge of who was suspected to be a malevolent presence as well as those known to be blessers or healers.

One of the best documented cases which does not appear in the pamphlet material, although it was well known due to the intervention of James I, was the apparent bewitching of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, in 1616. A letter written by the father, Roger Smith, detailing the possession of the boy stresses the importance of reputation in various ways. The first woman to be accused was

¹⁵³ L.R.O., QSB 1/138/60, QSB 1/210/27-8.

¹⁵⁴ L.R.O., QSB 1/202/89, QSP 324/20-1.

Randall,¹⁵⁵ who Roger said 'upon fallinge out with her neighboures, being called witche came to complaine and to desire to be searched,...I hadd harde an evill reporte of her she confessed nothinge, but named sixe more in the Town as women to be suspected and yielded me reasons why'. Again, this underlines the crucial issue of neighbourly disputes in the formation of a bad reputation, which lay behind many accusations of witchcraft. Randall claimed to have some healing powers, thus she was already associated with magic in the eyes of her neighbours. As she had recently fallen out with some of them this would explain how she had come to be suspected as a witch. The other accused women in this case included Lea who was 'longe suspected for severall witcheries, and for killinge of a childe', and Fritter, whose mother was reputedly a witch.¹⁵⁶ This aspect of the case further supports the idea that women were accused of witchcraft after a long-term suspicion of them in the neighbourhood. Not only was Fritter suspected because two other suspected witches had identified her, but she clearly had a long history of suspicion behind her relating to her mother. This highlights that suspicion of witchcraft tended to pass through a family, as has been seen above.

Reputation undoubtedly played a crucial role in the development of suspicions surrounding a particular woman leading up to an accusation of witchcraft. Therefore Roger Smith was also asked 'whither to his knowledg they were reputed for witches before that tyme', 'whither he did no alwayes accointe them before his sons sicknes for honest poore weomen, and whither they did not resort unto their p'ish Church in tyme of...prayers and behave themselves there ordly and christianlike' and 'whither did they or any of them ay any tyme give or send anything unto yt son, by wch yw might suspect them'. The danger of women using curses or expressing displeasure is also underlined - 'whithr did they the weomen at any tyme threaten yw or any of yours to bring evill upon yw, or wished evill to fall upon yw or yours'.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ The first names of only two of the six accused women examined here are known.

¹⁵⁶ L.A., D&C Ciii 13/1, Smith, R., A Brief Declaration.

¹⁵⁷ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, A course to be Held in the Examinacon of Mr Roger Smithes Cause.

Being related to one who had previously aroused suspicions of witchcraft unquestionably placed people in a more vulnerable position. The parents of Mary Spencer of Burnley, Lancashire, who appeared before the assizes in 1634, were both condemned for witchcraft in the previous assizes.¹⁵⁸ Frances Ward of Warmfield, Yorkshire, said of Margaret Morton of Krikethorpe in January 1650 that 'Margaret had beene a long time suspected for a witch and that her mother & sister who are now dead were suspected to be the like'.¹⁵⁹ And finally, George Benton of Snowhill, Yorkshire, was examined on June 7 1656 alongside his mother Jennet, when both denied being witches.¹⁶⁰

The poverty that could ensue after an accusation of witchcraft can be seen clearly in the case of Ann Baker of Warrington, Lancashire. Ann sent a petition to the justices in 1658 from the gaol at Lancaster Castle where she was being held on suspicion of witchcraft or sorcery although nothing had been proved against her. She stated that she:

remaineth heare still for not paying her feese wich shee can not procure, nor pay haveing noe frends to Looke uppon her, but hath sould all her clothes, her hatt and aprine and all that shee hath and now Lieth sore sicke in bed and is not able to ster or to helpe her selfe any way.

Her petition was signed by thirteen men who were 'daylie witnises of her miserable condition, beeing a woeman of fouerscore years of Age or therabouts'.¹⁶¹ This demonstrates the extreme difficulties which could be raised by a suspicion of witchcraft. Although nothing had been proved, the mere accusation itself had led to a situation which Ann could not afford to get out of. The social and economic exclusion of people suspected of witchcraft is further demonstrated in the case of

¹⁵⁸ Cal.St.Pap.D., 1634-5, 79.

¹⁵⁹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/131.

¹⁶⁰ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/3/13, as referred to earlier, Ann Shillitoe was also accused with her mother Susan Hincliffe of Denby, Yorkshire, in 1674, P.R.O., ASSI 45/11/1/90, 91, 93.

¹⁶¹ L.R.O., QSP 165/2.

John Rosthorne of Little Bolton, Lancashire, in 1664. After two people, including his landlady, suspected him to be a witch when some people had fallen ill, he had been turned out and had nowhere to live. He petitioned the justices to clear his name as he was 'allmost starved for want of A habitation', stating that 'Since the sixt of August last yr petitioner hath lyne [out] of doors 23 nights and could not have lodgings through this scandall'.¹⁶²

The poverty and mistrust in the community caused by a suspicion of witchcraft did not just affect the person accused, but their whole family. In October 1689 Mary Carley of Chowbent, Lancashire, petitioned the justices stating that:

your poor petitioners husband being Indicted at this Session for witchcraft, sorcery or Inchantment and is to be imprisoned at Lancaster whereby your petitioner (who hath 3 small children the oldest of which is but 4 years of age) is likely to be brought to great poverty, and apprehends her insufficiency to mantaine her said Charge, and that unlesse she provide for her husband he is in danger to be starv'd in the Gaol, he not haveing wherewith to maintain him there.

She further requested that she be provided for with relief from the parish of Rumworth, and the justices ordered that the Overseer for the Poor was to take care of her and the children.¹⁶³ Thus in these cases the danger of a damaged reputation, and the power of slander in the community is evident. This parallels the power which witches were believed to exercise through their words. People in the community had a very real power through words to make or break a person's reputation and place them in a situation of poverty and deprivation.

Reputation and Disorderly Behaviour

Further evidence of the importance of the issue of reputation is provided in cases where people accused of witchcraft appear elsewhere in the records as being either

¹⁶² L.R.O., QSP 286/6.

¹⁶³ L.R.O., QSP 674/20.

re-accused of witchcraft, or being accused of other anti-social crimes. This indicates that the charge of witchcraft was predominantly laid against people who were perceived to be undesirable, or a nuisance to the community. As demonstrated in the discussion of pamphlet material above, many of the women accused of witchcraft were also linked to other kinds of anti-social behaviour, and stereotypically deviant female crimes, particularly cursing and scolding, which would have made them a nuisance to the community. Agnes Standley of Basford, Nottinghamshire, was presented on 23 May 1588 'for a common curser or rather a wytche, for that she sayeth she never wysshed anything but it came to passe'.¹⁶⁴ In this case her words clearly took an ominously threatening tone. Margaret Gelder of Hayton, Nottinghamshire, acknowledged before the court on 10 August 1588 that her behaviour could be seen as outspoken, admitting 'that as she is abused by some of her neighbours, she ys shrewde of the tounge but of no deede'.¹⁶⁵

Thomas Tatterton of Gargrave, Yorkshire, deposed on 16 February 1653 that when he talked with Ann Green concerning her bewitching him, that 'she beegan to curse and sweare'.¹⁶⁶ Jennet and George Benton of Snowhill, Yorkshire, were accused in June 1656 of using threatening words towards Richard Jackson of Wakefield after George assaulted his servant Daniell Craven and Richard complained. Richard claimed that they said 'it should be a deare days worke unto the said Rich. Jackson or to his, before the yeare went about', since which time his wife had gone deaf, his child had fits, and he had extreme pains in his heart, back and shoulders.¹⁶⁷ Similarly when Hellen Gray and Margaret Rhodes of Chorne, Yorkshire, fell out in 1662 Hellen threatened that 'it would bee worse for her if she meddled with the said Hellen or hers', after which she was unable to bake good bread. Hellen was also said to be 'a very great Scold often rayling & cursing among her Neighboures'.¹⁶⁸ These

¹⁶⁴ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/2 f45d-47.

¹⁶⁵ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/3 f77.

¹⁶⁶ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/1/34.

¹⁶⁷ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/3/14.

¹⁶⁸ P.R.O., ASSI 45/6/1/69.

cases involving verbal crime also parallel the danger thought to be posed by the power of words to harm.

An additional case demonstrating that a bad reputation could leave people vulnerable to accusation for other crimes is the case of Katherine Foxgale of Walesby, Nottinghamshire, who was presented before the ecclesiastical court on 26 July 1608 'for a daylie scolde and curser of her neighbours and for watchinge upon Saint Markes even at nighte laste in the Church porche to presage by divelische demonstracion the deathe of somme neighbours within this yeere'.¹⁶⁹ This indictment demonstrates two points; it links the crimes of scolding and witchcraft as types of anti-social behaviour associated predominantly with women, and it locates her crimes firmly within the context of the community and neighbourhood. Katherine was no stranger to the ecclesiastical authorities of Nottingham having been presented on various occasions between 11 June 1601 and 23 February 1602/3 for 'cursing and scolding'.¹⁷⁰ There were similar complaints made to the Staffordshire quarter sessions in 1650 against Isabell Analey and Marie Vernon of Yoxall for cursing their neighbours and slandering various people with such insults as common Hackney whore, bawd, base bitch and jade.¹⁷¹

Joan Elderson of Ashton, Lancashire, was accused in 1636 that she 'hath of longe tyme kept a most badd & dissordered house receiveinge & recettinge into her house

¹⁶⁹ N.A.R., M462 f296. Radford, E. & M.A., explain this form of popular folklore thus: 'Watching in the church porch was a form of death or marriage divination that was well known in most parts of England until at least as late as the latter half of the nineteenth century. It could be performed only on certain nights. The most usual date was St Mark's Eve (24April)...If a man wished to know who would die in the parish within the coming year, he went to the church porch and waited there for an hour before and an hour after midnight...At some moment during the two-hour vigil, usually at midnight or a little later, the forms of those destined to die in the ensuing twelve months would appear and pass, one by one into the church. If anyone turned back at the door, or having entered, came out again, it was a sign that he or she would have a dangerous illness, but would recover'. Radford, E & M.A., *Superstitions of Death and the Supernatural*, (London, 1978), 121. This form of divination was practised until at least the nineteenth-century; in 1800 a woman died from shock after seeing an image of herself at the church door, Baker, J.B., *History of Scarborough from the earliest date*, (London, 1882), 469. See also Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 286.

¹⁷⁰ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/7 f193d, 289d, 322d, 329d.

¹⁷¹ S.Q.S.R., Q/SR/269.

all the knaves whores & thives in the Cuntree and all the stolen goods...soe that noe honest man can come to her house but in great danger of his lyffe'. It was further claimed that:

she doth continually keepe in her house lewde & light woemen of there bodyes to the great bridoeinge of mens sons and servants that dwell neere unto her & if there be noe course taken for the reforminge of these badd demenors noe Neighboures can live neere but in great perrill of their lyves...of theire Children & servants & losse of there goods.¹⁷²

Elizabeth, or Ann, Sandeman of Scarborough, Yorkshire, accused of poisoning her husband in 1644, blamed her misfortunes on her upbringing in her mother's house. It was said that she 'cursed the tyme she knew hir mothers house, for she said she ther was noe good company ever used thether, none but pedlars & tinkars & such like, which had been a meanes to bring hir to what she was comed to'. She was also heard to exclaim 'Oh woe worth my mother for bringing me up so loosly'.¹⁷³

Finally, in 1661 a petition was presented by an unknown person in Lancashire, complaining about a suspected witch. The petition claimed that the woman led a lewd life:

Nouble gentle men I desire you to consider of...this women what kinge [kind] acourse of life shee hath lived in...shee lived with her husband as man and wife and was not so and after the[y] weare married shee went away with another man besides her husband and shee goes in the name of a witch.¹⁷⁴

The author of this petition claimed that the woman had threatened her and killed goods belonging to her and others. These cases, therefore, highlight the connections made between witchcraft and other types of deviant behaviour, and how accusations

¹⁷² L.R.O., QSB 1/170/58.

¹⁷³ N.Y.R.O., MIC 1348/986, MIC 1348/988 in Ashcroft, M.Y., Scarborough Records 1641-1660 - A Calendar, (Northallerton, Yorkshire, 1991), 80-81.

¹⁷⁴ L.R.O., QSP 214/8.

were more likely to be made against people who were seen to be living an unruly or disorderly lifestyle, or one which caused a nuisance to others in the neighbourhood.

That the community was concerned with female crime is evident in the orders for the repair of items such as the cucking stool used to punish disorderly women. The Chamberlain's Accounts for the Borough of Nottingham include regular payments such as these; 'Item for a planke for the cuckestule...ijs.ijd'(1573-4), 'Item to the Constables for cucking the scouldes...ijs.viijd'(1617-8), 'Item for mendinge the cuckstoole and cord...vjd'(1617-8) and 'Item for rops for the cuckstoole...iijd'(1620-1).¹⁷⁵ The officials seem to have been quite stringent with payments of this type, the Chamberlain's Accounts of the Borough of Leicester include an item for 'the charges of meate and drinke of oulde mother Cooke beinge kepte in the hall fyve daies att the suite of Mr.Edw.Saunders uppon suspesion of witchrye, whoe was afterwards remoaved to the Countrie gaole, and was for the same arrayned, condempned and hanged...2s.6d'.¹⁷⁶

Drunkenness appears to have been a common type of disorderly behaviour connected with suspicions of sorcery in Staffordshire. In 1623, John Sutton appeared accused of being 'a Common drunkard and in his drinke a great blasphemmer and a quarreller'. It was claimed that he said that 'hee serveth the Devill...and prayeth god the Devill may fetch him within one howre'.¹⁷⁷ It is not clear how literally his words were taken, but they were evidently seen as serious enough to warrant a complaint at the quarter sessions. Again the links with arguing, or verbal crime, are evident. In the case of another man associated with sorcery, Josiah Slader of Birmingham, Warwickshire, the subject of a clergy discipline in 1662, he was accused of a wide

¹⁷⁵ Stevenson, W.H. & Raine, J., Records of the Borough of Nottingham IV 1547-1625, (London, 1889), 151, 356, 376.

¹⁷⁶ Bateson, M. (ed.), Records of the Borough of Leicester - Being a Series of Extracts from the Archives of the Corporation of Leicester 1509-1603. vol.III, (Cambridge, 1905), p335.

¹⁷⁷ W.S.Q.S.R., QS12C, roll 70, no.11. A similar case occurred in Edinburgh in 1678, Cal.St.Pap.D., 1678, 560. These examples appear to have been regarded as cases of drunkenness and disorderliness, rather than as instances of witchcraft.

range of subversive activities including forging title, gambling, immorality; adultery and incest with his wife's sister who became pregnant, swearing, speaking treasonous words about Charles I, conjuring, attending and preaching at Quaker gatherings, and taking the role of parson at the parish church at Birmingham without ever having been ordained. Furthermore, it was explicitly stated that due to his abusiveness while drunk he had been 'a contentious and troublesome pson amongst your neighbours for small or noe cause of accon'.¹⁷⁸ A year later Josiah Slader appeared before the quarter sessions court in connection with a riot intended to reinstate him as the rector of the parish church at Birmingham after the Church court had earlier ruled against him.¹⁷⁹

Thus in this case the man accused of conjuring and juggling, both activities associated with sorcery, was an acknowledged nuisance to his neighbours as well as being sexually and religiously deviant. The descriptions of men accused of witchcraft highlight the connections made between disorderly behaviour and witchcraft for men as well as women accused.¹⁸⁰ More work needs to be carried out on the concept of masculinity in early modern society before we can determine whether men associated with witchcraft can be defined as the opposite of the ideal in the same way as women.

The non-pamphlet evidence examined here thus emphasises the both the importance of maintaining a good reputation and good neighbourly relations, as well as highlighting the danger that bad neighbourly relations could cause, since these

¹⁷⁸ L.J.R.O., B/C/5.

¹⁷⁹ Ratcliffe, S.C. & Johnson, H.C., *Warwick County Records, vol. IV, Quarter Sessions Order Book Easter 1657 to Epiphany 1665*, (Warwick, 1938), xxxvi-xl. Roper notes that drunkenness was condemned because it led men to lose control over their bodies and their reason. Thus drunkenness could be seen as being opposite to the desired behaviour for the ideal man, Roper, L., *Oedipus and the Devil*, 153.

¹⁸⁰ Cases against male witches from other areas appear to support this assertion; including John Hockenhall of Chester, 1628 (buggery and sorcery), Richard Butler of Staffordshire, 1659 (burglary and sorcery), and John Piers of Cornwall in 1581, said to be a pirate and the son of a witch, Ewen, C.L., *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, 415, 436, 439.

disputes all led to suspicion and accusations for witchcraft. In particular, this evidence is useful for gaining an insight into slander and defamation cases arising from suspicions of disorderly behaviour, and into the social and economic problems faced by those suspected.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a development of the social theories outlined in Chapter One, particularly those of Thomas and Macfarlane. It has been demonstrated that although economic disputes and tensions are evident in the source material, that the gendered context of these tensions has not been fully acknowledged. Furthermore, it has been argued that reputation was the crucial factor leading to an accusation being made. Thus witchcraft accusations were more a question of intra-gender relations than of social factors.

The Essex witchcraft accusations detailed in pamphlets underline the evident concerns with the politics of economic exchange, through borrowing, lending and begging of household goods and food, and it has been demonstrated that these were particularly female affairs. This could explain why women were predominant as both accusers and accused in the neighbourhood. An examination of pamphlet material from the Midlands and the North of England further indicates the prevalence of economic concerns, and the fact that hardship could place individuals in a vulnerable position, for instance if they were known for begging in the community. Begging forced individuals into the public eye, being seen as a nuisance to local society, as in the cases of Alice Gooderige and the Pendle families.

Economic concerns were prevalent factors leading to accusations. Although this does appear to support the Thomas and Macfarlane thesis, a factor that has not been emphasised previously is a concern with property. Disputes over property have been

indicated throughout this chapter, notably in the cases of Bessie Whittle of Pendle in 1612, and Joan Elderson of Ashton in Makerfield, Lancashire in 1636. This connection between property disputes in particular and subsequent witchcraft accusations is one which requires further future consideration. Moreover, although economic concerns were the apparent basis of the majority of disputes which led to accusations, at the root of the suspicions were anxieties associated with issues of reputation and neighbourly behaviour. Economic disputes may have provided the rationale for the subsequent misfortune, however, reputation was again found to be the more decisive factor in accusations.

The overriding focus upon the nature of the insult or offence, or economic dispute, believed to have led to the act of witchcraft is perhaps misleading. Since the records under consideration predominantly concern accusations rather than the suspected individual's viewpoint, it is to be expected that the action leading to the response of witchcraft would be focused upon, as people tried to rationalise why the misfortune had taken place. As stated previously, acts of witchcraft were not perceived to be motiveless acts of malicious behaviour. Perhaps the focus upon the reason for the dispute in the records, therefore, has led to an overemphasis upon this feature of accusations in explanations of the witch trials.

As Pollock stated, 'What was at stake was the orderly conduct of neighbourly behaviour, not only the relationship involved in begging or borrowing'.¹⁸¹ Thus reputation was more of a determining factor than the actual nature of the dispute. Pamphlet material from the Midlands and the North of England supports these assertions as, again, concerns with reputation appear to have been more important to the accusation process than the nature of the immediate dispute mentioned. An emphasis upon the community context has been found to be effective in highlighting the issues surrounding reputation and neighbourly relations pertinent for this study,

¹⁸¹ Pollock, A., Regions of Evil, 53.

and, as has been demonstrated, this material does support the theory that witchcraft accusations are best approached from a local context. Evidence of the vulnerability of close neighbourly contact has been provided through the examination of insults and fear of offending suspected individuals, particularly those with whom people were in regular contact, including family members. The pamphlets of the Midlands and the North portray an image at times of claustrophobic fear of offending surrounding people.

The focus upon reputation in particular has indicated that reputations were developed in a female context, and that insults associated with women, such as 'whore', 'jade' and 'witch', were linked together in the minds of the populace. As well as verbal insults being framed within a particularly female context, the source of offence was frequently based in the female sphere, for instance disputes over nursing children or the exclusion of individuals from female rituals such as lying-ins, as in the cases of Ursula Kemp and Cicely Sellis in 1582. The examination of damaged reputations through insult, suspicion and disorderly behaviour has indicated that, in theory, witchcraft was associated in people's minds with a variety of other disorderly and anti-social behaviour which represented the opposite of the ideal for men as well as women. This may have contributed to the wider suspicions surrounding them.

As in the case of pamphlet material, the non-pamphlet sources provide evidence that the suspected parties frequently had damaged their reputations through association with other disorderly behaviour. This appears to have predominantly involved verbal misdemeanours such as scolding, cursing and swearing. Although these are actions associated with the opposite of the ideal of womanhood, this evidence runs counter to feminist claims that suspected witches were associated more with sexual misbehaviour, a debate which is explored in the next chapter.

Non-pamphlet material, therefore, further indicates a pre-occupation with reputation in the community, and here the process of safeguarding one's reputation from the taint of witchery is most apparent through slander and defamation cases. Clearly non-pamphlet material is crucial to our understanding of this element pertaining to reputation, since the pamphlets concern people for whom defending their reputation was in the hands of the law. Trial records indicate much more clearly the fear of being associated with witchcraft, and the social exclusion and economic hardship caused by suspicion, through the consideration of petitions as well as defamation cases. Thus the examination of non-pamphlet material provides an insight into the situation of the suspected individual as well as the accusers, and is thus essential for a fuller understanding of witchcraft suspicions in the community.

Non-pamphlet evidence also allows the examination of endemic trials, and provides a wider perspective on witchcraft beliefs in the community. Focusing solely upon pamphlet sources, frequently surrounding more sensational or epidemic type trials, gives a distorted view of witchcraft suspicions. A consideration of endemic cases in trial records indicates that witchcraft belief was very much a part of life in which suspicions were raised from time to time. People either lived with these suspicions, or went to court either to clear their name or to prosecute another. This is far from the claustrophobic image of fear and the inevitability of prosecution portrayed in many of the pamphlet sources, for instance in *The most wonderfull and true storie, of a certaine Witch named Alse Gooderige of Stapenhill*, (1597), Thomas Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches* (1613) and *The Wonderful Discoverie* of 1619. Since these pamphlets were written in hindsight from a more elite perspective, and were aimed to warn the public about the evils of witchcraft, to focus solely upon them gives a misleading view. The inevitability of the detection and prosecution of all suspects implied by the pamphlets is further disputed by cases of dismissal based on community support, such as the case of Ann Shillitoe and Susan Hincliffe in 1674. Importantly, whether a case was pursued or dismissed appears to have rested

upon the individual's reputation in the community, and the support of their neighbours. Thus, again evidence is provided of the importance of good neighbourly relations.

The different aspects pertaining to the issue of reputation emphasise how crucial both a good reputation and good neighbourhood relations were in order to avoid suspicion for a range of deviant activities including witchcraft. The material examined highlights the association of witchcraft with the opposite of ideal behaviour, especially for women. However, what is interesting is that where men were accused individually, they appear to have been associated with forms of disorderly behaviour which may have represented the opposite of the ideal for men. This included disorderly behaviour such as perjury, drunkenness, gambling and immorality as evidenced in the cases against Gilbert Smyth of Swithland, Leicestershire, in 1620, John Sutton of Staffordshire in 1623 and Josiah Slader of Birmingham in 1662. This further emphasises the importance of examining non-pamphlet as well as pamphlet evidence, since the latter tended to focus upon female witches, perhaps because they were regarded as more evil. More work on the concept of masculinity in early modern society will clearly have to be carried out so that the connections between witchcraft and disorderly men can be better explored.

Overall, it is clear that issues of reputation and good neighbourly behaviour lay at the very heart of witchcraft suspicions and accusations in the community, and that these concepts appear to have been predominantly, but not exclusively, female concerns. Although economic concerns, as highlighted by Thomas and Macfarlane, lay at the heart of many accusations, this study represents a departure from this model; arguing that the determining factor was ultimately the reputation of the individual, and their neighbourly relationships. Although this is alluded to in their work, the role of gender is played down. It has been demonstrated in this chapter that using gender analysis is a more effective way of exploring the politics of reputation in the

community than a purely social focus. It is necessary thus to assess further the importance of gender as an analytical tool, in the examination of feminist concerns with sexuality and witchcraft, which will form the central debate of the next chapter.

Chapter Three - Sexuality and the Body.

Introduction

Chapter One demonstrated how the figure of the witch has traditionally been seen as a victim of oppression of social, political, religious or economic forces. In the 1970s, with the rise of feminist history, feminists claimed the witch as a fellow victim of patriarchy. Feminists argue that the witch-hunts of the early modern period were fundamentally woman-hunts; orchestrated attacks on women by the male establishment which felt threatened by the non-conformity of these women. Much of the earlier feminist interpretations of the witch trials focused upon sexual elements. It was argued that women's sexuality in particular was feared, and thus punished.¹

The focus on sexual elements of witchcraft beliefs by earlier feminists was itself centred upon the notion of the witches' sabbat. This was where witches were believed to meet with the devil and engage in feasting, dancing and various sexual acts of perversion. The sabbat was an important part of early modern demonology, mainly because the sabbat represented the theme of inversion in a particularly graphic way, which could be understood by everyone. Everything that took place at the sabbat was the direct inversion, or opposite, of what was normal or good. People danced back to back, ate food that tasted appalling and was unsatisfying, copulated with animal-like demons and paid homage to the devil by kissing his anus.² Feminists in the 1970s took the image of the sabbat and the witch, and used it to assert their own sexuality and power.³ Feminist writers focused upon the sexual

¹ See Daly, M., Gyn/Ecology, 111; Dworkin, A., Woman Hating, 48, 93; Gauthier, X., 'Why Witches?', in Marks, E. & Courtivron, I., New French Feminisms - An Anthology, (Amherst, 1980), 199-203; and more recently Barstow, A., Witchcraze and Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches. See also Chapter One.

² A Pleasant Treatise of Witches, &c, (1673). Scot derided this idea in The Discoverie of Witchcraft, (1584), 27. The term sabbat was taken from the Jewish religion, itself perceived as anti-Christian. For further discussion of the sabbat see Cohn, N., Europe's Inner Demons, Clark, S., 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', 122-3; Cohn, N., 'Was there ever a society of witches?', 26-41.

³ See Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, Chapter 1.

content of the witch-hunters' manual *Malleus Maleficarum* in particular, some even regarding it as a form of early modern pornography.⁴

In the early modern period women were believed to be morally and spiritually weaker to men, thus they were more prey to temptation. They were also believed to be more sexual, more ruled by libidinal impulses. Sexual elements further emphasise the image of the witch as the opposite of the ideal woman, to whom modesty and chastity were her chief virtues.⁵ As the *Malleus Maleficarum* argued, 'witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable'. The authors further stated that 'the woman is...mentally and spiritually weaker...they are ungovernable, and follow their impulses without restraint...the guilt of women is proven'. This book may be considered atypical to a certain extent, as the majority of demonology did not focus so prominently upon women or sexuality. However, its popularity and influence cannot be denied, it went through fourteen editions before 1520.⁶

Based on these feminist arguments, we might expect to see a strong sexual content in witchcraft accusations and confessions. Dolan claims that 'plays, pamphlets, and proceedings all associate witches' power with the satisfaction of female sexual desire'.⁷ This interpretation is questioned in this chapter. In fact, across Europe the vast majority of accusations concerned acts of malicious witchcraft against

⁴ Daly, M., *Gyn/Ecology*, 188-9; Dworkin, A., *Woman Hating*, 134-6; Hester, M., 'The Dynamics of Male Domination', 12; Dresen-Coenders, L., 'Witches as Devil's Concubines', in *Saints and She-Devils - Images of Women in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries*, (London, 1987), 59-81; Hays, H.R., *The Dangerous Sex*, 151-6.

⁵ In an interesting case noted by Stearne, a woman used claims to modesty to avoid confession when asked if she had had sex with the Devil, the woman replied that 'she could not confesse before much company', Stearne, J., *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*, (1648), 30.

⁶ Sprenger, J. & Kramer, H., *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1486); Clark, S., *Thinking With Demons*, chapter 8; Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 440; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 259; Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 170; Anderson, A. & Gordon, R., 'Witchcraft and the status of women', 59-81; Cohn, N., *Europe's Inner Demons*, 225.

⁷ Feminists such as Hester and Dolan see a strong sexual element in popular literature and plays. Hester, M., *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*, 160-97; Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*, 212-7, quote 212, (my emphasis). This interpretation is questioned in this chapter.

neighbours, their families and their goods.⁸ When sexual elements did occur in confessions, historians usually attribute them to the use of torture by European justice systems. Specific references to the sabbat, and copulation with the devil are few and far between in English testimonies.⁹ Clark argued recently that in fact much of the literature surrounding the sabbat in contemporary literature was intended to be symbolic. Thus much of the emphasis on the sabbat in the early modern period was intended merely to illustrate that witchcraft was essentially a question of inversion.¹⁰

This chapter will argue that this focus on sexuality does relatively little to help us understand the actual witch trials which occurred in England. This is not new in itself, many historians have been refuting feminist claims for years.¹¹ However, the use of feminist theories in exploring the witch trials *per se* will not be dismissed. This does not make feminist arguments redundant, rather, their importance lies in the fact that they re-opened the debate over witches and women. Subsequent developments in gender history and the history of the body have enabled us to gain a wider understanding of witchcraft beliefs in this period. It will be argued that more recent feminist and gender theories surrounding the body are far more effective in helping us to understand witchcraft beliefs in early modern England than an emphasis on sexuality.

The feminist theories that women have been represented as evil and sexual throughout history, outlined in Chapter One, link into these developments towards a history of the body. Significantly, the actual body was not thought to be separated from the mental world by distinct boundaries. This helps to explain why witchcraft

⁸ Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 443.

⁹ They are most notable in the atypical trials fostered by Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne, Stearne, J., A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft, (1648).

¹⁰ Clark, S., Thinking With Demons, 11-30, 85-93. For discussion of the sabbat in Europe, see Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 31-53.

¹¹ Sharpe, for instance, refers to feminist interpretations as 'predictable' and 'simplistic', Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 169-70.

was thought to permeate the bodies of both witches and victims.¹² Witchcraft was connected with the witch's body in various ways. The figure of the witch was described in terms of her body; she might be a post-menopausal woman, one with physical deformities perhaps caused by age. Although there is little evidence of communal activity in England, apart from women confessing to sharing familiars or being taught witchcraft by other women, the material does, nevertheless, show concerns with the body that requires further investigation. This chapter will thus explore the centrality of the body to witchcraft beliefs through four main themes.

Firstly, as stated above, feminist writers have argued that there was a sexual element involved in accusations of witchcraft. Jackson states that: 'the strong links which were made between witchcraft and female sexuality, the subsequent depiction of female desire as deviant, and the important prescriptive role of the witch trials in society, meant that the persecution of witches was an ideal mechanism for the control of women's sexual behaviour'.¹³ Chapter Two demonstrated how some women accused of witchcraft were also the recipients of insults or complaints concerning their sexual reputation. This could indicate that some links were made between sexuality and witchcraft. However, the fact that there is so little emphasis upon sexual elements such as the sabbat or sexual relations with the devil in English accounts, suggests that they have been rather over-emphasised in some feminist arguments. There does not appear to be a close correlation between women accused of witchcraft and women accused of sexual crimes such as fornication. As the previous chapter indicated, women accused of witchcraft were far more likely to be associated with verbal crimes such as scolding or cursing. It could, therefore, be argued that feminist writers have overstressed this element, and this is an important feature which will be explored in this chapter.

¹² During the Enlightenment, changes in medical thought meant that the material body came to be seen as separate from the mental world of feelings and imagination. This could indicate a reason why the belief in the ability of witchcraft to affect the body declined, Geyer-Kordesch, J., 'Whose Enlightenment?', 114.

¹³ Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 72.

However, although the more lurid sexual content of European confessions relating to practices carried out at demonic sabbats appear to be lacking from English beliefs, we can perhaps see these ideas in a watered-down form in confessions detailing relationships between witches and their familiars. Holmes notes that the power of a witch over the animal world was a popular belief, which came to be incorporated into learned beliefs. The presence of the familiar is exclusive to the English trials and in the sixteenth-century the roles of Satan and the familiar seem to be been conflated in the popular mind. From the mid seventeenth-century this conflation was less apparent as the imposition of elite beliefs regarding the demonic pact took hold, and the presence of the devil in witchcraft narratives accordingly increased.¹⁴ Women were accused of suckling these demon familiars, which was linked to sexual deviant behaviour.

Secondly, the witch's body was used as a source of evidence because of the theories surrounding demonic familiars or imps. These familiars were believed to suck on the witch's body thus leaving a mark, which could be used as evidence or proof against the accused. This mark could be a mole or a wart, but was used as proof that the woman had made a pact with the devil.¹⁵ This was an adaptation of the continental, and elite, belief that the devil gave the witch an insensitive mark on the occasion of the demonic pact. The practice of searching witches for marks became more prominent after the 1604 Witchcraft Act, which made it a felony to 'feed or reward any evil and wicked spirit'. This led to the practice of searching suspected women's bodies for marks, which also had the effect of giving the women involved in the search unusual legal powers.¹⁶ The female searchers also held a powerful

¹⁴ Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 98-101.

¹⁵ Stearne, J., *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*, (1648), 42-50.

¹⁶ These female searchers, like Juries of Matrons required to establish pregnancy in cases of felony, held unusual legal powers since this was one of the few roles open to women in the legal system. Significantly, this gave them power over other women, but not men. Juries of Matrons were sometimes appointed to establish the claimed pregnancy of convicted witches, such as Mother Samuel of Warboys, despite the fact that she was almost eighty. Her daughter Alice refused to claim pregnancy, stating 'it shall never be said, that I was both a witch and a whore'. This provides an

position over the accused since, as in cases of bastardy and infanticide, it was women who were expected to have the knowledge of each other's bodies in order to point out any changes or abnormalities.¹⁷ As John Brinley noted in 1680, two forms of evidence were 'the Confessions of some of these miserable Creatures' and 'the privy marks and brands of the Beast, found in several parts of Witches bodies do confirm it'.¹⁸ Another contemporary advised that witches would have a 'teat' where their familiar sucked, in his 'observations for the discovery of witches'.¹⁹

The process of searching suspected witches further emphasises the concerns felt about evidence in this invisible crime. The female body was, therefore, a central element in the early modern witch trials, through confessions by women claiming to have been suckled by demonic familiars, and the practice of accused women being searched for witch's marks, places where the familiars had suckled. Purkiss argues that, contrary to the work of earlier feminists who stressed the sexual nature of the stripping of women's bodies, the stripping signified a stripping away of the woman's power and thus a de-eroticisation of the female body rather than the other way round. The physical act of stripping the women took away their identities and also signified death.²⁰ This is an instance of the move away from an emphasis on the sexual in gender analyses of witchcraft prosecutions.

Thirdly, the witch's body was also used as the site of attempts to use physical counter-magic against them which most commonly involved scratching the face in

instance of a woman defending the last shreds of her reputation to the last, Witches of Warboys, (1593), O2-3.

¹⁷ Holmes, C., 'Women: Witnesses and Witches', 65-75. Ackernecht, E.H., 'Midwives as Experts in Court', 1224-8; Oldham, J.C., 'On Pleading the Belly: A History of the Jury of Matrons', 1-64; Forbes, T.R., 'A Jury of Matrons', 23-33; Gowing, L., 'Gender and the Language of Insult', 13; Sharpe, J., 'Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process', in Kermode, J. & Walker, G. (ed.), Women, Crime and the Courts, 108-11; Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, 190-4; Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 180-1; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 217, 279-81. See Chapter One for full references and further discussion of this issue.

¹⁸ Brinley, J., A Discovery of the Impostures of Witches and Astrologers, (London, 1680), 35-6.

¹⁹ The Lawes Against Witches, (1645), 4.

²⁰ Purkiss, D., 'Desire and Its Deformities', 1-22.

an attempt to break the bad magic. These attempts could escalate into other violence, including beating or assaulting a suspect. There are various accounts of people taking unofficial action of this type which emphasises that the cases we know of certainly do not give us a full picture of witchcraft beliefs in the community. Importantly, the resort to violence indicates the fear of witches, and thus the reality of witchcraft to contemporaries. In many cases a successful result from attempts at counter-magic may have meant that no legal action was taken. Many stories of counter-magic which appear in these cases are thus retrospective accounts from neighbours, or failed attempts.²¹

Finally, the body was also seen as the site of narratives of bewitchment and possession. Witches' demons were believed to possess bewitched victims' bodies, making them have strange fits, even in some cases vomiting objects such as pins. Possession manifested itself in a physical way; the possessed child in particular appeared unable to see, speak, eat, feed themselves, or fulfil any of their normal bodily functions. They also struck themselves and withstood pain with no feeling during their fits. Here the body was vulnerable to attack from witchcraft and its response was seemingly to close itself down. As Dolan notes, the witch's invasion of the victim's body posits the witch herself as simultaneously inside (a close neighbour), and outside (an enemy). This also demonstrates the perceived permeability of the body.²² This, then, is an area in which the development of the history of the body might be important to the future study of the witch trials. This development of a history of the body corresponds with developments in the history of the mind. Recently various historians have used psychoanalysis and theories of fantasy to deal with this invisible crime.²³

²¹ See Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, 129-30. Further forms of counter-magic are explored in more depth in Chapter Six.

²² Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, 182-6.

²³ See Roper, L., Oedipus and the Devil, (1994); Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, (1995); Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, (1996) for examples of this method.

In pamphlet accounts in particular, detailed passages related how the power of witchcraft took hold over the victim's body in physical ways. A contemporary noted how certain features of an illness could be taken as signs that the victim was bewitched, such as a healthy person being taken ill suddenly, when strange fits were experienced, when the victim appeared to have unnatural strength, and when they vomited strange objects such as pins and coals.²⁴ Indeed a frequent motif common to narratives of bewitchment was the stressing of elements which appear unnatural or strange, elements which underline the inversion inherent in witchcraft beliefs.

Contemporaries evidently felt the problem of differentiating between natural illness, bewitchment, possession and fraud. In 1680, John Brinley wrote deploring the propensity of ignorant or 'Common people' to 'ascribe to Witchcraft, all Disasters, Mischances, or Diseases whatever, seeming strange to vulgar sense'. Thus he outlined various diseases including 'Catalepsis', 'Apoplexy', 'Phrenitis' and 'Hydrophobia', which exhibit symptoms which could be seen as evidence of bewitchment, such as stiffness of the body, sudden trances, numbness and convulsions.²⁵ These four elements pertaining to the theme of the body; the question over sexual elements in trials, the use of the body as evidence, counter-magic against the body and possession narratives, will thus be further examined, to elicit their centrality, and thus that of gender, to witchcraft beliefs.

²⁴ The Lawes Against Witches, (1645), 5. Significantly, natural illness was also perceived as a foreign element in the body, Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 120; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 221.

²⁵ Brinley, J., A Discovery of the Impostures of Witches and Astrologers, (1680), 15-16. Paracelsus also noted the importance of distinguishing between natural and supernatural diseases, Paracelsus, The Archidoxes of Magic, (1656, second edition London, 1975), 86-8.

The Essex Context

Sexuality and Witchcraft

Feminist writers have argued that there was a strong sexual element involved in witchcraft accusations, particularly in the more infamous trials such as those recounted in the Essex pamphlets under discussion. This discussion of sexual elements has focused particularly upon the first area under examination in this chapter, the argument that women involved in witchcraft accusations were connected with deviant sexual behaviour. Hester argued that, despite the denial by Macfarlane that sexual incontinency and witchcraft were linked, at least in the church court records, the two types of deviant female behaviour were connected in the Essex trial pamphlets. In fact Hester argues that 'instances of 'sexual deviance', ranging from calling the accused 'lewd' to fornication (with men and the Devil), incest and lesbianism were cited in relation to about one third of the cases mentioned in the Essex pamphlets'.²⁶

There are references to various types of sexual deviance in the Essex evidence. In 1582, Joan Pechey appears to have been accused of committing incest with her son:

beeing charged to have willed her Sonne Phillip Barrenger, beeing of the age of xxiii yeares, to lye in bedde with her, denyth that shee had so doone, other then shee had willed him at some tymes to lye uppon the bedde at her backe. But the saide Phyllyppe, beeing examined, confesseth and saith, that manye times and of late hee hath layne in naked bed with his owne mother, being willed and commaunded so to doe of her.²⁷

No further mention was made of this accusation, however it can hardly have given a good impression of Joan's morality.

²⁶ Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 196-7.

²⁷ A true and iust Recorde. (1582), C6.

A more frequent example of deviant sexual behaviour in early modern society was fornication outside marriage. Elizabeth Francis admitted in 1566 to having slept with two men before marriage, aborting the child from the first affair, and killing the child from the marriage. Agnes Herd was accused in court by her illegitimate daughter Agnes Dowsing in 1582. Five years later, Joan Cunny was said to have been 'living very lewdly, had two lewde Daughters, no better than naughty packs, [wastrels or drabs], had two Bastard children. beeing both boyes'.²⁸ Both children appeared as witnesses in the trial, highlighting the use of children, frequently related to the accused, as witnesses in witch trials, as well as the connection of bad sexual and moral reputations.

Sexual jealousy between women could also lead to accusation. In 1579, it was claimed that Mother Nokes of Lambourne parish 'saied that her housbande laie with one Tailers wife of Lamberd Ende, and with reprochfull words reviled her saiying at last: thou hast a nurse childe, but thou shalte not keepe it long, and presently thereupon the Childe died'.²⁹ This echoes the quarrels over begging, lending and reputation explored in the previous chapter, where paradoxically the accused witch was often the original injured or wronged party. Sexual jealousy was also involved in the examination of Agnes, wife of John Glascock, who claimed that when she lived with her brother Edward Wood, one Arnold's wife caused weights and stones to be cast into the house (where Arnold was boarding) 'to the intent to dryve her husband from boording there being in Jelosie of this Examinee: She being at that time not above the age of xx. yeares'.³⁰ Interestingly Arnold's wife was also reputed to be a witch.

²⁸ The Apprehension and confession. (1589), A4.

²⁹ A Detection of damnable driftes. (1579), B2.

³⁰ A true and just Recorde. (1582), C2. A similar case of stones, and household goods, flying about was noted in Strange and Wonderful News from Yowel in Surry. (1681).

The deposition of William Bonner offers a further dimension to sexual jealousy in 1582, when he accused Elizabeth Bennett not only of witchcraft but of conducting an apparent lesbian affair with his wife. He stated that:

the said Elizabeth Bennet and his wife were lovers and familiar friendes, and did accompanie much together: and saith that since Candlemas last his Wife hath complained of a lamenesse in her knee, and that sithence also shee hath been much troubled. And saith also that not ten daies past the saide Elizabeth Bennett being with his wife, she being sickely and sore troubled, the said Elizabeth used speeches unto her, saying, a good woman, how thou art loden, & then clasped her in her armes and kissed her: Whereupon presently after her upper Lippe swelled & was very bigge, and her eyes much sunked into her head, and she hath lien sithence in a very strange case.³¹

Very little work has been carried out on lesbianism in this period, although homosexuality and cross dressing were clearly frowned upon.³² It is clear that whether or not Bonner's wife and Elizabeth were lesbian lovers in our understanding of the term, he was definitely jealous of the intimacy of their relationship. The notion of familiar friends links in with studies of lesbianism in the early twentieth-century.³³ It is interesting that despite this accusation, Elizabeth Bennett refers to neither William Bonner nor his wife in her deposition.

The most frequent reference to sexual deviance involved in these sources was the suckling of demonic familiars on the woman's body. This represented the complete inversion of the modesty of the ideal woman, and the relations between the woman and her familiar appeared to mock the acceptable sexual relationship between a woman and her husband. Jackson notes how this 'relationship between the witch

³¹ A true and just Recorde, (1582), B5; Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 182.

³² See Karlen, A., 'The Homosexual Heresy', Chaucer Review, (1971), vol.6, no.1, 44-63; Crompton, L., 'The Myth of Lesbian Impunity - Capital Laws from 1270-1791', Journal of Homosexuality, (Fall, 1980), vol.6, 11-25; Crawford, P. & Mendelson, S., 'Sexual Identities in Early Modern England: The Marriage of two Women in 1680', Gender and History, (Nov.1995), vol.7, no.3, 362-77; Laurence, A., Women in England, 68-9, 250-2; Keeble, N.H., The Cultural Identity of Seventeenth-Century Woman, 243-53; Brown, J.C., 'Lesbian Sexuality in Medieval and Early Modern Europe', in Duberman, M.B et al, Hidden from History. Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past, (London, 1991), 67-75.

³³ See Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 182; Faderman, L., Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America, (London, 1992).

and her familiars was highly sexualised'.³⁴ Elizabeth Francis claimed in 1566 that every time her spirit Satan did anything for her, 'he required a drop of bloude, which she gave him by prycking herselfe, sometime in one place and then in an other, and where she pricked her self there remayned a red spot which was styl to be sene'.

Mother Waterhouse likewise confessed in 1566 that she gave the spirit Satan blood 'at all times when he dyd anythyng for her, be pricking her hand or face and puttinge the bloud to hys mouth, whyche he sucked...the spots of all which priks are yet to be sene in her skin'. When she later denied in court allowing a spirit to suck her blood, 'the jayler lifted up her kercher on her heade and there was diverse spottes in her face and one on her nose'. Her daughter Joan Waterhouse confessed that she had called on her mother's spirit to frighten the child Agnes Brown, and he had asked her 'what she wolde geve him, and she saide a red kocke, then sayde hee no, but thou shalt geve me thy body and sowle'.³⁵ Apparently the same Elizabeth Francis was accused again of witchcraft in Chelmsford in 1579. She claimed then that:

she knowes one Mother Osborne, a widowe in the same toun to be a witche, and that she hath a marke in the ende of one of her fingers like a pitt, and an other marke uppon the outside of her right legge, whiche she thinketh to bee pluckt out by her Spirit: and that one Mother Waterhouse, her own sister (long since executed for Witchcrafte) had the self same markes, which she termeth (nippes).³⁶

These images were echoed in *A true and just Recorde* (1582). Thomas Rabbet, the eight year old illegitimate son of Ursula Kemp claimed that 'in the night time the said spirites will come to his mother, and sucke blood of her upon her armes and other places of her body'. Ursula later confessed that her 'spirite did sucke of this examine upon the left thigh, the which when she rubbeth (shee saith) it will at all

³⁴ Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 71.

³⁵ The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex before the Ouenes majesties Judges. the XXVI dave of Julve Anno 1566. (London, 1566), no pagination.

³⁶ A Detection of damnable driftes. (1579), A5. Rosen believes the mark on her leg may have been a bad varicose vein. Rosen, B., Witchcraft, 94

times bleede'.³⁷ In a variation of this, Agnes Dowsing, the illegitimate daughter of Agnes Herd, being asked if she had seen familiar spirits sucking on her mother, claimed that they had sucked on her brother's legs and on her hands. Here, the claim that demon familiars had sucked on the children emphasises the image of Agnes Herd as a bad mother who failed to protect her children.³⁸ Accused women constantly reinforced the idea that they allowed their familiars to suckle them in return for carrying out maleficium for them. In 1582 Elizabeth Bennett was said to give her spirits a drop of blood as a reward, as were Margaret Grevell and Alice Manfield, and Joan Prentice, in 1589.

Sometimes this apparent consensus in the popular beliefs of the activities of witches and their familiars was confused. Joan Upney believed her spirits to suck others rather than herself. Joan Prentice deposed in 1589 that her familiar came to her many times as she was preparing to go to bed. This appearing at nighttime in the bedroom indicates the theme of sexuality, and the immodesty of a woman allowing a stranger into her private place, at a time when she was presumably in a state of undress. Prentice claimed that the second time the familiar appeared that:

the said ferret came againe unto her in the night time as she was sitting upon a little stoole, preparing her selfe to bed-ward, as is above said: Joan wilt thou goe to bed, to whome she answered yea, that I will by Gods grace, then presently the ferret leapt up upon her lap, and from thence up to her bosome, and laying his former feete upon her lefte shoulder, sucked blood out of her lefte cheeke,...the said ferret divers times after appeared unto her alwaies at the time when she was going to bed.³⁹

The charges of entertaining or consulting spirits were frequently cited in the Essex indictments, and increasingly so after 1604.⁴⁰ The keeping of familiars was a central

³⁷ A true and just Recorde, (1582), A3, B2.

³⁸ Joan Robinson was believed to make her nose bleed deliberately to feed her familiar, A true and just Recorde, (1582), F5.

³⁹ The Apprehension and confession, (1589), B2.

⁴⁰ Ewen, C.L., Witch Hunting and Witch Trials. The suckling of familiars was a central motif of the 1645 pamphlet in which Mary Greenleife, Francis Milles and two of her daughters, Sarah Hating,

feature of the 1645 case, every woman accused in this case was accused of having demon familiars. For instance, Elizabeth Clarke was watched and found to have five spirits called Holt, Jarmara, Vinegar Tom, Jack and Sugar. This is important as since the Witchcraft Act of 1604, the possession of familiars was taken as proof of witchcraft and thus warranted the death penalty.

The 1645 Essex pamphlet was also more explicit in its sexual content, and various women confessed to having relationships with the Devil, as well as suckling familiars. Elizabeth Clarke confessed that 'shee had had carnal copulation with the Devil six or seven years', Rebecca West confessed that 'about seven years since, shee began to have familiaritie with the Devill, by the instigation of her mother' and further that she had undergone a kind of marriage ceremony to him. The Devil came to her 'as shee was going to bed, and told her, he would marry her, and that shee could not deny him; she said he kissed her...and promised to be her loving husband till death'.⁴¹ This appears to have been a romantic fantasy, or a way of explaining an illicit encounter with a man. The Essex material, therefore, appears to support feminist claims that witches were portrayed in a sexualised fashion.

The Body as Evidence

The Essex pamphlets also provide evidence of the use of the witch's body as the site of the search for evidence. The suspected witch's body became public after accusation by the community, as her body would be laid open to scrutiny by the women of the community, some of whom were sometimes among the accusers.) Agnes Glascock was searched by Agnes Letherdale and Margaret Simpson in 1582, who claimed that 'upon the left side of the thighe of this examine, there be some spots and upon the shoulder likewise one or two. Which spottes bee like the sucked

Elizabeth Harvy and Marian Hocket were all searched and found to have teats in their 'privie parts' or 'secret parts', A true and exact Relation, (1645).

⁴¹ Ibid., 2, 11, 14.

spots, that Ursley Kempe hath upon her bodie'.⁴² Agnes Letherdale at least cannot be regarded as an impartial searcher since she was one of the accusers of Ursula Kemp, who in turn had accused Agnes Glascock.

Searches of the witch's body by the women of the community highlight the distinctions made between women based on their reputations, the searchers being women of 'credit' and good reputation, the suspected woman having a bad reputation. Cicely Sellis was also searched in 1582. The pamphlet relates that:

Ales Gilney, Joan Smith, and Margaret Simson women of credite, appointed by mee Brian Darcey, to view and see the body of the said Cysley, say, that shee hath upon her body many spots very suspicious, and the said Margaret saith, that they bee much like the sucked spots, that shee hath seene upon the body of Ursley Kemp and severall other.⁴³

Here again the good reputation of the searchers is juxtaposed with that of the accused woman.

Having similar marks to another woman was taken as proof, and Margeret Simpson appears to have made herself an expert in identifying witch's marks having seen three accused women's bodies. In his 1647 pamphlet, Matthew Hopkins gave details on how it was possible to differentiate witch's marks from other marks on the body. He argued that midwives could tell witch's marks apart by the place where they were found, the fact that they were insensitive, and that they may change shape or disappear.⁴⁴ The searchers of 1645 explicitly differentiated between witch's marks and piles or haemorrhoids, claiming that the marks on Mary Greenleife were 'not like emerods, nor in those places where women use to be troubled with them', and that the marks on Francis Milles 'were not like Pyles, for this Informant knows well

⁴² A true and just Recorde, (1582), C2-3.

⁴³ Ibid., D4.

⁴⁴ Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 190. Stearne gave similar instructions in Stearne, J., A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft, (1648).

what they are, having been troubled with them herself'.⁴⁵ The searchers did not always profess to find witch's marks however. In the case of Margaret Grevell in 1582 it was stated that 'this examinat beeing viewed and seene by women, say, that they cannot judge her to have any sucked spots upon her body'.⁴⁶

Counter-magic and the Body

The witch's body was also the site of attempts to break the bad magic through counter-magic, most commonly through trying to draw blood from the witch's face. Purkiss argues that this was the 'most thoroughly masculinized method of dealing with a witch'.⁴⁷ This is a little surprising, given the verbal and physical abuse used by women against other women throughout these pamphlets. In 1579, Mother Staunton claimed that she had gone to Pratt's house and that 'after certaine woords of anger betweene hym and her, he rased [scratched] her face with a Nedle'.⁴⁸ After Ursula Kemp accused Agnes Glascock of witchcraft in court in 1582, Agnes 'used outrageous words, calling the sayde Ursley whore, saying, shee would scratch her: for shee was a Witch, and that shee was sure shee had bewitched her: for that shee coulde not nowe weepe'.⁴⁹ This serves as an example of scratching the witch as a form of counter-magic, and also of the bewitching taking a bodily form. Ironically it was popularly believed that witches could not weep so Agnes did herself no favours by this remark.⁵⁰

In 1645 Elizabeth Otley told how after the death of her child, believed to be bewitched by May Johnson, that she herself fell ill 'with extreame pains in her body'. When Mary came to her house to try and persuade her that she had not killed her child, Elizabeth stated that 'she could not be satisfied untill she had gotten the

⁴⁵ A true and exact Relation, (1645), 16, 24.

⁴⁶ A true and just Recorde, (1582), E5.

⁴⁷ Purkiss, D., 'Desire and Its Deformities', 112.

⁴⁸ A Detection of damnable driftes, (1579), A7.

⁴⁹ A true and just Recorde, (1582), C3.

⁵⁰ Scot questioned this belief in Scot, R., The Discoverie of Witchcraft, (1584), 16.

blood of the said *Mary Johnson*: And meeting with her after long scuffling, this Informant made the said *Mary Johnsons* teeth to bleed, and immediately after, this Informants extraordinary pains left her'.⁵¹ These three cases serve as examples of the importance of the body, as the site of attempts at counter-magic. This counter-magic could also serve as evidence in legal cases if, as in the case of Elizabeth Otley, the scratching cured the bewitching.

Bewitchment, Possession and the Body

Finally, the representation of bewitchment and possession as bodily disorder must be considered. The accusations against Mother Staunton of Wimbish in 1579 demonstrate that witchcraft was believed to affect victims in a number of bodily ways, and further emphasise the importance of neighbourly disputes over borrowing and lending in leading to witchcraft accusations. After the wife of Robert Petty of Brook Walden refused her demands and accused her of stealing a knife, 'the little child of the said Petty fell so strangely sick as for the space of a week nobody thought it would live'. And being denied by William Turner's wife:

certaine thynges which she craved, as a piece of leather etc. she asked the good wife how many children she had, who aunswere one, whiche childe beeyng then in perfite healthe, was presently taken with suche a sweate and coldnesse of bodie, and fell into suche shrickyng and staryng, wringyng [twisting] and writhyng of the bodie to and fro, that all that sawe it were doubtfull of the life of it.⁵²

It was further claimed that Robert Cornell's wife of Swards End refused her a bottle of milk as she suspected her to be a witch. After barring the door to her, Mother Staunton:

made a Circle uppon the ground with a knife. After that she digged it full of holes with in the compasse, in the sight of the saied wife, her man, and her maide, who demaundyng why she did so: She made aunswere that she made a shittynghouse for her self...the nexte daie the wife commyng out at the same doore, was taken sicke, and began

⁵¹ *A true and exact Relation* (1645), 18.

⁵² *A Detection of damnable driftes* (1579), A8. Rosen argues that this is a description of violent ague, or malarial fever. Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, 97

to swell from tyme to tyme as if she had been with child, by whiche swellyng she came so greate in bodie, as she feared she should burste: and to this daie is not restored to healthe.⁵³

Importantly, this provides evidence which disputes Thomas's assertion that some women may have cultivated a reputation for witchcraft to frighten others into giving aid, since that is the very reason Cornell's wife gave for denying her. Mother Staunton was also accused of bewitching the son of the vicar at Wimbish after his wife 'denyed her errande'. It was said that 'his little sonne in the Nurses lapp was taken with suche vehement sicknes, that the beholders supposed no lesse, but it would straight have died, the saied Mother Staunton sittynge by, and havynge touched the child before it grew sicke'. She was further accused of bewitching various animals, including the cattle of John Cornell the younger of Wimbish which 'in steede of sweete Milke, yelded gore stinkyng blood'.⁵⁴ The expression of blood instead of milk is a basic symbol of inversion, since it negates the possibility of providing nourishment. These illnesses of both people and animals emphasise not only that people's understanding of the power of witchcraft was expressed in bodily terms, but also the potent imagery of inversion, unnaturalness and pollution.

The bewitchment of children was described in physical terms. In 1579, Ellen Smith of Maldon confessed to giving Goodwife Webb's daughter 'a blow on the face' the day after she had fought with her daughter, 'whereupon so soone as the childe came home she sickened, and languishyng twoo daies, cried continually, awaie with the

⁵³ A Detection of damnable driftes, (1579), A8. Rosen argues that this may have been an ovarian cyst, claiming also that 'it is likely...that the witch's curse focused attention on symptoms already present, and made the sufferer conscious of the development of a disease over a period of time'. Rosen, B., Witchcraft, 97. The use of circles in magic is indicative of conjuring practices. Joan Cunny claimed to have been taught by Mother Humphrey of Maplestead how to get spirits to come to her by kneeling on the ground, making a circle and praying to Satan 'the chief of the devils'. The Apprehension and confession, (1589), A3. Edmund Hartley was also condemned for his use of circles and magic. Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), Stories of witches meeting in circles were also referred to in A Pleasant treatise of Witches &c. (1673).

⁵⁴ A Detection of damnable driftes, (1579), B1. Mothers were believed to produce milk by converting their blood to milk to nourish their infants. The witch inverted this process. As Willis argues, the production of blood instead of milk inferred the 'disruption and diabolical reversal' of the normal processes of the maternal body. Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 52, 55. See also Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, 134.

Witch, awaie with the Witch, and so died'.⁵⁵ In 1582 Cicely Sellis was believed to have bewitched Thomas Death's daughter who 'was taken very strangly, and lay in a most piteous case'.⁵⁶ These cases further emphasise the disharmonious neighbourly conflicts at the root of many accusations.

An additional example of bewitchment being described in terms of abnormal bodily features is provided when Agnes Letherdale claimed in 1582 that after refusing Ursula Kemp some scouring sand, 'knowing her to be a naughtie beast', 'presently after her childe was taken as it lay very bigge, with a great swelling in the bottome of the belly, and other privie partes'. The pamphlet claims that:

the said Letherdals childe (being a woman childe) at the time of this examination, appeared to bee in a most piteous sort consumed, and the privie and hinder partes there of, to be in a most strange and wonderfull case, as it seemed to verye honest women of good judgement, and not likely to live and continue any long time'.

It was further claimed that Agnes Letherdale carried the child to Mother Ratcliffe's house (who had a reputation for healing), and that both times they passed Ursula's house 'the Infant cryed to the mother, wo, wo, and pointed with the finge[r] to the wyndowe wardes'.⁵⁷ This case emphasises the bad reputation of Ursula, known to be 'naughty', and also the dualistic popular beliefs of the community as an unlicensed healer was relied upon to deal with the bewitching.

Adult victims of bewitchment were also affected in physical ways. In 1582, Ursula Kemp admitted that she asked Alice Newman to send her spirit Jack to John Stratton's wife after her husband had insulted her, which 'plagued her in the backe even unto death'. In the same year Alice Manfield accused Margaret Grevell of sending her spirit Jack 'to plague Cheston, upon the great Toe unto the death'.

⁵⁵ A Detection of damnable driftes. (1579), A6. Cases like this demonstrate that the concept of a witch caring for, and protecting, her own children in this way was not thought to be contradictory.

⁵⁶ A true and just Recorde. (1582), E1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, A3, B1.

Margaret Grevell was also accused of sending her spirit Robin 'unto her husband to plague him, where of he pined above halfe a yeere and more, having by that meanes many and severall straunge sores, and thereof died'.⁵⁸ In 1589 Mother (Joan) Cunny of Stisted confessed to bewitching Harry Finch's wife at Braintree after she refused her some drink as she was busy brewing. She 'went away discontented: and at night Finches wife was greevously taken in her head, and the next day in her side, and so continued in most horrible paine to: the space of a week and then dyed'.⁵⁹ Again these cases stress the nature of the conflict in attempting to explain the cause of the witchcraft.

In 1582, Alice Baxter, servant to Richard Ross, gave a description which serves as a good example of how witchcraft was believed to attack the bodily functions of the victims:

she felt a thing to pricke her under the right side, as if she had been stricken with ones hande, and she saith that after, as she was going homewardes with her milke neere the stile in the same closse, there came a thinge all white like a cat, and stroke her at the hart, in such sort as shee could not stand, goe, nor speake.⁶⁰

This provides further evidence emphasising the physical representation of bewitchment in witchcraft narratives.

Frequently bewitchment was believed to take the form of affecting the internal body, particularly the digestion. This was symbolic of the witch gaining power over another by breaching the boundaries of their body.⁶¹ A deposition against Ellen Smith of Maldon in 1579 claimed that after her mother, Alice Chandler, was executed for witchcraft, her step-father went to Ellen and asked for the return of some money which Alice had given her. They fell out and:

⁵⁸ Ibid., B2, D6. Cheston's illness may have been a case of gout.

⁵⁹ The Apprehension and confession, (1589), A4.

⁶⁰ A true and just Recorde, (1582), D4, Felice Okey also highlighted the abnormal aspects of her husband's behaviour when he believed that Elizabeth Eustace had bewitched him, E4.

⁶¹ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 423.

Ellen said it had been better for him he had never fallen out with her, and so it came to pass; for the same John Chandler confessed before his death that after the same hour that she had said this to him, he never ate any meat that digested in him, but ever it came up again as soon as it was down, by which means he consumed and wasted away to his death.⁶²

The inability to eat could also affect animals. In 1582, John Tendering of St Osyth told how William Byatt had told him of a cow 'which had lien two dayes or longer in a strange case and had eaten nothing, and was not likely to live'.⁶³ Rosen demonstrates how 'suspension of the normal processes of digestion was often taken as a sign of the presence of demons, as was the vomiting of stones, pins, hair etc'.⁶⁴ Thus, witchcraft was believed to damage the natural process of nourishment, thus underlining the image of the witch as an evil mother and as the opposite to all that was natural. Significantly, Jackson argues that refusing food may have been a way of the victim attempting to regain control over the body.⁶⁵

Witchcraft was also believed to have the power to suspend other normal bodily functions such as the control over movement. This could affect the suspected witches as well as their victims. Elizabeth Bennett, for example, was affected bodily by her familiars, and she believed that they had control over her body. She claimed that as she 'was comming from mill, the spirite called *Suckin* came unto her and did take her by the coate, and helde her that shee coulde not goe forward nor remooove by the space of two houres'.⁶⁶ Thus, cases of bewitchment constantly stress abnormal or 'strange' aspects underlining the images of inversion and unnaturalness.

⁶² *A Detection of damnable driftes*, (1579), A6. Hester, M., *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*, 173.

⁶³ *A true and iust Recorde*, (1582), A5.

⁶⁴ Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, 94-5; Purkiss sees the vomiting of household items as a violent rejection of the mother, 'Women's Stories', 424.

⁶⁵ Jackson, L. notes similar cases from Suffolk, 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 78. See Chapter Four for further discussion of the evil mother theory.

⁶⁶ *A true and iust Recorde*, (1582), B7, the inability to move was not confined to people, John Sayer claimed that he could not move his cart after he angered Alice Manfield, C7.

The Essex material, therefore, appears to support feminist assertions that witchcraft was associated with deviant sexual behaviour, as there are several references to sexual misdemeanours in the five pamphlets. The pamphlets also clearly indicate the centrality of the body in witchcraft narratives through the search for evidence, attempts at counter-magic and in descriptions of bewitchment. It is necessary, therefore, to determine whether the evidence of cases from the Midlands and the North supports this assertion.

The Midlands and North - Pamphlet Accounts

Sexuality and Witchcraft

As has been shown above, with reference to the Essex material, the theme of sexuality and the witch's body can be observed in three ways; through the association of the accused with deviant sexual behaviour in the community, with a familiar, or with the devil. Somewhat surprisingly, the only indication of deviant sexual behaviour associated with other humans mentioned in the pamphlets for this region concerns a male suspect, Edmund Hartley, who was believed to have bewitched members of the Starkey household in Leigh, Lancashire in 1594 by kissing them. More, in his pamphlet *A True Discourse*, explained how 'His maner was when he ment them a mischiefe, then he would kisse them if he could, and therewith breathe the Devil into their bodies'. Only one maidservant, Joan Smith, successfully avoided being kissed, and was thus the only maid not bewitched. Hartley seemed to be on intimate terms with most of the household implying a depth of trust in those relationships, thus he is portrayed as the enemy within the household, who had not only invaded the household, but the body space of everyone in it.

Hartley's relationships with the two eldest bewitched persons, Margaret Byrom and Jane Ashton, appear to have been flirtatious at least. Byrom was affected when

'sitting upon his bed, he leaned his heade downe to the maide who satt just underneath him, whereupon she was suddenlie taken that shee could neither stande nor speake', More also claimed that Hartley showed her 'loving affections'.⁶⁷ There appears to have been some kind of relationship between Hartley and Ashton as 'kisses...with promis of mariag' were referred to, and it was claimed that 'her belly began to swell greatly, so that she compared her belly to a womans great with child'.⁶⁸

Jane Ashton was troubled when:

it first tooke her in her throat, as if she had a pyn sticking there, wherupon she strayned herself so sore that she got up bloud, & for two dayes was very sicke, Mistris Starchie iestingly said, Jane is sicke of the hooke, nay quoth Hartlay I assure you it is no hooke. for if your owne daughter or any other had bene in the same place the had bene so served. As I remember I hard them say that lane Ashton had gone into Hartlays chamber & looked into his chest.⁶⁹

This highlights various important issues. The description of Jane Ashton's fit emphasises the importance of the mouth area as the illness affected her throat in particular. Hartley again portrayed himself in a suspicious manner, claiming to have some knowledge over why Jane was ill, which in hindsight could be construed as having been worded in a threatening manner. Finally, it is significant that Jane herself had invaded Hartley's space in entering his room and looking into his chest. Perhaps she felt guilty about this and projected this bad feeling back onto him, or maybe she saw something which made her more suspicious of him. It is important, however, that after Jane had invaded Hartley's personal space physically, she believed him to have invaded hers psychologically.

That Hartley was believed to breathe the devil into the mouths of his victims through a kiss is significant, as it mirrors the case of Joan Willimot of Goadby,

⁶⁷ More, G., A True Discourse, 16-17.

⁶⁸ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 9; see also More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 17.

⁶⁹ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 4-5.

Leicestershire, who claimed that her master had blown a fairy or spirit into her mouth. Another case involved a Lancashire woman attempting to heal cattle by blowing into their mouths. The mouth, therefore, appears to have been seen as extremely important in the exchanging of spirits. Darrell himself commented how ironic it was that 'he who had so sweetly (by kisses forsooth) sent the divel into so many, had by the iust iudgement of god, the divell sent into him'.⁷⁰ The description of how Joan Willimot of Goadby, came by her spirit is worth highlighting here. She claimed on 17 March, 1618, that:

shee hath a Spirit which shee calleth *Pretty*, which was given unto her by *William Berry* of *Langholme* in *Rutlandshire*, whom she served three yeares; and that her Master when he gave it unto her, willed her to open her mouth, and hee would blow into her a Fairy which should doe her good; and that shee opened her mouth, and he did blow into her mouth; and that presently after his blowing, there came out of her mouth a Spirit, which sttod upon the ground in the shape and form of a Woman, which Spirit aske of her her Soule, which shee then promised unto it, being willed thereunto by her Master.⁷¹

The description of the spirit as a woman is very unusual, as the vast majority of narrations portray familiars as taking an animal form, as demonstrated in several cases above. The fact that the spirit came from inside Joan's body is also fascinating, as this appears to be the inverse of the spiritual testimonies of pious seventeenth century women who physically felt the presence of God or Christ within them.⁷² We can also see here how Joan gained power, but still at the bidding of a man, her Master.⁷³ This also leads one to speculate about their relationship, which was clearly beyond the boundaries of a conventional master/servant relationship.

⁷⁰ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 17; L.R.O., QSB 1/78/49; Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 8. This belief in the mouth as the entrance to the body for evil spirits is further expounded below.

⁷¹ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 17.

⁷² Some of these pious women were directly associated with 'cunning' or witchcraft, including Anna Trapnel and Lady Eleanor Davies. See Mack, P., 'Women as Prophets During the English Civil War', *Feminist Studies*, (Spring 1982), vol. 8, no. 1, 19-45; Hobby, E., *Virtue of Necessity. English Women's Writing 1649-88*, (London, 1988), chapter 1.

⁷³ See Chapter Five for further discussion of gender and power.

Although there is little evidence to support a link between witchcraft and deviant sexual behaviour with other people in these pamphlets, there is more to support the belief in women witches suckling familiars as a form of sexual inversion. That this was commonly accepted to be part of witchcraft beliefs can be seen in Heywood and Broome's play *The Late Lancashire Witches* of 1634; which includes a song where the witches called their familiars to come to them, singing 'Then suck our blouds freely, and with it be jolly'.⁷⁴ Alice Gooderige of Stapenhill, Staffordshire, was believed to have suckled spirits in 1596. Her 'victim' Thomas Darling was seen to talk to the spirits with which she had possessed him, to whom he said 'thy Mistris hath given thee a drop of her bloud to thy dinner, and that therefore thou wilt tel no tales of her'. He also claimed that the spirit tormented him because Alice had rewarded it with blood.⁷⁵ Again the belief in the reciprocal relationship between witch and familiar is evident.

Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie* provides various examples of confessions of suckling familiars. Anne Whittle, confessed on 19 May 1612, that fourteen years previously, Elizabeth Southernns had persuaded her to become a witch and enter into a pact with the devil. Soon afterwards, the devil appeared to her as a man in Elizabeth's house where:

the wicked Spirit mooved this Examinee, that she would become his Subiect, and give her Soule unto him...whereupon the sayd wicked Spirit then sayd unto her, that hee must have one part of her body for him to sucke upon; the which shee denied then to graunt unto him; and withall asked him, what part of her body hee would have for that use; who said, hee would have a place of her right side neere to her ribbes, for him to sucke upon; whereunto shee assented.⁷⁶

This highlights two main points. Firstly, it is clear from this statement that Elizabeth and Anne were not always the great enemies which they claimed to be, since Anne

⁷⁴ Heywood, T. & Broome, R., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (London, 1634).

⁷⁵ *Most wonderfull and true storie*, 15, 23.

⁷⁶ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), B4. Elizabeth's grand-daughter Alizon Device also admitted to suckling a familiar, R3.

seemed willing to act under the persuasion of Elizabeth, even apparently against her better judgement.⁷⁷ Secondly, this is a clear description of the sexual pact with the devil, and of the unnatural nurturing practices of the witches towards their familiars, both of which have been stressed in feminist theories and recent gender analyses respectively.

Potts' pamphlet also provides a rare English description of a witches sabbat. Grace Sowerbutts, aged around fourteen, gave evidence against three women, including her own grandmother and aunt, of Salmesbury, Lancashire, on 19 August 1612. She claimed that the women were carried over the River Ribble by 'blacke things' and that at Redbank 'after they had eaten, the said three Women and this Examinee danced, every one of them with one of the blacke things aforesaid, and after their dancing the said black things did pull downe the said three Women, and did abuse their bodies'.⁷⁸ That this case was dismissed is pertinent, emphasising the lack of significance attached to the sabbat in English trials.

An additional description of a demonic pact, which stresses the sexual theme, is provided in *The Wonderful Discoverie*, detailing the case of the Flower witches of Bottesford, Leicestershire in 1618. It was claimed that when the Devil saw the evil behaviour of the three Flower women, he came to think that Joan and her daughters 'might easily bee made instruments to enlarge his kingdom'. The description of the pact with the Devil is important:

he came neerer unto them, and in plaine tearmes to come quickly to the purpose, offered them his service, and in such a manner, as they might command what they pleased: for he would attend you in such prety forms of Dog, Cat or Rat, that they should neither be terrified nor anybody else suspicious of the matter. Upon this they agree, and (as it should seeme) give away their soules for the service of such Spirits, as he promised them; which filthy conditions were ratified with abominable kisses, and an odious sacrifice of blood, not leaving

⁷⁷ See Chapter Two.

⁷⁸ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), L2.

out certaine charmes and coniurations with which the Divell deceived them, as though nothing could bee done without ceremony, and a solemnity of orderly ratification.⁷⁹

There are two important points to be made here. Firstly, we see the demonic pact itself, which is loaded with sexual signs and symbols of inversion. The women were offered demonic spirits in the form of everyday animals, spirits who suckled on the witches in a perversion of the nurturing of children. The conditions of the pact were sealed with the 'abominable kisses' which featured in many descriptions of the demonic pact in contemporary demonology. This was a basely sexual pact with the women giving their bodies as well as their souls to the Devil. Secondly, the pact was carried out with 'ceremony' and 'solemnity' as if it were somehow religious in nature. This ties in strongly with Clarke's notion of inverted or reversed formal rituals.⁸⁰

The Flower witches also confessed to suckling spirits. Phillippa claimed that she had a spirit in the form of a white rat which had sucked her left breast for three or four years, and claimed that she had given her soul to it when it promised to make Thomas Simpson love her. Margaret claimed to have two spirits, one white, which sucked under her left breast, the other black spotted, which sucked 'the inward parts of her secrets'.⁸¹ Finally, the women accused in the Fairfax case in Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621 were claimed to have suckled familiars. Jennit Dibb was said to have let her victims 'see a spirit suck upon her head, and another under her arm'. The victims also saw a bird suck on Margaret Thorp's face.⁸² Evidently the belief that women had suckled familiars was further proof of their evil and inversion of the ideal, and their confessions to such were taken as valid proof in legal cases.

⁷⁹ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 10.

⁸⁰ Clark, S., 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', 98-127, see Chapter One for further discussion.

⁸¹ Ellen Greene of Stathern and Joan Willimot of Goadby, both in Leicestershire, also confessed to suckling familiars in this pamphlet. *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 23, 20-1.

⁸² Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 83, 120.

The accusation of copulating with the devil seems to have been extremely rare, in the pamphlets from the Midlands and North of England only one person appears to have been accused of this. William Somers of Nottingham named thirteen witches in 1597, and after twelve of the accused were released, the attention was focused on Alice Freeman. Harsnett related how 'shee poore woman, suspecting shee had beene with childe, till M.Darrell told her it was a wicked spirit within her'.⁸³ Although this appears to be an indication of bewitchment, this has popularly been taken to infer that she had had intercourse with the devil.⁸⁴

In an interesting parallel to the belief that witches copulated with the devil, two apparent victims of bewitchment claimed to have been wooed by the devil. Harsnett claimed that Satan appeared to Katherine Wright from Derbyshire in 1586 'in the likenes of a handsome man, that making suite unto her in the way of marriage, gave her a peice of bread'.⁸⁵ Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire, also told how a spirit appeared to her claiming he would leave his fair woman if she would have him. Later, when she had realised that he was the devil, 'he promised to come to her again in bed, and departed'. As in the case of the 1645 Essex witches, these narratives appear to be more romantic fantasy than nightmare. Hellen also believed that she had been made to suckle a spirit baby during a trance, which left her in agony. This suggests that her knowledge of witchcraft beliefs was rather confused.⁸⁶

The Body as Evidence

The second way in which the body can be seen as central to the subject of witchcraft is through the use of the witch's body as the site of evidence or proof. Typically this took the form of stripping and searching the witch to look for witch's marks, but this focus on the witch's body could also take the form of bodily tests or informal torture.

⁸³ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 37.

⁸⁴ Robbins, R.H., *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*, 119.

⁸⁵ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 41.

⁸⁶ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 39, 41, 46.

This process can be seen at its most extreme in Shadwell's play *The Late Lancashire Witches* in which the character Sir Jeffery Shacklehead fancies himself as somewhat of an expert in finding and prosecuting witches. Coming across one whom he suspects he exclaims:

lay hold o'th' Witch quickly; now you shall see my skill, weel search her, I warrant she has biggs or teats a handful long about her parts that shall be nameless; then weel have her watched eight and fourty hours, and prickt with Needles, to keep her from sleeping, and make her confess...and if not, after all, weel tye her Thumbs and great Toes together and fling her into your great Pond.⁸⁷

The searching of suspected women can be seen in various pamphlets from this region. In 1596 Alice Gooderige and her mother Elizabeth Wright of Stapenhill, Staffordshire, were searched by women in the community 'to see if they could finde any such marks on them, as are usually found on witches'. The account states that:

The old woman they stript & found behind her right sholder a thing much like the udder of an ewe that giveth sucke with two teates, like unto two great wartes, the one behinde under her armehole, the other a handfull off towards the top of her shoulder: which when they had found, they put on her cloths againe, leaving the place bare, that it might be seen...Then did they search Alice Gooderige, and found upon her belly, a hole of the bignesse of two pence, fresh and bloody, as though some great wart had been cut off the place.

This account demonstrates the concern with finding evidence for this invisible crime, as explored in relation to the Essex material, and also the fear of those being searched. It appears here that Alice may have harmed herself in order to remove a growth that could have been seen as evidence, although she claimed that she accidentally stabbed herself when she fell with a knife.⁸⁸ It does not matter so much whether she mutilated herself or not, what is important is that this response was

⁸⁷ Shadwell, T., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (London, 1681), 10.

⁸⁸ *Most wonderfull and true storie*, (1597), 8-9. It has been argued that women's denials or explanations for witch's marks drew on feminine roles. As Kermode and Walker suggest, their denial of knowledge about their bodies may have been a way of asserting an image of themselves as modest women. Kermode, J. & Walker, G., *Women, Crime and the Courts*, 15.

thought perfectly possible. Significantly, her claim was negated, thus denying her a voice.⁸⁹ Alice was brought to her victim Thomas Darling during one of his fits and stripped again on another occasion 'that they might see her suspected place' during which 'she cursed the daie of her birth, making great outcries'.⁹⁰ This demonstrates the despair and anger that suspected people must have felt at their powerlessness in this situation.

The concern with evidence is further highlighted in the Fairfax case in Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621. When a woman appeared to Hellen in her trances, she told the woman 'I would have given thee a mark, that I might have known thee again, but it is no matter, for I see thou hast a mark'. On another occasion a woman appeared to both Hellen and Elizabeth Fairfax and 'they saw the woman let a spirit suck upon her breast; to whom Hellen said, 'Thou art a cunning witch indeed to let a spirit suck there upon thy pap's head, for nobody can find a mark upon thee if thou let thy spirit suck there'.⁹¹ On 23 February, 1621, the accused women in this case were searched for marks at the house of one Widow Pullein at Fewston.⁹²

In rare cases, suspected witches could be subjected to tests or torture which centred, again, on the site of the body. It is not stated how the Flowers women of Bottesford, Leicestershire came to be apprehended for witchcraft in 1618, other than that they had been disliked and suspected in the neighbourhood for many years. On the way to Lincoln gaol Joan Flower apparently requested to undertake the test of bread. It was said that she:

called for Bread and Butter, and wished it might never goe through if she were guilty of that, whereupon she was examined: so mumbling it in her mouth, never spake more words after, but fell donne and dyed

⁸⁹ Gibson, M., 'Now the Witch is Dead', 3; Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, 192-3, 203.

⁹⁰ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 13.

⁹¹ Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: 1621, 69, 85.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 78.

as she was carryed to Lincolne Goale, with a horrible excruciation of soule and body, and was buried at Ancaster.⁹³

This test was clearly quasi-religious, as was the infamous swimming test for witches, as bread is symbolic of the body of Christ. Therefore an evil body would not have been able to accept such a holy object. We can only speculate as to the real reason for the death of Joan, certainly the journey to Lincoln would not have been a pleasant one, or perhaps she was already ill which may account for her changed appearance and ill temper, noted in the previous chapter.

Although formal torture was not used in cases of witchcraft, informal methods were sometimes used. Alice Gooderige of Stapenhill, Staffordshire, was subjected to informal torture in 1596. When she appeared unable to confess voluntarily, a cunning man called Robert Toones was brought to help. He 'put a paire of new shooes on her feete, setting her close to the fire, till the shooes being extreame hot, might constraene her thorough increase of the paine to confesse'.⁹⁴ This method failed since she promised to confess, but once released refused again.

In the case of Jennet Preston of Gisburn, Yorkshire, it was the site of the victim's body provided the evidence which condemned her. Jennet was brought to the body of Mr Lister whom she was suspected of murdering by witchcraft, and 'the said Jennet Preston comming to touch the dead corpes, they bled fresh blood presently...Which hath ever beene held a great argument to induce a Jurie to hold him guiltie that shall be accused of Murther, and hath seldome, or never, fayled in the Tryall'.⁹⁵ The bleeding of a corpse when someone touched it was believed to mean that that person was guilty of the murder.⁹⁶

⁹³ The Wonderful Discoverie, (1619), 11.

⁹⁴ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 24.

⁹⁵ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), Y3.

⁹⁶ The Lawes Against Witches, (1645), 4; Radford, E. & M.A., Superstitions of Death and the Supernatural, 120. Further cases of bleeding corpses as proof in murder trials are noted in Sundry strange and inhumaine Murthers lately committed, (1591); The Witches of Northamptonshire, (1612), C2; Stearne, J., A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft, (1648), 55-6.

Counter-magic and the Body

As with the Essex material, the witch's body was also seen as a site for attempts at counter-magic, particularly the scratching of the witch's face. In several cases the suspected person would be brought to the bewitched victim during their fits so that they themselves could try to break the malevolent magic which was afflicting them. For instance, Alice Gooderige was brought to Thomas Darling at Burton on Trent during his fits in 1596, when she denied that she knew him. Then 'some of the standers by, perswaded the Boye to scratch her: which he did upon the face, and the back of the hands, so that [the] blood came out apace: she stroked the back of her hand upon the child, saying; take blood enough child, God helpe thee'.⁹⁷ We can only imagine the suspicions which undoubtedly surrounded this supposedly innocent reaction to the illness of the boy by Alice. When Thomas attempted to scratch her on another occasion he was apparently unable to do so as 'his hand was presently benumbed and pluckt to his side'.⁹⁸ This demonstrates the power which witchcraft was felt to hold over the victim's body.

There was, however, some concern over the use of counter-magic such as scratching the witch. This is evident in the dilemma of Edward Fairfax in 1621 over whether to seek remedy from this source when he believed his two daughters to be bewitched. He wrote that:

I was often moved to seek help by some of these means, especially by the scratching, which was urged to me as a remedy ordained of God, but I could never believe it to be so, for I well knew that God is not tied to forms and circumstances...We left therefore their charms, tongs, and scratchings to them that put confidence in them, and to the devil who devised them; and only relied upon the goodness of God.⁹⁹

Thus, despite the widespread knowledge of scratching as a form of counter-magic, there were those afraid to use it, since it too was a type of magic, and was thus

⁹⁷ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 5.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁹⁹ Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: 1621, 88-89.

ungodly. Significantly, Fairfax was well educated, thus he may have emphasised this opinion to portray a godly image of himself to his readers.

Bewitchment, Possession and the Body

Finally, the notion of the body as the site of bewitchment and possession needs to be examined in relation to the pamphlet sources from this region. These pamphlets provide an extremely rich source of lengthy descriptions of the fits suffered by people, predominantly children, believed to be bewitched in the Midlands and North in this period. The main pertinent points will be highlighted in relation to the theme of the body.

The fits suffered by victims of bewitchment were described primarily in terms which emphasised the sudden or unnatural nature of the illnesses. This is demonstrated in the case involving seven people bewitched in early February 1594 at Clayworth Hall in the parish of Leigh, Lancashire, when the gentleman Nicholas Starkey's two children John and Anne fell ill. Darrell wrote that Anne 'was taken with a dumpish and heavie countenance and with a certaine fearfull starting and pulling together of her body' and that around a week later John 'as he was going to the school was compelled to shout, neither was able to staie himselfe after the waxed worse and worse, falling into often and extreame fits'.¹⁰⁰ The contemporary concerns with establishing the difference between natural and supernatural illness are clearly indicated in this case. Darrell's colleague, More, stressed that the afflictions suffered in this household were 'very harde & unusual quite beyond the nature of things as neither by arte, nor any humaine skil could be counterfai't'.¹⁰¹

¹⁰⁰ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 1.

¹⁰¹ More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 14. The fits exhibited by the inhabitants of the Starkey household were very similar to those of the Throckmorton family of Warboys, detailed in Witches of Warboys, (1593).

Similarly, in the case of the bewitched Fairfax daughters in Yorkshire in 1621, Edward Fairfax reacted angrily to suggestions that they might be pretending to have fits, or that they might be suffering from a natural illness. He claimed that 'to satisfy me herein some books were lent to me in physic, but they did not describe their agonies as I thought; for I saw in my children many things which could not be done but by operations of agents supernatural'. Indeed he asserted that the extremity of their fits should be taken as proof that they were real 'their afflictions of body are so violent as cannot be counterfeited, especially by an infant'.¹⁰²

The features taken to stress the unnatural, or supernatural, nature of body bewitchment or possession were varied. Several of the seven believed to be possessed at Leigh, Lancashire, were described as having dancing fits in 1595. Darrell described how 'On the .1. of February .4. of them fell a dauncing Eli. Hardman singing and playing the minstrell, whom Anne Starchie the .5. being well, followed laughing at her toyces, but after a while she fel down as deade. All the time of there dauncing they wist not what they did if others called to them, they hard them not, answered not, and yet talked to an other'.¹⁰³ This provides an image of links with both madness such as the St Vitus Dance, and with the supposed activities of witches at sabbats.¹⁰⁴

The strangeness of these actions is echoed, and exaggerated, in the case of the 'Surey Demoniac', nineteen year old Richard Dugdale from Lancashire. Although some asserted that Richard's afflictions from 1689 were not the result of witchcraft or possession, but stemmed from natural disease, imposture, or an unknown cause; others pointed to the strangeness of his actions as proof of demonic possession. During his fits Richard danced amazingly well, although he could not dance before,

¹⁰² Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 36, 125.

¹⁰³ Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 3; also More, G., *A True Discourse*, (1600), 39.

¹⁰⁴ William Somers of Nottingham was similarly described as laughing and dancing in his fits, Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 15, 23. Dancing was also one of the popular activities denounced by Puritans such as Darrell.

he spoke in different voices, was able to write in different languages and ran around on his hands and feet. Former schoolfriends deposed however that he had played similar tricks in his schooldays.¹⁰⁵ Finally, in another case emphasising the abnormality of the bewitched body, William Perry, the Boy of Bilson, appeared to emit black urine in 1620. Plot tells how 'following making *water* in a *Urinal*, it was found as *black* as *Ink*, for there was some that *wrot* very legibly with it'.¹⁰⁶

Although a great variety of symptoms were expressed during these fits, the majority of the descriptions appear very similar. In 1600 More wrote a list of similar symptoms expressed in the fits of the seven bewitched at Leigh in Lancashire from 1594 to 1596, and this list serves as a good indication of the manifestations displayed in the fits of others across this region. More claimed that 'they had all and every one of them very straunge visions, and fearfull apparitions', 'they heard verie hideous and fearfull voices of the spirits sundrie times', 'they should neither see nor heare nor tast, nor feelee nothing...they could feelee no other paine or torture that could be offered unto them', 'they all of them were taken suddenlie, with a verie fearfull schriking, and a marveilous straunge howling', 'all of them had their bodies swolne to a wonderfull huge bignes', 'they had also a marveilous sore heaving and lifting...so that some of the[m] vomites much bloude', 'they had their faces disfigured...with a most uglie distorting of their mouths', 'they were all of them verie fierce, offering violence both to themselves and others, wherein also they shewed verie great and extraordinary strength', 'they blasphemed God', 'they for the most part delighted in filthie & unsavorie speeches', 'the most of them were both blinde, deafe, and dumbe, for divers dayes together', 'they were out of their right mindes, without the use of their sences', 'they were kept fasting a long time', 'they in their fits had divers partes and members of their bodies so stiffe and stretched out, as were inflexible', 'they shewed verie great and extraordinarie knowledge', and 'they ever

¹⁰⁵ The Surey Demoniack, (London, 1697), preface, 23, 24, 32, 48, 52; Z.Taylor, The Surey Imposter, (London, 1697), 26/7.

¹⁰⁶ Plot, R., The Natural History of Stafford-shire, (1686), 282; The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 64.

after their fits, were as wel as might be'. More stressed that although any of these signs of possession could be attributed to a natural illness, 'when all these signes shall concurre and meete together...it will proove a verie sounde and corporall possession'.¹⁰⁷ All of the people suspected of suffering from possession or bewitchment in these pamphlets displayed a variety of these symptoms, the most pertinent of which will be examined in closer depth now. It should be noted, to follow from the points made about pamphlets in Chapter One, that there was a common knowledge about witchcraft beliefs, and a wide dissemination of these pamphlets, thus the similarity of symptoms displayed in these cases is not altogether surprising.

The spectacle of possessed children in particular acting out their fits drew large audiences. In some cases this appears to have been staged quite deliberately. On 7 November 1597, the public exorcism of William Somers of Nottingham by John Darrell was held in front of a large congregation, which was said to be of one hundred and fifty people, although Darrell claimed that there were only sixty. Darrell claimed that Somers was suffering for the sins of the people of Nottingham, and called for a public fast day, claiming that the men of Nottingham should refrain from the company of their wives that night. He then proceeded to recite the fourteen signs of demonic possession which Somers demonstrated to the crowd; signs such as foaming at the mouth, staring eyes, and trying to throw himself into fire and water. After this Darrell recounted the three signs of deliverance, which again Somers demonstrated; weeping, tearing his clothes and lying as if dead. Somers was then declared dispossessed, but Darrell warned that the devil would try to repossess him.¹⁰⁸ Somers also played out the sins of Nottingham to the crowd; including

¹⁰⁷ More, G., *A True Discourse*, (1600), 42-8. See also Walker, D.P., *Unclean Spirits*, 12-17.

¹⁰⁸ Hutchinson, F., *An Historical Essay Concerning Witchcraft*, (London, 1718), 199-201.

'brauling, quarriling fighting, swaring, robbing by the high wayes...whordom, prid both in men and women...dauncing...the games of dicing and carding' etc.¹⁰⁹

A common way of stressing the unnatural nature of a person's fits was to emphasise the contrast between the fits and normal health. Alizon Device, one of the notorious Pendle witches of 1612, was believed to have bewitched and lamed a peddler, John Law, after a dispute about some pins. When his son Abraham came to see him, he was said to have lost his speech and was unable to move his left side apart from his eye. It was deposed in court that 'before his unfortunate meeting with this Witch, was a verie able sufficient stout man of Bodie, and a goodly man of Stature. But by this Devillish art of Witch-craft his head is drawne awrie, his Eyes and face deformed...his Thighes and Legges starcke lame'.¹¹⁰ In fact, to display too much good health, or signs which were not extraordinary enough, were taken as signs that perhaps the person was not possessed after all. The Boy of Bilson, Staffordshire, was suspected to be a fraud in August 1620 after several indications of his good health were noted, namely 'the easie and equall beating of his pulse in his strongest fits, his quiet rest and sleepe...[and]...his spitting forth from him as naturally and perfectly as ever hee could doe in his best health'.¹¹¹

In contrast to this, other narratives stressed the reality of possession by relating how close to death the victims appeared. Of Thomas Darling of Burton on Trent it was said in 1597 that 'somtime he was so wrested, that no beholder thought it possible for him to live; sometime he lay so stil, that there scarce appeared any signe of life in him'.¹¹² Likewise, Darrell said of William Somers of Nottingham later in 1597 that on 5 November 'he seemd to be sicke, and his sicknes greatlye to increase upon him,

¹⁰⁹ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 18; Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 118; Margaret Hardman of Leigh, Lancashire, also acted out sins in her fits, More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 26-8. The importance of spectacles such as these as a means of gaining power is discussed in Chapter Five.

¹¹⁰ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), S.

¹¹¹ The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 61; Plot, R., The Natural History of Stafford-shire, (1686), 281.

¹¹² Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 29.

soe as they feared he would have dyed, or had bene dead, for he laye an hower with his face and handes blacke, cold as ice, noe breath being perceived to come from him'.¹¹³ Finally, Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire, was also believed to be close to death when 'her flesh was consumed and her colour gone, so that her death was expected'. Hellen and her sister had earlier prepared themselves for death by 'making earnest signs of fervent prayer, and taking leave of all the family, and shaking hands with every one'.¹¹⁴ This emphasis on the closeness of death, and on the contrast between health and illness underlines both the inversion theme inherent in witchcraft belief, and also the acknowledgement of the fragility of human life in this era.

The emphasis on the strangeness of possession, and the contrast with good health, is further demonstrated by the stress on the loss of the victim's control over their senses or bodily functions. Thomas Darling lost the power of speech and was described as being stiff and senseless. Four of the children bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire, were 'senceless & speechles', and were struck dumb when required to testify against Edmund Hartley, claiming that 'Edmonde would not suffer them to speake against hym'. Harsnett argued that one of the ways Darrell deceived the people of Nottingham was to convince them that William Somers had no senses or 'faculties' of the mind whilst in his fits, and that it was the spirits within him which spoke and made noises and movements. Grace Sowerbutts of Salmesbury, Lancashire, claimed to have been left speechless and senseless by witches, as were the Boy of Bilson in 1620, Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621, and the Surey Demoniack in 1689.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 17

¹¹⁴ Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: 1621, 132-3, 67.

¹¹⁵ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 5, 11-12; More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 37; Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 4; Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 108; Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), L3; Plot, R., The Natural History of Stafford-shire, (1686), 281; Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: 1621, 53-4, The Surey Demoniack, (1697), 3, 22.

Despite this apparent loss of senses and control over the body, it was not thought paradoxical that the same people could perform amazing feats of strength and knowledge. The Surey Demoniack, although senseless, was able to hit various priests with 'Foam Bullets' from his mouth. Thomas Darling, though a child of thirteen years old, was so strong that 'it was enough for two or three to hold him'. The Lancashire Seven and the Surey Demoniack were likewise believed to possess great strength in their fits.¹¹⁶ This emphasises again the unnatural nature of the fits. This is stressed similarly by the apparent knowledge which victims displayed, particularly concerning things that they could not possibly know. Ellen Holland and Eleanor Hardman, two of the children bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire from 1594, accurately predicted what time they would fall into their fits, even when the hourglass was hidden. The Boy of Bilson in 1620, and the Surey Demoniack in 1689 also both claimed to be able to foretell when they would fall into fits.¹¹⁷ John Starkey of Leigh, Lancashire, was able to say who was in the room, although he was apparently blind, and it was popularly believed that victims were able to tell when the guilty witch was brought to them, as the Boy of Bilson did in 1620.¹¹⁸

One of the most common features in possession narratives was that the digestion of the victim was hampered, or that they vomited strange, usually sharp household, objects. As stated above, witchcraft was believed to attack the digestive system, which is a telling sign of the belief in the power of witchcraft as an enemy within. Margaret Byrom, one of those bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire was affected in this way. When she tried to drink, for example, it was said that both she and the drink were cast down. However,

at other tymes shee did eate greedily, slossinge up her meate like a greedy dogge, or hogge, that her mother and her freindes, weare

¹¹⁶ The Surey Demoniack, (1697), 6, 8; Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 2; More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 41; The Surey Demoniack, (1697), 52-3.

¹¹⁷ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 5; More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 35; The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 49; The Surey Demoniack, (1697), 8, 57.

¹¹⁸ More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 26; Webster, J., The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft, (London, 1677), 274.

ashamed of her. styll shee was hungrye and cryed for more, saying shee had nothing, though she spared no kinde of meate...After abundance of meate her belly semed never the fuller, that she marveiled which way it went.

Throughout her possession was portrayed as unnatural and like an animal. In the same case Ellen Holland and Eleanor Hardman were also unable to eat.¹¹⁹ Like Margaret Byrom, Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire, suffered from altered appetite in 1621. Thomas Darling of Burton in 1596 was unable to eat anything without vomiting afterwards, and it was stressed when he recovered from his possession that he was able to eat and pray again as normal.¹²⁰

The disruption of the digestive process was at its most violent in cases where victims vomited a variety of objects. There was some suspicion surrounding these activities, inasmuch as it undoubtedly brought some individuals under suspicion of counterfeiting. Webster wrote scathingly in 1677 that 'it is but precarious...to imagine that any persons have vomited up or voided strange things that saw or knew that they were injected by Devils, for they were either naturally bred there, or else were meer Impostures and delusive Juglings'.¹²¹

William Perry, the Boy of Bilson's, fits included his vomiting of various objects. It was said that 'with extreme fits and heavings hee brought up pinnes, wooll, knotted thred, thrums, rosemary, walnut leaves, feathers, &c'. He later admitted to stealing these items and putting them in his own mouth, including half a knitting needle.¹²² A pamphlet detailing *The Most True and Wonderfull Narration Of Two Women Bewitched in Yorkshire* in 1658 related how the two victims 'comming to the Assizes at York to give in Evidence against the Witch after a most horrible noise to the terror and amazement of all the beholders, did vomit forth before the Judges, Pins, wool,

¹¹⁹ Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 7, 9; More, G., *A True Discourse*, (1600), 30, 34.

¹²⁰ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia: 1621*, 130-1; *Most wonderfull and true storie*, (1597), 18, 37.

¹²¹ Webster, J., *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, (1677), 271.

¹²² *The Boy of Bilson*, (1622), 48, 67; see also Webster, J., *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, (1677), 274; Plot, R., *The Natural History of Stafford-shire*, (1686), 280-1.

and hafts of Knives, &c'.¹²³ Similarly, Richard Dugdale, the Surey Demoniack, vomited various objects from 1689, including stones, and 'Gold, Silver, or Brass Rings, and an Hair Button...One time he vomited a Stone as was an Inch and an half long, and an Inch and an half broad, having Blood upon the edges'.¹²⁴

As well as emphasising the unnatural nature of the victim's fits, this feature further underlines the importance of the mouth in narratives of bewitchment and possession.¹²⁵ Thomas Darling of Burton claimed in 1597 that the devil told him to open his mouth so that he could re-enter his body. Likewise Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire, said that the devil appeared to her as a little dog and 'desired her to open her mouth and let him come into her body, and then he would rule all the world'. Hellen also claimed that a cat blew into her mouth making her feel hot inside. Her sister Elizabeth claimed that an apparition of Margaret Wait encouraged her to put pins into her mouth, and that Margaret Thorp put her finger into her mouth and made it bleed.¹²⁶

Thomas Darling of Burton also claimed to have vomited and expelled his spirit in the form of a mouse.¹²⁷ And finally, Darrell noted that William Somers of Nottingham also had a sore throat after the spirit left his body. This reinforces the importance of the throat and mouth in these descriptions. Although the sore throats

¹²³ Heers, H., The Most True and Wonderfull Narration Of Two Women Bewitched in Yorkshire, (London, 1658), title page.

¹²⁴ The Surey Demoniack, (1697), 23, 51. Objects vomited in these cases were typically household items, but could be more localised items. John Tonken of Penzance, for instance, vomited rushes shaped like fish hooks and sticks in the shape of fishing net needles. Thus, while general witchcraft beliefs appear to have been similar across England, certain elements could be altered to make the incident more understandable to the local context. A true account of a Strange and wonderful Relation of one John Tonken of Pensans in Cornwall, (1686).

¹²⁵ The mouth symbolised an opening of the body's boundaries, and indicates the belief that witchcraft could be passed between bodies through their permeability. Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, 123.

¹²⁶ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 41; Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: 1621, 41, 55, 133-4. The mouth was also the site for the expelling of evil spirits from the seven people bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire.

¹²⁷ Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 53-4.

were attributed to the pain of the evil spirit leaving the body, they were more than likely caused by preceding days of shrieking and shouting.

One feature which is striking about possession narratives, is the extent of violence used both by victims against themselves, and by third parties experimenting on the victims. Various victims were subjected to violence in attempts to show how 'real' the bewitchment was, since the victim appeared to feel no pain. These attempts demonstrate the whole possession scenario as one of spectacle in front of substantial audiences.¹²⁸ William Somers of Nottingham was subjected to violence in 1597 by a commission investigating his apparent possession, when 'great violence [was] offered unto him, he was in the first of them thruste deepe into the hand & leg with pins, but stirred not therat, neyther did any bloud issu'. William Perry, the Boy of Bilson, was beaten by the priests dealing with his case in 1620. He told how one priest 'beate me about the head and face, untill to my thinking hee made me blacke and blue'. Plot also told how Perry was '*whiped with a rod, beside other like extremities*; yet could not be perceived either by *shrinking* or *shreiking* to bewray the lest passion of *feeling*'.¹²⁹

It is evident from this discussion of the role of the body in narratives of witchcraft, relating both to the witch and victim, that the body played a central role in the playing out of witchcraft beliefs in this region. The pamphlets can be seen as a particularly rich source of evidence of bewitchment and possession narratives, although they are not as informative about the processes of searching and using counter-magic against suspected witches. It is necessary, therefore, to consider whether the importance of the body to witchcraft narratives is supported by non-pamphlet material from the same region.

¹²⁸ See Chapter Five for further discussion of this point.

¹²⁹ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 23; Triall of Maist. Dorrell, or A Collection of Defences, (London, 1599), 29; The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 67; Plot, R., The Natural History of Stafford-shire, (1686), 281; The Fairfax girls were also subjected to violent experiments at the assize court, Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: 1621, 127.

The Midlands and North - Non-Pamphlet Accounts

The above examination of pamphlet sources has considered the presence of sexual elements in witchcraft narratives, particularly evident in the Essex material, and has demonstrated the centrality of the body in these accounts. In the latter, evidence of the body's importance in bewitchment and possession narratives is particularly striking. It is thus necessary to examine these factors in relation to non-pamphlet sources in order to determine whether they support these findings.

Sexuality and Witchcraft

There is little evidence of concern over deviant sexuality in non-pamphlet evidence, saving the implication of suckling familiars which led to the practice of searching women for marks. Few cases explicitly mention familiars in the cases examined here, in contrast to the prevalence of this feature in pamphlet accounts. In the case of the bewitchment of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth in 1616, the witches' familiars were presented as substitutes for husbands. Lea confessed that 'her spirit in the likenes of a fullmer came to her a weeke after the death of her husband...and desired her soule and to suck her, wch she consented unto'. This is interesting as her spirit appears very soon after her husband's death, thus leaving her without male control in society. In contrast to this Hawes claimed in her confession that her spirit came to her at about midnight when she was in bed with her husband.¹³⁰ A warrant for the apprehension of Sibill Farclough of Orrell, near Wigan, which was presented in October 1638 is another exception. This was the second time she had been accused, as she had been presented four years earlier, and she was said this time to be 'vehemently suspected by the said informers & divers other persons being her neighbors, not onely for witchcraft but for dealing with familiar spirits'.¹³¹

¹³⁰ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1., R.Smith, A Brief Declaration. Stearne related the case of another woman, Bush of Barton, who claimed that the Devil came to her three weeks after her husband's death. This emphasises the loneliness clearly felt by newly widowed women. Stearne, J., A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft, (1648), 29.

¹³¹ L.R.O., QSB 1/210/28.

In the case of Ann Green of Gargrave, Yorkshire, in 1653 there were also allusions to familiars. Jane Robinson claimed that she heard Elizabeth Cowgill talking of 'three thinges like blacke dogges' at her bedside which pricked her in the side and head, one of which she believed to be Ann. Elizabeth Wade also claimed to see these three dogs at her bedside and identified one as Ann.¹³² Finally, in the testimony of Richard Jackson of Wakefield, Yorkshire in June 1656, he claimed that his family had been bewitched by Jennet and George Benton. During his illness he 'heard a greate Noyse of Musicke & dancinge About him', the next night 'he conceived there was A noyse Like ringinge of small bells wth singinge & dancinge' and another time 'doggs did howle and gett at the windowe as though they would have puld them in peeces'. This description emphasises the imagery of inversion, the 'world turned upside-down' by witchcraft. There are similarities here with the images of sabbats in continental demonology although this is not made explicit.¹³³ Thus it can be seen that the connection between witches and demonic familiars was made in some non-pamphlet sources, although not apparently to the same extent as in pamphlet sources.

The Body as Evidence

Although the more fantastic allusions to suckling familiars were rarely expressed in these non-pamphlet sources, these beliefs nevertheless provided the rationale for searching a body for witch's marks as evidence of witchery, which would signify guilt of their participation in a pact with the Devil or one of his imps. In Louth, Lincolnshire in 1633 there was a reference to an item 'pd to 2 searchers for suspicion of witchcraft...xijd'.¹³⁴ Likewise the Chamberlain's Accounts of the Borough of Leicester 1649/50 states '*Item* paid to foure women that searched Ann Chettle shee

¹³² P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/1/36-8.

¹³³ The expression of ideas about the sabbat appear to be especially rare in non-pamphlet evidence. One exception is a collection of depositions against several suspected witches in Morpeth, Northumberland in 1673. These included images of sabbats including dancing with the devil, riding on wooden dishes and saying the Lord's Prayer backwards. These accusations appear to have been strongly influenced by the 1634 Pendle case. Raine, J., 'Depositions from York Castle', 191-200.

¹³⁴ L.A., Goulding, R.W. (ed.), Louth Old Corporation Records. Being Extracts from the Accounts, Minutes, and Memoranda of the Warden and Six Assistants of the Town of Louth and Free School of Louth, and Other Ancient Documents Relating to the Town, (Louth, 1891), 54.

being suspected for a witch'.¹³⁵ In 1706 at Leicester there was an order 'that Anne Davis be searched by Mrs Waggott and Mrs Clarke and Mrs Simpson and Mrs Yowell immediately'.¹³⁶ It is not clear whether this latter case was to determine proof of witchcraft, or perhaps pregnancy in the case of a felony, however it demonstrates the use of the body as proof and evidence.

An insight into the process of searching women for witch's marks is provided in the Calendar of State Papers. In June 1634, a group of midwives were chosen to inspect the bodies of four women brought to London from Pendle. The ten midwives appointed received instructions from the King's physician Dr William Harvey and were assisted by seven surgeons. This case was unusual in that the King took a personal interest in establishing the truth in it. However, this underlines the emphasises the concern with differentiating between natural and unnatural marks on the body, highlighting a wider concern over evidence in witchcraft cases.¹³⁷

Several instances of the searching of suspected witches appear in the material for this region. Six women searched the body of Mother Sikes of Bossall, Yorkshire in 1649. Isabell Bollard stated that they found 'upon the side of her seate a Redd Lumpe...being wett and that when they wrung itt wth theire fingrs moisture came out of itt' and 'upon her left side neare her Arme a little Lumpe like a wart and Being puld out it stretcht about half an Inch. The unnatural nature of her body is stressed, 'they never sawe the like upon anie oth weomen'. Mary Sikes denied being a witch, claiming that the lump near her seat was a strain from carrying a bushell, and that the one near her arm was a wart.¹³⁸ Frances Ward of Warmfield, Yorkshire, was one of four women commanded to search the body of Margaret Morton in 1650. She

¹³⁵ Leicestershire Chamberlain's Accounts 1649-50, in Stocks, H. (ed.), Records of the Borough of Leicester, 397-8.

¹³⁶ Le.R.O., QS 5/1/1.

¹³⁷ Cal.St.Pap.D., 1634-5, 98, 129. One of the women, Margaret Johnson, was found to have two unnatural teats, but no marks were found on the other three women. Significantly, Johnson was also the only one to confess. See also Keynes, G., The Life of William Harvey, (Oxford, 1966), 206-16.

¹³⁸ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/2/134-5.

claimed that they found 'two black spotts between her thigh & her body they were like a wart but it was none. And the other was black on both sides an inch broad & blew on the midst'. Frances was hardly an objective searcher since she immediately after this stated that Margaret had been suspected for witchcraft for many years, and that she herself suspected her of killing her two children.¹³⁹ The Clarke family of Great Wigston, Leicestershire, were also searched in 1717:

The Witches before an assembly had been publicly searched and many of the Informants were of the number of the searchers, and the Good Women agreed that they found upon the Old Woman in secret parts two white pieces of flesh plainly resembling teats, only the informants differed in their Evidence and some of them said they were like the Paps of a Cat, others, like the Teats of an Ewe.¹⁴⁰

This demonstrates again the association with the reverse, or inverse, of nature, as the accused are likened to animals. The good women and the evil woman are again strikingly juxtaposed.¹⁴¹ In this way women held a powerful position over the accused.

In an unusual case from Lancashire, the focus on the body as the site of evidence was associated with a male suspect. Thomas Hope, a blacksmith, from Aspull, was accused of witchcraft and practising healing in 1638. He claimed that when he was ten years old he went with his uncle John Hale to Rome and that 'att his being in Rome he was washed in a chamber with water by vertue of which water he hath helped horses, beasts, and sondrie Children'. Later he claimed that 'the spotts which he hath on his Armes and thighes he had then by vertue of that water wherewith hee was washed when he was in Rome'.¹⁴² This case is an important variation on the other cases examined in this study, since this is the only case discovered in these

¹³⁹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/131.

¹⁴⁰ Le.R.O., OS 133.

¹⁴¹ Other women searched included the women accused of bewitching John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire in 1616, L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1., R.Smith, A Brief Declaration, and Ann Hunnam of Scarborough, Yorkshire in 1652, N.Y.R.O., MIC 1348/1307, MIC 1348/1318 in Ashcroft, M.Y.(ed.), Scarborough Records 1641-1660 - A Calendar, 195-9.

¹⁴² L.R.O., QSB 1/202/89.

counties where a man was found to have witch's marks on his body.¹⁴³ Also it is interesting that the power and knowledge of healing seems to have passed between male relations in this case in parallel to the belief that witchcraft typically passed between female relations, as indicated in Chapter Two in particular. The 'water' which Thomas alluded to was presumably some kind of holy water, which also reinforces the links with popular religion, residual Catholicism and magic beliefs.¹⁴⁴

Concern with the witch's body continued after their death in rare cases. Elizabeth Hartshorne, one of the women accused of bewitching John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire in 1616, fell sick and died in prison before her reprieve. It was noted that she was 'seene in the Gaole sitting in a corner with her tonge hanging about two inches owt of hir head, and so swolne that she could not pull it into hir mouth'.¹⁴⁵ This must have been part of the illness that killed her in the gaol. There appears to be some dispute also touching her illness, as the court inquiry asked:

what sraune or strang fitts she had...what search was made of her body after her death by the midwife.../and what she informed and what contradiction of that information was made upon view of Hartshorne's body by Mrs Winkall Mrs Ellis Mrs Heirick Mrs Resine and Mrs Getley, and what,...the midwife thereupon confessed.

Thus we see a variation on the search for the witch's mark as in this case the accused witch is deceased. This description supports Purkiss's notion of a de-eroticising of the body, and a taking away of the power of the person by her nakedness. She was defenceless in the most extreme sense. This is contrary to the radical feminists' thesis of an eroticised search of the female body.

¹⁴³ Two further cases of men from other counties found to have witch's marks are William Walles of Berkshire in 1634, and William Starr of Wiltshire in 1653. Ewen, C.L., Witchcraft and Demonianism, 452, 440.

¹⁴⁴ See Chapter Six for further discussion.

¹⁴⁵ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith,R., A Brief Declaration.

Counter-magic and the Body

As stated previously, the witch's body also provided the possibility of breaking the perceived bewitching through counter-magic such as scratching the witch's face. The father of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, referred to counter-magic in 1616, as each of the suspected women were brought to the boy so that he could scratch them. For instance, Lea went to John in his fit and 'commaunded him to scratch her by the face and albeit there weare manye about her and hee blinde, yett he reatched directlie to her face to scratch her but his fingers doubled soe yt hee could not hurt her'. Scratching above the mouth and drawing blood from the witch's face was believed to be a way of breaking the witch's magic, the fact that John was unable to do so, therefore, indicates the witch's power over her victim.¹⁴⁶ John was also encouraged to strike the other women accused in this case, striking Elizabeth Hartshorne around the head, and hitting Ursula Hawes and Halliday.¹⁴⁷

A slander case from Staffordshire in 1622 described the various informal actions taken by the community against a suspected woman. Humphrey and Elizabeth Clarke of Alington slandered Margaret Bradeley by 'calling her old whoore and old witche, and saying that her children were haggas children', and threatened to kill her and set her house on fire. Humfrey also 'lately drew blood of Margaret Bradeley and hurt her husband so that he died'. James Grococke also victimised Margaret, setting fire to her house, slandering her children and saying that she was 'an old hagg and a witch, and yf shee had her sight shee should bee burned'.¹⁴⁸ This further indicates that people in the community were so afraid of witchcraft that they believed that witches should be burned, even though the death penalty for witchcraft in England was hanging. A further indication of this is evident in the cries of a

¹⁴⁶ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith, R., A Brief Declaration.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ W.S.Q.S.R., QS12, roll 66, no13.

victim of Anne Wilkinson of Yorkshire in 1670, who was said to cry out 'burne her, burne her'.¹⁴⁹

Scratching as a form of counter-magic was evidently well known, and popular. Francis Torratt of Ilkeston, Derbyshire, stated in June 1650 how when the minister Mr Fox's wife fell sick, they suspected Ann Wagg so 'the said Mr.Fox fetcht her downe & his Wife drew blood on her'.¹⁵⁰ In the case of Jane, Joseph and Mary Clarke of Great Wigston, Leicestershire, in 1717 it was stated that:

they had another cure which was infailable when they could come at it; and that was to fetch blood of the Witch and this they continually practiced upon all occasions if they could get an opportunity, but the Witches were so stubborne that they commonly called the Constable to come, with the assistance of a Good number of People to hold them by force while they were blooded. The Olde woman's skin (they deposed) was so tough that they could ne're draw blood by scratching, so the' used great pins and such instruments for the purpose.¹⁵¹

The image of a community united against these objects of fear, and the violence used to defend themselves against the source of evil as they perceived it is striking.

Attempts at counter-magic through other forms of violence are evident, with cases of people attacking as well as trying to scratch the faces of suspected witches. Henry Cockcrofte beat Mary Midgely of Heptonstall, Yorkshire, accused in 1646, after which she confessed herself to be a witch, as well as three other women in the community. In the same case it was deposed that another child had recovered briefly after Elizabeth Crossley had been hit with a candlestick.¹⁵² Elizabeth Lamb, of

¹⁴⁹ Women were subjected to burning in cases of petty treason, but not witchcraft in this period, see R.Campbell, 'Sentence of Death by Burning for Women', 44-59. P.R.O., ASSI 45/9/3/96. The belief that witches should be burned appears to have been widespread. Joan Throckmorton, when faced with the suspect Mother Samuel, cried 'for God's sake take her away and burne her', *Witches of Warboys*, (1593), A4. The notion of burning the source or symbol of evil can also be seen in popular methods of counter-magic, see Chapter Six.

¹⁵⁰ D.R.O., Q/SB 2/170.

¹⁵¹ Le.R.O., OS 133.

¹⁵² P.R.O., ASSI 45/1/5/38.

Reedness, Yorkshire, accused in March 1692, was beaten by her neighbours to stop her from bewitching their goods and to break her magic, and was also brought to the house of Richard Browne to be scratched. Richard apparently said that 'she had drowne blood of him, & if he could draw blood of her, he hoped he should amend'. A vain hope, since although he 'scratcht her till [the] blood came', he died a week later.¹⁵³

In a further example of a vicious attack upon a suspect, Mary Farthing of Scarborough, Yorkshire, complained in June 1659 that:

yesterday being the lords day one Wm Sheffield of this town porter did assault this informant and violently drew her into the house of his mother the wife of James Garnet of this towne and there hee bett her with his fists and called for a knife saying hee would cutt this informants throat and if his mother did not mend hee would pull her heart out of her belly, and then both the mother of the said Wm and his sister gott out of bedd and did beat and scratch this informant and drew blood of her face calling her witch and thrust her out of doores

This particularly violent attack emphasises both the belief in the power of counter-magic in order to break the magic of a witch, and the intense fear of witches and the power that they could hold over their victims. William Sheffield was presented on 8 July of the same year for assault.¹⁵⁴

Counter-magic could be used as evidence in a case, if it resulted in the recovery of the victim. Two women of Skipton, Yorkshire, deposed in September 1650 how when their friend was ill they sent for Ann Hudson who was scratched, after which the victim recovered.¹⁵⁵ When a victim recovered after counter-magic in this way, it was seen as confirmation that the accused was in fact a witch. When Margaret Morton was suspected of bewitching the child of Joan Booth of Warmfield in 1650,

¹⁵³ P.R.O., ASSI 45/16/3/54-6.

¹⁵⁴ N.Y.R.O., MIC 1348/1652; MIC 1348/1656 in Ashcroft, M.Y., Scarborough Records 1641-1660, 254-5.

¹⁵⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/2/81.

she was brought to the house where 'this Informt drew blood of the said Margaret wth a pin and imediately after the child amended'. Thus Joan deposed that she 'was therby induced to beleieve the said Margt had bewitched her said child'.¹⁵⁶

The use of scratching was sometimes requested by suspected persons in desperate attempts to clear their name. Mother Sikes of Bossall, Yorkshire, asked Elizabeth Nicholls to scratch her when she was being searched in 1649. When Elizabeth refused, Mother Sikes 'scratchd her owne Backe and drew blood at everie scratch and made her back verie Bloodie'.¹⁵⁷ Although she claimed that she had an itch, it is more likely that she did this to clear her name as the significance of scratching for a suspected witch could not have been hard to see. Finally, an anonymous complaint about a witch in Lancashire in 1661 alludes to people being taught to 'get blood' from a witch to cure children.¹⁵⁸ This demonstrates that beliefs about counter-magic, as well as about magic, were common knowledge in the community, and were passed between people as public knowledge.

Bewitchment, Possession and the Body

The final area of importance connected with the body to be considered, is the emphasis upon physical elements in descriptions of bewitchment and possession. The manifestation of bodily bewitchment can be seen in endemic trials, but does not seem to have been such a prevalent feature of these trials as it was in the more epidemic trials already focused upon in pamphlet material.

Unnatural elements were stressed in descriptions of bewitchment, which underlined their apparent supernatural cause. Alice Carpenter of Ilkeston, Derbyshire, giving

¹⁵⁶ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/131, other cases of attempts at counter-magic through scratching can be seen in the cases against Jane Kighley, 1649, P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/1/242; Ann Green, 1650, P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/1/34; Hester France, 1651, P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/2/13-14; and Hellen Gray, 1662, P.R.O., ASSI 45/6/1/69.

¹⁵⁷ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/2/134-5.

¹⁵⁸ L.R.O., QSP 214/8.

evidence against Ann Wagg of the same town in 1650, claimed that a year previously her child 'was taken suddainely with a skreeking & soe continued about a weeke & then dyed', and that the child 'was taken with skreeking and foming att the mouth'.¹⁵⁹ Henry Cockcrofte's son and the infant John Shackleton of Heptonstall, Yorkshire were both believed to be bewitched by local witches. It was deposed in 1646 that Henry's young son, although he had previously been in good health 'fell sicke by fitts bendinge backwards', and that John 'was sore taken and held with paynes & convulcons the head & knees being drawne neare together'.¹⁶⁰ The information given against Elizabeth Lively on 25 October 1637 claimed that her victim Catherine Best 'in the intermission betwixt fitt & fitt she was as well in health as ever'.¹⁶¹ As noted peviously, it was a common feature of bewitchment narratives to juxtapose the binary opposites of good health and unnatural illness.

This type of inversion is further shown in the case against Joan Jurdie of Rossington, Yorkshire in 1605. Joan was invited to the labour of Jennet Murfin, but did not come until three or four days later when she refused to eat or drink with the family Jennet subsequently fell sick and her breast milk turned to blood.¹⁶² Descriptions of the bewitchment of the child of John Allen of Scarborough, Yorkshire, in March 1652, also underlined the unnatural elements of the victim's actions. Margery Fish deposed that:

John Allen of Scarbrough hath a woman child of about fower yeares of age that is strangely handled by fitts namely the hands & armes drawne together & contracted the mouth some tymes drawne together & other tymes drawne to a wonderfull wideness the eyes drawne wide open & the tounge lyes out of the mouth & almost bitten of & lookes blacke & the head drawes to one side & the mouth drawne awrye & makes much noyse with trembleing & when itt is out of the fitts itt starts often as if in feare.

¹⁵⁹ D.R.O., Q/SB 2/1213.

¹⁶⁰ P.R.O., ASSI 45/1/5/38.

¹⁶¹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/110.

¹⁶² 'Alledged Witchcraft at Rossington, near Doncaster, 1605', *Gentleman's Magazine*, (1857), vol.1, 593-5. This further indicates tensions between neighbours surrounding social occasions and the vulnerability of childbirth, as noted in Chapter Two. The inversion of the milk turning to blood has already been noted.

Mary Westow backed up this description, claiming that she watched the child all night, during which the child had forty fits in which was described as having the 'tounge hanging out & blood came out off the mouth & the eyes extreamely staring & the head drawne on one side soe as itt could not bee sett streight untill the fitt was over'.¹⁶³

In the case of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, in 1616, his illness was originally thought to be natural until a Doctor Sheppard suggested that perhaps witchcraft was at the root of it. It was reported that:

John Smyth the bewitched childe then of the age of 11. yeares and a half fell sicke in a naturall kynde of sicknes, beinge pained in his head, stomacke and bellie...hee contynued thus about 3. weekes when his sickenes in a manner left him, but he fell then to have most strange fitts in his bellie, and kept his bedd for weaknes and torment...he would crye out most lamentable and fearfullie hee had many of theis fitts every day.¹⁶⁴

There are lengthy descriptions of his fits stressing his loss of senses, and unusual fits and strength, in a similar style to those described in the pamphlet accounts from the same region. Possession manifested itself in a bodily way; the child appeared unable to see, speak, eat, feed himself, or fulfil any of his normal bodily functions. In addition, he struck himself and withstood pain with no feeling during his fits. This can be seen in parallel to Purkiss's notion of the witch as a closed body when others appear unable to hurt her.¹⁶⁵ The use of violence in this case, as in similar cases described in pamphlet accounts, appears to be part of a spectacle for the gratification of the audience:

He hath many tymes in his fitts runn his head against yt beds head and stricken his fists against the posts and front of the bed ynough to break them in peces, and yet nev' felt it, also for our satisfaction he hath in his fitts byn beaten wth a rodd, pincht blacke and blewe, thrast

¹⁶³ N.Y.R.O., MIC 1348/1307 in Ashcroft, M.Y., Scarborough Records 1641-1660, 195-6.

¹⁶⁴ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith, R., A Brief Declaration.

¹⁶⁵ Purkiss, D., 'Desire and its Deformities'.

through yt eare with a pinn, and in other places, and yet never felt anything till after his fitts, and then he would complaine.¹⁶⁶

At times this portrayal of violence towards the boy tended on the abusive, perhaps the reason for his need for attention from the outside world.

Frequently, as in the pamphlet sources examined above, descriptions stressed the loss of control over bodily functions. Jane Chisnall's brother William of Little Bolton, Lancashire, was believed to have been bewitched by the mother of Richard Nuttall after William said that she was a witch in 1634. William fell lame and also lost the power of speech, after which Nuttall's mother was sent for to break the magic. She promised to pray for the boy, after which William recovered but his mother and other sister suffered from lameness and sweating, from which their mother died.¹⁶⁷ Hester France of Hetherfield, Yorkshire, was accused in 1651 of bewitching Elizabeth Johnson so that she was unable to speak or stand.¹⁶⁸ The image of the victim being unable to control their body, or having their body controlled by another, the witch, can also be seen in the accusations against Joane Elderson of Ashton, Lancashire, who was believed to have bewitched to death the children of Elizabeth and Thomas Baxster of Newton, Lancashire in 1636. Neighbours deposed that they had seen the children 'many tymes in traunces for halfe a yeaere together at sev'all tymes'.¹⁶⁹ These cases, in a similar way to the other cases of bewitchment examined in this chapter, emphasise the belief that witches had the power to attack people through their bodies, and that this typically involved a loss of normal bodily functions, and the victim's loss of power over their own bodies. The centrality of the body in witchcraft narratives is thus further demonstrated.

Several depositions indicate the belief that once the witch was confronted, recovery would take place. In the information against Mary Sikes in 1649 Henry Cordingley

¹⁶⁶ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith, R., A Brief Declaration.

¹⁶⁷ L.R.O., QSB 1/139/85.

¹⁶⁸ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/2/13-14.

¹⁶⁹ L.R.O., QSB 1/170/55.

reported that once she had been searched his animals had recovered, and that a horse 'eates his meate verie well', emphasising the belief that bewitchment interfered with the digestive system.¹⁷⁰ Sometimes, however, the confrontation with the suspect appeared to have the opposite to this desired effect. Margaret Wade of Gargrave, Yorkshire, testified in February 1653 that when her daughter appeared to recover Ann Greene had come to the house and given her some prunes after which she relapsed saying 'Ann Greene thought I was to well, & shee hath made mee [as] I was'.¹⁷¹ This indicates both the power of the witch over the victim's body, and the importance of food, which is examined further in the next chapter.

The case of the Clarke family of Great Wigston, Leicestershire in 1717 clearly highlights the importance of the body as the site of physical bewitchment. The illnesses described in these cases emphasise not only that people's understanding of the power of witchcraft was expressed in bodily terms; but also the potent imagery of inversion, unnaturalness and pollution. The belief in bewitchment affecting the internal body was emphasised in this case. It was deposed that 'one of the Bewitched Comitted a great quantity of Gravell, Dirt and Thatch of an House and Stones so big that it required the utmost Strength of Good Women who nursed her and attended her to wrench them out of her mouth and much blood came with them'. This extract emphasises the images of pollution and inversion associated with witchcraft, and clearly juxtaposes the images of the 'Good Women' who care, with the evil witch who harms.

It was further claimed that 'A younge maiden about 20 voided downwards by the help of a midwife and with as much pain as if it had been a Childbirth, a Great number of Stones of a much larger size than the former'. The girl, her mother and the midwife produced these stones as evidence in court. Finally, it was claimed that

¹⁷⁰ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/2/133.

¹⁷¹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/1/36.

'A Woman who was bewitched to death had upon her body many strange wounds...and some looked as if they had been Gnawed by Dogs'.¹⁷² Each of these stories emphasised the unnatural nature of the illnesses; each was the inverse of the norm. This is particularly well expressed in the case of the girl 'giving birth' to stones, which can be seen as the opposite of the natural process of childbirth. Attempting to expel the stones through a kind of 'childbirth' may have also been a symbolic way of attempting to regain control over the victim's body, a physical way of expelling the evil.

The inversion of the norm is strikingly described in cases where victims expressed sharp objects in their fitts, as in the case of the Clarke family above. In the description of the afflictions of Elizabeth Mallory, Yorkshire, on 12 July 1656, it was stated that, 'since the tyme of the nameing of the sd Mary [Waide - the suspect] she hath vomited sev'all strange things as blottinge pap[er] full of pins...a peece of woole & pins in it & likewise two feathers & a sticke'.¹⁷³ In 1674, Mary Moor of Denby, Yorkshire, was said to have vomited various objects, including 'a peice of bonded wyer & a peice of paper with two crooked pinns in it. Elizabeth Brooke of Clayton claimed that she had checked Mary's mouth to see if she was hiding pins there after others suspected that she was not really vomiting them from her stomach'.¹⁷⁴ Clearly, there was some scepticism about the reputation of the 'victim' in this case since many neighbours signed a petition on behalf of the accused 'witches'. However the images of inversion in connection with witchcraft appear to have been generally accepted modes of explaining what was happening.

Finally, James Johnson, an 11 year old servant from Chorne, Yorkshire, claimed that he had been bewitched by Hellen Gray in December 1662. He stated that he had great pains in fits and then 'came from him att sev'all tymes about twenty gravell

¹⁷² Le.R.O., OS 133.

¹⁷³ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/3/132.

¹⁷⁴ P.R.O., ASSI 45/11/1/92.

stones some about the bignes of Cherry stones others as bigg as hazle nutts others as bigg as Nutmeggs...coming from him through his yard'.¹⁷⁵ The imagery of sharpness as an inversion of the softer images associated with motherhood, and thus the good woman, are thus evident in many depositions.

Psychological problems undoubtedly lay at the root of many accusations by children in particular. George Wrightson of Alne, Yorkshire, deposed on 1 April 1670 that Margaret Earnley had fallen into a fit 'cryinge out in a most sad and lamentable manner that Anne Wilkinson was cruelly prickinge and tormentinge her wth pins'. Margaret was probably suffering from psychological problems resulting from the death of her two sisters, perhaps she needed attention as the surviving child. Anne Mattson claimed further that when one of these girls died the previous March 'a little before her death there was taken out of her mouth a blacke ribbon with a crooked pinne at [the] end of it'.¹⁷⁶ The use of household items in order to harm was also another indication of inversion in these narratives.

In several cases, the suspected person was believed to appear before her victims to torment them. As John Willson, from Ellel, Lancashire, deposed in 1629:

hee this Informer fell sicke, And that about Eight or tenne daies after hee began the said sicknes hee did see one Jennett Wilkinson of Ellill aforesaid widowe, or the shape of her the said Jennet, come three severall nights together to him this Informer being in bedd, And that hee then verily thought shee the said Jennet did teare him in peeces.¹⁷⁷

It is pertinent that she was believed to appear at night since this was the time when evil powers were believed to be at their greatest, and also the time when people felt at their most vulnerable when asleep in bed. Ellen Clarke also deposed that her late husband John Clarke felt that Jennett was in his mind, and Anne Harrison claimed

¹⁷⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/6/1/69.

¹⁷⁶ P.R.O., ASSI 45/9/3/94-7.

¹⁷⁷ L.R.O., QSB 1/64/21.

that 'she was soe troubled with the said Jennet Wilkinson that shee could not rest in her bedd shee still thincking the said Jennet was at the bedd syde disquietinge her'.¹⁷⁸

Similarly, in March 1649, Dorothea Rodes of Bossall, Yorkshire, deposed that her daughter, Sara, had suffered at the hands of Mother Sikes. Sara claimed that 'mother Sikes wife came in att a hole att the Bedd feete and upon the Bedd and tooke me By the throate and wold have put her fingers in my mouth and wold needes Choake me'. Dorothea claimed that Sara had been taken several times 'with paines and Benumbedness by six tymes of a day in great extremity the use of her joynts Being taken from her her hart leapeing the use of her Tongue being taken away and her whole body neare unto death'. Anne Lollard, of the same town, also reported that she was troubled with fits, 'the saide Mary Sikes then coming into her minde and memory'.¹⁷⁹ This further indicates the fear which witchcraft suspicions could cause in the community. Finally, Ann Green of Gargrave, Yorkshire, accused in February 1653, was believed to have appeared before her victims at night with other apparitions or dogs.¹⁸⁰ These cases emphasise the power that witches were felt to have over their victim's bodies, and the fear that witches could attack anywhere, even breaching the boundaries of people's houses. They clearly demonstrate that witchcraft was believed to attack the mind as well as the body.

In an interesting parallel to the emphasis on the bewitched victim's body, two people claimed that their bodies were affected when they practised healing. Mary Shawe of Croft, Lancashire, was accused of healing in 1630, when it was claimed that:

shee Came into the said Hadfeilds howse and that there was a pigge fell downe very sicke. And thereupon she went into a Chamber there and was very sicke and the Nicholas Hadfeild caused a possett to be made for her, but tell she was amended shee could not eate yt, but after shee Came out of the Chamber shee said that under god and her the pigg was amended.

¹⁷⁸ L.R.O., QSB 1/64/22.

¹⁷⁹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/2/129.

¹⁸⁰ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/1/31-9.

She was believed to be pregnant which may have made her sick.¹⁸¹ Likewise Henerie Baggilie of Oldham, Lancashire, was accused of healing in 1634 and confessed that 'duringe all the tyme of his blessinge, hee this examinat for all such tyme hath alwaies beene suddenlie taken with sicknes...and that alwaies in the same manner that the man or beaste that hee blessed was trobled withall'.¹⁸² This sickness could have been a belief that the magic healing was working, or may have been a device used by people who carried out healing to demonstrate to the authorities that they did not carry out the healing fraudulently for monetary gain. Healers frequently argued that they could not help their powers, and that they did not receive any payment for their services.¹⁸³

The importance of the body in witchcraft narratives has, therefore, been demonstrated in relation to non-pamphlet sources, although the emphasis upon sexual elements appears to be lacking in these cases. Non-pamphlet sources, it has been demonstrated, are particularly useful in examining features such as the searching of the witch's body for evidence, and attempts at counter-magic against the witch. These elements are not as evident in pamphlet accounts, perhaps due to the emphasis upon the victims in them. Thus the consideration of non-pamphlet evidence is useful to provide a fuller indication of the importance of the body.

Conclusion

This chapter has assessed the question of the importance of sexuality and the body in witchcraft narratives of various types. As stated in the introduction, the aim of this chapter was to ascertain the validity of the emphasis upon sexual elements of witchcraft accusations in many feminist texts. A consideration of the sources indicates that while the Essex pamphlets, upon which much feminist analysis has

¹⁸¹ L.R.O., QSB 1/78/49.

¹⁸² L.R.O., QSB 1/139/81.

¹⁸³ See Chapter Six for further discussion.

been based, notably Hester's, do indeed appear to support the emphasis on sexual elements, the evidence from the Midlands and the North does not. Although the material from the Midlands and the North of England does not discuss a connection between deviant sexuality and witchcraft in any sustained way, however, it does so implicitly through the theories of witch's marks underlining the practice of searching suspected witches.

The theme of sexuality is generally supported more strongly in pamphlet material, probably because pamphlets tended to focus upon more sensational trials, and also gave more detail about cases. Furthermore, pamphlets involved discussion almost exclusively of accused women; in the Essex pamphlets, for instance, all of those mentioned were female. Thus, a heavier emphasis on sexual elements might be expected. The 1645 pamphlet *A true and exact Relation* in particular can be seen as exceptional in its emphasis on sexual elements and can, therefore, be regarded as an untypical case study to base assertions upon. Non-pamphlet evidence frequently provides little background to a case, therefore discussions of sexual misconduct are rarer. However, as argued previously, this does not indicate that feminist theories are redundant. Elements of sexuality are certainly worthy of consideration, but should be placed in a wider context. Furthermore, the emphasis on sexuality leads to a consideration of the importance of the body in witchcraft narratives, which, it has been demonstrated, played a fundamental role.

Although the importance of the body has been underlined throughout this examination of the evidence, there are differences between the emphasis placed on the body in the different types of evidence. The main difference in emphasis between the pamphlet and non-pamphlet evidence is that the pamphlets tend to focus more strongly upon the bodily afflictions of the possessed victim, whereas the trial records refer more to the processes of dealing with the suspected witch, through searches and counter-magic. It has been demonstrated throughout this chapter that

the witch's body was important, both as the site of searches for evidence, and as the focus of attempts at counter-magic. Searches of the witch's body disempowered the individual, and made her body public property. The unusual legal, and social, powers which these searches provided other women has also been indicated; the processes of searching becoming almost a science of establishing the natural from the abnormal, and thus suspicious. The focus upon reputation in witchcraft cases has again been established, as in the previous chapter, in cases where the good reputation of the searchers was juxtaposed with the evil reputation of the accused. The fear of being searched is also evident in several cases, most notably that of Alice Gooderige in 1596. Ultimately, searching emphasises the concern contemporaries felt over establishing proof in this ostensibly invisible crime, and underlines the focus upon the body as a means of rationalising what was feared and not understood.

The evidence of counter-magic, particularly the use of scratching, has also been explored. The prevalence of this feature highlights that this form of counter-magic was evidently widely known and popularly practised, despite its association with popular magic and superstition which prevented some, such as Edward Fairfax, from resorting to it. It should also be emphasised again that the cases of scratching which are provided in these sources undoubtedly represent a small indication of their widespread use, since those examples we have consist of failed attempts or additional evidence presented in hindsight. Unquestionably, there were many other cases which did not lead to formal accusation because the outcome of the counter-magic was deemed satisfactory.

Evidence of the widespread use of scratching and open violence against suspects, particularly in non-pamphlet sources, also indicates the very real fear and anger which these individuals aroused in the community. Counter-magic could thus be understood as a means of regaining control in the face of supernatural power. The fact that the processes of searching and scratching are much more evident in non-

pamphlet material emphasises the importance of considering non-pamphlet as well as pamphlet evidence to gain a wider picture of witchcraft beliefs as they were expressed at a community level.

Finally, the importance of the body to bewitchment and possession narratives has been explored. In both pamphlet and non-pamphlet evidence bewitchment was explained in ways which focused upon the physical. Again, this may have been an attempt to rationalise and understand this invisible crime. It has been demonstrated, furthermore, that these narratives focused upon the unnatural and bizarre features exhibited, thus emphasising to the reader, in pamphlet cases, both the supernatural cause of the afflictions, and thus the evil of witchcraft. Since emphasis was focused much more strongly upon bewitchment and the body in pamphlet accounts than aspects surrounding the body of the witch, this supports Gibson's assertion that witchcraft pamphlets increasingly focused upon the victim, rather than the witch, from the 1590s onwards.

Images which emphasise the victim's lack of control over their body caused by witchcraft, and the apparent spectacle formed by afflicted children and young people demonstrating their fits, leads us to issues of power, which are further discussed in Chapter Five. That the narratives of bewitched children also predominate emphasises the double evil of the woman who harms children. This directs us to recent gender theories focusing upon the witch as an evil mother, which is the subject of the next chapter. The three features associating witchcraft with the site of the body emphasise both the importance of a gender-centred study of the witch trials, and the importance of the development of a history of the body for the wider understanding of the witch trial phenomenon. The importance of examining previously unresearched geographical areas to compare with the example of Essex has also been further established.

Chapter Four - The Evil Mother

Introduction

The image of the witch as an evil 'mother' can be seen in direct opposition to the 'ideal' of early modern womanhood. Rather than being modest, obedient and nurturing, the witch was sexually insatiable, insubordinate and killed children, often using food in her evil practices. As Jackson illustrates in her analysis of witchcraft confessions in Suffolk, confessions involved women 'judging themselves in their role as neighbours, wives and mothers,' and expressing their insecurities about these roles. She states that:

The key to understanding the witch trials lies in their gender-specificity. The details of the cases refer directly to traditionally defined feminine space - the home, the kitchen, the sickroom, the nursery; to culturally defined female tasks or occupations and their direct opposites - feeding (poisoning), child-rearing (infanticide), healing (harming), birth (death).¹

This situates witchcraft accusations within a female sphere. The dual image of womanhood is very revealing, as by concentrating on what was perceived as 'abnormal' behaviour, theories of the 'ideal' were reinforced. These ideas link very closely to the issues surrounding sexuality and the body. Witchcraft conjured up images of all that was paranormal and against the ideal. For instance, the 1634 play *The Late Lancashire Witches* gives an image of a community disrupted to such an extent that 'the wife the husband check and chide'.²

Aside from Jackson, the major theorists on this subject have come from a literary criticism background, and focus particularly upon plays and pamphlets.³ It is

¹ Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 63-44, 70-1, 80; See also Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 410; Purkiss, D., 'Desire and Its Deformities', 115; Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*, 93; Matalene, C., 'Women as Witches', 584.

² Heywood, T. & Broome, R., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (1634), C8.

³ Notably Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*; Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*; and Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*. Willis in particular places the emphasis of her discussion of witchcraft beliefs on 'malevolent

necessary, therefore, to investigate the effectiveness of these theories from a historian's viewpoint, particularly in relation to non-pamphlet evidence neglected by these writers. The aims of this chapter are therefore; firstly, to assess the validity of evil mother theories in relation to the material from the Midlands and the North of England, which has not previously been researched for evidence of these factors; and secondly, to assess them in relation to non-pamphlet evidence, typically neglected by feminist writers. This is not to criticise these writers who have necessarily developed theories using more accessible sources. However, it is necessary from a historian's perspective, to widen the debate to include the more endemic trials which may not support the theories as strongly as pamphlet sources since, as stated previously, pamphlet material tends to focus upon the more sensational aspects of trials, and almost exclusively upon women.

This chapter will focus on four main areas pertinent to the notion of the witch as evil mother. It should be noted that the term evil mother is used to denote behaviour which was the opposite to that of the ideal woman; this includes wifely, and housewifely, as well as motherly, behaviour. Firstly, feminists have argued that the suckling of familiars supports the notion of the witch as a malevolent mother figure, or anti-mother, nurturing demons in a direct inversion, or perversion, of the good woman nourishing her children.⁴ Spirits, imps or demon familiars, were thought to suckle on the witch in return for the witch having given her soul to the Devil, thus their presence was proof of a demonic pact which became a felony in the 1604 Witchcraft Act. This suckling on the witch, often on sexual parts of the body or in places where the skin was thinnest such as behind the ear, can be seen as the complete opposite of the norm in a parody of acceptable sexual or motherly nurturing practices. The demon familiars represented all that was inversion -

nurture' and 'maternal power'. Purkiss attempts a post-modernist approach, which is criticised for not delineating between fact and fiction by Evans, J., *In Defence of History*, (London, 1997), 98-101, 240-3.

⁴ F.E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 175.

renouncing God for the Devil, women harming instead of caring, and the base sexuality of suckling demon spirits. This belief in witches rewarding and feeding their familiars can be seen in plays of the time. Mawd in Heywood and Broome's play *The Late Lancashire Witches* calls her familiar saying 'come my puckling lake thy teat, your travels have deserv'd your meat'.⁵

Secondly, the notion that witches poisoned rather than nourished others through food will be considered. There were explicit accusations of poisoning which were linked to witchcraft. As Jackson states, the two were similar crimes in that they were 'secret crimes' and thus were 'likely to be committed in private or behind closed doors'.⁶ In 1584, Scot noted that women were 'the first inventors, and the greatest practisers of poisoning'.⁷ These crimes were, therefore, potentially more dangerous; because as they could not be seen, they could not be controlled by the community. Purkiss further indicates how poisoning involved the witch breaching the boundary of the body through food.⁸ The belief in witches gaining power over people by using food was common across Europe; a pamphlet detailing a case of two women bewitched in Yorkshire linked the case to another in Germany where a nine year old girl was bewitched by food from a woman begging at her door. At her execution the suspected woman said that she could not cure the girl because she had 'swallowed down the Witchcraft'.⁹

Women who poisoned, or used witchcraft, against their victims literally became the enemy from within, attacking the digestion and functions of the body, as demonstrated in Chapter Three. These women not only transgressed the boundaries

⁵ Heywood, T. & Broome, R., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (1634), C8.

⁶ Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 67; Hester, M., *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*, 127; F.E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, 173; Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 15, 33-4, 52-9, 76-7, 88-9, 122-3.

⁷ Scot, R., *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, (1584), 67.

⁸ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 423; Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*, 107-9; see also Roper, L., 'Witchcraft and Fantasy', 28.

⁹ Heers, H., *The Most True and Wonderfull Narration of Two Women Bewitched in Yorkshire*, (1658), 5, 7.

of the body, but stepped over notions of trust too. This notion of poisoning, pollution and food can be seen in popular literature and plays. Heywood and Broome's play describes a wedding feast destroyed by witchcraft, one character exclaiming 'such a chance in a kitchin was never heard of, all the meat is flowne out o' the chimney top I thinke, and nothing instead of it, but Snakes, Batts, Frogs, Beetles, Hornets, and Humble-bees'. This gives a clear picture of the intrusion of witchcraft, and the inversion and pollution caused.¹⁰

Thirdly, accused women were seen as a danger to others' households. Witches were seen as invading the households of good women, spoiling their goods and food, and harming their children.¹¹ Thus the witch was not only an evil mother but also the enemy of the good housewife. Accusations of witchcraft seem to have provided an explanation for the failure of certain household activities, particularly brewing, baking and dairy production. These household tasks were specifically female, and skill in them was essential for the good housewife. Cheese, bread and beer were essential components of the early modern diet, thus failure in these tasks would mean that the woman could not nourish her family adequately. As Thomas Tusser noted in his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, the good housewife was successful at dairying and providing for her family. One who was unskilful was an 'ill housewife'.¹² Excess produce could also be sold to bring in extra money to the household, so these processes were fundamentally important. This indicates why witchcraft was thought to pose such a threat to these processes in particular. The destruction of these processes not only threatened the livelihood of the family, but also shamed the woman as a bad housewife who could not provide for her family.¹³

¹⁰ Heywood, T. & Broome, R., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (1634), E8.

¹¹ Significantly, the boundaries of the house were symbolic of female reputation. Witches breached these boundaries to cause pollution. Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*, 94-8.

¹² Quoted in Sim, A., *The Tudor Housewife*, 68-9. See also O'Faolain, J. & Martines, L. (eds.), *Not in God's Image*, 253-4; Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 67-8; Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 71.

¹³ Plowden, A., *Tudor Women*, 165-6; Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*, 97. Willis notes that witchcraft was perceived to attack elements associated with maternity - butter, milk and cows for instance, Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 39, 48, 52.

Furthermore, dairying in particular was an unpredictable process, which was thus seen as being more vulnerable to supernatural forces.¹⁴ This was perhaps why witchcraft was called upon as an explanation for failure.

Witches were also connected with uncleanliness, pollution and filth, the opposite to the good woman's connections with cleanliness and modesty. It was important for early modern women to keep themselves and their homes as clean as possible. The importance of cleanliness is indicated by household manuals, which provided recipes and advice for this purpose.¹⁵ Many of the images of pollution and filth associated with witchcraft centred upon the household.¹⁶ Significantly, Dolan argues that in all early modern representations of domestic crime, the danger was perceived to lie in the familiar, rather than the strange. Arguing that witchcraft was understood as a form of domestic crime, she notes how witches were portrayed on the margins of households, inverting housewifely tasks and invading the home through the exchange of goods.¹⁷

Fourthly, as well as causing disruption to household tasks, witches were seen as a particular danger to people's children, as has been seen in the discussion of the bodily effects of the bewitchment of children in the previous chapter. Thus, it has been argued, the witch can also be seen as an 'anti-mother'.¹⁸ Roper, for instance, has indicated how intra-gender tensions leading to witchcraft accusations of witchcraft in Germany focused on the issue of maternity.¹⁹ As with the failure of

¹⁴ Crawford, P., Women and Religion in England 1500-1720, (London, 1993), 100; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 609-10, 648-9.

¹⁵ Sim, A., The Tudor Housewife, 50.

¹⁶ As Purkiss notes, domestic work emphasised order, while witchcraft inferred disorder and disruption, Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 414. An instance of this is the accusation of Mistress Moulsho of Thrapston, who blamed her dirty linen on the witchcraft of Hellen Jenkenson, The Witches of Northamptonshire, (1612), D1-2.

¹⁷ F.E. Dolan, Dangerous Familiars, 4, 174-5, 181, 186-7, 235-6.

¹⁸ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 417; Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, 107-10.

¹⁹ Roper, L., 'Witchcraft and Fantasy', 21; Roper, L., Oedipus and the Devil. Willis sees an increasing preoccupation with issues of maternity in early modern England, with rising prosecutions for infanticide and debates over the benefits, or otherwise, of wet-nurses, Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture.

household activities, witchcraft could be used as an explanation for failure in child rearing.²⁰ Cases frequently gave the image of the witch invading the household to harm the children; Purkiss in particular stresses the house as a symbolic boundary, which the witch transgresses and pollutes.²¹ The images presented in continental demonology, such as the *Malleus Maleficarum*, of the extreme danger posed by witches to children was echoed in some English literature influenced by the text.²² The author of *Great News from the West of England* defined witches as 'such Persons, who, by a League and Confederacy with the Devil, do get him to enter, possess and torment the Bodies of Children, and others'.²³ Shadwell's 1681 play includes a scene where witches meet with the devil, one reporting how 'to a Mothers Bed I softly crept, And while th'unchristen'd Brat yet slept, I suckt the breath and blood of that, And stole anothers flesh and fat'. The same character boasted of slaying children in their mother's wombs. The witches in this play, and in various cases noted below, intruded into households via the chimney.²⁴ Plot accepted the image of the danger posed to children by 'Midwife-Witches' in particular, since 'the Devils as they are best pleased with the sacrifices of young Children'.²⁵ And in a final example of a pamphlet strongly influenced by continental perceptions of the danger witches posed to children, a 1673 pamphlet told of witches killing children, cutting them into pieces and putting them in a kettle to boil.²⁶

65-71. These anxieties about maternity were bound up with concerns about female power, Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 77.

²⁰ Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 79, 282-3. Women were the principal child carers, thus posing a danger to children was the inversion of the acceptable. Sharpe notes that witchcraft pamphlets were typified by accounts of suffering children, Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 175-8.

²¹ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 415.

²² It should be stressed again that the *Malleus Maleficarum* is not a typical example of demonology. S. Clark argues that it was exceptional in its excessively misogynistic treatment of women. However, it is referred to here since it is the text predominantly referred to by feminist writers.

²³ *Great News from the West of England*, (1689), title page.

²⁴ Shadwell, T., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (1681), 25, also 40-1, 20.

²⁵ Plot, R., *The Natural History of Stafford-shire*, (1686), 13. See Chapter One for discussion of the myth of the midwife-witch. Scot noted these beliefs in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, (1584), 23; and Summers expounded them again early this century, Summers, M., *The History of Witchcraft and Demonology*, (New Jersey, 1992), 160.

²⁶ *A Pleasant Treatise of Witches, &c.*, (1673).

Witches could harm not only by cursing, but also by displaying too much interest or concern in other's affairs. Suspected women were even seen as displaying dubious behaviour when they appeared over-friendly. An instance of this can be seen in a 1634 play when a witch meets a young boy in a parody of the 1634 Pendle witchcraft case. When the boy asks what the witch wants from him she replies 'to hugge thee, stroke thee, and embrace thee thus, And teach thee twentie thousand prety things'.²⁷ This behaviour may have been seen as immodest, and thus unacceptable. Thus accused witches, through exhibiting behaviour opposite to the ideal for women, were to a certain extent de-feminized as they were stripped of all feminine qualities.²⁸

The Essex context

Nurturing Familiars

The keeping of familiars not only transgressed notions of normal sexual practices, as explored in the previous chapter, but also gave weight to the image of these women as the anti-mother, or opposite to the ideal woman. Confessions and accusations of keeping familiars frequently emphasised the naming, feeding and care of them, and that they were shared between women in some cases. These stories give the impression of lonely women and their desire for companionship.

²⁷ Heywood, T. & Broome, R., The Late Lancashire Witches, (1634), E.

²⁸ Interestingly, although it might be inferred from this that accounts of women murdering own children would reflect this point, they do not appear to. Although female child-murderers were referred to in damning terms such as 'unnaturall beasts in womens shapes' and 'monstrous femall (for no woman)', and the titles of murder pamphlets suggest an unsympathetic portrayal of these women, the actual text is more sympathetic than might be expected, particularly when women killed their own children. Furthermore, the portrayal was more sympathetic than the portrayal of witches. It appears that witches were perceived as women who killed other people's children, and who had long-standing bad reputations in the community. Women guilty of infanticide, however, were presented as being of good reputation prior to the incident. Examples include: Sundry strange and inhumaine Murthers lately committed, (1591); Natures Cruell Step-Dames: Or Matchless Monsters of the Female Sex, (1637); Blood for Blood, or, Justice Executed for Innocent Blood-Shed, (1670); A True and Perfect Account of the Proceedings at the General Sessions of the Peace, holden for London and Middlesex, (1674); and Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants, (1692). It is not clear why women who killed other people's children, such as Annis Dell of Hatfield, were not accused of witchcraft, thus further research on this issue is necessary. The case against Annis Dell is presented in two pamphlets: The Most Horrible Murder of a young Boy of three veres of age, (1606), and The Most Cruell and bloody murther, (1606).

Accused women spoke of feeding their familiars with essential food and drink items. Elizabeth Francis, Alice Hunt, Elizabeth Bennett, Cicely and Henry Sellis, Margery Sammon and Joan Cunny all claimed to have fed their spirits milk, often from a specific or special bowl or spoon. Elizabeth Francis, Ursula Kemp, Margaret Grevell and Alice Manfield, Agnes Herd, Joan Cunny and Francis Milles fed their familiars bread. Margaret Grevell, Alice Manfield, Agnes Herd and Francis Milles gave them beer to drink. Other items fed to the spirits included cake, wheat, barley, oats and water. The feeding of these items by the women was clearly a crucial element of witchcraft belief portraying the witches in a perverse, but still very feminine, role. No one appears to have questioned the belief that although the spirits were thought to have the power to change shape and harm people, they were yet unable to find basic sustenance without the aid of a woman. This also emphasises the notion of the relationship between the witch and familiar as a bargain, the witch gives comfort in return for power.

The descriptions of where the familiars stayed or hid were also very precise, ranging from a leather or wicker bottle (Ellen Smith) to an earthen pot (Ursula Kemp and Alice Hunt). A common feature of these stories was that the spirits were given the best comfort the women could have managed. Ellen Smith kept one of her spirits in a wool pack, Alice Hunt kept hers in black and white wool by her bedside, Elizabeth Bennett's spirits stayed in a pot of wool, Cicely and Henry Sellis kept theirs on a fleece of wool, and Margaret Grevell deposed that the four spirits she shared with Alice Manfield were kept in a box of wool by Alice's bed. The frequent descriptions of familiars being kept close to the bed-side and in great comfort reinforces the image of the witch as the malevolent mother caring for demons instead of children.

The centre of witchcraft belief was firmly located within the female sphere of the household. Elizabeth Bennett's spirits came to her when she was undertaking a variety of household tasks; coming from the mill, sifting meal, kneading bread and

making a fire in her oven. The belief that familiars were kept within the household was emphasised by more learned sources too. A pamphlet of 1645 giving notes to aid the discovery of witches suggested that a search of the suspected woman's house should be carried out for charms and 'pots or places where their spirits may be kept, the smell of which place will stink detestably'.²⁹ The imagery of pollution associated with witches is evident here.

The familiars were described as taking the form of a variety of animals including cats, dogs, toads, as well as a lamb and a lion. These were all named individually by their keepers. Elizabeth Francis kept a spirit called Satan, Ellen Smith named hers Great Dick, Little Dick and Willet, Ursula Kemp kept Titty, Jack, Piggin and Tiffin, Elizabeth Bennett kept Suckin and Lierd, Cicely and Henry Sellis kept Hercules and John (Jack), Margaret Grevell and Alice Manfield shared Robin, Jack, William and Puppet (Mommet), and Joan Cunny had Jack and Jill. These depositions give the impression of very lonely women in many cases, women such as Joan Cunny claimed that the spirits spoke to them in their own language.

In *A true and exact Relation* (1645), all of the women accused were said to have familiars, and the discovery of these was focused upon strongly by the author. Elizabeth Clarke told Matthew Hopkins and John Stearne, who had been appointed to watch her, that 'if they would stay and do the said *Elizabeth* no hurt, shee would call one of her white Impes, and play with it in her lap'. When they asked her if she was not afraid of her familiars she exclaimed 'What doe yee thinke I am afraid of my children?', and later stated that 'shee had one Impe for which shee would fight up to the knees in bloud, before she would lose it'.³⁰

²⁹ *The Lawes Against Witches*, (1645), 5.

³⁰ *A true and exact Relation*, (1645), 2-3. See also Stearne, J., *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft*, (1648), 15. Stearne noted the case of Elizabeth Hubbard of Stowmarket, Suffolk, who claimed that 'three things came to her in the likenesse of Children', 26.

It is apparent from these depositions that there was a consensus of popular belief about how familiars were treated by witches, as there are great similarities in the narratives concerning the keeping and feeding of them in particular. It is interesting how the familiars are described as sometimes quite unattractive creatures, yet they were given pet names and treated very well. This underlines the images of inversion of the witch as an evil mother, caring for and nurturing demon familiars in the place of natural children.³¹

Food and Poison

There was a preoccupation with food in the accusations and confessions in the Essex pamphlets, which surrounded accusations of feeding demon familiars, disputes over food, and accusations of poisoning. Disputes over food, like other neighbourly disputes, could lead to accusations of witchcraft. In 1566 Joan Waterhouse was accused of sending her mother's spirit Satan to plague Agnes Brown after she had refused to give her bread and cheese. Agnes claimed that the spirit came many times to her asking for butter, and on one occasion went into the milkhouse and made 'flap butter' and also printed the cheese with the butter moulder. The making of flap butter, which was worthless, and the imprinting the cheese with the butter mark indicates the images of inversion common in accusations of witchcraft.³² In 1582, Joan Pechey was believed to have bewitched Johnson the Collector of the Poor after she expressed her anger over the quality of the bread he had given her, and Alice Newman was suspected after her neighbour William Hook overheard her husband's constant complaints about the meat which she gave him. These complaints highlight the concerns with being a good housewife.

³¹ See Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, 135-6.

³² The location of this incident in the dairy is significant. The dairy was a woman's responsibility and had to be kept spotlessly clean to avoid contamination, which would damage the produce. The entrance of the spirit here indicates the presence of uncleanness in the dairy. Sim, A., The Tudor Housewife, 46, 69,

Preoccupations with food are most evident in cases where poisoning was explicitly linked with witchcraft. In 1579, Elizabeth Francis claimed that Elizabeth Lord had 'brought drinke in a crewse, and gave it to one John Fraunces servaunte to goodman Some of the same parishe, shortly after the taking of whiche drinke he sickened and died' and that the same woman had 'bewitched one Jone Robertes, servaunte to old Higham, in a peece of Apple cake whiche she gave her, upon the eatyng whereof she presently sickened, and not long after died'.³³ Mother Staunton was also suspected in 1579, when she went to Thomas Pratt of Brook Walden's house with some grains, and after he gave them to his chickens all but one died.

In 1645 Elizabeth Otley of Wivenhoe claimed that Alice Dixon came to her house and 'gave her child an apple, and kissed it, And within a short time after the said child sickened and died'. Likewise, Annabell Durrant claimed that when walking with her child, 'Mary Johnson took occasion of her own accord to commend the said Child, saying, it was a pretty child; and stroaked it upon the face, and gave it a peece of bread and butter...within half a quarter of an houre after, her said child shricked and cried out it was lame'. And Henry Cornwall fell ill for twelve weeks after eating an apple given to him by Margaret Moone. His wife 'knowing the said *Margaret Moone* to be a woman of very bad fame and suspected for a witch, and had formerly been questioned at an Assise for the same, she flung away the aples'.³⁴ The use of food in accusations is revealing as the poisoning of people, particularly children, is in direct contrast to the traditional role of the mother nourishing others. Over-concern or over-friendliness also appears to have been perceived as equally suspicious behaviour from suspected women as bad behaviour. This could be

³³ A Detection of damnable driftes, (1579), A4-5. Rosen highlighted a form of unintentional poisoning which some argue may have played a role in the early modern witch trials; pointing out that bread can only be made from wheat or rye, or a mixture of the two, and that rye is subject to a blight which can lead to ergot poisoning, the symptoms of which include hallucination. As she states: 'it is possible that ergot poisoning might sometimes have been a factor in the wilder stories of witches and their spirits', Rosen, B., Witchcraft, 145.

³⁴ A true and exact Relation, (1645), 17, 20, 22.

because it was perceived as immodest behaviour to intrude into the personal lives of others; immodesty being very much against the ideal of womanly behaviour.

Endangered Households

Witches were believed to transgress the boundaries of the house as well as boundaries of the body. Witches' familiars were believed able to gain access to people's households to carry out acts of maleficia for their mistresses. In 1645 Alice Dixon accused Mary Johnson of keeping an imp in her pocket, which she carried to Elizabeth Otley's house and let it in through a hole in the door to harm her child.³⁵

A number of people claimed that witchcraft had caused the pollution of their household goods and activities, particularly those connected with food and drink.³⁶ Elizabeth Francis, accused in 1566, asked her familiar to waste Andrew Byles' 'goods' after he refused to marry her, and Mother Waterhouse sent the same familiar to destroy her neighbour and his goods as well as killing three of Father Kersey's hogs, drowning Widow Gooday's cow and killing a neighbour's three geese.³⁷ In 1589, Joan Cunny sent her spirits to knock down a stack of logs belonging to John Glascock of Stisted, and when her familiars were unable to harm William Unglee, she requested them to hurt his servant Barnaby Griffin instead. By harming a servant Joan perhaps felt that she was still mounting an attack upon William's property. The disputes between Richard Ross and Cicely and Henry Sellis in 1582 led to the death of his horses, illness of his other animals and the burning of his corn, Alice Hunt bewitched six beasts belonging to Hayward of Frowick, and Agnes Herd was believed to have bewitched the pigs of Andrew and Anne West. This pollution and damage to the property of others underlines the danger witches were felt to pose to

³⁵ Paracelsus noted that witchcraft penetrated all things, and could not be held out by locks and doors, Paracelsus, *The Archidoxes of Magic*, (1656), 83.

³⁶ See Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers' for similar cases in Suffolk.

³⁷ Hester argues that to 'waste' Andrew's 'goods' was a reference to causing impotence, which fits in with the feminist emphasis on sexuality as explored in the previous chapter, Hester, M., *Lewd Women and Wicked Witches*, 167. However, as in Gibson's work, the literal meaning of the term is the preferred reading here. Gibson, M.H., *Taken as Read?*

their neighbours' households. Significantly, by harming the animals and woodstacks, witches were essentially mounting an attack upon the boundaries of the household.

The bewitching and death of people's animals and livestock was expressed in terms which emphasised the paranormal aspects, in a similar way to the descriptions of bewitched people examined in the previous chapter.³⁸ In 1579 Mother Staunton was thought to have bewitched John Cornell's cattle so that they yielded blood instead of milk, Elizabeth Bennett was accused of bewitching William Byatt's cow so that it was unable to eat in 1582, and Elizabeth Eustace was believed to have bewitched Robert Sannever's and Felice Okey's cattle so that they gave blood instead of milk.³⁹ Robert Sannever also claimed that his hogs 'did skippe and leape aboute the yarde in a straunge sorte'.⁴⁰ The inversion associated with witchcraft is most apparent here. The turning of milk to blood was also a gendered taboo since that lactation cannot take place at the same time as menstruation.

Witches were believed to cause particular disruption in the carrying out of household tasks. In 1566, Mother Waterhouse admitted destroying brewing, and confessed that 'beyng denyed butter of an other she caused her to lose the curdes ii or iii dayes after'.⁴¹ In John Carter's information against Margaret Grevell in 1582, he claimed

³⁸ Interestingly, cases of maiming animals which were unconnected to accusations of witchcraft appear to have been rare, see Sharpe, J.A., *Crime in Seventeenth-Century England*, 161.

³⁹ As noted in the previous chapter, the expression of blood instead of milk was a symbol of inversion.

⁴⁰ *A true and just Recorde*, (1582), C7. Hickey has put forward the interesting theory that unusual illnesses or deaths of livestock can be directly attributed to toxic elements in plants ingested by the animals. The ingestion of various plants could explain symptoms such as lameness, wasting diseases, sudden illnesses and miscarriages. Livestock was very important for people, so the sudden illnesses of animals may have made an explanation of witchcraft more likely. Bloody milk, she argues, could be attributed to the animal having some form of mastitis or a ruptured blood vessel in the udder. Hickey, S., 'Fatal Feeds?: Plants, Livestock Losses and Witchcraft Accusations in Tudor and Stuart Britain', *Folklore*, (1990), vol.101, pt.2, 131-42. See also Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 116; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 84-9.

⁴¹ *The examination and confession*, (1566).

that she came to his house asking for 'God's good' which was denied.⁴² This led to problems with household activities including brewing and seething milk which 'stancke and was bytter'. Carter's wife was unable to make butter so:

hee caused his wife to powre the saide creame into a kettle, and to set it upon the fire, the whiche was done: And making a great fire under it, this examine sayeth they coulde not make it to seeth over: Then this Examine sayeth, that hee seeing it woulde not doe, hee sayeth hee tooke the kettell off the fire, and powred one halfe thereof into the fire, and the other halfe hee let stande in the kettle, the whiche he sayeth stancke in such exceeding sorte, as they coulde not abyde in the house.⁴³

Thus in this case the pollution was such that the family were driven from the house. Witchcraft appears to have been an explanation for inanimate, as well as animate, objects behaving in an unnatural fashion, as the symbolism of the beliefs surrounding witchcraft in this period connected it to the opposite of naturalness, and thus Godliness. The unnatural smell which is stressed twice also links these problems with pollution. Interestingly Margaret Grevell in her denial of witchcraft claimed that 'she her selfe hath lost severall bruings, and bakings of bread, and also swine, but she did never complaine thereof'.⁴⁴

Similarly, in 1582, Bennet Lane claimed to have suffered after she requested back a dish and twopence which she had lent to Agnes Herd. After this she was unable to spin until she 'tooke her spindle and put it into the fire, & made it red hot, & then cooled it [a]gaine and went to worke, and then it wrought as well as ever it did at any time before'. The application of something red hot to something polluted or bewitched was a popular household remedy or method of counter magic, Bennet Lane also claimed to have been unable to fleet her milk bowl or seethe her milk which 'would quail, burn by, and stink' until she placed a red hot horseshoe into her

⁴² Rosen argues that this was probably a request for some yeast, which seems likely considering what was seen to happen to the brewing when this was denied, however she also notes other possible meanings such as property belonging to no-one or to God and the church. Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, 142.

⁴³ *A true and just Recorde*, (1582), E3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, E5.

milk which solved the problem.⁴⁵ Godlife Osborne also testified against Agnes Herd in 1582 claiming that she was unable to brew after asking Agnes for three pence which she owed her for a peck of apples, which Agnes said that she could not pay until the wool man came. After this Godlife was unable to brew until she had placed a red hot iron into her mash vat, and she deposed that 'it stancke in suche sorte, as they were compelled to put the same in the swill tubbe'.⁴⁶ Purkiss argues that through this emphasis on disruption of household activities and the employment of domestic forms of counter magic, we can see that female accusations were 'actuated not by godly zeal, but by the fear of losing what she [the housewife] must preserve; the milk and cream or 'white meats' which were vital to the early modern diet', thus witchcraft was seen by women 'as a threat to the domestic sphere of food production and household manufacture'.⁴⁷ The concern over controlling complex and unpredictable household activities is also apparent.

Thus accusations of witchcraft seem to have provided an explanation for the failure of certain household activities, which were frequently connected with images of pollution and unnaturalness. It is interesting how the cause of the problem and the result frequently seem to be linked in the mind of the accuser - the denial of yeast to Margaret Grevell led to brewing problems, and the loaning of a dish containing milk to Agnes Herd led to dairy problems. The accusers linked the source of the quarrel or disagreement, perhaps with a feeling of guilt or resentment, with the resulting failure of their household tasks. Witchcraft was an explicit threat to the authority of the housewife in her own home, thus the witch was not just the opposite of the ideal woman, she was the 'anti-housewife', a threat to the position of other women.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Ibid., E8. Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 412. See Chapter Six for further discussion of counter-magic.

⁴⁶ *A true and iust Recorde*. (1582), F2; others whose brewing was affected by witchcraft included Anne West and William Adam's wife, 1589.

⁴⁷ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 413. Hickey notes that failure in dairy production may have been caused by the cattle not having enough good fodder, Hickey, S., 'Fatal Feeds?', 137.

⁴⁸ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 414; Matalene, C., 'Women as Witches', 583.

This juxtaposition between the good and the bad woman is shown clearly in the depositions against Margaret Moone in 1645. She fell out with the Rawhoods after they were given the house that she had been living in because they could pay more than her. Richard Caley of Thorpe claimed that:

the wife of Rawhood being a very tydy and cleanly woman, sitting upon a block after dinner, with another Neighbour a little before it was time to go to Church...the said Rawhoods wife was on the sudden so filled with Lice, that they might have been swept off her cloaths with a stick.

The inferred differences between Margaret Moone and Mrs Rawhood are clear; the latter was clean, godly and neighbourly, whilst Margaret was vindictive, evil and polluted. The theme of pollution is further highlighted in the depositions of Richard Carter and Henry Cornwall of Thorpe against Margaret. They claimed that while watching her one night they saw something like a rat fall from her coats, and 'presently there was such an extreame offensive stink in the Roome, that these Informant were scarce able to endure to stay in it'.⁴⁹

Endangered Children

Witches were seen as a particular danger not only to other's households, but also their children. In 1579, Mother Staunton of Wimbish was accused of bewitching the child of Richard Saunder of Brook Walden. After being denied yeast by his wife:

she went her waie murmuryng, as offended with her aunswere, and after her departure, her yonge child in the Cradle was taken vehemently sicke, in a marveilous strange maner, whereuppon the mother of the childe tooke it up in her armes to comforte it, whiche beyng doen, the Cradle rocked of it self, sixe or seven tymes, in presence of one of the Earle of Surreis gentilmen, who seying it, stabbed his dagger three or fower tymes into the Cradle ere it staid: merily jesting and saying that, that he would kill the Devill, if he would bee rocked there.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ A true and exact Relation. (1645), 23, 21.

⁵⁰ A Detection of damnable driftes. (1579), A7.

Thus witches were seen to invade the households of their neighbours, upsetting household activities and harming their children.

It could be argued that to a certain extent witches were de-feminized as they were stripped of all feminine qualities, they were the exact opposite of the womanly ideal. For example, Elizabeth Francis was portrayed in 1566 as the antithesis of the ideal mother and wife. After requesting her familiar Satan to kill her lover Andrew who refused to marry her, and to kill the child she thought she was carrying, she asked him to get her another husband. He did so:

willyng her to consent unto that Frauncis in fornycation which she did, and therof conceaved a daughter that was borne within a quarter of a yere after they were married. After they were maryed they lived not so quietly as she desyred, beinge stirred (as she said) to much unquietnes and moved to swearing and cursinge, wherfore she willed Sathan her cat to kyll the childe, beinge aboute the age of half a yere olde, and he did so, and when she yet founde not the quietnes that she desyred, she willed it to lay a lamenes in the leg of thys Frauncis her husbände.⁵¹

Not only did Elizabeth confess to fornication outside marriage with two people, but to killing a man, two of her children (one unborn) and laming her husband. She was clearly the opposite of the ideal woman. Even if she was not guilty of witchcraft she certainly appears to have wanted to carry out these acts showing her desire for power over others. Her unquiet living would also have been looked down upon by the community, as well as her lewdness. She was also believed, at least by herself, to be a danger to children - an important part of witchcraft labelling. The killing of her own children links with studies of infanticide which argue that child killing was

⁵¹ The examination and confession, (1566). This provides an important instance of the witch as anti-wife as well as anti-mother. Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 72. See Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 79, for further discussion of this case. It was believed wrong to engage in disputes of this kind with one's husband, the ideal wife was to be deferent and obedient. In a further case in Somersetshire in 1584 a woman using 'idle speeches' to her husband was assumed to be possessed, A True and Dreadfull Discourse of a woman possessed with the Devil, (1584), A4.

carried out through economic necessity, thus this may have been expressed in terms of witchcraft as it was a framework in which this action could be understood.⁵²

In connection with the themes surrounding the malevolent mother we can also see the images of dysfunctional families in which the mother is blamed for the misfortunes in the household.⁵³ A clear example of this can be seen in the case against Henry and Cicely Sellis in 1582, in which their sons Henry and John testified against their parents. Henry told how one night at midnight a spirit came to his brother which:

tooke him by the left legge, and also be the litle Toe, which was like his sister, but that it was al blacke: at which time his brother cryed out and said, Father, Father, come helpe mee, there is a blacke thing that hath me by the legge, as big as my sister: whereat his father said to his mother, why thou whore cannot you keepe your impes from my children.⁵⁴

He further claimed that when he told his mother how afraid he was of the spirit the next day she answered 'Thou lvest, thou lvest, whoresonne', and related that he had seen his mother feed the imps every other day with milk.

It appears that the children were jealous of their mother paying attention to an animal rather than themselves, certainly the parent's responses to their children and each other appear very harsh. The image of the malevolent mother is demonstrated, as the mother appeared to neglect her natural children to cosset and favour her familiar. The language directed against the mother is couched in sexual terms, underlining the link between disorderly women, sexuality and witchcraft. Images of pollution were

⁵² Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 74-9, Lees, L., 'Infanticide - Necessity or Evil?', paper at Forward Research Symposium, Nottingham Trent University, 12/6/98. Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 75-6. The portrayal of women who killed their own children is discussed in Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, chapter 4. The defeminizing of female witches in contemporary drama is explored by Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 167-8, 170, 182-3.

⁵³ Dolan argues that witchcraft provided an explanation for internal conflicts within families, this allowed the family members to displace responsibility onto an external figure, Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, 230-6.

⁵⁴ A true and just Recorde. (1582), D1.

also emphasised. John, the younger son, related how his father exclaimed to the mother 'Ye stinking whore' and there were constant references to the mother as a whore. The mother was portrayed as unnatural because she failed to protect her children as a good mother should. Finally, in 1645 Mary Greenleife and Anne Cooper were accused of allowing their familiars to suck on their children in complete opposition to the natural behaviour of a mother.

The Essex material clearly demonstrates the importance of the theory of the witch as 'evil-mother'. Suspected women in these five pamphlets were portrayed in a way that emphasised their inversion not only from the ideal, but also from the norm. Although it could be argued that women were generally perceived as more disorderly than men were, witches were the epitome of this. This was not merely a feature of the typical inversion theme in witchcraft but was gendered almost explicitly towards women's activities and roles. All that was natural, good and productive in the domestic sphere and everyday life was subverted and polluted by witchcraft.

The Midlands and North - Pamphlet Accounts

Nurturing Familiars

Many of the accused women who appear in the pamphlet material from the Midlands and North confessed to keeping familiars, though explicit descriptions of feeding and caring for them are lacking, in contrast to the Essex material. Alice Gooderige of Stapenhill, Staffordshire, claimed in 1597 that the devil appeared to her as 'a little partie-colored dog red and white, and I called him Minny'. Margaret Roper of Eckling, Derbyshire, suspected of bewitching Katherine Wright in 1586, was said to have a spirit named Middlecub. The strange woman who appeared to William Somers of Nottingham and reputedly bewitched him was accompanied by a cat. He claimed that the cat 'leapt up into her bosome, the which she imbraced, and with hir

armes claspt it unto hir, and thus they parted'.⁵⁵ Interestingly, although Edmund Hartley confessed to sending spirits into the seven possessed in Leigh, Lancashire from 1594, he did not appear to have named them. This could highlight a gender difference, as it would be seen as more 'natural' for a woman to nurture spirits in a perversion of her ideal role. Although there were instances where men were portrayed in these roles, Henry Sellis of Essex being one example, perhaps this was because the latter was married with children.⁵⁶ It may not have occurred to the single man Hartley, or his interrogators, to portray him in this kind of nurturing role.

The case study of Elizabeth Southern serves as a useful example of perceptions of witches and their familiars. Elizabeth was examined before the magistrates at Fence on April 2, 1612, when she confessed that:

about twentie yeares past, as she was comming homeward from begging, there met with her this Examinee neere unto a Stonepit in *Gouldshey*, in the sayd Forrest of *Pendle*, a Spirit or Devill in the shape of a Boy, the one halfe of his Coate blacke and the other browne, who bade this Examinee stay, saying unto her, that if she would give him her Soule, she should have any thing that she would request.

The spirit also informed her that its name was Tibb. This appears to be quite a typical description of a person meeting with a witch or spirit, the source of magic was frequently said to appear from some kind of hole or pit, William Somers of Nottingham came across a witch by the side of a coal-pit. This could be representative of the magic coming from underground or Hell. The issue of power is also prominent here, it is indicative that the spirit offers to give her anything she desires when she is on her way home from a begging expedition, thus demonstrating that she has nothing.

⁵⁵ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 26; Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 37; Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 15.

⁵⁶ A true and just Recorde, (1582), D1.

The spirit appeared to her numerous times over the next six years, after which she claimed it appeared as a brown dog which forced itself onto her left knee to get blood from under her left arm when she was resting with a small child in her lap. Although she was able to exclaim '*iesus save my Child*', she claimed that she had been unable to pray for herself, and that after this experience she 'was almost starke madd for the space of eight weekes'. This reinforces the issues surrounding demon familiars and the witch as the evil mother nurturing these unnatural dependants; in this case the familiar is seen as disregarding the woman's child in order to get sustenance. The inability to pray was seen as proof of being a witch, and as stated in Chapter One, witchcraft was linked to madness in the minds of many contemporary sceptics.

A final example emphasising the image of the witch as an evil mother who nurtured spirits instead of children can be seen in a case from Yorkshire. On 7 March 1621 Hellen and Elizabeth Fairfax, of Fewston, Yorkshire, claimed that a woman appeared to them whilst they were in a trance. Their father relates that 'they saw the woman let a spirit suck upon her breast; to whom Hellen said,...'Hast thou any children?' She said, 'No.' The other replied, 'It is well: for God help the children that must suck where the spirit sucketh!'⁵⁷ This again indicates that the familiars were sometimes represented as a sort of child substitute for witches. Witches were still being represented in a feminine nurturing role, albeit a perverse one.⁵⁸

Food, Poison and Pollution

Images of poisoning and pollution can be seen clearly in these pamphlets. Various narratives talk of the witches gaining power over their victims by using food. Harsnett told how 'an old woman meeting *William Somers* uppon *Blackewell-more heath*, did procure her spirite to enter into him, or by his accepting at her handes a

⁵⁷ Fairfax, E., *Demonologia*: 1621, 85.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 79, 82.

piece of bread and butter, and eating it'. Somers himself claimed that it was 'the sweetest that ever he did eat of in his life'. This emphasises the image of the woman tempting the child to gain power over him in a way echoed in a plethora of more modern fairy-tales. Darrell's account of the same episode portrayed the woman as more malevolent, and Somers as more innocent. He claimed that Somers ate the bread and butter against his will as the woman threatened to throw him into a coal pit and break his neck if he did not.⁵⁹ In this way witches were able to transgress the boundaries of their victims' bodies - this was a way of explaining the internal damage believed to be done by witchcraft. It is worth noting that the items of food referred to were staple items, as in the descriptions of disputes over food and descriptions of food apparently polluted by witchcraft. This demonstrates how witchcraft beliefs were integrated into everyday concepts and issues of day to day survival as people tried to make sense of their lives and environment.

In 1621, Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire, complained that the suspect Margaret Wait, junior, appeared to her and put something in her mouth. Hellen then 'sneezed violently, and said, 'Thou hast not hurt me; thou wouldst poison me'. Then her speech was taken from her'. On another occasion, 'she cried out suddenly '-Oh I am poisoned!' Her mother asked, 'What with?' She answered - 'A white cat has been long upon me, and drawn my breath, and hath left in my throat so filthy a smell, that it doth poison me'. Her parents wondered whether she was dreaming, but noted that after this she brought up blood at her mouth. The bad smell echoes the connections made between witches and pollution. There was a preoccupation with poisoning in this case. Hellen further claimed that a woman attempted to put something into her mouth which she called spice, that Jennit Dibb appeared to her with poison in her hand, that Margaret Thorp threw something bitter into her mouth which made her

⁵⁹ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery* (1599), 37, 91; Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 15.

feel sick, and that Margaret Wait had attempted to poison her drink.⁶⁰ Food was also seen as an important factor. Elizabeth Fairfax later reported that she had seen Margaret Thorp with a loaf stolen from their house, which emphasises both the importance of food and the belief that witches gained power by intruding into other's households. Thorp was also believed to have gained power over the children by stealing a spoon from the house.⁶¹

There were various references to the presence of pollution in the case of the seven bewitched in Leigh, Lancashire, from 1594. Of Margaret Byrom it was claimed that 'ther came out of her mouth such a stincking smoke and breath that shee could not endure it her selfe. her voyce and crying were quite altered, and so continued till night. But her breath stank soe yll a day and a nyght after, that her neighbours could not enduer to come neare her'.⁶² This bad smell emphasises the presence of evil and pollution. When the spirits left Margaret 'it left behinde it in the maide a soare throat, & a most filthie smell, in so much that her meate was verie unsavorie for a weeke after'.⁶³ Both Margaret Byrom and John Starkey were described as bleeding in the dispossession, Margaret vomited blood and with John 'aboundance of blod gushed out both at his nose and mouth'.⁶⁴ The others described vomiting phlegm and thick spittle, all of these represent the expelling of the evil and pollution in a physical way. The emphasis upon pollution in this case is further demonstrated in the description of John Starkey's fits in early February 1596. It was said that he 'fell to washing his hands after every short fitt, and when soever he washed he would have newe water, if it were the same wherwith he had washed before (for he could tell) he refused it'.⁶⁵ This indicates the uncleanness of the maleficia that he

⁶⁰ Fairfax, E., *Demonologia*: 1621, 76, 37, 65, 111, 120. John Tonken of Penzance also believed that a witch was attempting to poison him by putting something in his mouth, *A True Account of a Strange and Wonderful Relation of one John Tonken of Pensans in Cornwall*, (1686).

⁶¹ Fairfax, E., *Demonologia*: 1621, 106, 152, 144.

⁶² Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 7; G. More, *A True Discourse*, (1600), 33.

⁶³ G. More, *A True Discourse*, (1600), 76.

⁶⁴ Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 10.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 3. This is not unlike the image of Lady Macbeth portrayed in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, who was also portrayed as being unable to wash the evil off her hands. Similarly in the case of the Surey

constantly wanted to wash away, thus the bad magic in being unclean was the inverse of godly cleanliness.

Endangered Households

Further images of pollution were emphasised in cases where witchcraft was blamed for the pollution of food in the household, or for the disruption of household activities. As in the Essex cases, witches in the Midlands and the North were believed to pose a danger to other's households. In August 1612, James Robinson of Pendle, Lancashire, accused Anne Whittle of ruining their drink when she had been hired to card wool with his wife in his house. He said that 'the said *Ann Whittle* taking a Dish or Cup, and drawing drinke severall times: and so never after that time, for some eight or nine weekes, they could have any drinke, but spoiled'.⁶⁶ This deposition shows the fear of inadvertently inviting a suspected witch into the household, and the belief that witches polluted food and drink through intruding into other's homes. This narration is also unusual in that the accusers portray themselves in a completely innocent light. Anne is presented here as someone who has carried out these actions in an act of ungratefulness despite the fact that they had employed her. This is in contrast to the majority of cases in which accusers would emphasise the reason for the witchcraft as originating in some kind of dispute.

Household activities also figured highly in the Fairfax case in Fewston, Yorkshire. Edward Fairfax claimed in 1621 that many suspected witches lived in his parish, 'so that the inhabitants complain much of great losses sustained in their goods, especially in their kine, which should give them milk'. The perceived danger which witches posed to livestock is also shown by Maud Jeffray's assertion that she had seen a spirit boy milking her father's cows. For witches and their spirits to steal the

Demoniack, Richard Dugdale of Lancashire, published in 1697, the author refers to 'a very rank smell' which was present during his fits. *The Surey Demoniac*, (1697), 46.

⁶⁶ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), E-E2.

milk of a victim could place their household in jeopardy.⁶⁷ Dairy work was also a particularly female activity, emphasising the location of witchcraft within the female sphere.

Witchcraft could explain unexpected success in household activities, as well as their failure. Ellen Holland was one of the seven believed to be possessed in Leigh, Lancashire from 1594. One day it was claimed that 'she tooke a distafe, & spane both faster & finer then at any tym before. when she had done spinnig she said unto them, now shall I worke you all. and thenceforth was so extreamly handled, that tuo could scarcely rule & hold her'. This action could signify Eleanor's awareness of her power over her audience; in effect she was spinning them the tale of her possession which was being taken so seriously by the authorities as events led swiftly towards the execution of Edmund Hartley, the suspected witch. After spinning so fast she stated that she would work them all, emphasising her ability to alter their judgement. More added to this that 'though she was but a child, & as it were beginning to learne to spinne, yet she did it at that time so finely & with such expedition, as was thought impossible for a very skilful woman to do'.⁶⁸ This underlines the strangeness of the activity. Similarly in this case, Margaret Byrom, while in a fit 'went to the maides as they were washing of cloathes, and beganne to wash with them, & though they were two lusty women, and she but a yong girle, yet shee washt more for the space of an hower so quicke and so fine, that they could not come near her'.⁶⁹ Again, witchcraft is taken as the explanation for amazing household activities, as well as for the failure of them.

Two examples from Lancashire further demonstrate this point. Alizon Device of Pendle, Lancashire, claimed in March 1612 that her grandmother had made butter

⁶⁷ Fairfax, E., *Demonologia*: 1621, 35, 44.

⁶⁸ Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 5; G. More, *A True Discourse*, (1600), 35.

⁶⁹ G. More, *A True Discourse*, (1600), 29.

appear in a 'piggin' full of milk, which she had obtained through begging. She stated that:

there was Butter to the quantity of a quarterne of a pound in the said milke, and the quantitie of the said milke still remayning; and her Graund-mother had no Butter in the house when this Examine went forth: duering which time, this Examinate's Graund-mother still lay in her bed.⁷⁰

This, again, demonstrates that any abnormality concerning household activities, either failure or success, could be attributed to witchcraft. In the 1634 Pendle witchcraft trial, the main witness, Edmund Robinson, claimed that witches had taken him to a meeting where they had a feast and magically produced food. He stated that:

seeing divers of the said company going into a Barn near adjoining, he followed after them, and there he saw six of them kneeling, and pulling all six of them six several ropes, which were fastened or tied to the top of the Barn. Presently after which pulling, there came into this Informers sight flesh smoaking, butter in lumps, and milk as it were flying from the said ropes.⁷¹

Again, this demonstrates the popular concerns with food and sustenance regarding everyday items, and the understandable fantasies and dreams about having plentiful food.

There was felt to be a danger in allowing suspected people into the household. Peter Chaddock of Windle, Lancashire, claimed in July 1612 that he believed that Isabel Robey had bewitched him after she had an argument with his wife in his house, and his wife left the house before her. Jennet Preston of Gisburn in Craven, Yorkshire, was suspected of killing a Mr Lister. She was presented as being particularly ungrateful and vengeful since she had been 'for many yeares well thought of and esteemed by *Master Lister* who afterwards died for it. Had free access to his house, kind respect and entertainment; nothing denied her she stood in need of'. Jennet was

⁷⁰ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), C.

⁷¹ Webster, J., The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft, (1677), un-numbered pages at end.

portrayed as having violated Mr Lister's personal trust and personal space. It was stated by witnesses that Lister cried out against Jennet on his death-bed saying that she was in the house and to 'looke where shee is, take hold of her: for Gods sake shut the doores, and take her, shee cannot escape away. Looke about for her, and lay hold on her, for shee is in the house'.⁷² Here she was presented as very much the enemy within. Witches were also believed to have the power to enter into people's houses uninvited. In 1612 Anne Whittle claimed that Margaret Pearson of Padiham, Lancashire, 'hath done very much harme to one Dodgesons goods, who came in at a loope-hole into the said Dodgesons Stable, and shee and her Spirit together did sit upon his Horse or Mare, untill the said Horse or Mare died'.⁷³

In several of the narratives which identify concern with witches intruding into their homes, there is an emphasis on boundaries.⁷⁴ Elizabeth Southern, alias Demdike, of Pendle, Lancashire, told in August 1612 how her spirit Tibb 'appeared at sundry times unto her this Examine about *Day-light Gate*'. James Device claimed that he had heard children crying and cats yelling at the same place.⁷⁵ This concern with the intrusion of witches in the household can also be seen in the Fairfax case of 1621 in Yorkshire. Hellen Fairfax claimed that she saw a man come in through the chimney, and that Thorp's spirit escaped up the chimney when they shut the doors to prevent it leaving. The chimney was evidently believed to be popular route for witches and their spirits. She further claimed that a girl came in and attacked her while she was basting a capon, and that she often saw a boy in the form of a dog between the

⁷² Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), T3, X4, Y2. This ingratitude of the witch is reflected in the case of Mother Sutton of Bedfordshire, believed to have bewitched her erstwhile benefactor. Ingratitude of this type was evidently seen, and presented as, shocking behaviour which fitted in with the contemporary perception of a witch. Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, (1613).

⁷³ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), S4.

⁷⁴ Significantly, this is echoed in cases of defamation, which emphasised the doorway to the house as the most frequent location of the act of insult. This was the boundary between the home, the symbol of chastity, and the street, where reputation was more vulnerable. Gowing, L., 'Gender and the Language of Insult', 19.

⁷⁵ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), B2, C2.

kitchen and milkhouse. Her young sister Anne was thought to have been bewitched when no-one was in the house, thus the household was vulnerable to attack.⁷⁶

Endangered Children

As well as being a danger to other households, witches were also seen as a particular danger to children, and this comes across very strongly in three pamphlets in particular, which will now be examined. James Device, of Pendle, Lancashire, deposed on 27 April 1612, that a month before he had seen a brown dog coming from his grandmother Elizabeth Southern's house, and that two or three nights after he had 'heard a voyce of a great number of Children screiking and crying pittifully' at about the same distance from his grandmother's house as he had seen the dog. He also claimed that on the previous St. Peter's Day, Henry Bullock had come to Elizabeth's house and accused Alizon Device of bewitching his child. When they went to his house with him, James claimed that '*Alizon* fell downe on her knees, & asked the said *Bullocke* forgivenes, and confessed to him, that she had bewitched the said child'.⁷⁷

This passage emphasises twice the danger that witches were believed to present to children, and also highlights the reputation of the whole family for witchcraft. This fear is again emphasised in the descriptions of the conversations which reputedly took place at a great meeting of witches at Malkin Tower. James Device deposed further that Katherine Hewyt, alias Mould-Heels, was at the meeting and that she and Alice Gray 'did confesse amongst the said Witches at their meeting at *Malkin-Tower* aforesaid, that they had killed *Foulds* wifes child, called *Anne Foulds*, of Colne: And also said, that they had then in hanck a child of *Michael Hatleys* of Colne'.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Fairfax, E., *Demonologia*: 1621, 43, 116, 55, 57, 106.

⁷⁷ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), C2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, (1613), P4.

In an additional example of witches harming children from the same pamphlet, Grace Sowerbutts, of Salmesbury, Lancashire, presented a very explicit description of the fear of witches and their intrusion into households to harm children. She claimed that she had been taken out at night by three witches, two of whom were her aunt and grandmother. She claimed that they went to the house of Thomas Walshman of Salmesbury 'when all the house-hold was a-bed, the doores being shut, the said *Jennet Bierley* did open them, but this Examinee knoweth not how'. After getting into the house:

the said *Jennet Bierley* went into the Chamber where the said *Walshman* and his wife lay, & from thence brought a little child, which this Examinee thinketh was in bed with it Father and Mother: and after the said *Jennet Bierley* had set her downe by the fire, with the said child, shee did thrust a naile into the navell of the said child: and afterward did take a pen and put it in the said place, and did suck there a good space, and afterwards laid the child in bed againe...after the death of the said child; the next night after the buriall thereof, the said *Jennet Bierley* & *Ellen Bierley*, taking this Examinee with them, went to Salmesburie Church, and there did take up the said child, and the said *Jennet* did carrie it out of the Church-yard in her armes, and then did put it in her lap and carryed it home to her own house, and having it there did boile some thereof in a Pot, and some did broile on the coales, of which both which the said *Jennet* & *Ellen* did eate...And afterwards the said *Jennet* & *Ellen* did seethe the bones of the said child in a pot, & with the Fat that came out of the said bones, they said they would annoint themselves, that thereby they might sometimes change themselves into other shapes.⁷⁹

This description clearly demonstrates, in a more explicit way than the majority of narratives, the belief that witches posed a specific danger to children. Although these lurid descriptions are rare, particularly in England, they do point to an underlying belief in witches as the opposite to the ideal of nurturing women. This description was undoubtedly closer to European demonology since Grace was coached by a Catholic priest who was evidently well-versed in elite witchcraft beliefs.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Ibid., L-L2; Webster, J., *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, (1677), 275-6.

⁸⁰ For further discussion of the relationships between children accusers and their 'mentors' see Chapters Five and Six.

Various examples of witches presenting a danger to children were related in *The Wonderful Discoverie* (1619). Ellen Greene confessed, on 17 March 1618, that when she moved to Stathern, Leicestershire, Joan Willimot of Goadby asked her to bewitch the wife of John Patchet, a yeoman, and her young child because she had had a dispute with him. She claimed that she did this 'touching the said *John Patchets* Wife in her bed, and the Childe in the Grace-wifes armes.' The baby died the next day and the mother a month afterwards. This further emphasises the danger witches were felt to pose to children in particular. Ellen was clearly close enough to be accepted into the bedchamber and was able thus to intrude the household at an extremely vulnerable time and bewitch mother and child.⁸¹

The description of the illnesses of the children of the Earl of Rutland, believed to have been bewitched by the Flower witches of Bottesford, Leicestershire, sound similar to the 'fits' experienced by children claiming to be possessed by demons sent by witches, examined in the previous chapter. As the author of *The Wonderful Discoverie* reported in 1619:

as mallice increased in these damnable women; so his family felt the smart of their revenge and inficious disposition, for his eldest Sonne *Henry Lord Rosse* sickened very strangely, and after awhile died: his next named *Francis Lord Rosse* accordingly, was severely tormented by them; and most barbarously and inhumanely tortured by a strange sicknesse; not long after the Lady *Katherine* was set upon by their dangerous and divellish practises, and many times in great danger of life, through extreame maladies and unusuall fits, nay...both the Earle and his Countesse were brought into their snares as they imagined, and indeed determined to keep them from having any more children.⁸²

The danger that witches were supposed to present to children, by bringing sickness and death upon them, went further in this case as the Earl and the Countess appear to

⁸¹ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 20. See Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 418, for further discussion of this point.

⁸² *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 11.

have been prevented from having further children. This links in with ideas of more extreme continental demonology that witches could cause impotence and infertility.⁸³

This passage also, however, highlights the problems with using contemporary pamphlets and chapbooks as a source. The passage clearly implies that the Earl loses more than one of his children due to the witchcraft of the Flower family at this time. It is also stated that despite 'the losse of his Children' he attended the Court of King James twice. This implication is supported by the Earl's tomb in Bottesford Church, Leicestershire, which claims that the Earl had 'two sonnes, both who dyed in their infancy by wicked practice and sorcerye'. However, since the first son Henry died in 1613 (six years before the apprehension and trial of the women), and the younger son Francis did not die until 1620 while living in London, there appears to be a problem with chronology in the pamphlet.⁸⁴

Finally, the suspected women in the 1621 Fairfax case in Fewston, Yorkshire, were also perceived to be a particular danger to children. The three victims bewitched were young women and children, and the witches were believed to have killed another daughter previously, who was still being nursed. The witches appeared to Hellen Fairfax and told her that they would bewitch to death John Pullein's child and Maud Jeffray, and that Elizabeth Dickonson 'did get blood of my little daughter, Anne Fairfax, by which means they did bewitch her to death'. Edward's youngest son Henry also claimed that a woman appeared to him with 'a great knife in her hand'. Likewise Hellen claimed that on 29 June 1621, 'Thorp's wife in the morning came and peeped into the chamber where the children were in bed...she had in one hand a dagger, and in the other a great knife, with which she did assault Hellen, and threaten to kill her'.⁸⁵ Undoubtedly these episodes could be explained as nightmares; however it is indicative of witchcraft belief that these incidents were believed and

⁸³ Sprenger, J. & Kramer, H., *Malleus Maleficarum*, (1486), Part One, chapter 9, Part Two, chapter 7.

⁸⁴ Honeybone, M., in Rook, M., *Leicestershire Now*, (March 1995), 8.

⁸⁵ Fairfax, E., *Demonologia: 1621*, 103-4, 92-3, 119, 130.

thought perfectly feasible within existing ideas about witches and their activities. These beliefs further demonstrate the fear felt about the power of witches to intrude into other's households.

In conclusion, through these images of witches suckling familiars instead of children, poisoning and polluting, and posing a danger to households and children, the accused were portrayed as very much the opposite to the ideal of womanhood. To a certain extent this is bound up with the use of inversion motifs throughout witchcraft belief, however this was done in a particularly gendered way. Significantly, this also appears to apply to the few men who were accused. Although he was male, Edmund Hartley fits in with the themes of feminist theses on this subject; he had a reputation for healing, and he represents the theme of the enemy within who becomes known to the family, invades their household and abuses their trust. This highlights the importance of issues of masculinity as well as femininity as noted in Chapter Two. Thus the notion of the witch as evil mother appears to be a helpful one in extending our understanding of witchcraft beliefs in this region, although it is not represented as explicitly as in the Essex material.

The Midlands and North - Non-Pamphlet Accounts

There does not appear to be the same explicit concern with some of the elements associated with the theory of the witch as evil mother in the non-pamphlet material of the Midlands and North, perhaps because of the lack of background information in many of the cases. However, although there is little evidence of beliefs in witches suckling familiars instead of children, there were various accusations of poisoning which were explicitly linked to witchcraft. There are also a number of cases which highlight the fear of witch's intrusion into other's households and harming household activities, livestock and children.

Nurturing Familiars

One case which does highlight some of the images of the evil mother and her familiars is that of the bewitching of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire in 1616. All of the accused women in this case confessed to having familiars, in various forms, which affected John in varying ways, taking away his power of speech and control over his sense and body. One of the accused women, Fritter, was brought to the boy in his fit who was said to have 'wispered, what more witches yet? more yet? whose spirit art yw, Fritters, Fritters. What toades, toads? these are filthy things to sucke on a woman?' Fritter at one point refused to say her charm that the boy believed would bring him out of his fit and appears to have been emotionally blackmailed into repeating it - 'she still refusinge and sayinge she was no witch, he cried aloud, oh filthy witch, filthy witch, thou art a witch and ever wilt be; oh make her speake it, make her speake it, the spirit saith shee must be made to speake it' and eventually she did. The emphasis on the word 'filthy' throughout this scene could either be a reference to her reputation, or recognition of the connections made between witches and pollution. This pollution was also stressed when Randall was brought to John in his fits. It was said that 'dureinge also her beinge by the bedds syde, there was such a poysonous smell, that made the company much to wonder, she alsoe used manye suspitious words concerninge his recovery, and that if hee shoulde be well they would saye shee was a witche, but indeede she was a luckie woman amongst sicke folkes'.⁸⁶

Food and Poisoning

The more serious accusations involving witchcraft in non-pamphlet accounts concern indictments for poisoning and murder, as well as allusions to the use of 'charms' and 'incantations'. Eight women were accused of involvement in this type

⁸⁶ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith, R., *A Brief Declaration, The Witches Severall Charmes*. This emphasis on the evil smell is echoed in the account of the possession of Margaret Cooper of Somersetshire in 1584. There was apparently such a 'horrible stincke' in the hall of her home that the family had to cover their noses with cloths and napkins, *A True and Most Dreadfull discourse of a woman possessed with the Devil*, (1584).

of crime before the quarter sessions court of Nottinghamshire, but unfortunately in the majority of the cases very little information is provided. Two Nottinghamshire women were explicitly accused of murder by poisoning and witchcraft. Sibill Gooder of North Wheatley was presented before the quarter sessions court on 11 July, 1606, charged with 'poisoning: murder' and 'witchcraft', and seven people were bound by £10 each to give evidence against her at the next gaol delivery.⁸⁷ On 13 January, 1613, Margaret (or Ann) Pattrick of Worksop was charged with 'administering poison' and for using 'charms and poison'. The record states that 'Ann, wife of Ralph Pattrick of Worksop, charged with the murder of Oliver Bray, late Clerk of Worksop by means of charms and administering poison was committed to gaol'. This case was referred to the assize court, the records of which do not survive for this county in this period.⁸⁸ The case of Joan Clark of Sturton in the Clay, who appeared before the court charged with 'witchcraft' and 'felony' on 6 October, 1609, was also referred to the assize court.⁸⁹ A note written beside this charge suggests that this may have involved a poisoning incident. In both of these cases people were bound by large amounts of money to appear at the assizes. Edward Bray, a gentleman of Barrington Magna, Gloucestershire, (probably a relative of the deceased victim) was bound by £20 to give evidence against Margaret Pattrick. In the case of Joan Clark, two men, including her husband, were bound by £20 each to 'give answer' at the assizes, and three others were bound by £40 each to give evidence against Joan.

As in the case of Margaret Pattrick, the use of 'charms' was taken very seriously in other cases that did not expressly make accusations of murder. Elizabeth (or Isabell) Colton of Hayton, Nottinghamshire, appeared on 8 April 1608 accused of 'using 'charms' contrary to statute'.⁹⁰ Elizabeth Tutty, widow, of Mattersey,

⁸⁷ N.Q.S.M., C/QSM 1/66/4, 112-4.

⁸⁸ N.Q.S.M., C/QSM 1/69/2, 80-2.

⁸⁹ N.Q.S.M., C/QSM 1/67/3, 129-31.

⁹⁰ N.Q.S.M., C/QSM 1/67/1 vol.2, 25-6.

Nottinghamshire, appeared on 17 April, 1629, accused of 'using charms'. She appeared again on 17 July when her case was referred to the assizes, and on this date an explicit charge of witchcraft was recorded. Ten residents of Mattersey were bound by £10 each to indict Elizabeth 'for using certain charms of which she is suspected & to give evidence against her at the Assizes'. Elizabeth was committed to gaol to wait for the assizes.⁹¹ This case again emphasises the importance of neighbourly relations in either dismissing or supporting a suspicion of witchcraft.

Finally, three women; Christiana Clark, and Elizabeth and Susan Hudson, all from North Muskham, Nottinghamshire, appeared on October 12 1616 accused of 'witchcraft'. The charge claims that they were 'suspected of using incantations against Anne Strey', and that they were to appear before the justices the next day.⁹² This case also highlights the belief that witchcraft practices were passed between female members of the same family. This use of undefined charms emphasises the perceived secretive nature of female related crime.

The assize depositions for the Northern Circuit further highlight the connections made between witchcraft and poisoning. Poisoning through food was clearly seen as a particularly female means of breaching the boundaries of the body to produce harm from within. The information of Marie Hobson of Fole, Yorkshire, in July 1649, claimed that Jane Kighley had followed her son with an apple and a piece of bread asking him to eat them. She did this 'till she caused him to byte both of the Apple & the bread...[he]...prsently after spitted blood, & fell sicke & languished of the said sicknesse about a yeare, of which sicknesse hee dyed'. Jane denied making him eat the apple and bread.⁹³ Likewise, Joan Booth of Warmfield, Yorkshire, testified on 10 January 1650 that Margaret Morton came to her house the previous May and gave her son 'being (about fower years old) & then in good health & likeing, a peece of

⁹¹ N.Q.S.M., C/QSM 1/73/2 vol.8, 224-5, 240-1, 245.

⁹² N.Q.S.M., C/QSM 1/70/1 vol.5, 25-8.

⁹³ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/1/242, 244.

bread after wch time her said Childe begann to bee sicke & his body swelled very much & his flesh did duly after much waste till he could neither goe nor stand'.⁹⁴

Finally, Mary Moor's accusations against Ann Shillitoe and Susan Hincliffe of Denby, Yorkshire, in August 1674, included an account of a conversation between the two women about how to get power over others, which Mary claimed to have overheard. She stated that Susan said to Ann 'if thou canst but bring Nyne bitts of Bread away and Nyne bitts of Butter in thy Mouth; wee shall have power enough to take the life of their Goods'.⁹⁵ Thus the connection between food and the opportunity for evil powers to breach the boundaries of the body through it were clearly recognised by contemporaries. This emphasis on the power of bread specifically may have been related to popular beliefs in the power invested in communion bread.⁹⁶

Cases involving murder by poisoning, and witchcraft by use of charms and incantations are important as they reinforce the concept of witchcraft, and witches, as the complete inverse of the norm. Cases linking poisoning and witchcraft involve women exclusively in this region. This could mean that because of the stereotypical image of the witch as a woman, female offenders of this crime were more likely to be assumed to be witches because it explained their unfeminine behaviour. For a woman to harm others through poison was the reverse of the image of the mother figure whose role is to provide food and nourishment.⁹⁷ These women were believed to have poisoned others which involved both a breach of trust and of the bodily boundaries. In this way the witches literally became the 'enemy within'. Perhaps this is why these women were regarded as so dangerous. Poisoning, like witchcraft,

⁹⁴ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/131.

⁹⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/11/1/90.

⁹⁶ See Chapter Six.

⁹⁷ Purkiss, D., 'Women's Stories', 408-432.

was also perceived as a form of hidden violence, and was thus more likely to be associated with the female.

A case of suspected poisoning in Scarborough, Yorkshire, in 1644 further highlights these issues. Elizabeth (Ann) Sandeman was accused of killing her husband Thomas by poisoning him in August 1644.⁹⁸ The connection with poisoning as the inverse of nurture through food, the natural role of a woman, is shown clearly in these depositions. Some people thought that Elizabeth's mother, Elizabeth Meggison, was also involved in the poisoning of her son-in-law.⁹⁹ Elizabeth Sandeman was said to have confessed in William Hickson's parlour that 'I gave him poyson in an egg & in possett drinke', which suggests poisoning as both a breach of trust, and the bodily boundaries.¹⁰⁰ Although these accusations did not involve witchcraft specifically, they do reinforce some of the important themes in this chapter, since poisoning, like witchcraft, was an invisible crime associated with deviant women and the inverse of the natural. This also underlines the direct threat that disorderly women posed to patriarchy.

Interestingly not all accusations of poisoning in this period involved charges of witchcraft. For instance, the quarter sessions records of the early eighteenth century in Nottinghamshire include the cases of Thomas Stone of Sneinton, Nottinghamshire, who was accused of murdering his wife Anne by poison in 1716, Richard Anderson of Winthorpe who was charged in 1726 with the poisoning of his brother John's hens and cocks, Mary Danks of Sutton on Trent who was whipped and sent to the House of Correction in 1730 for the attempted poisoning of Thomas Carteret and his wife, and Elizabeth Charlesworth and Mary Clay of Papplewick who

⁹⁸ N.Y.R.O. MIC 1320/2320, MIC 1320/2323, MIC 1348/944, MIC 1348/976, MIC 1348/978 in Ashcroft, M.Y., *Scarborough Records 1641-1660 - A Calendar*, 40.

⁹⁹ N.Y.R.O., MIC 1348/983, MIC 1348/985 in Ashcroft, M.Y., *Scarborough Records 1641-1660*, 80.

¹⁰⁰ N.Y.R.O., MIC 1348/986 and MIC 1348/988 in *Ibid.*, 80-1.

were charged in 1735 with the attempted poisoning of Sarah Kitchen 'by putting yellow arsenick into some mint tea'.¹⁰¹

That connections with witchcraft were not made in these cases could indicate two possibilities. Firstly, these may have been isolated misdemeanours by the accused individuals who may not have been generally disliked by the community for other reasons, as the accused witches appear to have been. Secondly, the fact that there are no further accusations of 'witchcraft' in the quarter sessions records of Nottinghamshire after 1629, and after 1634 in the archdeaconry courts could indicate that for this county this crime was either being prosecuted elsewhere, either informally, or in the borough courts, or was sent directly to the assize court. Actions seen as being connected with witchcraft earlier in the period appear to have been prosecuted on their own later on; accusations of fortune telling and lunacy as well as poisoning appear to be more prevalent later in the period examined in this study.

Endangered Households

It has been shown that witches were presented as a particular danger to other women's households, their household activities and their children in pamphlet accounts. Various depositions in non-pamphlet material also tell of witchcraft causing disruption and pollution in other people's homes. Joan Booth of Warmfield, Yorkshire, giving information against Margaret Morton in January 1650, claimed that 'shee had diverse times beefore mistrusted the said Margaret to be a witch' because since 'some discontentmts given to her by this Informt shee could not gett Butter when shee churned as formerly nor cheese'.¹⁰² Margaret Rhodes of Chorne, Yorkshire, told in December 1662 how after they had fallen out Hellen Gray had used threatening words against her. After this she had a delivery of rye to bake with

¹⁰¹ N.Q.S.M., C/QSM 1/79/4, C/QSM 1/25, 244, 246-7. There were also various pamphlet accounts where poisoning was associated with women, but not with witchcraft, including Sundry Strange and Inhumaine Murthers lately committed, (1591), Natures Cruell Step-Dames: or Matchless Monsters of the Female Sex, (1637), and Murther, Murther, (1641).

¹⁰² P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/131.

to sell, but 'of that Corne the bread was sweete when it came out of the oven but in two dayes tyme it became soe bitter that noe body could eate of it & she beleeveth the bread was bewicht by the said Hellen'.¹⁰³ Margaret was a widow thus it was probably her livelihood, as well as her household, which was under threat here. In the information of Margaret Wilson against Ann Wilkinson in 1670, she claimed that Ann had cursed her and that the 'next daiy she this ex[amina]t churned but could gett noe butter, and psently after this ex[amina]t fell sicke'.¹⁰⁴

Suspected women were often described as having intruded into the houses of their accusers. Hester Spring testified against Hester France in January 1651 on the basis of information from her servant Elizabeth Johnson who believed herself to be bewitched by the latter. Elizabeth told her mistress that Hester France had come into her house and had cursed her and 'prayed to god that the sayde Elizabeth shold never Bake againe'.¹⁰⁵ Conversely, as in some of the pamphlet accounts from this region, the apparent success of a person in making household food and goods could also be suspected. Mary Moor claimed in 1674 that she overheard Ann Shillitoe telling Susan Hincliffe how her father Joseph Hincliffe got butter magically. Ann apparently related that 'he asked for butter and there came butter on to his knee in a wooden sawser'.¹⁰⁶

The fear of the witch's power to invade households is also evident in depositions detailing the witch coming to the victims while they are in bed.¹⁰⁷ For instance in the information of John Johnson of Reedness, Yorkshire, on 17 March he claimed that 'one Elizabeth Lambe at severall times hath appeared unto him by night, at his bed side, & an old man in browne clothes with her, at which he was very much

¹⁰³ P.R.O., ASSI 45/6/1/69.

¹⁰⁴ P.R.O., ASSI 45/9/3/97.

¹⁰⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/2/13.

¹⁰⁶ P.R.O., ASSI 45/11/1/91.

¹⁰⁷ The situating of these events at night added to their shocking nature. The author of a murder pamphlet expressed his horror of unspeakable acts taking place at night, the 'time created for quiet rest, ease of labour, honest man's repose'. *The Most Cruell and bloody Murther*, (1606), 3.

affrighted, but had not power to speak to her'.¹⁰⁸ This can also be seen in the belief that witches came to taunt their victims, often by sitting out of reach on the chimney top. James Johnson of Chorne, Yorkshire, deposed on 12 December 1662 that he knew he was bewitched by Hellen Gray because 'when he was in extreame paine sitting in the Chimney Corner, hee sawe her sitt on the Chimney Topp...his payne was always violent uppon him whilst hee sawe her & imediatly after shee was out of his sight hee had ease'. His master Alexander Greathead confirmed that James thought he could see Hellen sitting on the chimney top, though he could not see her himself.¹⁰⁹ This notion of the witch's power invading the household via the chimney is similar to that mentioned in the Fairfax case above.

Endangered Children

Also associated with the theme of the evil mother is the notion of evil women, or witches, gaining power over others in their community, particularly children. This can be seen in the case of Joane Elderson of Ashton, Lancashire, in 1636. Joane was accused of bewitching and killing the children of Elizabeth and Thomas Baxster, and was thought to have gained power over the children by touching and kissing them. Elizabeth Higgenson of Newton, Lancashire, claimed that Thomas Baxster's servant Raph Lytherland said that 'after the said Joane Elderson had touched the said child he never after had health'.¹¹⁰ Ann Hunnam, or Marchant, of Scarborough, Yorkshire, was believed to have gained control over her victim in a similar fashion; Elizabeth Hodgson claimed that 'Ann Marchant did gett power of the saide child in the fathers armes as hee was bringing itt from the peir'.¹¹¹ This echoes many of the pamphlet cases of witches getting power over people by entering their personal space, and also highlights the vulnerability which parents of young children felt in the face of dangerous witches.

¹⁰⁸ P.R.O., ASSI 45/16/3/55; further examples of this can be seen in the previous chapter.

¹⁰⁹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/6/1/69. An additional instance of a witch invading the household via the chimney is the case of Doll Bartham of Stradbroke in Suffolk, 1599. Triall of Maist Dorrell, (1599), 93.

¹¹⁰ L.R.O., QSB 1/170/55.

¹¹¹ N.Y.R.O., MIC 1348/1307 in Ashcroft, M.Y., Scarborough Records 1641-1660, 195.

People with an ambiguous reputation who showed too much interest, friendliness or concern in the affairs or health of others were further suspected. Ironically, in another context this would have been construed as neighbourly behaviour. Suspicion of an individual thus soured all subsequent interactions. Daniell Briggs of Wadworth, Yorkshire, recounted in December 1646 how Elizabeth Crossley was suspected of bewitching the infant John Shackleton. He told that he and a maid servant were carrying the child to a neighbour's house when they met Elizabeth who 'asked how the said childe did but this Informer suspectinge her to bee a witch did not tell her how ill it was but said it was indifferent well att wch she seemed very angry'. Later he came across Elizabeth again on the day of the child's burial. She said 'have you brought this witched childe to Towne to Whom he Answered yt hee was pswaded he was not witched, shee swore by God it was witched'.¹¹² In 1649 Robert Booth of Bossall, Yorkshire, told how Mary Sikes 'hath divers tymes saide unto this Informt Bless the[e] and Cross the[e] and thatt he hath had much loss By the death of his goods'.¹¹³ These depositions show how a combination of bad reputation, over-interest, and suspicious knowledge about another's health was seen as very dubious.

In a similar way Jane Kighley's over-interest in the Hobson family led to her accusation in 1649. She was believed to have bewitched Abraham Hobson the younger by poisoning him, and Abraham the elder by touching him. The latter deposed how Jane had been at a pig feast with some neighbours and had 'sate doune next unto him & said shee loved him & all at his howse very well, & gave him a little Clappe with her hand on his knee'. These outwardly affectionate actions were seen in a very suspicious light after Abraham reported that his knee was then very painful and that he had been unable to cure it.¹¹⁴ These cases also show the power of

¹¹² P.R.O., ASSI 45/1/5/38.

¹¹³ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/2/132.

¹¹⁴ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/1/243.

touch as well as words. In another case, Mother Sikes was believed to have gained power over Sara Rhodes by grabbing her apron and pulling it.¹¹⁵

Three additional cases from Yorkshire demonstrate the fear of a suspect's friendly overtures. Elizabeth Lively of Hornby, Yorkshire, accused on 25 October 1637, acted suspiciously when she showed too much interest in the health of Catherine Best's husband. Elizabeth asked Catherine 'how her Husband did who answered her yt he was well, but for his fall of his horse, wch he gott in Hornby where ye sd Elizabeth lived, who replied what do you blame me for it'.¹¹⁶ This curiously paranoid response led to the suspicion of her for bewitching Catherine too. Margaret Morton of Krikethorpe, Yorkshire, accused in 1650, was thought to show too much interest in the health of a child she was suspected of bewitching when she asked a neighbour 'how Willm Booth child did, and whether Willm Boothes wife had been any wayes to seeke remedy'.¹¹⁷ Finally, in 1653, it was claimed that Ann Green of Gargrave, Yorkshire, acted suspiciously when she often said to Thomas Shutt 'thou art not well butt I can helpe the in an houres space'.¹¹⁸ These latter two cases appear to constitute the actions of women known for healing practices touting for business.

This examination of non-pamphlet material in relation to the theme of the witch as evil mother has been effective, as it suggests that the emphasis upon the nurturing of familiars should perhaps be tempered since this material presents little evidence to support this point explicitly. However, the concerns over food and poisoning, the images of pollution, and the belief in witches posing a danger to households and children are evident in this material. This, then, supports the use of the evil mother theme as an effective model which enables us to further explore the gender aspects of witchcraft beliefs.

¹¹⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/2/129.

¹¹⁶ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/109.

¹¹⁷ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/1/131.

¹¹⁸ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/1/31.

Conclusion

The three groups of evidence highlight the effectiveness of theories relating to the evil mother to varying extents. As regards the keeping of familiars, the Essex material demonstrates more concern with nurturing relationships between witches and their spirits than the material from the Midlands and the North. As demonstrated above, the Essex pamphlets provided detailed accounts of the keeping, naming and feeding of familiars, which is not so evident in the other material. The examples provided give evidence of women feeding their familiars essential food items, keeping them close by in comfort and giving them pet names. As demonstrated by the case of Elizabeth Clarke in 1645, some of these women explicitly referred to their familiars as children. In the pamphlet evidence of the Midlands and the North there is evidence of the keeping and nurturing of familiars, although the more explicit descriptions included in the Essex material are lacking. The belief in the use of spirits by witches to help them carry out acts of witchcraft is evident, but the accused were rarely depicted as 'mothers' in relation to their imps. The most explicit example of familiars being portrayed as substitute children in this group of evidence, is in the accusations of Hellen and Elizabeth Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621, where the evil woman was believed to suckle her familiar on her breast in a perversion of motherly nurture. 8

The prevalence of the belief in witches working evil through their familiars is evident in non-pamphlet evidence, particularly after the 1604 Witchcraft Act made the entertaining of spirits a felony. However, apart from one case, that involving the accusations of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, in 1616, the non-pamphlet material gives very little indication of beliefs in the witch as a kind of evil mother with her spirits as substitute children. The maternal devotion to familiars as evidence of the belief in the witch as an evil mother figure, therefore, is supported to varying degrees in the three types of material. This emphasises the importance both

of exploring new material, and of considering non-pamphlet evidence in order to assess and modify these theories.

The other concerns related to the model of the witch as evil mother, that witches were commonly connected with images of pollution, that they were believed to poison instead of nurturing through food, and that they held the power to intrude into other's households to damage household activities, livestock and children appear to have been common across all types of material. The reference to pollution appears to have been a particularly effective means of portraying the evil and inversion associated with witchcraft. The images provided in the case against Margaret Moone of Essex in 1645 were particularly explicit - the sudden presence of lice on her victim's clothes and the 'extreame offensive stink' mentioned in connection with her.

The pamphlets of the Midlands and the North emphasise the theme of pollution, particularly through examples of filthy smells in the throats and around the bodies of bewitched people, such as the seven bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire in 1594, Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621, and Richard Dugdale of Surey, Lancashire in 1689. The theme of pollution is also supported, to a lesser extent, in the non-pamphlet accounts, notably in the references to the word 'filthy' in connection with those accused of bewitching John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire in 1616. One explanation that has not been considered, is that these allusions to the accused being filthy may have been an accurate portrayal rather than merely an image of inversion. This might explain the evident dislike and mistrust of them in the neighbourhood.

The issue of pollution and inversion is further evidenced by the preoccupation with food and poisoning evident in the three groups of evidence examined. This emphasis upon food, as in the disputes over food and household items discussed in Chapter

Two, underlines the contemporary concerns over economic survival, which witches were seen to threaten. The emphasis upon the belief in witches harming through food also highlights the portrayal of the witch as an 'anti-housewife', or the opposite of the ideal woman nurturing through food. Explicit connections were made between witchcraft and poisoning in cases included in all three groups of evidence. This indicates the similarities between the two crimes; both being perceived as invisible crimes which worked by attacking the internal body of the victim, both crimes being associated predominantly with women.

Giving food was seen as a particularly female activity, which, therefore, gave women almost exclusive access to other's bodies, and thus the power to harm them. However, as has been indicated in relation to non-pamphlet evidence, not all cases of poisoning were associated with witchcraft, nor were all cases of witchcraft associated with poisoning. Thus, the connections made between the two crimes were acknowledged, but certainly not inevitable. Further research will have to be carried out to determine the extent of connections made between the two crimes by contemporaries, and the reasons for these connections.

The concern over witches endangering households by invading them and causing disruption to household activities, typically brewing, baking and dairy production, further emphasises the portrayal of the witch as anti-housewife, and the images of pollution and inversion prevalent in witchcraft narratives. The fear of witches gaining access to other's homes and lives is evidenced by references to the strange illnesses of livestock and the disruption of household activities in particular in the Essex material. Interestingly, the disputes leading to these acts of maleficia were frequently associated with property, such as the case surrounding Margaret Moone in 1645, thus supporting the concluding comments made in Chapter Two. Witchcraft beliefs were evidently used as a means of explaining the failure of household tasks,

thus the blaming of a witch was a way of maintaining the self-image of a good housewife for some women.

The pamphlet evidence of the Midlands and the North supports these points. There the concern over the intrusion of witchcraft into the household is further evidenced through the fear of inviting suspects into the home, and the invasion of uninvited witches, typically via the chimney or through holes. This, again, provides evidence of the belief in witches' power to transgress the boundaries of the household, as well as the boundaries of the body, as demonstrated both in this and the previous chapter. The use of witchcraft to explain apparent success in household activities, as well as their failure, has also been highlighted. This emphasises the use of witchcraft beliefs by contemporaries as a means of explaining anything out of the ordinary. These narratives were also a response to people's social situation. Beliefs in the magical production of foodstuffs in particular, was an understandable fantasy in the economically maligned Pendle Forest for instance. Non-pamphlet evidence underlines and supports the points already discussed, and the continuing concern with the intrusion of evil into households and private lives can be seen clearly. As in several cases examined from the pamphlet material, this power to invade other's lives could be achieved through over-friendliness or over-interest in the health of others in the community. The suspicion of this over-friendliness was undoubtedly directed towards those who already had an existing ambiguous reputation socially.

Finally, the ultimate evidence of the belief in the witch as the opposite of the ideal woman, was the notion that witches posed a danger to children in particular. Cases of witches apparently harming children were far too numerous to consider but a small fraction of the more explicit examples in order to demonstrate the points made, most notably the deposition of Grace Sowerbutts of Salmesbury, Lancashire in 1612. All three types of material provided evidence of strong parental concern for their children, understandable in a period when mortality amongst children was much

higher than today. As in cases of household failure, to blame witchcraft may have been a means of displacing guilt felt by parents over the death of their child. The witch figure was a useful image to blame.

The danger to children posed by witches is evidenced not only by the danger which they were felt to pose to other's children, but also the danger that they apparently posed to their own children; either through direct acts, such as abortion, or neglect. This latter point has been highlighted most effectively in relation to the Essex material. The idea that witches could also cause infertility, and thus prevent the conception of future children, is indicated in the case against the Flower witches of Bottesford, Leicestershire in 1618. This does not appear to have been a frequent motif in narratives, this case providing a rare instance of the belief in England. This runs counter to the emphasis upon misogynistic passages in the *Malleus Maleficarum* by some feminist writers, particularly the notion that witches actually stole men's members and hid them to prevent fertility.

Thus the examination of the various elements connected with the theme of the witch as evil mother indicates that this notion is an effective one for exploring witchcraft beliefs from a gendered approach. This enables the development of our understanding of the locus of witchcraft beliefs within the household, which draws us away from the overriding emphasis upon external economic concerns of studies such as those by Thomas and Macfarlane. However, the strong emphasis upon the nurturing relationships between witches and their familiars perhaps requires some modification, based on the fact that evidence from the Midlands and the North, particularly non-pamphlet evidence, does not support this argument as strongly as the Essex material upon which it is based. This again highlights the importance of considering material from other counties to counter the Essex experience of witchcraft beliefs portrayed through pamphlets, and also the importance of

examining non-pamphlet evidence in order to assess, and modify, these interpretations.

Examination of the other elements of the evil mother model, however, namely the emphasis upon pollution, food and poisoning, and the notion that witches were felt to endanger households and children in particular, has been effective. This indicates how witchcraft beliefs were understood not only within the neighbourhood context but, much closer to home, within a household context. The evident fear surrounding the activities of witches emphasises the vulnerability of day to day survival in this period of economic instability. Witches were believed to damage essential food and drink needed for sustenance, livestock necessary sustenance and for livelihoods, and children. The main difference between the groups of evidence appears to be a question of emphasis. Although the pamphlet material, particularly that from Essex, indicates these fears and beliefs more explicitly, the non-pamphlet material also indicates similar concerns with the household and survival.

Finally, this chapter has, as have previous chapters, alluded to the issue of power, particularly the power of the witch to invade and destroy. It is necessary, therefore, to turn to the crucial question of power in witchcraft beliefs, which forms the central debate of the next chapter.

Chapter Five - Desiring Power

Introduction

Witchcraft beliefs in the early modern world were imbued with inherent concerns about, and desire for, power. This chapter will argue that witchcraft beliefs and accusations can be seen as a means of gaining power for a range of powerless groups, in spite of the imaginary, illusionary or limited nature of this power. Secondly, it will be argued that the notion of power was heavily gendered, since real or actual power ultimately lay in the hands of masculine figures. This argument concerning power will be discussed through three main themes. Firstly, accused witches' confessions demonstrate the wish for more control over their surroundings and others in their community. Secondly, accusers who felt powerless in the face of supernatural power achieved power through the process of accusation, and seemingly possessed children gained power over firstly their audience, and ultimately the power of life or death over the accused witches. Accusers were also frequently involved with experts, legal, religious or medical, who in several instances encouraged witchcraft accusations to enhance their personal power. Thirdly, real power was believed to lie in the hands of a masculine figure, the law, the Devil or, ultimately, God.

Accused witches' confessions demonstrate the wish for more control over their surroundings and others in their community. In the early modern world it was thought neither befitting nor natural for a woman to hold power; powerful women were against nature, and thus un-Godly.¹ Feminists such as Hester have raised the idea that we may be seeing 'the attempt by women to use witchcraft belief as a means of empowerment; that is, to be perceived as more powerful than otherwise

¹ See Chapter One for discussion of the debate over female rule with specific reference to Elizabeth I; for a discussion of the links between female rule and power and images of motherhood see Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 19, 68, 71

socially possible'.² Thus however false or limited the power of witchcraft was, it could be argued that it gave some women a feeling of control over their social environment. Willis argues that contemporary plays by Shakespeare showed witchcraft as a means of empowerment for women 'in a cultural system that drives men as well as women at all social levels into rivalries, feuds, civil war'.³ Furthermore, Purkiss shows how feminists in the late 1960s and 1970s seized on the figure of the witch as a paradoxical figure of both male oppression and female power in defiance of it. Thus they constructed 'an image of the witch as a violent and empowered woman'.⁴

It is significant that women were represented as agents of power after the demonic pact. These are the witches of recent feminist literature - women who controlled the world around them rather than the helpless victims of male oppression portrayed in earlier feminist writing. The witch through feminist writing has become an ambiguous figure, one who defies male oppression while at the same time being ultimately destroyed by it. However much of a cultural myth the notion of the feminist witch resisting male supremacy may be, it is nonetheless significant that the idea of witchcraft has involved discussions about power for all concerned for over five centuries.

Although the patriarchal system of the early modern period denoted all women as powerless to a certain extent, it could be argued that the women accused of witchcraft were seen as particular burdens, or nuisances, in their communities, whether economically or due to their deviant reputations. Although these women may not have been the poorest in their locality, therefore, they may have felt the

² Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 110.

³ Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 169.

⁴ Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, 9; Bovenschen, S., 'The Contemporary Witch, the Historical Witch, and the Witch Myth', New German Critique, (1979), vol.15, 83-119. Mitchell questions the apparent 'attraction' of feminists to witches as mass victims of patriarchy as a kind of sado-masochism, Mitchell, L., 'Enemies of God or victims of patriarchy?', Trouble and Strife, (Spring 1984), no.12, 18-20. See Chapter 1 for discussion of the appropriation of the image of the witch by feminists.

most alienated, and thus in the most need of more social power. Thus, as Jackson claims, 'women may well have 'turned to witchcraft', through conscious decision, as a solution to poverty and powerlessness'.⁵ Gaskill concurs, noting that the weak could use witchcraft to 'free themselves from the constraint of daily life and take control of their destinies'. Women, in particular, used the power of words to compensate for their lack of actual power.⁶ The power of witchcraft was thought to include the power to control the weather, the illness and death of people and animals, and the harming of household produce and goods.⁷ Examinations of witches also frequently involved the claim that the devil offered them tangible images of power such as gold and silver. Importantly, this power was attributed predominantly to women and, as Hester notes, it appears to have been predominantly women who believed *themselves* to possess this power.⁸ The power and knowledge of witchcraft were also thought to be passed down through families, usually through the female line.

Willis notes that witchcraft beliefs could be empowering for all women involved:

witchcraft beliefs allowed escape from a patriarchal symbolic that located deficiency in the female. The witch gained magical power through her powers of maternal nurture. The mother of merely human children could use a variety of anti-witchcraft techniques as well as the legal process to reclaim a magic of her own by defeating the witch.⁹

⁵ Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 75, see also Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, 219; Gaskill, M.J., Attitudes to Crime, 83-4.

⁶ Gaskill, M., 'Witchcraft and Power in Early Modern England - the case of Margaret Moore', in Kermode, J. & Walker, G., Women, Crime and the Courts, 138, 129. Sharpe also states that witchcraft entailed a struggle for female space, Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 150, 185-8.

⁷ Shadwell, T., The Late Lancashire Witches, (1681), 11; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 17, 25. As Thomas notes, these temptations would have been very real, the images offered relating closely to the reality of women's needs, Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 521.

⁸ Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 132.

⁹ Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 77. Roper argues that mothers accusing other women of harming their children may have been transferring their own negative feelings towards their child onto the accused, Jackson, L. notes similar cases from Suffolk, 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 77, see also Purkiss, D., 'Desire and Its Deformities', 106.

The role of women in witchcraft cases as accusers, witnesses and searchers, as well as witches, has been discussed increasingly by historians.¹⁰ However, this important element has frequently been used as a means to discredit the feminist notion of the witch trials as a woman-hunt. Although this notion is undoubtedly simplistic in its limited analysis of intra-gender relations, there is a danger in dismissing the feminist argument *per se*. These arguments have led to major, and varied, developments in our understanding of the gender dynamics at work in witchcraft beliefs.

Finally, it has been argued that witches were attributed power by elites in order to justify their persecution. Witches were seen as dangerous because they had the capacity to wield power over anyone they chose. Thus, as Dolan states, 'witchcraft was believed to destabilise the distributions of power within the culture and foundations of social order'. This was further achieved by attributing power to socially powerless people. She further argues that the only texts which portrayed witches in a sympathetic light, those by sceptics such as Scot for instance, took away the agency of witches, showing them instead as old, mentally ill and powerless. Thus, although the rise of scepticism gradually saw a decrease in the persecution of witches, there was a corresponding trend of taking women less seriously.¹¹

Although the presence of some malicious accusations cannot be discounted, formal witchcraft accusations in general appear to have been a way for people to gain power over the seemingly invisible enemy, and perceived reality, of witchcraft in their neighbourhoods. Sharpe has alluded to the 'theatricality' prevalent in possession cases.¹² Accusations provided the opportunity for children to gain attention by controlling their audiences with their unbelievable actions during their fits, when the

¹⁰ For example Holmes, C., 'Women: Witnesses and Witches', 45-78, Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, chapter 7. See Chapter One for further discussion.

¹¹ Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, 5-18, 171-180, 194-5, quote 16. See also Dresen-Coenders, L., 'Witches as Devil's Concubines', 63.

¹² Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 196, 204-8, Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 101; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 388.

witches' demon familiars seemingly possessed them.¹³ Apart from images of power offered to victims of possession by the devil, real power was offered in the form of an audience of people willing to watch and believe the amazing fits and convulsions which took place. This suggests that a desire for attention by powerless or neglected children and servants was undoubtedly a factor in encouraging them to dissemble. The great numbers of people who went to witness victims of possession attests to the widespread interest in witchcraft and possession in early modern culture. The presence of an audience also underlines the image in some of these scenarios of a spectacle or performance.

The common motifs believed to be a staple part of possession cases, including fits, shrieking, violence, and blasphemy, allowed the victims the opportunity to transgress acceptable modes of behaviour in reacting against all forms of authority, particularly religious. It is hardly surprising that some have argued that these people tended to come from a rather austere religious background from which they were attempting to rebel in the only acceptable way.¹⁴ By rebelling in this fashion, the victim could indulge in various forms of outrageous behaviour while retaining a blame-free innocence in the eyes of the audience. Paradoxically, although they appeared to have lost all control over their bodies during their fits, they ultimately held the power of life and death over the suspected witches in their localities since, as an exceptional crime, the evidence of children under fourteen was accepted in court in witch trials.¹⁵ The perceived danger that witches were felt to pose to children can be seen in the accounts of children seemingly possessed by witches' demon familiars, as

¹³ The ability of such children to control their elders is noted with reference to the Salem trials of 1692 in Kaplan, C., 'Witchcraft: A Child's Story', *History Workshop Journal*, (Spring 1996), no.41, 258.

¹⁴ Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 64, 272-3; Sharpe, J., 'Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process', 116; Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 203. Kermode and Walker suggest that demonic possession enabled females to express power while remaining free from culpability, Kermode, J. & Walker, G. (eds.), *Women, Crime and the Courts*, 15. This study demonstrates that this power was desired not only by powerless females, but by children and servants in particular.

¹⁵ *The Lawes Against Witches*, (1645), 5; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 233-7; Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 155.

discussed in Chapter Three. Accusations of witchcraft also presented an opportunity for parents, and various experts to improve their prestige.

Importantly, despite the fact that witches were punished for wielding evil power over their communities, this power was believed, in educated opinion anyway, to lie ultimately with a male figure, either the Devil, or God. The masculine power of the law was also a factor, since the witches were believed to lose their power once apprehended by the law through a formal accusation. A character in Heywood and Broome's 1634 play *The Late Lancashire Witches* noted how 'I have heard, that witches apprehended under hands of lawfull authority, doe loose their power; and all their spels are instantly dissolv'd', to whom it is replied 'If it be so, then at this happy houre, The witch is tame that over us had power'.¹⁶ In Shadwell's 1681 play of the same title, Sir Edward Hartsert tells Sir Jeffrey Shacklehead that 'The old women have reason to fear you, you have hang'd so many of 'em'.¹⁷

Theologians and demonologists alike wrestled with the problem of how much power to attribute to the witch. As Sharpe indicates, 'to attribute too much power to Satan was to make a mockery of God's justice, while to assign vast powers to the witch, and hence elevate the creature's powers to those of the creator, was worse'.¹⁸ Scot derided the attribution of power to a 'toothles, old, impotent and unwieldie woman'.¹⁹ Thus even when women appear to be powerful, they were seen still to be under masculine influence. In 1680, John Brinley argued that 'All do grant, which have any knowledge in the power of Witches, that they work only by the Devil; for though themselves do Threaten, Curse, make Images, and the like; yet the Devil is the great Instrument that works the Mischief'. He further asserted that people gave

¹⁶ Heywood, T. & Broome, R., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (1634), L.

¹⁷ Shadwell, T., *The Late Lancashire Witches*, (1681), 10.

¹⁸ Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 82-4, 236, 240. See also Bever, E., 'Old Age and Witchcraft', 153-4; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 104-7, 380; Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 470-6.

¹⁹ Scot, R., *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, (1584), 8.

themselves to the Devil because of their 'desire for revenge'. Another author described witches as 'some poor miscreants' deluded by Satan.²⁰ Thus as Matalene states: 'the witch's evil power was thought to reside actually in her 'husband', for she had united herself in an unnatural marriage with no less a mate than the Devil himself'.²¹ The belief in the power of the devil took away power and agency from the witch, portraying the witch as merely deluded by a male figure.

Furthermore, it was believed that even the Devil had access to power only at the behest of God, since God's providence was omnipotent. Gifford emphasised that although witches existed, they could not really carry out the evil deeds attributed to them. Witches could not control the Devil, only God could. And Perkins noted in 1608 that Satan 'is as it were God's ape'.²² Overall, it was unthinkable to the early modern psyche for a woman to hold power in her own right - she must be given it either by God, as in the case of *exceptional* women rulers such as Elizabeth I, or, as in this case, by the Devil.²³

Willis argues that there were discontinuities between popular and elite beliefs in the location of power. As she states:

elite discourse worked to undo the association of the witch's maternal attributes with *power*. In village-level discourse, the witch acquires supernatural power in exchange for the maternal care - food and comfort - she provides to needy, childlike imps in the form of small animals, allowing them to nurse from her witch's teat. In elite discourse, the imps front for or are completely replaced by an adult

²⁰ Brinley, J., A Discovery of the Impostures of Witches and Astrologers, (1680), 26, 43; A Pleasant Treatise of Witches, &c., (1673).

²¹ Matalene, C., 'Women as Witches', 584.

²² Scot also expounded this view, Scot, R., The Discoverie of Witchcraft, (1584), 7; Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, 207-8; Harrison, G.B., The Trial of the Lancaster Witches, xvii. Perkins quoted in Rowse, A.L., The Elizabethan Renaissance - The Life of the Society, (London, 1974), 302. See Clark, S., Thinking with Demons, chapter 11.

²³ An interesting parallel to the case of witches is the case of Queen Elizabeth I who had to justify her status of a female ruler on the grounds that she had been ordained by God. Ironically, she embodied the opposite to the sexual in her cult of virginity.

male devil - Satan himself. Satan controls all; it is a mistake to think that the witch has any independent power of her own.²⁴

Even contemporary sceptics, such as Reginald Scot, who argued against the witch-hunts can be seen as disempowering the witch by attributing her confessions to deficiencies of the mind and body. Willis argues that this increasing emphasis on the weakness of women led to a loss of their agency. Nevertheless, women still had the power to choose which male power to follow, whether God or the Devil, regardless of what this may mean about their weakness.²⁵ Issues concerning power were, therefore, intrinsic to witchcraft beliefs in contemporary theory, and have been recognised as such by both feminists and historians. It is necessary, then, to assess how far this is reflected in the contemporary records surrounding witchcraft beliefs.

The Essex Context

The Power of the Witch

That the power of malefic witchcraft was associated with women in particular is demonstrated in the Essex material by confessions indicating a belief in witchcraft passing between female family members or friends and neighbours.²⁶ In fact, Hester argues that one third of the Essex pamphlet cases involved women claiming to have learnt witchcraft from their mother or another older woman, thus 'knowing a witch or being related to one was likely to label a woman as a witch herself'.²⁷

In 1566, Elizabeth Francis claimed to have been taught witchcraft by her grandmother when she was twelve, and Joan Waterhouse told how 'her mother this laste wynter woulde have learned her this arte, but she lerned it not'.²⁸ Thirteen years later, Elizabeth Francis revealed that Mother Waterhouse, the mother of Joan,

²⁴ Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 89-90, 163, 181, 209.

²⁵ Ibid., 92, 93, 243.

²⁶ Jackson, L. notes similar cases from Suffolk, 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 65.

²⁷ Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 194, 200-1.

²⁸ The examination and confession, (1566).

was her sister. In 1582, Alice Hunt and Margery Sammon were thought to be the daughters of another reputed witch, Mother Barnes; and after Alice persuaded Margery to confess she claimed that her mother had given her familiars to her. Alice Manfield and Margaret Grevell reputedly shared their familiars. Alice confessed that Margaret had given her the familiars on the condition that she could use them sometimes. She further deposed that one of the familiars had warned her that she would be accused, and told her that they would be going to stay with Mother Grey (Ursula Kemp), Mother Turner, or the two daughters of Mother Barnes (Alice Hunt and Margery Sammon). In 1589, Joan Cunny's two daughters were accused along with her, and she herself claimed to have been taught witchcraft by Mother Humphrey of Maplestead, who taught her how to invoke spirits.

Further instances of this belief are provided by the pamphlet *A true and exact Relation* of 1645. Elizabeth Clarke, Hellen Clarke, Rebecca West, Susan Cock and Ann Cate were daughters of reputed witches, and Francis Milles accused her own daughters when she herself was searched. This pamphlet is also unusual in that several of the women confessed to meeting together to carry out acts of witchcraft. Anne Leech of Misley confessed that she, Elizabeth Gooding and Anne West of Lawford had met at Elizabeth Clark's house 'where there was a book read, wherein she thinks there was no goodnesse'.²⁹ Rebecca West later confessed to having been at the same meeting, and that the women prayed to their familiars before reading Elizabeth Clark's book. Similarly Joyce Boanes, Susan Cock, Rose Hallybread and Margaret Landish were said to have met together and shared their imps. This demonstrates that witchcraft was believed to have been carried out in a distinctly female setting.

²⁹ *A true and exact Relation*, (1645), 9; Dolan notes that contemporary drama situated witches in a separate female space, Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*, 224.

The power of witchcraft was seen as invisible, yet dangerous in its invasion of privacy into people's households. This power to intrude into the space of others has already been indicated in the previous chapter. In a further example, Joan Pechey claimed in 1582 that 'shee coulde tell what any man saide or did at any time in their houses, when & as often as shee listed'.³⁰ This claim to almost omnipotent, all pervasive power must have validated the concerns people had about witchcraft.

Witches were also believed to be able to usurp the power of men. In 1566, Mother Waterhouse confessed that 'because she lyved somewhat unquietly with her husbände, she caused Sathan to kyl him, and he doid so about ix. yeres past, syth which tyme she hath lyved a widdow'. She further claimed that 'going to Brackstede a lyttle before her apprehentyon, this Sathan wyllled her to hye her home, for she shulde have great trouble and that she shoulde be eyther hanged or burned shortly'.³¹

Witches' confessions frequently told of the devil offering them tangible images of power in return for their homage of him. The examination of Elizabeth Francis at Chelmsford in 1566 demonstrates the wish of the accused woman for empowerment. She claimed to have been given a familiar in the form of a white spotted cat named Satan by her grandmother Mother Eve of Hatfield Peveril when she was 12. Her first request of Satan was 'that she might be ryche and to have goodes, and he promised her she shoulde, and askinge her what she would have, and she sayde shepe'. This request was fulfilled and the cat brought eighteen black and white sheep into her pasture, although they 'did all wear away, she knew not how'. She also 'desired to have one Andrew Byles to her husband, which was a man of some welth, and the cat dyd promise she shold, but that he sayde she must fyrste consent that this Andrew shuld abuse her, and so she did'.³² This is indicative both of the accused woman's

³⁰ A true and just Recorde, (1582), A5.

³¹ The examination and confession, (1566). Burning was the punishment for killing a husband, however she was condemned not for this crime but for killing her neighbour. See Chapter One.

³² *Ibid.* Hester notes that all three women accused at this trial appear to have used witchcraft as a means of empowerment, Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 163.

desire for power - property and a rich husband - and also the ultimate power of the devil as exercised through the familiar. The limited nature of this power is shown through the disappearance of her sheep, her new wealth and property, and the betrayal of her lover. The ultimate powerlessness of the woman is shown as she is forced to sleep with her chosen husband before she can have him. This backfired as he refused to marry her, so Elizabeth requested that the familiar first kill him, then the baby she suspected that she was carrying. This underlines the vulnerability of women to the risk of illegitimate childbearing, another activity strongly ostracised by the community.

In a similar scenario in 1645, Anne West apparently gave a familiar to Elizabeth Clarke so that she could get a husband to take care of her. Elizabeth claimed that Anne 'seemed much to pitie this Examinant for her lamenesse (having but one leg) and her poverty'.³³ Purkiss highlights the danger women posed to the social order in this way as we can see 'the offer of sex as the only recourse of a poor woman who hopes to attract a man of wealth and taste'. Thus 'commodification can allow women to 'sell' their way out of their just place in the social hierarchy'.³⁴ However, contrary to this assessment, it could be argued that Elizabeth Francis's confession highlights the vulnerability and powerlessness of poor women, rather than power. The church court records are full of women who failed to 'sell' their way out of their position, being subjected to punishment for lewd behaviour and bastardy instead.³⁵

³³ A true and exact Relation, (1645), 6. Megged notes similar cases from seventeenth-century Mexico, Megged, A., 'Magic, popular medicine and gender in seventeenth-century Mexico: the case of Isabel de Montoya', Social History, (May 1994), vol.19, no.2, 203.

³⁴ Purkiss, D., 'Desire and Its Deformities', 123. Healers in seventeenth-century Mexico also had aspirations of the Devil finding them a husband of high social status to look after them, A. Megged, 'Magic, popular medicine and gender', 203.

³⁵ That women were desperate to avoid the disgrace or economic burden of having a bastard child is demonstrated by several publicised instances of women killing their illegitimate children. Pamphlets noting such cases include Sundry strange and inhumaine Murthers lately committed, (1591); Natures Cruell Step-Dames: or Matchlesse Monsters of the Female Sex, (1637); The Proceedings at the Assizes in Southwark, (1678); Fair Warning to Murderers of Infants, (1692).

Other women wished to better their lives in different ways. In 1645, Hellen Clark claimed that the Devil told her to 'deny Christ, and she would never want', and Rebecca West said that her mother, Anne, had 'desired of her Spirit, that shee might be freed from all her enemies, and have no trouble'.³⁶ This provides evidence of the desire for an easier life for women ostracised by the community and living in poverty. Women claimed to have been tempted when offered seemingly unlimited power. Mother (Agnes) Waterhouse of Hatfield Peveril claimed in 1566 that Elizabeth Francis gave her the cat Satan in return for a cake and 'told her that yf she made much of him, he would do for her what she wolde have him to do'.³⁷ Likewise Joan Prentice claimed in 1589 that her familiar, a ferret named Bid, told her 'Joan, if thou will have me doo anything for thee, I am and wilbe alwaies ready at thy commaundement'.³⁸ The offer of having something loyal and willing to do anything to please must surely have tempted these alienated women. The name 'Bid' also indicates how the accused women saw the familiars - they believed, mistakenly, that they were in control. Thus to become a witch appears to have been the only access to power these women had.

The Power of the Accuser

Various children were actively encouraged to testify in the Essex witchcraft accusations, which underlines the opportunity for power which witch trials presented for powerless children, adolescents and young servants. In 1579 Ellen Smith's thirteen year old son testified against his mother, and in the St Osyth trial of 1582 young children were brought forward to testify against their parents. Phoebe Hunt, aged eight, gave information against her step-mother Alice Hunt, accusing her of having 'two little thinges like horses' and claiming that 'her mother had charged her not to tell anything, what shee had seene: And if shee did those thinges woulde take

³⁶ A true and exact Relation, (1645), 10, 13; for witchcraft as a means to improving conditions see also Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 520-2.

³⁷ The examination and confession, (1566).

³⁸ The Apprehension and confession, (1589), B2.

her'.³⁹ Henry and John Sellis, aged nine and six respectively, testified against their parents Henry and Cicely Sellis, also claiming that they had familiars. Finally Agnes Dowsing, the six year old illegitimate daughter of Agnes Herd, gave evidence against her mother, alleging that her mother kept spirits which had also sucked from her and her brother.

In the Chelmsford trial of 1589, children were openly praised in the pamphlet and in court for testifying. The illegitimate sons of Joan Cunny's 'lewd daughters' testified against their grandmother and were commended for doing so, 'firste the Judge of the circuite very wisely with a great foresight called in the two Bastard Children before mencioned, and comended them greatlye for telling the trueth of that which he should aske them concerning their Grandam and their mothers, which they did'.⁴⁰ It is difficult to ascertain why these children should have testified against their parents, undoubtedly they had no idea of the gravity of what they were taking part in, perhaps they just wanted the attention and excitement of having adults believing every word they said and taking them seriously for once.⁴¹

An important variation on the image of the uncontrolled female household appears when children seem to have become bewitched by witches' demons while their father was away from the household for some reason. This provides the implication that households were more vulnerable to evil when the man as head of the household, protector and controller of order, was absent. For instance, in 1579 Mother Staunton was accused of bewitching the child of the vicar at Wimbish after 'beyng denied her errande by his wife (he beeyng as then from home)'. Interestingly the child was said to have 'recovered perfectly, and plaid as before' within an hour

³⁹ A true and just Recorde, (1582), A6.

⁴⁰ The Apprehension and confession, (1589), B3.

⁴¹ Willis uses psychoanalysis to explain children's role, attributing their depositions to 'persecuting fantasies'. Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 45, 56-8. Briggs notes that younger people had a higher capacity for imagining more elaborate fantasies, Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 392.

of the vicar returning home.⁴² In this case, with the vicar being away, God's representative is absent thus allowing evil to spread. All fathers were the heads of the household's religion, so when they were away, their households were seen to be out of control. Similarly, in Thomas Death's information against Cicely Sellis at St Osyth in 1582 he stated that 'having bin at sea and newly arrived at Ipeswitch, a messenger which was newly come from his wife, by chaunce mette him, who told this examine that his daughter Marie was taken very strangely and lay in a most pitious case'.⁴³ The father's absence may also provide a more tangible explanation for the illness of the child, as the child may have been in more need of attention if a parent was often absent, or perhaps the children in these cases felt that they could get away with it when their father was away.

Witch trials could provide a way of obtaining personal power and fame for the varied 'experts' called in, in a legal, religious or medical capacity. Brian Darcy, a Justice of the Peace, evidently used the 1582 trial at St. Osyth as an opportunity to gain prestige. The pamphlet of the trial indicates that he oversaw the examinations of the suspected witches and their accusers, as well as appearing to have had some personal input into the pamphlet itself. Rosen claimed that 'the whole work is planned to display his superlative cleverness and efficiency', noting that he applied Continental theories and methods to the trial, including the use of very young child witnesses, and the use of persuasive tactics of questioning including false promises of clemency which appear to have been strongly influenced by the work of Jean Bodin in his *De la Demonomanie* which appeared in 1580.⁴⁴

⁴² *A Detection of damnable driftes*, (1579), B1.

⁴³ *A true and iust Recorde*, (1582), E1.

⁴⁴ Rosen, B., *Witchcraft*, 103-4, 121-2. See Chapter One for further discussion of dissemination of ideas between witchcraft texts.

Masculine Power

Despite the illusionary power which witches were believed, and felt themselves, to hold, the ultimate power was seen by elite writers to be in the hands of masculine figures; the devil, or God. The belief in the ultimate powerlessness of witches can be seen clearly in the preface to *A true and exact Relation* (1645), when the author claimed that Satan with 'deceitfull promises and subtile devices...hath insnared and drawne these poore silly creatures'. He stated furthermore that witches were merely deluded by Satan into thinking that they had power.⁴⁵

The popular conflation of the devil with demonic imps in England is evident in that the power of the accused women over their familiars was also seen to be limited. Women told of being tormented by their familiars, or of them taking matters into their own hands. Joan Prentice confessed in 1589 that she sent her spirit Bid to nip Sara, a child of Master Glascock, however when he returned the next night Bid reported that the child would shortly die. To this Joan exclaimed 'thou villaine what hast thou doon, I bid thee to nip it but a little and not to hurt it, and hast thou killed the childe'.⁴⁶ Also Elizabeth Bennett claimed in 1582, that after she fell out with William Byatt and his wife, her spirit Suckin came to tell her that it had killed Byatt's wife, 'she this Examinee saying that it was done by the spirite, but not by the sending of this Examinee.' The spirit claimed to have killed her because of the ill treatment Elizabeth had suffered at the Byatt's hands, and 'to winne credit with this Examinee'.⁴⁷ Again this gives the impression that the familiars are serving the women rather than the other way round. In 1645, Anne Leech claimed that when she 'did not send and imploy them [her familiars] abroad to do mischief, she had not her health, but when they were imployed, she was healthfull and well', thus attempting to give some justification for her behaviour.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ *A true and exact Relation*, (1645), preface.

⁴⁶ *The Apprehension and confession*, (1589), B2.

⁴⁷ *A true and just Recorde*, (1582), C1.

⁴⁸ *A true and exact Relation*, (1645), 9.

There also appears to have been a relationship of trust formed between the witch and her familiar. In 1579, Mother Nokes told of her trust in her familiar. When reproved for arguing with Taylor's wife at the church she 'in a fume aunswereth that she cared for none of them all, as long as Tom helde on her side, meanyng her Feende'.⁴⁹ This indicates the desire of these women for someone on their side. When asked in 1582 whether her familiar had ever lied to her, Ursula Kemp answered that 'the said spirite did ever tell her true in any matter shee required of it, and saith, that shee never knewe it to tell her otherwise then truth'.⁵⁰ This would further emphasise to the reader the folly of placing trust in the Devil for power.

Pamphlet accounts reported with satisfaction that these women relied on their new powers falsely, since the Devil and his spirits were believed to abandon them in their time of most need. In 1566, Mother Waterhouse was offered release from prison if she could make her spirit appear, but she claimed that 'I have no more power over him'.⁵¹ Alice Manfield's spirits warned her that 'shee shoulde be called in question, and bad her shift for her self: saying, they woulde nowe depart from her'.⁵² And of Mother (Joan) Upney of Dagenham, Essex, it was noted in 1589 that:

being inwardlye pricked, and having some inward feeling in conscience, cryed out saying: that she had greivously sinned, that the devill had decefed her, the devill had decefed her, and that she had twice given her soule to the Devill...she seemed very sorry for ye same, and died very penitent, asking God & the world forgiveness, even to [the] last gaspe, for her wicked and detestable life.⁵³

⁴⁹ A Detection of damnable driftes, (1579), B2. In a similar case in Cambridgeshire, a woman refused to renounce the devil whom she regarded her faithful friend; Ewen, C.L., Witchcraft and Demonianism, 450.

⁵⁰ A true and just Recorde, (1582), B5.

⁵¹ The examination and confession, (1566).

⁵² A true and just Recorde, (1582), D7. This is echoed in the case of Mary Sutton from Bedfordshire in 1613 who, when apprehended, claimed that the devil had left her to her 'shame', Witches Apprehended, Examined and Executed, (1613).

⁵³ The Apprehension and confession, (1589), B3.

Despite the apparent power gained through witchcraft, therefore, it is clear that even the seemingly powerful woman was believed to have been under the control of a male figure.

A true and exact Relation (1645) went further and argued that even the Devil did not hold the ultimate power in these cases, but that only God was ultimately powerful. The author argued that only God could create and that thus the only power that the Devil had was the ability to deceive people, thus 'the reason, therefore, why 'witches' should be punished is because they have allowed themselves to be taken in by the Devil'.⁵⁴ This pamphlet was also more explicit in portraying the accused women as heretics; Hellen Clark, Rebecca West and Ann Cate all confessed to denying God and Christ in return for power from the Devil. Rebecca stated that she asked the Devil to kill the son of Thomas Hart, after which 'she conceived hee could do as God; after which time shee gave entertainment to him'.⁵⁵

The witch trial pamphlets from early modern Essex provide the evidence to argue that witchcraft entailed issues of power for all individuals involved. Witchcraft provided some powerless women with, albeit illusionary, power over others in their community, especially those who had wronged them in some way. Accusations also provided individuals in the community; children, parents, neighbours, and also external 'experts', with the opportunity to exercise power, either by rebelling against authority, by attacking a known object of fear or by improving their personal status. Finally, these pamphlets also highlight elite notions of the locus of real power lying with God, and how the witch's confessions can be used to support these ideas.

⁵⁴ *A true and exact Relation*, (1645), preface. See Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 104, 106, for a discussion of George Gifford's views on this issue, particularly how he turns 'maternal power into powerlessness', 108, 147.

⁵⁵ *A true and exact Relation*, (1645), 12.

The Midlands and North - Pamphlet Accounts

The Power of the Witch

Both suspected witches and their supposed victims stressed issues of tangible power and very real need in depositions and examinations. These concerns are prevalent in the accusations and confessions from Lancashire, 1612, during the first Pendle witch trial. Elizabeth Southernns confessed that she had given her soul to a spirit named Tibb so that 'she should have anything that she would request'. Her grand-daughter, Alizon Device, claimed that she gave her soul to a black dog who said he 'would give her the power to doe any thing shee would'. Anne Whittle claimed further that:

there was a thing in the likenes of a spotted Bitch, that came with the sayd Spirit unto the sayd *Demdike*, which then did speake unto her in this Examinate hearing, and sayd, that she should have Gould, Silver, and worldly Wealth, at her will. And at the same time she saith, there was victuals, viz. Flesh, Butter, Cheese, Bread, and Drinke, and bidde then eate enough...And she sayeth, that although they did eate, they were never the fuller, nor better for the same; and that at their said Banquet, the said Spirits gave them light to see what they did, although they neyther had fire nor Candle light.⁵⁶

To women who lived constantly on the verge of poverty, this fantasy of plentiful food and promised riches is understandable enough, and it represents the need of these women for power, which they expressed through their reputations for witchcraft.⁵⁷ The disclosure that they felt no fuller after this feast indicates the illusionary nature of this motif. It was common in narratives of this type to claim that what the Devil or their spirits offered them either disappeared or offered no real sustenance. This underlined the elite notion that suspects were merely duped by the Devil into believing the reality of these images.

A desire for social power was also frequently expressed. Anne Whittle further confessed that 'the Devill then in the shape of a Man, sayd to this Examinee: Thou

⁵⁶ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), B2, R3, B4.

⁵⁷ Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*, 137; Gaskill, M.J., *Attitudes to Crime*, 79.

shalt want nothing; and be revenged of whom thou list.' Thus here we see the fantasy of the powerless woman for both worldly comforts and power to have her will over others, as well as perhaps for company. Again the image of the Devil is conflated with the familiar in the popular mind. Importantly, the familiar in this case was thought to be able to harm only with the witch's consent, thus Anne refused the spirit when it wished to harm Richard Baldwin of Pendle, for which it attempted to bite her on the arm. She further confessed to having sent Fancy, her familiar, against Robert Nutter who had threatened to evict them if he inherited the land on which their house stood, because her daughter Anne Redfearn had rejected his advances. This was a clear-cut wish for power against a man attempting to wield his real power over them. This demonstrates the argument that witchcraft provided an alternative for powerless people to express their anger or need for revenge.⁵⁸

Women of higher social ranking also desired power. Anne Whittle claimed that Elizabeth Nutter, the wife of Robert Nutter senior, had asked her and two other women to kill the younger Robert if they could, as if he were dead then 'the Women their Coosens might have the land' to which they all agreed.⁵⁹ Women were portrayed as coming together to pool their resources and power in this case. James Device deposed on 27 April 1612 that Jennet Preston had attended the witches' meeting at Malkin Tower to request help in killing someone, as 'her power was not strong ynough to doe it her selfe'.⁶⁰

Power, then, either material or social, was usually the perceived, or admitted, reason for engaging in a pact with the devil. The 1612 Pendle trials in Lancashire were unusual amongst English trials in that one of the accused, Alice Nutter, was of high social status and wealthy. She was described as 'a rich woman; had a great estate,

⁵⁸ Dolan, F.E., Dangerous Familiars, 196-7; Crawford, P., Women and Religion, 105; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 94.

⁵⁹ Potts, T., The Wonderful Discoverie, (1613), D2-3, E2.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.

and children of good hope: in the common opinion of the world, of good temper, free from envy or malice'. Thus not only was she not poor, she also appeared to have a good reputation, unlike the vast majority of the suspects in English witch trials, as discussed in Chapter Two. But women from all social rankings felt the need for social and personal power, if not material power. Potts wrote that 'the two degrees of persons which chiefly practise Witch-craft, are such, as are in great miserie and povertie, for such the Devill allures to follow him, by promising great riches, and worldly commoditie; Others, though rich, yet burne in a desperate desire of Revenge'.⁶¹

Explicit mention of a pact with the devil seems to have been rare in English witch trials, however there are a few indications of the belief in a demonic pact. Reference was made to a pact in the Fairfax case, Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621. Hellen Fairfax claimed that Margaret Thorp told her that she made a pact with a man on the moors. He offered her money and she signed a lease with blood, giving her her life for forty years.⁶² Earlier, in *The Wonderful Discoverie* (1619), the Flower women of Bottesford, Leicestershire, were portrayed as agents of power after their pact with the devil. The author related how they 'grow proud again in their cunning and artificiall power, to doe what mischeif they listed. By this time they have learnt the manner of incantations, Spells and Charmes'. These epitomise the witches of more recent feminist literature, who are presented as agents rather than victims. However, this was really a false sense of power as the women were still under the control of a masculine figure in the form of the Devil. Because of their evil nature, rather than using their female power to nurture and heal, they used it to destroy; 'By this they will kill what cattle they list'.⁶³ Not only did they threaten the livelihoods of their neighbours by killing their cattle, thus intruding into their households, they then turned their malevolent attention to the family of the Earl of Rutland. Witchcraft

⁶¹ Ibid., O3.

⁶² Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 86.

⁶³ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 10.

was thus the only form of power, albeit illusionary, available to the Flower women against a powerful gentry family whom they felt had wronged them.

Joan Willimot, of Goadby, Leicestershire, claimed in 1618 that Joan Flower confessed to her that she had bewitched the Earl of Rutland's son because she was angry about the Earl's treatment of her family but she could not bewitch him personally. He was probably perceived to have been protected by God, since witches were not believed to be able to harm those firm in faith. Joan further confessed that she had claimed that John Patchet's child would be alive if he had 'sought for it in time', and that Patchet's wife had 'an evil thing within her, which should make an end of her'.⁶⁴ This demonstrates the power that Joan was believed, and thought herself, to have. Not only did she hold the power to heal, and thus potentially to harm, but she could withhold this power thus causing death by neglect. Her reputation in the community would not have been helped by her talking to others of the Patchet family's fortunes, or her claimed knowledge of others with magical powers.

An additional example demonstrating the desire for power is that of Ellen Greene of Stathern, Leicestershire, in 1619. She claimed that Joan Willimot had come to her six years previously and persuaded her to give up God for the Devil in return for two spirits, to which she agreed. So she received two spirits, one in the form of a kitten which Joan called '*pusse*', the other a moldiwarp (a mole) which she called '*hiffe, hiffe*'. Ellen stated 'that she gave her soule to the Divell to have the Spirits at her command; for a confirmation whereof, she suffered them to suck her alwayes as aforesaid about the change and full of the Moone'.⁶⁵ Not only did Ellen consistently further implicate Joan Willimot, but she importantly gave her reason for selling her soul - to gain power by the use of spirits. To become a witch appears to have been

⁶⁴ Ibid., 18-19.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

the only access to power that these women had. Margaret Flower also claimed that she gave up her soul as two spirits promised 'to doe all things which she commanded them'.⁶⁶ Again, these stories indicate the desire of these women for some kind of power in a world in which they had none, as well as underlining the sexual or nurturing nature of their relationships with their spirits.

It has been suggested that accused witches, for example the Flower family of Bottesford, Leicestershire, confessed so elaborately since they recognised that their case was already lost in the face of examiners such as the Earl of Rutland, his brother Sir George Manners and Sir Edward Bromley, who had previously sentenced the nineteen Pendle witches in Lancashire in 1612.⁶⁷ It was, after all, popularly believed that witches lost their powers once they had been apprehended by the law, and the suspects themselves would have shared these common assumptions. Gaskill has suggested that the individuals may have confessed because they held a genuine belief in their guilt due to their real feelings of anger.⁶⁸

The belief that witches lost their power once they were formally prosecuted against is demonstrated in the pamphlet material from the Midlands and the North. Potts, writing about the Pendle witches of 1612, told of the witches meeting at the court 'where their power and strength was gone'.⁶⁹ In the trial of the Flower witches of Bottesford, Leicestershire, it was stressed that the women relied on their new powers falsely. As the author of *The Wonderful Discoverie* stated, 'so was it as wonderfull to see their desperate impenitency, and horrible distraction, according to the rest of

⁶⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁶⁷ Honeybone, M. in Rook, M., *Leicestershire Now*, (March 1995), 8. Contemporaries gave various explanations for witches' confessions, including melancholy, good imaginations or the fact that the accused were perhaps weary of life, Cal.St.Pap.D., 1682, 347. Scot saw torture as the main cause of confession, Scot, R., *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, (1584), 17, 28-9, 33. Other women resisted authority by refusing to repent or confess. Sharpe, J., 'Women, Witchcraft and the Legal Process', 117. Briggs attributes voluntary confessions to self-hatred, despair and an awareness of their malevolent wishes, Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 156.

⁶⁸ Gaskill, M., 'Witchcraft and Power in Early Modern England', 129, 134, 136-7; see also Cohn, N., *Europe's Inner Demons*, 250.

⁶⁹ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), H.

that sort, exclaiming against the Divell for deluding them, and now breaking promise with them, when they stood in most need of help'.⁷⁰ And in a final example; Edward Fairfax noted, in April 1621, that once the six women he suspected of bewitching his daughters had been taken to York for trial, that his children were no longer troubled.⁷¹

Resistance and power were further shown by people threatening to accuse others if accused themselves. Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire, claimed that Margaret Thorp, accused of bewitching her and her sister in 1621, appeared to her claiming that 'she would now, till the assizes, do the worst she could, for she would not hang for nothing; and that they would accuse others in the parish that should hang as well as they'.⁷² This demonstrates the fear that those accused would exercise power for as long as they could, and the recognition that power would be lost once the witches were apprehended.

The findings of both social and feminist theories are supported by the material presented in *The Wonderful Discoverie*. Men did not appear to be present in the personal worlds of the six women accused, with the exception of Anne Baker where it is stated that she had 'more knowledge than her Maister', so they fit the feminist thesis of women who are a danger to the community as they have no male householder to control them.⁷³ Even when women gained the power of magic however, they were seen to be under the influence of a masculine figure, the Devil. These narratives provide an insight into how women in particular, and their communities, saw their world. Life was a struggle to gain power, or a voice, for some, and a fight to prevent the intrusion of evil witchcraft and illness for every household.

⁷⁰ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 25.

⁷¹ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 95.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷³ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 15.

The Power of the Accuser

Suspected witches were not alone in claiming to have been tempted by the Devil offering them tangible images of power. Victims of demonic possession also told of the Devil offering them items which ranged from the material, such as money, to the less palpable, such as strength. In 1596, Thomas Darling of Burton claimed that the Devil appeared to him and offered him a bag of money, a crown, towns and countries, to be as strong as a giant and rich, to be a god, £100, a fair woman and a bag of gold and silver. That these images of power became steadily more exaggerated as his 'fits' continued is evidence of the addictive nature of simulating possession for children. The images of power were vague, indicating what power meant to a young boy. Significantly, this narrative also indicates the belief that the Devil indeed exercised the power, rather than the witch, in this case. Not only was it believed possible that the Devil could offer these things, but the Devil also threatened to harm the boy, for instance by turning him into a toad, if he did not submit to him and accept his offerings.⁷⁴

The case of the seven people bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire in 1596 also indicates the belief in the Devil appearing to tempt victims with promises of material wealth and power. Two nights before Margaret Byrom was due to give evidence at the assizes, she claimed that the devil appeared to her in the image of Hartley [the accused witch] 'requesting her to take heed what she sayd, and to speake the truth, for the time was come promissing her silver and Gould. she answerd (thinking it to be Hartlay) that the truth she had spoken already, & that she would not favour him neither for silver nor gold'. This promise of riches, and thus power, to women and children by the devil appears to have been a common fantasy for people who had little power. Each of the bewitched people in this case claimed that their spirits attempted to re-possess them using a mixture of threats and promises of riches such as these. Both of these elements have connections with power. Firstly, the promises

⁷⁴ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 15, 19, 21, 23, 40.

of gold and riches offered the possibility of power to those who have none and, secondly, the threats sought to overpower the will of the victim with a show of strength.⁷⁵ The similar claims to have been offered silver and gold in this case may have been due to the ministers More and Darrell telling the possessed victims that the Devil commonly appeared offering such 'goodly things'.⁷⁶

The case of Richard Dugdale, the Surey Demoniack, is unusual in that he, the 'victim', was believed to have made a pact with the devil to become a better dancer. The girl whom he wished to dance with preferred another because he was a better dancer. However, the common motif of the devil's empty promises is again stressed in this pamphlet; the author addresses the devil, saying 'thou offerest the World and its Kingdoms, Powers and Glories...How dost thou delude such Worshippers, some of them, whom thou givest most to, finding all empty, fading, cloying, vexing, and so far short of what thou promisedst'.⁷⁷

Aside from being offered tangible images of power, victims of possession were offered real power over their circumstances. Through pretending to be bewitched, children, adolescents, servants, and other powerless people found a way to express their need for more control, or attention. Varying reasons were cited as the cause for this need for attention. An indication of the reason behind Thomas Darling of Burton's counterfeiting lies in the fact that he did not have to go to school during his apparent possession. When he returned to school he told his classmates that he would show them 'a strange thing' and presently had another fit, after which the 'standers by betooke themselves to Praier'.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ Darrell, J., A True Narration, (1600), 7, 11-12.

⁷⁶ Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 56; More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 81. Other victims who claimed to have been offered riches or power include William Somers of Nottingham, offered gold, and Hellen Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire, offered a horse by the devil, and told that if she married him she would become the Queen of England, Darrell, J., A True Narration, (1600), 23; Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 196-8; Fairfax, E., Daemonologia: 1621, 38, 40.

⁷⁷ The Surey Demoniack, (1697), 2, 28, 32.

⁷⁸ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 38-9.

Likewise in the case of the Boy of Bilson, William Perry, in 1620, he confessed that he had come across a man called Thomas who tempted him saying 'If thou wilt doe as I shall teach thee, thou shalt not need to goe to schoole; for...I can teach thee such tricks and feats, that the people that see thee, shall believe that thou art bewitched, and so shall lament and pittie thee'. William told how people came to see him where he was laid in the lower room of his house, his body was washed in holy water, and he was paid much attention by both the visitors and various priests called in to give advice. He continued pretending as 'much people did resort unto him, and brought him many good things'. He also admitted that he was going to pretend to be dispossessed since he was tired of pretending his fits.⁷⁹

In the case of William Somers of Nottingham in 1597, the reason behind his counterfeiting lay in his obvious hatred of working under his masters. Somers ran away twice from both his first master, Mr Brackenbury, owing to his 'hard usage' of him, and from his second, Mr Porter. When he first began having fits in Ashby, Mr Brackenbury 'supposed hym to playe the counterfeite, and theirupon he whypped him'. He claimed to have been tempted into pretending to be possessed when Darrell promised to release him from his second apprenticeship. Harsnett demonstrated that there was some scepticism about the antics of these children, noting how:

divers children, having heard how such & such have been thus and thus troubled, they of themselves will begin to faine themselves sicke: if they bee boyes, peradventure because they would remaine from the school: if wenches, for that they would be idle, & both of them, that they might be made much of, and dandled.⁸⁰

Somers even claimed that after he had confessed to counterfeiting his fits, he began to dissemble again because the audience 'liked that better'.⁸¹ This is a classic

⁷⁹ The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 61, 64-5, 69-71; Plot, R., The Natural History of Stafford-shire, (1686), 280.

⁸⁰ Darrell, J., A True Narration, (1600), 14; Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 83, 97, 68.

⁸¹ Hutchinson, F., An Historical Essay, (1718), 205.

scenario of the victim's desire for approval and attention, revealing their ultimate powerlessness.

This notion of people pretending to be possessed to gain otherwise lacking attention, or to fulfil other emotional needs, is indicated by two other cases involving John Darrell. Katherine Wright of Derbyshire pretended to have fits in 1586, and 'finding that this made a severe Father-in-Law more kind, she made her fits more, and worse than they were'. Mary Cooper, William Somers' sister-in-law, had deeper emotional reasons for pretending to be possessed. Her actions probably arose from fear, since Darrell openly warned her that the Devil might wish to possess her as he often used to possess more than one in a family. Furthermore, Mary had recently suffered severe emotional distress through the death of her child just before Christmas, and her abandonment by her husband. She claimed afterwards that she was ill which made her stomach swell as if she was pregnant, but Darrell told her that 'It was no Child, but such a Child as God bless every good Body from'. The strangeness of her affliction is symbolised by the assertion that she expressed water instead of milk from her breasts, similar to the cases discussed in Chapter Three. Mary further told how a group of women, including midwives, came together expecting her to give birth to 'some monstrous Thing', and that she could not help laughing to see them, at which they thought she was in a fit.⁸² Her evident amusement at the way the women took her condition so seriously indicates her triumph over them in terms of power.⁸³

Servants were a group of people who appear to have been more likely to feel this lack of power over their circumstances. They may have felt alienated and trapped, thus appearing to be possessed was a way of escape, (an alternative to running away

⁸² Ibid., 194, 202; Triall of Maist Dorrell, (1599), 26. The term 'in-law' also referred to step-relations at this time.

⁸³ For beliefs surrounding 'monstrous births' see Strange News from Scotland. or. A strange Relation of a terrible and prodigious Monster, (1647) for a contemporary view. See also Niccoli, O., 'Menstruum Quasi Monstruum': Monstrous Births and Menstrual Taboo in the Sixteenth Century', in Muir, E. & Ruggiero, G. (eds.), Sex and Gender in Historical Perspective - Selections from Quaderni Storici, (London, 1990), 1-25 for further discussion.

as Somers had tried, and failed, many times). Appearing possessed also gave the servant an opportunity to rebel against their immediate authority, their masters, and against the authority of the church in their outrageous behaviour. Jane Ashton, a maid in the Starkey household at Leigh, Lancashire appeared to become possessed along with the children of the household in 1597. Perhaps she saw how seriously the matter was being taken and decided to join in. Like the five children, Jane would have had very little personal power in her life so this would have been an ideal opportunity to exercise power over her employers.⁸⁴

As in the cases of Jane Ashton, and William Somers of Nottingham, Richard Dugdale, the Surey Demoniack of Lancashire, was also a servant, aged 19. When he first became afflicted with fits he went to live with his parents again, emphasising his need for attention and desire to leave his work. During the course of his possession from 1689, 'multitudes' of people travelled to see him in his fits; the author of the pamphlet referring to 'the many Hundreds or Thousands that on such Nights were there'. So many people came to see him that a post in the barn where Richard was was broken, and the landlord started to complain that the crowds were damaging his hedges. During his fits Richard spat at and attempted to attack the ministers who had come to help, and on another occasion hurt some bystanders when he threw them to the ground, demonstrating his rebellion against all authority.⁸⁵

As the introduction to this chapter, and the case of Richard Dugdale above, indicate, victims of possession were offered real power in the form of an audience watching their fits. Pamphlets from the Midlands and North of England attested to large numbers of people travelling to witness cases of possession. In the case of Thomas Darling of Burton in 1595 to 1596 a local clergyman Jesse Bee was sent for, who

⁸⁴ In the similar case of the Throckmorton household of Warboys, servants as well as the children of the family claimed to be possessed, *Witches of Warboys*, (1593), A3. Briggs discusses the marginal social position of servants, Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 231-2.

⁸⁵ *The Surey Demoniack*, (1697), 1, 8, 50, 5-6, 40.

diagnosed that the boy was bewitched. This underlines the recourse to 'experts' such as physicians and clerics in possession and witchcraft cases. The desire for attention is suggested in the following passage: 'The next morning...his Keepers thinking not the hower of fits to be come, tooke no great care of looking to him he was upon the sodaine throwne under the bedde'. The effects of his fits on the beholders is clearly stated: 'he was cast into a fit terribly tormented and vexed, as that it did much humble the beholders, and moove them to commiseration and pittie, for the childes so distressed estate'. Darling evidently enjoyed his newly found fame; after being freed from possession he went into the town to show people how Jesus had cured him, to the 'admiration of those that had been acquainted with his marvailous visitation'.⁸⁶

The case of William Somers of Nottingham in 1597 provides a further example of the possessed victim wielding power over their audience. William demonstrated through signs the sins of Nottingham to a crowd of sixty people on 5 November, and two days later was brought by six or seven strong men and laid upon a couch in the middle of a crowd so that they could watch his fits and pray for him. At one point, when he appeared as dead, Darrell claims that the people present were 'affected in the boweles of compassion towards hym, breakyng ther hitherto continued silent, cryed out all at once: as it were with one voyce unto the Lord, to have mercye upon hym'.⁸⁷ This indicates the power that the possessed victim held over their audience, and the emotional involvement of the beholders who genuinely believed in the struggle between good and evil played out before them.

The presence of an audience also demonstrates the interest in witchcraft at a community level, as many people would have come out of natural curiosity. Further evidence of the interest in cases of witchcraft and possession is provided by the case

⁸⁶ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 7, 12.

⁸⁷ Darrell, J., A True Narration, (1600), 18-19, 20.

of the Fairfax girls of Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621, when one of the accused women was brought to the house 'for many persons were desirous to see the trial of these speeches of the children to the witches'.⁸⁸ This also demonstrates the powerlessness of the accused that she could be brought to play her part in this spectacle against her will.

Finally, possessed victims were offered the very real power of life or death over the suspected witches that they were encouraged to name. Soon after Somers claimed to be re-possessed, he accused thirteen 'witches' of setting their demons into him. As soon as Somers named people as witches they were brought to him, and Darrell claimed that Somers had the power to detect all of the witches in England. When all but two of the suspected were released Darrell himself exhorted the people to believe that witches were God's enemies and thus must be discovered.⁸⁹

The power that witchcraft accusations afforded children is also clearly shown in the 1612 Pendle witch trials where a number of children were involved in testifying, frequently against members of their own families. Elizabeth Device was said to have been distraught at the fact that her children testified against her, 'exclaiming, in a very outrageous manner crying out against her owne children'. One of the main witnesses used at the trial was her nine year old daughter Jennet. When Jennet claimed that she could not give evidence in front of her mother, who was cursing her in the court, Elizabeth was removed so that Jennet could make her accusations. Jennet was taken to groups of people, including the accused, and invited to pick out the ones who were present at the meeting of witches at Malkin Tower by taking them by the hand and declaring where they were sitting at the feast. Potts claimed that this proved that the accusations were true, and that indeed it was 'an Honourable meanes' to try witches. Potts applauded the role played by the children of Elizabeth

⁸⁸ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 79.

⁸⁹ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 141-2.

Device in particular, stating that 'although she were their own naturall mother, yet they did not spare to accuse her of every particular fact'. He also referred to Jennet Device's role as being caused by 'the wonderfull work of God'.⁹⁰

Another young girl involved in the Lancashire trials was fourteen year old Grace Sowerbutts who was the main witness against the three Salmesbury witches, two of whom were her grandmother and aunt. Although the court subsequently found her accusations to be false, Potts again attributed her actions to the higher power of God, claiming that 'all this was the Act of GOD, to raise a child to open all things, and then to discover his plotted Tragedie'.⁹¹ Potts did not appear to see any irony in praising the actions of one child in discovering witches, while deploring the, almost identical, actions of a second.

These cases thus demonstrate the argument that witchcraft accusations offered the powerless, in these cases predominantly children, adolescents and servants, a mode of both gaining power and rebelling against authority. There was an added danger when these people came together to make accusations, as has been shown in the case of the seven people bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire noted above. Likewise in the case of the Fairfax sisters, Hellen and Elizabeth, of Fewston, Yorkshire, when they were brought together with another supposed victim of possession, Maud Jeffray, they all fell into trances. Hellen, like Jennet Device above, was invited to pick out the guilty witches. There was some contemporary suspicion that Maud had encouraged the Fairfax girls to pretend, which Fairfax vehemently denied.⁹² Thus, as in cases in Sweden involving children as accusers, there was a clear danger in bringing supposed victims of possession, or young witnesses together, since accusations supported by more witnesses were more likely to succeed.⁹³

⁹⁰ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), F2, G, P2, Q, F3, H4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, K3, M3.

⁹² Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 77, 78, 81.

⁹³ Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 197-8.

Various experts might be called upon in cases of suspected bewitchment and possession - doctors, clerics or practitioners of 'white' magic for instance. In some cases the desire for power of these people appears to have played a decisive role, in a parallel fashion to the desire for power displayed by witches and their victims as demonstrated above. In the case of the seven people bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire, a known witch and conjuror, Edmund Hartley, was called on for help when recourse to formal medicine had failed. Hartley appears to have been somewhat of a confidence trickster, since after visiting often for a year and a half, during which time the children appeared to have recovered, it is related that 'at length he [Hartley] fained as thought he would have gone into another country, but wether M.Star. might not know: when he begane to goe his way, John fell of bleedinge, then presently he was sent for again, who affirmed that if he had bene 40 rodes of, no man could hav stanchd him. & thus it fell out at other times'.⁹⁴ Thus it appears that when Hartley became sure of how much the family depended upon him for the relief of their children, he periodically threatened to leave, and decided to see how much he could gain from them.

The power that Hartley held over the family can be seen clearly, as Mr Starkey agreed to pay him an annual pension of forty shillings for his 'assistance', after which Hartley requested 'an house and ground', 'wherunto because M.Starchi would not accord, he threatened in a fume (M.Starchie being absent but in the heareing of divers) that if he would not fulfil his minde, he would make such a shout as never was at Cleworth and so ther was indeed'.⁹⁵ This highlights various significant points. Firstly, we can see the importance of the concept of power in the relations between the accuser and the accused in witchcraft cases. Hartley felt a need to display his power over others, supporting Thomas's contention that some people actively used their reputation for magic to gain power in the community. Thus it was a way for the

⁹⁴ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 1.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

powerless to gain some power over their environment. Hartley, as a trusted member of the household, had a greater opportunity to gain from this perceived power. Secondly, it is important that part of this episode occurred when the father was away, in a similar way to the John Smith case in Leicestershire in 1616, and the Mary Death case in Essex in 1582.⁹⁶ This gives the image of a household already in disorder, as the male head of the family is absent, which provides the opportunity for evil magic to invade the household. Hartley's threats of what would happen if he was not satisfied were vague, and were thus easily attributed in hindsight to episodes when the possessed were particularly distressed.

The power of experts called in to help in cases of supposed or suspected possession is evident in that they were able to play on the suggestibility of their young accomplices. The case of the self styled exorcist John Darrell will serve as a useful illustration of this point.⁹⁷ Darrell gained notoriety in the late sixteenth-century when he claimed to have helped cure a number of people, predominantly children, of possession in the Midlands and the North of England between 1586 and 1597. His actions culminated in an ecclesiastical controversy over the use of exorcism in England, during which Darrell was investigated by the High Commission in London before the Archbishop of Canterbury, imprisoned and defrocked.⁹⁸

In the subsequent pamphlet debate over the controversy there was much debate over the role of Darrell in these cases. Defenders of Darrell asserted that he was

⁹⁶ L.A.,D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith,R., A Brief Declaration; A true and just Recorde, (1582).

⁹⁷ Although Darrell is the main focus for this point, other 'experts' were also criticised for their dealings with children witnesses and accusers, for instance the priests involved in the case of the William Perry of Bilson, Staffordshire, see The Boy of Bilson, (1622); and the Jesuit priest Thompson, alias Christopher Southworth, accused of tutoring Grace Sowerbutts in Salmesbury, Lancashire, 1612, see Potts,T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), M4-N2. The role of religion in these cases in examined in the next chapter.

⁹⁸ Hutchinson,F., An Historical Essay, (1718), 207-9. George More was also defrocked, even though he was not accused of teaching people to counterfeit possession. Darrell used this as evidence for their general unfair treatment in the hands of the law, Darrell,J., A Survey of Certain Dialogical Discourses, (1602), A3. This led to the 1604 Canon making it compulsory to gain permission from the bishop before attempting an exorcism. Walker,D.P., Unclean Spirits, 77.

requested to come and give help in cases of possession, whilst his detractors accused him of tutoring his young charges to counterfeit fits in order to increase his own reputation.⁹⁹ George More, who assisted Darrell in the dis-possession of those bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire, in 1596, argued vehemently against Samuel Harsnett's assertions that Darrell had tutored William Somers of Nottingham. More stressed that Darrell was not the only expert involved in these cases; he had merely given advice in the Thomas Darling of Burton case, and had only reluctantly responded to the invitation to help in Lancashire. Overall, the power of fasting and prayer, and thus God, was to be stressed over the role of the individual.¹⁰⁰ Hutchinson took a balanced view in 1718 when he conceded that although it was probable that Darrell had instructed Somers to do his fits, that Somers had in all likelihood exaggerated Darrell's role 'to extenuate his own Fault'.¹⁰¹

Harsnet alluded to the power gained by Darrell, deploring how '*M.Darrell* being taken at *Nottingham* by some, for a time, to be a marvellous bugge to scarre the Devil, was in the heate thereof chosen by certaine in the towne, to be their preacher', and that 'by the time that *Somers* had his fittes, *M.Darrell* was of some name'. Somers himself told how when he claimed to be repossessed, '*M.Darrell* did grow to bee more and more in credite'.¹⁰² Harsnett argued that exorcists got work by alluring children or servants of 'the poorer sort' who were already ill, taking an interest in them, and then instructing them to play tricks to make it look as if they were possessed. For instance, he claimed that Darrell told William Somers about the fits of Katherine Wright and Thomas Darling, whom he had previously helped, showed

⁹⁹ As well as Darrell's *True Narration* (1600), he produced a number of other works defending his position. Two other preachers, John Deacon and John Walker, joined the debate besides George More and Samuel Harsnet. Remarking on the number of treatises produced in this debate, Darrell himself remarked that 'It must needs be enough, and more then enough for thee, to have perused so many treatises already, all harping on one string', Darrell, J., *A Survey*, (1602), to the reader.

¹⁰⁰ More, G., *A True Discourse*, (1600), 68-80, Darrell, J., *A Detection of that Sinful, Shamful, Lying and Ridiculous Discours. of Samuel Harshnet*, (1600), to the reader.

¹⁰¹ Hutchinson, F., *An Historical Essay*, (1718), 196.

¹⁰² Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 14, 23, 150. Darrell himself refuted the claims of Deacon and Walker that 'my credit would be too great', claiming 'I have learned by God his goodnes not to glory in this', Darrell, J., *A Survey*, (1602), A3.

him how he could do the same fits and promised to buy out the rest of his apprenticeship. William Somers admitted to this and claimed that Darrell had told him he would never want for anything if he obeyed him. Ironically, this parallels the power relationship believed to exist between witches and the Devil, Harsnett himself referred to the arrangement as 'a secret compact'.¹⁰³

The power held by such experts over their patients is evident. Darrell suggested openly in front of Thomas Darling of Burton, the seven bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire, and William Somers of Nottingham that the devil would surely seek to re-possess them, which of course subsequently occurred. Harsnett remarked that 'concerning his knowledge, that Sathan would make such promises unto them: hee relyeth upon this, vz. because the nature of man is subject to bee seduced by such offers'. Darrell also reputedly told people that William Somers was possessed before he had even seen him.¹⁰⁴ Somers claimed that even when he had tired of pretending, Darrell would not let him give up, and that he had said William must be possessed by 'legions of Devils' to be confessing to such behaviour. During Somers' fits, Darrell also refused to allow anyone else to deal with him, ensuring a monopoly of power over him.¹⁰⁵ Thus even after his dissembling, Darrell had the power to influence others' minds as to the state of Somers. The involvement of experts can, therefore, be argued to be a quest for power, in a similar way to victim's desire for attention.

Masculine Power

Ultimately, the power of the law came into play in formal accusations of witchcraft. As well as suspected witches, apparent victims of possession also came under the legal spotlight when any suspicion was raised about the reality of their afflictions.

¹⁰³ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 59, 63, 78-81, 87.

¹⁰⁴ *Most wonderfull and true storie*, (1597), 38; Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 57; Hutchinson, F., *An Historical Essay*, (1718), 197.

¹⁰⁵ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 104, 185, 225.

Scepticism was raised in Nottingham in 1597 in the case of William Somers, who confessed to counterfeiting his fits after a celebrated public dis-possession overseen by John Darrell, but later claimed to be possessed again. Somers was removed from his stepfather's house to the workhouse, away from the influence of Darrell, where he again confessed to pretending. The power of the law, and some abuse of it in these matters, is evident in Somers' claims that his keepers threatened him 'with roddes and whippes' and the Mayor of Nottingham offered Somers £10 and some assistance in setting him up in a trade.¹⁰⁶ Ironically, Somers himself was formally accused of bewitching a man named Sterland to death by treading on his heel, which Darrell subsequently claimed was the real reason behind Somers' confession since he feared punishment himself for witchcraft at the next Assizes.¹⁰⁷ Thomas Darling of Burton, Staffordshire, complained that at the trial of Darrell he was beaten, starved and threatened with hanging to force him to confess to faking his possession.¹⁰⁸

The families of supposedly possessed parties also came under doubt if there was any suspicion of counterfeiting. In the cases of William Perry of Bilson in 1620 and Richard Dugdale of Surey in 1697 it was stressed in the respective pamphlets that their fathers knew nothing of the pretence, but were innocent and of good character.¹⁰⁹ Edward Fairfax of Fewston, Yorkshire, also came under suspicion in 1621, when it was rumoured that his daughters might have been pretending to be possessed. He related how 'upon myself was put an aspersion, not of dishonesty, but of simplicity; for it was given out that Jeffray and his family devised the practice, to which they drew my eldest daughter, and she the younger, and that I, like a good

¹⁰⁶ Darrell, J., A True Narration, (1600), 21, 23; Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 177, 179; Hutchinson, F., An Historical Essay, (1718), 203.

¹⁰⁷ Darrell, J., A True Narration, (1600), 20; Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 199.

¹⁰⁸ Notestein, W., A History of Witchcraft in England, 76-8; Rickert, C.H., The Case of John Darrell - Minister and Exorcist, (Gainesville, 1962), 10-18; Hutchinson, F., An Historical Essay, (1718), 195-6. It was further claimed that Harsnett threatened to burn Katherine Wright's feet if she did not confess to lying, Trial of Maist Darrell, (1599), 18.

¹⁰⁹ The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 58; The Surey Demoniac, (1697), 58. This again highlights the importance of reputation, as discussed in Chapter Two.

innocent, believed all that I heard or saw to be true and not feigned'. He further stated that the rumours suggested that the children did this 'to be more cherished'.¹¹⁰ This indicates that there was contemporary scepticism about cases such as these, which supports the assertion that the more celebrated cases such as this actually did more to discredit the witch trials in elite eyes, than to encourage them.¹¹¹

Importantly, the real locus of power in these cases was felt, in elite thinking anyway, to rest with a male figure, usually either the Devil or God. In the case of the Fairfax family of Fewston, Yorkshire, a man named Henry Graver was accused of hiring the accused women to bewitch Fairfax's daughters, the implication being that they, as women, needed a master. Elizabeth Fairfax retorted to Margaret Wait, during a trance, 'You can do nothing but what God will give you leave, nor your master neither'. Another of the accused women in this case, Jennet Dibb, was believed to have disguised herself as a man which has important ramifications for the theme of gender and power.¹¹² The notion of disguise also fits in with the inversion theme of witchcraft beliefs, that nothing was as it seemed.¹¹³ This Fairfax case, like the two Pendle cases already noted, is unusual in that allusions were made to witches meetings, the closest approximation to the demonic sabbat that we have in English witchcraft beliefs. In this case the witches were believed to have met 'to confer with the master in what sort to proceed in bewitching of the children'.¹¹⁴ As well as showing the perceived vulnerability of children, this also indicates the power structure between the witches and their master.

¹¹⁰ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 123-126.

¹¹¹ See Chapter One.

¹¹² Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 92, 137. Several women in the early modern period disguised themselves as men in order to take on male roles, and there was a general fear of cross-dressing, see Chapter Three.

¹¹³ The most famous example of this would have to be the opening speeches of the three witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, 'fair is foul and foul is fair'. The centrality of inversion and contrariety to witchcraft beliefs is explored in depth in Clark, S., *Thinking with Demons*, especially chapters 3-5 and Clark, S., 'Inversion, Misrule and the Meaning of Witchcraft', 126.

¹¹⁴ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia*: 1621, 110.

In contrast to the Middle Ages when it was considered heretical to believe in the existence and power of witches since God was all powerful, from around 1400 the established church put forward the teaching that God had allowed the Devil to have powers on earth.¹¹⁵ The common motif of the Devil offering various images of power to witches and possessed parties, and of those promises coming to nothing has been demonstrated above. This emphasises the notion that although people in the community, and even some of the accused themselves, believed witches to have the power to harm, the real power was felt by elite observers to lie with the devil, who deluded his witches, and ultimately with God, who allowed the devil a certain degree of power to test the faiths of his people.

These elite notions concerning power do not appear to have been at the forefront of community accusations against witches, the concern of the majority was to safeguard themselves against a malevolent presence in the community. However, an indication of the belief in the limited power of witches is apparent in the confessions of the 1612 Pendle witches' dealings with their familiars or the devil. Elizabeth Southernns confessed that when she refused to engage in image magic, her spirit threw her into a ditch and caused her to spill the milk which she was carrying. Anne Whittle claimed in the same trial that she believed that her spirit Fancy, or the Devil, had taken away her sight, and that when she refused to talk to her spirit he pulled her down. Possibly she believed that the loss of her vision was a trade for her powers of witchcraft. The confession of James Device indicates some confusion over the role of the Devil and god. He claimed that his spirit Dandy had requested him to give him his soul, to whom he answered 'he would give him that part thereof that was his owne to give'. Dandy then replied that 'hee was above CHRIST JESUS, and therefore hee must absolutely give him his Soule: and that done, hee would give him power to revenge himself against any whom he disliked'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Cohn, N., *Europe's Inner Demons*, chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), E1, E3, K.

Ultimately, in elite thinking, to attribute too much power to any individual or to the Devil was to belittle the power of God. More stressed in 1600, in his defence of John Darrell, that 'the good hande of God...is the onely inward, & efficient cause of this great worke of dispossessio[n]'.¹¹⁷ A continuing theme in the Potts' *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, detailing the trials of the 1612 Pendle witches, is that it was God who decided to discover the witches of Pendle, and 'raised up' the witnesses to testify against them. The judge, Sir Edward Bromley, exhorted the witches to thank God for discovering them and stopping them from harming any others.¹¹⁸ In fact, one of the main functions of writing witchcraft pamphlets was to warn people from engaging in witchcraft, and to emphasise the power of God.

In Edward Fairfax's *Daemonologia* the power of God was again emphasised. Elizabeth Fairfax claimed on 7 January 1621 that a boy and a woman carried her to some water, and that 'they would have drowned her if they could, but God was above the devil'. Her sister Hellen further demonstrated this belief when she told the apparition of a witch that she could not make her well until God wished it, neither could she harm her as 'God will not suffer you to hurt me'.¹¹⁹ This demonstrates the elite belief in God's ultimate power, and thus the witch's relative powerlessness. Fairfax also expounded the belief that the Devil had to ask God's permission before taking action; Elizabeth claimed that a woman had appeared to her and told her that her master had asked God's permission to harm her and her brother Henry, which permission was denied.¹²⁰

Pamphlet material from the Midlands and the North, therefore, supports the arguments made in relation to the Essex material; that witchcraft beliefs provided an opportunity for people to gain power. As has been demonstrated above, pamphlet

¹¹⁷ More, G., *A True Discourse*, (1600), 73.

¹¹⁸ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), B2, Z3, V4.

¹¹⁹ Fairfax, E., *Daemonologia: 1621*, 61, 76 107.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 94-5.

accounts of witchcraft indicated how these beliefs could mean power for the suspected witches themselves, the apparent victims of bewitchment and the community surrounding them. However, the locus of power remained inherently male. It is necessary, then, to examine the non-pamphlet material to elicit how far this is supported with reference to the more endemic trials.

The Midlands and North - Non-Pamphlet Accounts

Non-pamphlet material does not involve as many explicit indications of the desire for power as pamphlet material, but by reading between the lines we can see the attempts of mainly powerless people to make sense of, and gain some control over, their surroundings. Due to the brief nature of the majority of non-pamphlet accusations, they do not provide much indication of beliefs about the locus of power. These debates were also more likely to take place within elite discourse, thus we might expect extended discussion of these factors in tracts and pamphlets, but not in community based accusations of maleficium. There is also less indication of the 'motives' of suspected witches concerning power than in the pamphlet cases, since the non-pamphlet material consists mainly of indictments, depositions and recognisances, and contains very few confessions by accused witches. Where the suspect was examined, few confessed in the material surviving here. There are, however, some indications underlining the importance of power as a concept in witchcraft beliefs.

The most valuable non-pamphlet evidence for indications of the importance of power, are the materials relating to the suspected bewitchment of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire in 1616. These documents are the most detailed amongst the non-pamphlet material surviving for this region, and were written by educated people, John's father Roger, and various justices debating issues of power relevant to this case. Here we have an insight into the perceived powers of the witch,

and especially into the power of the boy's father Roger, over which there was considerable debate.

The Power of the Witch

There is relatively little explicit indication of the desire of suspected witches for power, aside from Lea, one of the women accused of bewitching John Smith in 1616, who claimed that after suckling her body, her spirit promised her as much gold and silver as she wished.¹²¹ Margaret Johnson of Pendle claimed in 1634 that a man appeared to her and promised her the power to harm. He also gave her gold and silver but it vanished, again emphasising the illusionary nature of this motif. As in the pamphlet cases examined above, it was believed that her familiar abandoned her when she was imprisoned.¹²² A suggestion of the desire for power is implicitly present in the words of women such as Agnes Standley of Basford, Nottinghamshire, who claimed in 1588 that 'she never said anything but it came to pass'.¹²³

The accusations by Mary Moor of Clayton, Yorkshire, against Ann Shillitoe and Susan Hinchcliffe in August and October 1674 were centred on a desire for power projected onto the suspected women. The conversation between the women, which Mary claimed to have overheard, concerned methods of gaining power over people in the neighbourhood. These methods involved the systems of exchange, borrowing and lending which were at work in the neighbourhood, but which arguably were breaking down in this period.¹²⁴ For instance, Susan was heard to say 'if thou canst but gett young Thomas Haigh to buy thee three pennyworth of Indicoe, and look him in the face when hee gives it thee, and touch his Bucks, wee shall have power enough to take Life'. Later Mary reported that she had heard Susan Hinchcliffe declare that 'if any body would not let them have what they wanted they could take

¹²¹ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith, R., A Brief Declaration.

¹²² Cal.St.Pap.D., 1634-5, 78.

¹²³ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/2

¹²⁴ See Chapter Two for discussion.

the life of any body'. Susan also reassured her daughter Ann that they would never be hanged or burned.¹²⁵ These accusations reflect the belief that the methods of exchange could allow someone to get power over another, and the desire for power or some control over the community and surroundings. They also demonstrate the importance of hearsay and rumour in the community, and their use in witchcraft accusations.¹²⁶

The power that witches were believed to hold is further illustrated by the complaint against Sibill Farclough, Lancashire in 1634. A petitioner wrote that Sibill had reduced her 'into a continuall & dayly feare both of her lyffe & goods'.¹²⁷ These brief indications support the assertions made concerning pamphlet evidence from both Essex, and the Midlands and the North of England. Power was understandably the wish of various people who felt powerless in their community, due to social and economic pressures as well as the general mistrust and dislike expressed by their neighbours. These very same neighbours encouraged this by projecting their belief in the suspected person's powers against them.

The Power of the Accuser

As in the pamphlet material examined above, there was a similar preoccupation with the bewitching of children, adolescents and servants in the non-pamphlet material. Various cases can be used to support the assertion, already discussed, that pretended bewitchments and witchcraft accusations provided a way for these powerless groups to gain personal power and attention.

¹²⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/11/1/90-91

¹²⁶ The use of hearsay and rumour in forming witchcraft accusations is further demonstrated by the accusations made by Edmund Robinson of Pendle in 1634, which were based on rumours overheard from the conversations of neighbours. Cal.St.Pap.D., 1634-5, 152. For further discussion of the role of rumour in the community see Chapter Two.

¹²⁷ L.R.O., QSB 1/138/60.

In the case of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, he had a series of fits on the first day of the assizes in Leicester in the presence of Sir Henry Hastings, Sir Edward Harrington, Sir Supcute Harrington, Mr Bale, Doctor Clarke, Mr Radder and 'divers ladies and persons of quallitie'. He went through all of his fits and 'did alsoe verie straungelie ymitate the Catt, the toade, the horse, the fish, the fulm' and the dogg being the said witches spirits'.¹²⁸ The accused witches were made to say their charms to free him from his fits. Again, this scene appears as a kind of spectacle for all the audience of quality to wonder at, and is thus similar to the dispossession of William Somers discussed above. Indeed this episode was mentioned in a letter of 1616 from alderman Robert Heyrick of Leicester to his brother Sir William, who tells of 'dyvars wonderfull straunge fyts in the syght of all the greatest parsons here, as dyvers knyghts and ladies, and manny others of the bettar sort'.¹²⁹ Furthermore on the third day of the assizes John had more fits in front of his audience during which Sir Henry Hastings drove a pin through his ear and 'Doctor Clarke did strike him over the bottom of the back three times with a birch riding whippe verie hard, so that the markes therof were exceedinglie sens and pittied'. Lady Cave was invited to say one of the charms to prove that only when the witches said them did they have any effect.¹³⁰ This again indicates the power of the victim over their audience.

That children were, at least in some instances, fully aware of the power they held over their audiences and the accused, is evidenced by the case of fourteen year old Elizabeth Mallory in 1656. She accused Mary Waide of Studley, Yorkshire, of bewitching her, and presently Mary was brought to her bedside and persuaded by those present to beg Elizabeth's forgiveness. When she complied Elizabeth appeared to recover, which clearly feared Mary, knowing that this miraculous recovery could well be used as proof against her. Two observers claimed that 'Mary Waide denied

¹²⁸ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith,R., A Brief Declaration.

¹²⁹ In Nichols,J., The History and Antiquities of the Countv of Leicester. vol 2. pt 2. containing Gatre Hundred, (London, 1798), 471.

¹³⁰ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith,R., A Brief Declaration.

yt she had done her wrong whereupon ye sd Elizabeth sayd if she denyed it I shall be ill again, and psently begun wth her ill fitts as formly'.¹³¹ Adolescents of all social backgrounds appeared prone to this type of deception. Elizabeth Mallory was from a gentry background, while James Johnson of Chorne, Yorkshire, as in several of the pamphlet cases discussed above, was a servant. Eleven year old James accused Hellen Gray of bewitching him in 1662 when he began to emit stones 'through his yard'.¹³² The accusations made by the James Johnson, John Smith, and sixteen year old Mary Moor may have been a way of gaining some power, prestige and attention in their communities.¹³³

Although power was undoubtedly a motive in cases of feigned bewitchment, other victims clearly had more emotional reasons. Mary Earnley, the daughter of a gentleman, accused Anne Wilkinson of bewitching her in 1670. Anne Mattson, deposing, stated that 'two sisters of [the] said Mary Earnleys dyed since Candlemasse last', and that one of them was found to have a crooked pin in her mouth before her death. Evidently there was some suspicion surrounding the previous deaths in the family, which presumably disturbed Mary so much that she either believed herself to be in danger, or else pretended to be bewitched in order to share some of the attention given to her dead sisters. Either way, psychological factors were undoubtedly at the foundation of these accusations.¹³⁴ Finally, the desire for some young people for power in their community is also highlighted by the illustration of Mary Moor of Clayton, who, as demonstrated above, accused Susan Hinchliffe and Anne Shillitoe of witchcraft in 1674, despite their evident sound reputation amongst the community. Perhaps Mary was jealous of this esteem, being regarded as being of low character herself.¹³⁵

¹³¹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/3/132

¹³² P.R.O., ASSI 45/6/1/69.

¹³³ P.R.O., ASSI 45/6/1/69, 45/11/1/90, 91, 93

¹³⁴ P.R.O., ASSI 45/9/3/96. Bereavement may also have led to women confessing themselves to be witches, Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 187.

¹³⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/11/1/90-93.

As demonstrated above with reference to pamphlet material, the families of those apparently bewitched or possessed could come under suspicion if it was thought that any counterfeiting was occurring. The case of John Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire, in 1616 clearly illustrates this issue. Throughout Roger Smith's letter detailing his son's apparent bewitchment there are indications of the evident power which he wielded over the suspects in this case. Each of the suspected women was brought to his house, clearly under duress in some instances, and subjected to searches, attempts at counter-magic through scratching, and pressure to repeat their 'charms' to the afflicted boy. Using the example of Randall, Roger stated that 'hereupon shee not confessinge any thinge, I left her, but shee hadd not power to departe my howse till the childe fell into his fitt'. This is in contrast to the notion of a witch using her power to invade other's households and disrupt them as here she is unable to leave. It is not clear whether she was believed to have been kept in the house by supernatural means or under duress.¹³⁶

Nine women were executed in this case, however after the intervention of James I the remaining six women were acquitted, although one had died in gaol in the meantime. After being rebuked so harshly by the king for hanging nine women needlessly, and allowing a tenth to die in prison on the word of a lying boy, the justices and magistrates were understandably extremely keen to get to the bottom of the matter. In-depth questions were to be put to Roger Smith in his examination 'concerning his sons counterfett bewitching'. Roger was thus forced to take the responsibility for the consequences of his son's actions. Importantly, the power relations were reversed in the proposed examination. While the Brief Declaration, written by Roger Smith, portrayed six evil women with power over a possessed victim, the legal course of examination depicted Roger Smith as the one wielding power over the accused women who were portrayed as victims. John Smith also lost

¹³⁶ L.A., D & C Ciii 13/1, Smith, R., A Brief Declaration. The accused individual in the witches of Warboys case in 1593 were also brought to their victims and made to repeat certain charms. The Smith family had probably heard of the famous case. Witches of Warboys, (1593), B, O.

the power which he held over his audience; it was implied that due to his young age it was probable that someone had aided him in his deception.

Roger Smith emerges from this document as a rather dubious character who could not seem to let the story of his son's bewitching go, rather that he was the one continuing against the 'witches'. Perhaps engaging in the possession story was a way of gaining power, control and fame for him too. This is highlighted in a further question asking what his meaning was in his speech to the Bishop of Lincoln at Leicester, 'viz that he did not thincke to have lived to see that day, when his son was brought forth to his Matie in the sighte of all the company present, freed from his pretended fitte'. It is as if he got carried away with the excitement and the attentions of the king. This emphasises the argument that accusations of witchcraft could lead to power and prestige for some, although this was inevitably limited.

As in the pamphlet cases outlined above, therefore, it has been demonstrated that issues of power can be seen as important issues in the non-pamphlet material of the Midlands and the North of England. Although the non-pamphlet material is neither consistent nor explicit in discussing issues of power, it does, nonetheless, indicate that power played an essential role in witchcraft beliefs. In particular, the discussion over the ultimate source of power, as discussed in relation to pamphlet sources, was lacking in this material. These differences in emphasis are due to the structure and depth of the material as outlined in the introduction to this section.

Conclusion

Issues of power were inherent in witchcraft beliefs, and the evidence in this chapter has demonstrated how witchcraft accusations provided the opportunity to gain power by the accuser and a variety of 'experts', as well as questions over the perceived locus of power with the witch, God or the Devil. The notion that witchcraft or

accusations of witchcraft were potentially sources of power for a range of relatively powerless people has thus been demonstrated. Thus power was an integral part of witchcraft beliefs.

The notion that witchcraft beliefs offered some women power and control over their surroundings has been discussed. Pamphlet material in particular provides images of women becoming empowered through witchcraft, notably in the case of the Flower witches of Bottesford, Leicestershire, in 1618. It has also been argued that perhaps confessions and counter-accusations constituted a final act of defiance by suspects. This power was rather different to the other types of power considered in this chapter, in that it was imaginary in most respects. The only real power that suspects held was the fear in which the community perceived them which, in a few cases, suspects took advantage of to gain goods and services.

The majority of the images of power considered in relation to witches here were bound up with fantasy. These fantasies were prevalent in pamphlet material in particular, however this is due to the fact that few confessions were included in the non-pamphlet material examined. Fantasies of being offered riches and bountiful food by the devil were understandable given that the majority of those suspected were poor. The desire for social power, such as revenge over those perceived to have wronged them, was also an understandable fantasy for suspects. Finally, the desire for a husband, as indicated by the cases of Elizabeth Francis and Elizabeth Clarke of Essex demonstrates both the loneliness and the need for a protector for these socially marginalised women. The illusionary nature of these fantasies is highlighted as the riches offered frequently disappeared, or food was unsatisfying. This is further shown in cases where suspects spoke of the devil and their familiars abandoning them once they had been apprehended by the law. This feature of narratives also indicates the elite belief that the devil held the real power, merely

deluding witches into thinking they held power. These elite beliefs were put forward by the authors of the pamphlet material examined in this chapter.

As stated above, non-pamphlet material provides evidence of the desire for social power in particular by accused witches, but only implicitly. Explicit references to fantasies involving images of power are lacking as the non-pamphlet evidence consists mainly of depositions and accusations. Where the suspect's view does exist, this rarely included a confession. Overall, the notion of witchcraft as a means of gaining power for women is a problematic one, since we are discussing a crime which ultimately involved the death penalty for many. However, the idea that witchcraft beliefs provided a means of expressing desire for power, social or material, and fantasies of empowerment, appears to be an effective one.

A more explicit example of the use of witchcraft beliefs to obtain power, prestige and attention is provided by accusations made by children, servants and parents, and the actions of experts who encouraged these accusations. For the young, there were two main opportunities for power. As well as gaining power over the perceived source of evil in the neighbourhood, accusations provided powerless groups such as children and servants the opportunity to control their audiences and transgress acceptable modes of behaviour. Accusers held the power of life and death over those suspected. This, for children under fourteen, placed them in a position of unique legal power since they would not have been allowed to testify in any other criminal trial. Evidence of this is provided by the Essex and Lancashire Pendle witch trials in particular; instances of sensational epidemic trials. However, the power provided by accusations for children and servants is further evidenced by the majority of cases examined in the pamphlet sources from the Midlands and the North, and many trials included in the non-pamphlet material. This indicates that witchcraft accusations were an effective means of gaining power for powerless groups, particularly the young. That these cases are more prevalent in pamphlet

sources is perhaps not surprising since the presence of young witnesses, especially those exhibiting bizarre fits, would have provided more material upon which to base a pamphlet account. The public would also have been very interested in hearing about these cases.

Importantly, as has been discussed with reference to both pamphlet and non-pamphlet evidence, power was provided for powerless groups such as children and servants, in the opportunity to indulge in unlicensed misbehaviour in the violence, blasphemy and swearing exhibited in fits. This, it could be argued, was an act of rebellion against authority and an expression of the desire for attention and control. As the pamphlet material of the Midlands and the North highlights in particular, children and servants, such as Thomas Darling of Burton, William Somers of Nottingham, William Perry of Bilson and Richard Dugdale of Surey, Lancashire, drew large crowds of people eager to witness their extraordinary fits. The reasons indicated for pretending to be bewitched or possessed; to avoid school or work, or more emotional needs, highlight the desire for attention and power by these individuals. These factors were focused upon more in the pamphlets of the Midlands and the North than those of Essex, which tended to focus more upon the witch and explicit accusations. The arguments made concerning accusations as a means of obtaining power by the young are further supported by non-pamphlet evidence, such as the accusations of John Smith of Leicestershire, and Elizabeth Mallory, James Johnson and Mary Moor of Yorkshire. The assertion that witchcraft accusations provided a means of obtaining power for powerless groups has thus been demonstrated.

It has also been indicated that witchcraft accusations presented an opportunity for power not only for the young, but also for the parents and experts involved. Evidence of this point has been provided by examples from each group of material; Brian Darcy, JP, in Essex, 1582, the exorcist John Darrell in the late sixteenth

century, and Roger Smith of Husbands Bosworth, Leicestershire in 1616. In the case of Darrell in particular, the power gained by these individuals was questioned by others, notably Samuel Harsnett, and was undoubtedly used to discredit, rather than encourage, witch trials.

It has been argued that the notion of power was gendered, in that the real power was believed by contemporaries to lie in the hands of male figures. Witches were believed to lose their power once apprehended by the justice system, and there was discussion over the whether the witch, the Devil or God exercised power. These discussions were indicated only in the pamphlet evidence examined here, predominantly in the author's viewpoints, underlining the assertion, made in Chapter One, that pamphlet sources present more of an elite view than non-pamphlet material. Where discussions of masculine power occur in pamphlets, they frequently involved images of witches left powerless after their abandonment by the devil or their familiars. Pamphlets from both Essex and the Midlands and the North indicate the elite belief that witches were merely deluded by the devil into believing that they could carry out acts of maleficia. Ultimately, however, it was argued that the devil could only exercise what power God allowed him to. Although discussion of this point was not prevalent, the indications do underline the importance of gender in early modern conceptions of power.

Finally, issues of power can be seen in the exercise of folk magic in the community. Thus far, the study has focused mainly upon beliefs and issues surrounding the exercise of maleficia or bad magic. But to focus solely upon this area presents a narrow view of magic beliefs in this period. People responding to requests for help in healing people and livestock illustrates the belief by the community in their powers. The prevalence of people going to fortune tellers and cunning people, and the popular use of divination, to discover the whereabouts of lost or stolen goods, the gender of an unborn child, or the identity of a future husband, all point to an obvious

social need for more knowledge about the world people were living in, and thus the need for more control over their circumstances and environment. Thus it is to the subject of popular religion and folk magic which we must finally turn.

Chapter Six - Popular Religion and Folk Magic

Introduction

The fifth, and final, area to be analysed in this study is that of religion. Specifically, primary material relating to witchcraft trials can be examined to highlight evidence of community beliefs in popular or folk religion and, furthermore, these sources are indicative of the confusion suffered by the common people over religious doctrine in the years following the Protestant Reformation. Matalene claimed that witchcraft was a 'fiction'.¹ If it was, then it is was a fiction that reveals much about popular belief in early modern society, and the ways in which people made sense of their world. This chapter will argue that it is necessary to consider the role of popular religion and folk magic in order to gain a fuller understanding of witchcraft beliefs in this period. To focus solely upon malefic witchcraft provides a narrow, and distorted, picture of beliefs in magic in the community.²

It is necessary first to indicate what is meant by the term popular religion.³ Scholarship on the English Reformation of the sixteenth-century has, to a certain extent, been polarised over the issue of popular religion. Much of this comes down to a question of the evidence consulted. Whilst historians like Dickens, using evidence of early Protestant activity, stress the unpopularity of the late medieval church and thus a more inevitable move towards Protestantism, other scholars, including Duffy, Haigh, Hutton and Scarisbrick, who examine evidence such as wills, parish registers and churchwardens accounts, have argued convincingly that the pre-Reformation church was a vital and popular one, and that there was much

¹ Matalene, C., 'Women as Witches', 577.

² For convenience practitioners of the various types of cunning or folk magic have been grouped together under the terms cunning folk or cunning people.

³ Duffy indicates that the use of the term 'popular religion' is somewhat problematic as it raises questions about what constituted 'non-popular religion'. With this caveat in mind, the term popular religion is here used to denote traditional religious practices at a community level, Duffy, E., The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c1400-c1580, (London, 1992), 2-3.

continuity of traditional religious practices across England into the seventeenth-century and beyond. Catholic, or traditional, religious practices appealed to the populace more because they were highly visual and ritualised, almost magical. The people were used to these rituals, even if they did not fully understand the theology behind them.

The imposition of the Protestant religion arguably widened the gulf between learned and popular culture, with the Protestant emphasis on preaching the Word and on a literal reading of the scriptures, which had little meaning for a largely illiterate population. Generalisations are rarely adequate, however it has been demonstrated that there was more adherence to elements of traditional religion in the north and west of England, notably, for this study, large areas of Lancashire, Yorkshire and parts of the Midlands, while the imposition of Protestantism appears to have been more successful in the south and east of England, including Essex.⁴

It could be argued that the quasi-magical elements of traditional orthodox religion made more sense to the early modern mentality which perceived a supernatural world in which good and evil were personified as God and the Devil, and which was inhabited by not only witches, but also fairies, pixies and ghosts. Significantly, most historical accounts of the witch trials ignore the fact that witchcraft was a reality in early modern perceptions. Accusers and accused would have shared these

⁴ Dickens, A.G., The English Reformation, (London, 1969); Duffy, E., The Stripping of the Altars; Haigh, C., Reformation and Resistance in Tudor Lancashire, (London, 1975); Haigh, C., English Reformations: Religion, Politics and Society Under the Tudors, (Oxford, 1993); and Haigh, C., 'The Continuity of Catholicism in the English reformation', Hutton, R., 'The Local Impact of the Tudor Reformations', and Palliser, D.M., 'Popular Reactions to the Reformation during the years of uncertainty 1530-70' in Haigh, C. (ed.), The English Reformation Revised, (Cambridge, 1987); Rex, R., Henry VIII and the English Reformation, (London, 1993); Scarisbrick, J.J., The Reformation and the English People, (Oxford, 1994). Hutton has indicated the survival of various 'traditional' practices into the nineteenth-century, Hutton, R., 'The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore', Past and Present, (1995), no.148, 89-116. The survival of traditional beliefs in witchcraft can be seen in the association of Methodism with witchcraft by contemporaries in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, Davies, O., 'Methodism, the Clergy, and the Popular Belief in Witchcraft and Magic', History, (April 1997), vol.82, no.266, 252-65.

assumptions.⁵ The ritual elements of traditional religion, including the intercessionary power of the saints, holy water and crucifixes, fitted in with the popular use of holy shrines, wells and magic stones by the people. The Reformation swept away many of these 'props' which people relied upon. These rituals were particularly important to women, for instance during pregnancy and childbirth.⁶ It also led to the attempts of the Protestant elite to eradicate features of popular belief which were seen as superstitious, and thus immoral.⁷

Many of the cases involving folk magic or petty sorcery were connected with forms of popular belief and religion. Thomas has indicated how the populace continued to rely on cunning people in the community, and how they continued to distinguish between white and black magic despite the insistence of elite groups, particularly Puritan writers, that, if anything, white magic was actually worse than black magic as it did not admit that all magic was derived from the Devil. He further argued that there was an increasing reliance on cunning people after the Reformation, because the recourse to the magical elements of Catholicism, particularly the intercessionary power and protection of the Saints and the Virgin Mary, had been swept away leaving the people defenceless.⁸ Changes in religious doctrine could also intensify the vulnerability of the populace in the face of events over which they had no control. As well as no longer having recourse to the power of the saints under Catholicism, the newer religious doctrine frowned on displays of grief and saw

⁵ Gaskill, M., 'Witchcraft and Power in Early Modern England', 138.

⁶ Rowse, A.L., The Elizabethan Renaissance, chapters 8-9; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, chapters 2-6; Crawford, P., Women and Religion, 98-102; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 102-4; Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, 154-5; Gaskill, M.J., Attitudes to Crime, 35, 73; Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 37, 58-9, 66-70, 250, 282.

⁷ Ingram, M., 'Religion, Communities and Moral Discipline in Late Sixteenth- and early Seventeenth-Century England: Case Studies', in Von Greyerz, K. (ed.), Religion and Society in Early Modern Europe 1500-1800, (London, 1994), 117-93; Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 324, 339; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 24, 330-2. Scot explicitly associated witchcraft with elements of Roman Catholic rituals, Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 53-4, 85-6.

⁸ Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 493-501; Macfarlane, A., Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England, 204. The question of whether the extent of Protestant zeal had a bearing on the numbers of witches accused in certain counties is too broad for inclusion in this study, and is alluded to elsewhere; see Jackson, L., 'Witches, Wives and Mothers', 66-7; Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 84-5, 91.

misfortune as punishment from God for sins committed. Willis thus argues that by displacing the blame for misfortune on to the witch, the victims resolved their own consciences and were in effect resisting the Protestant doctrine.⁹ Recourse to witchcraft beliefs may thus have been a way of coping with, or adapting to, the newer Protestant religion.

The 'poor treatment' of cunning folk by writers on witchcraft has been emphasised recently by Willem de Blecourt, who argues that they are typically ignored, neglected or placed in the context of the myth of their persecution in the witch trials. As he states, 'cunning people are not deemed important enough to figure prominently in syntheses and introductions, which consequently points to their marginal place in...historical works...One of the reasons for the neglect of cunning folk lies in the preoccupation of historians with witch trials'. De Blecourt claims that an examination of the issue of cunning folk 'from below' is necessary, to answer the question of why people continued to consult them. Ultimately, he stresses the need for more in-depth research into cunning folk and their practices. To understand witchcraft, he argues, it is necessary to understand those who were perceived by contemporaries as experts in dealing with the problem of witchcraft.¹⁰ This chapter aims to redress this neglect by examining the activities of cunning folk in the Midlands and the North of England in particular.

Recourse to cunning folk or wise people appears to have been a frequent, and acceptable, reaction to illness in the community, although this was increasingly a punishable offence in the ecclesiastical courts.¹¹ An Act of 1542 conceded that

⁹ Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 60-3.

¹⁰ De Blecourt, W., 'Witch doctors, soothsayers and priests. On cunning folk in European historiography and tradition', *Social History*, (Oct 1994), vol. 19, no. 3, 285-303, quote 286. Cunning folk are discussed in Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, chapters 7-9.

¹¹ Thomas claims that cunning folk were treated relatively leniently by the courts, Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 291-5, 306; Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 27-8; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 121-30, 171-86. De Blecourt argues that cunning folk attracted the attention of the authorities because they were so popular, De Blecourt, W., 'Witch doctors, soothsayers and priests', 297.

there were 'divers honest persons, as well men as women, whom God hath endowed with the knowledg of the nature kind and operation of certain herbs, roots and waters, and the using and ministering to them to such as be pained with customable disease'.¹² These people were frequently the only practitioner of medicine available locally, thus it is not surprising that people turned to them for help. There seems to have been a common knowledge of who had skill in this area, and this was evidently based upon reputation of their activities and their outcome.

This appeal to 'cunning' people, and the use of counter-magic and folk magic by the populace, was despised by learned writers. John Brinley, writing in 1680, bemoaned the tendency of 'ignorant and Narrow-sould' people to resort to cunning people and witches. He wrote disparagingly that 'these sort of abused people have as many Followers as the greatest Divines', and further of his purpose in writing his book: 'I shall make it my business to undeceive the people, and to shew them that it is altogether Unlawful to have recourse to such men, who practise unlawful Arts; that is in all Trials, Crosses, and Afflictions whatever, God alone is to be sought after'. He deplored the fact that common people attributed their misfortunes to witchcraft, which led them either to seek a blessing from the cunning man, or to accuse 'the next Old-woman'. This illustrates the elite view that white witches were as bad as malefic ones, since all magical power came from the Devil. Brinley underlined this point explicitly, stating that

These are such as we usually call White Witches, a sort of Sots who being Gull'd, and having their understandings Debauch'd by Superstition, do evil that good may come of it, that is, use Charms, Spells and Incantations (all which are of no force without the Cooperation of the Devil) to remove Distempers, and do certain Feats in some measure useful to Mankind yet of pernicious consequence to themselves.¹³

¹² Quoted in Sim, A., The Tudor Housewife, 86. Paracelsus claimed that physicians could learn much from wise-women, Paracelsus, The Archidoxes of Magic, (1656), 88.

¹³ Brinley, J., A Discovery of the Impostures of Witches and Astrologers, (1680), 4-5, 15, 45.

Brinley was not alone in this opinion. Perkins argued in 1608 that 'the more horrible and detestable is the good witch...it were a thousand times better for the land if all witches, but specifically the blessing witch, might suffer death' and Stearne noted in 1648 that 'all witches be bad, and ought to suffer alike, being both in league with the Devill'.¹⁴ As Dolan argues, methods of counter-magic were seen as problematic by learned writers, since 'popular strategies for counteracting witchcraft, which allow the victim to seize some agency, simply collapse the distinction between witches and victims'.¹⁵ Thus the use of counter-magic, in effect, turned the victims into witches too. But despite the fact that recourse to cunning people and the use of counter-magic was deplored at an elite level, the populace continued to distinguish between good and bad magic. The only times when the two belief systems converged over this issue, was in cases where healers were suspected of using their powers for evil purposes, which supported elite discourse about the ultimate evil source of all magic.¹⁶ Moreover, even the more learned sections of society were not unanimous in condemning cunning folk or healers. This emphasises the complexity of beliefs about magic across the social spectrum.

Local healers were undoubtedly relied upon by the populace in the absence of trained practitioners; doctors, apothecaries and barber-surgeons, who were relatively scarce in rural areas, and also expensive. The good housewife was also expected to provide basic medical aid for her family, which is reflected in the rising numbers of herbals and medical works in English at this time. Gervase Markham, although he considered the science of physic to be beyond women, included various recipes for

¹⁴ Quoted in Rowse, A.L., *The Elizabethan Renaissance*, 302; Stearne, J., *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft*, (1648), 7-8. Stearne also claimed that the use of counter-magic showed a 'distrust in God's providence', 34. Daneau also expounded a similar view in *A Dialogue of Witches*, (1575). Willis examines Gifford's condemnation of cunning folk, Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 99-111. See also Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 301-18.

¹⁵ Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*, 189.

¹⁶ Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 102-3; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 116.

household cures for ailments in his manual *The English Housewife* of 1615. Recipes and remedies were also passed down through families.¹⁷

These issues surrounding popular religion and culture allow us not only to discover more about witchcraft beliefs in the community, but also highlight two points pertinent to a gendered reading of the English witch trials. Firstly, as highlighted in Chapter One, one of the major feminist theories of the 1970s put forward the notion that the witch trials actually posed a direct attack on female healing by the male medical establishment. Much of this surrounded what is now seen as the myth of the midwife-witch. The importance of distinguishing between female healers and midwives has also been noted.¹⁸ However, many of the cases examined in the course of this study do highlight concerns with popular healing, particularly in the court material. Thus one of the questions which needs to be addressed in this chapter is the question of whether we have been too quick to dismiss links between witchcraft and healing, despite some of the obvious problems with Ehrenreich and English's original argument.

Secondly, throughout this thesis it has been demonstrated that using gender theories is extremely effective in discussing some of the various issues relating to witchcraft beliefs, and how gender provides us with an essential viewpoint which allows us to focus on issues which fall outside a more traditional political, social or economic theory framework. However, up to this point much of this analysis had focused predominantly upon women, since the vast majority of those suspected as malefic

¹⁷ Sim, A., *The Tudor Housewife*, 86, 91; Plowden, A., *Tudor Women*, 166; Smith, H., 'Gynecology and Ideology in Seventeenth Century England', in Carroll, B.A. (ed.), *Liberating Women's History*, 108; Lerner, C., *Witchcraft and Religion*, 141-58; Beier, L.M., *Sufferers and Healers*, 19-32, 211-41. For further discussion of women practising medicine in this period, both licensed and unlicensed, see Frith, B., 'Some Aspects of the History of Medicine' and Wymen, A.L., 'The Surgeoness: The Female Practitioner of Surgery 1400-1800', *Medical History*, (1984), vol.28, no.1, 22-41.

¹⁸ As de Blecourt states, 'the boundaries between private care, neighbourly help and public reknown may have been rather fuzzy, especially when they concerned women healers', de Blecourt, W., 'Witch doctors, soothsayers and priests', 296. Green, M., 'Women's Medical Practice', 434, 445, 451; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 279. See Chapter One for further discussion of this issue.

witches were women. The concentration upon witch trials by most writers thus neglects the role of men in early modern magic.¹⁹ This chapter, in examining popular recourse to, and use of, folk magic and counter-magic, and also the issues surrounding religious confusion in the aftermath of the Reformation, should allow us to focus more upon men as well as women.²⁰

This chapter will, therefore, examine pamphlet material from Essex, and pamphlet and non-pamphlet evidence from the Midlands and North of England in the light of these suppositions to demonstrate recourse to 'wise', or 'cunning', people, the use of a variety of forms of folk and counter-magic and the apparent common knowledge of these remedies in society, and the adaptation of orthodox religious doctrine to popular belief by the common people. This will also serve the purpose of extending existing knowledge and understanding of folk magic and popular religion.

The Essex Context

Cunning Folk

The Essex pamphlets provide evidence of people visiting cunning people for a variety of ailments. *A true and just Recorde* (1582) is particularly rich in this kind of information. The author referred to cunning people as equally ungodly as witches in his dedication, expressing his wish that 'sorcerers, wizards (or rather dizzards), witches, wise women (for so they will be named), are rigorously punished'.²¹ This demonstrates the elite view that all practitioners of 'magic' drew their powers from

¹⁹ A recent exception is Gaskill, M., 'The Devil in the Shape of a Man'.

²⁰ Stearne argued that there were more male cunning witches, and more female demonic witches. Stearne, J., *A Confirmation and Discovery of Witchcraft*, 10-11. There appears to have been a large proportion of male cunning folk in Europe, based on the evidence that we have, de Blecourt, W., 'Witch doctors, soothsayers and priests', 301; Sharpe, J., *Instruments of Darkness*, 189; Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 277-9.

²¹ W. W., *A true and just Recorde*, (1582), Preface. See Willis, D., *Malevolent Nurture*, 89-90, 94 on disparities between elite and popular belief in pamphlet accounts. Her chapter three includes a discussion of George Gifford's ideas which demonstrates the elite view that cunning people were as bad, if not worse, than maleficent witches.

the Devil, however the text of the pamphlet shows that his opinion was evidently not shared by the common populace.

Grace Thurlow deposed that after she began to feel 'lameness in her bones', particularly in her legs, Ursula Kemp 'came unto her unsent for and without request'.²² Ursula herself had visited 'one Cock's wife of Weeley, now deceased' when she felt lameness in her bones ten or eleven years previously. This woman taught Ursula how to 'unwitch' herself and prescribed her a herbal remedy including St John's Wort, known traditionally as having the power to repel evil. Ursula clearly had a wide reputation for healing or skill in unwitching. Even when in gaol during the trial, several inhabitants of Walton, Essex, visited her to discover who had bewitched Edward Upcher's wife. Agnes Letherdale, who suspected Ursula of bewitching her child, took her child first to another 'cunning body' who confirmed her suspicions, and then to one Mother Ratcliffe 'for that shee had some experience of her skill'.²³

There are several other examples of recourse to cunning people in the Essex material. Agnes Glascock went to a man called Herring after she started feeling strange pains in her bones. He told her that she was bewitched and gave her as a remedy 'a little linnen bagge of the breadth of a groate, full of small thinges like seedes, and willed her to put the same where her payne was most'. Robert Sannever sent 'to one of skill' after he suffered what appears to the modern reader to have been a minor stroke, and Thomas Death carried his daughter Mary to two people after he believed her to be bewitched. After taking her to 'one Berte dwelling in the town' who said he could not help him, an 'acquaintance' sent him 'to a man whome he knewe not, nor his name he nowe remembreth not'.²⁴ These vague claims to

²² W.W., A true and iust Recorde. (1582), A2. As Rosen notes, Grace clearly avoided the accusation that she had gone to Ursula for help, since this may have got her into trouble with the ecclesiastical authorities. Rosen, B., Witchcraft, 108.

²³ W.W., A true and iust Recorde, (1582), A3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, C2, C7, E1.

ignorance appear to have been an attempt to avoid getting the cunning man, or himself, into trouble. Finally, John Rivet of Manningtree went to a cunning woman in 1645, who told him that his wife had been bewitched by two women, after she had had 'such violent fits, that this Informant verily conceived her sicknese was something more than meerly naturall'.²⁵

Counter-magic

As well as a common knowledge of whom to turn to in times of need, there was apparently common knowledge of, or belief in, what to do to counteract bad magic. There were various attempts at forms of counter magic which would bring the suspected witches to the bewitched person. Several examples of cunning men and women telling people what to do to make the suspected witch appear and thus prove them guilty are provided in the Essex material. John Eastwood of Maldon, claiming to have been bewitched by Ellen Smith in 1579, saw a rat run up his chimney, which fell down as a toad. He held the toad in the fire with some tongs which 'made the fire burne as blewe as Azure...at the burnyng thereof the saied Ellen Smithe was in greate paine and out of quiete'.²⁶ The cunning man whom Thomas Death visited in 1582 to help his daughter Mary gave him something to administer to his daughter, which he sent to his wife as he was going off to sea. His wife reported that:

the next nyght after his daughter had receyved the thinges ministered unto her, that shee heard a noyse like a groning, and that shee did arise and went unto her daughter, and asked her howe she did: whereunto her daughter made answeare and sayed, ah mother that you had commen a little sooner, you shoulde have seene Celles wife and Barkers wife here standing before mee.²⁷

Chapter Three discussed the body as the site of counter-magic, and examined some popular forms of counter-magic used against suspected witches. A variety of other

²⁵ A true and exact Relation, (1645), 1.

²⁶ A Detection of damnable driftes, (1579), A6. Other methods of bringing the witch to the scene included boiling her urine, or burning thatch from her house, Rosen, B., Witchcraft, 95n.

²⁷ W.W., A true and just Recorde, (1582), E1.

common forms of counter-magic were available, many involving burning or stabbing the object affected by witchcraft.²⁸ Burning or boiling an afflicted object was believed to counteract the evil attached to it. When a cow belonging to John Tendering of St. Oysth appeared to be bewitched in 1582, he made plans to kill it with an axe and then burn it, presumably to stop the witchcraft from spreading. However, as he was kindling the fire the cow got up, ran away to a nearby woodstack, and started to eat again. Also in 1582, Bennet Lane of Little Oakley described various remedies she used when her household activities appeared to be affected by witchcraft, including making her spindle needle red hot, and placing a red hot horseshoe into her milk and cream. In 1579, Ellen Smith was believed to have bewitched the cradle of Richard Saunder's child which 'rocked of it self, sixe or seven times' after the child had been taken out. It was deposed that 'one of the Earle of Surreis gentilmen, who seying it, stabbed his dagger three or four tymes into the cradle ere it staied'.²⁹ In a similar way John Carter of Thorpe, believing his brewing to have been affected by Margaret Grevell in 1582, got his son to shoot at the brewing vat with a bow and arrow until the arrow stuck, after which they were able to brew again. These examples of counter-magic provide evidence of attempts by the common people to regain control over their lives, and power over the perceived source of evil in the neighbourhood.

Religious Tension

Finally, the depositions of witnesses and accused witches in Essex highlight evidence of religious confusion and tension following the Reformation, as well as the clinging of the populace to traditional beliefs and remedies as seen above. These depositions clearly indicate that there was a distinction between the elite beliefs of those authoring the pamphlets, and of the people involved in the trials. Significantly, evidence is provided of the tensions surrounding residual Catholicism, or actions

²⁸ Further discussion of forms of counter magic can be found in Purkiss, D., *The Witch in History*, 121-5.

²⁹ *A Detection of damnable driftes*, (1579), A7.

which could be interpreted as such by the authorities. In 1566 Mother (Agnes) Waterhouse told how she attended the church, but prayed in Latin, as she would have been taught to do as a child. She recounted how when she wanted her familiar to do anything, she would say her Pater noster in Latin, and that to turn it from a cat into a toad 'she praied in the name of the Father and of the sonne, and of the holy ghost'.³⁰ Agnes serves as a good example of the confusion felt by people who had lived through the various changes of the sixteenth-century and whose beliefs presented an amalgam of forms borrowed from both old and new religions, as well as popular beliefs. Catholicism, or 'popery', aroused great suspicion, and was frequently explicitly associated with witchcraft as another form of heresy or misdemeanour against society in elite discourse.³¹ Catholicism was also associated with superstition and magical practices by the newer Protestant religion. This case also demonstrates the adoption of religious phraseology into popular belief which can also be seen in the evidence of the other counties in this study, as illustrated below.

As well as confusion over practices linked with superstition and popery, these depositions also highlight mystification surrounding the role of God and Jesus as protectors, and explicitly whether they could protect people from the actions of witches. In 1566, Agnes Brown was told by the priest to 'praye to God, and cal on the name of Jesus' to protect herself from the familiar sent by Joan Waterhouse to torment her.³² The introduction to *A Detection of damnable driftes* (1579) also warns people to pray to God for protection.³³ There is evidence of people using prayer for attempted protection in *A true and just Recorde* (1582). Elizabeth Bennett said to her spirits 'I trust I am in the faith of God, and you shall have no power over mee',

³⁰ The examination and confession, (1566).

³¹ Stearne, J., A Confirmation and Discovery of Witch Craft, (1648), 2. Rosen, B. notes how the term 'conjurat[i]on' was 'a useful blanket term both for the mass and for attempts to foretell the future', Witchcraft, 103; Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 169; Willis, D., Malevolent Nurture, 118-9.

³² The examination and confession, (1566).

³³ 'For thyne owne parte with praier, and assured faith in the merites of Christ Jesus shield thy self, so shal neither the Devill nor his Angelles have power, over thee, or thine.' A Detection of damnable driftes, (1579).

after which they went away (albeit only briefly). And Margery Sammon sent her spirits to Mother Pechey, exclaiming 'all evill goe with you, and the Lorde in heaven blesse mee from yee'.

Richard Harrison, the parson of Beaumont, deposed in 1582 that his wife believed herself to have been bewitched by Agnes Herd when they lived at Little Oakley. After she admitted her fears to him he:

said to his wife, I pray you, be content and thinke not so, but trust in God and put your trust in him onely, and he will defend you from her, and from the Divell himselfe also: and said moreover, what will the people say, that I beeing a Preacher shoulde have my wife so weake in faith.³⁴

In 1589, Joan Cunny deposed that although she had sent her spirits to harm George Coe of Stisted, they claimed that they were unable to because he had such a strong faith in God. Despite this apparent enduring popular belief in the protective power of God, elite Protestant belief asserted that the Devil had the power to harm anyone.³⁵ Thus the importance of traditional religious beliefs, and their maintenance in the face of elite opposition can evidently be shown.

The Essex material, therefore, provides evidence of the continuing importance of popular belief at the community level, through the continuing recourse of people to cunning folk and the popular use of counter-magic. The residual religious confusion caused by the religious changes of the sixteenth-century has also been indicated. This emphasis upon religious confusion may be stronger here due to the fact that the majority of the Essex material under discussion here dates from the late sixteenth-century. The pamphlets from the Midlands and the North date mainly from the seventeenth-century, thus it will be interesting to discover whether there any difference of emphasis on this point is evident.

³⁴ W.W., A true and iust Recorde, (1582), B7, C5, F2.

³⁵ Rosen, B., Witchcraft, 184; Hester, M., Lewd Women and Wicked Witches, 171; Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 493-9, Sharpe, J., Instruments of Darkness, 156.

The Midlands and North - Pamphlet Accounts

Cunning Folk

As has been demonstrated in relation to the Essex pamphlet material, people in the community continued to resort to cunning people despite the opprobrium of learned writers. This can be demonstrated in Edward Fairfax's denouncement, in 1621, of his neighbours going to wisemen for help when their cattle were sick, claiming that 'these wizards teach them to burn young calves and the like', indicating the popular belief in burning items as a form of counter-magic. Fairfax's position was clear, he deplored that 'So little is the truth of the Christian religion known in these wild places and among this rude people - on whose ignorance God have mercy!'. Fairfax himself was adamant that they would not resort to cunning folk like their ignorant neighbours, however he later said that he would burn a penny brought by Margaret Wait because 'it had been put to evil use'.³⁶ This indicates the complexity of beliefs in magic, and the confusion over what were acceptable remedies for witchcraft.

It is clear from the pamphlet evidence of the Midlands and the North that in many cases people appear to have resorted to cunning folk and witches when recourse to other means, including physicians and clerics, had failed. For instance, it was only after spending around £200 in doctors' fees, and consulting a variety of doctors and priests for advice, that Mr Starkey of Leigh, Lancashire, called on Edmund Hartley, known as a conjuror and white witch, for help in 1596.³⁷ Starkey had attempted to gain help for his children by taking 'his sonnes water' to a physician in Manchester who 'sawe no signe of sicknes', and by visiting Doctor Dee the warden of Manchester who refused to help but suggested that he enlist the help of 'some godlye preachers, with whom he should consult concerning a Publicke or Privat fast'.³⁸ The

³⁶ Fairfax, E., *Demonologia*: 1621, 35, 43.

³⁷ More, G., *A True Discourse*, (1600), 12-13.

³⁸ Darrell, J., *A True Narration* (1600), 2. In the case of the witches of Warboys, a Cambridge doctor was consulted three times with samples of urine before the doctors concluded that the affliction of the victim was caused by witchcraft, *Witches of Warboys*, (1593), A3-4.

studying of urine to determine illness was an established medical practice.³⁹ It is uncertain whether Dee's suggestion to turn to religious, rather than medical, remedies was the first implication that the illnesses of the children may be unnatural, certainly Hartley seems to have already been suspected for strange magical practices. However, as the evidence that we have of these events was written some years afterwards by third parties who were not present at the time of these events, it is possible that hindsight played a part in the language used.

When Thomas Darling of Burton, Staffordshire, first fell sick in 1595, his aunt consulted a physician, taking a sample of Thomas's urine, who told her that the boy had worms and that he doubted bewitchment.⁴⁰ Other witnesses believed that he had the falling sickness. This indicates both the recourse to a range of sources of help, and the fact that witchcraft was only one of a vast number of explanations for illness, and that natural causes were usually suspected at first. Several cunning folk offered their help in this case. The author noted that 'one which being skilful in discerning of witches had bin with Alice Gooderidge at Darbie, and affirmed flatly that she was a witch, offering to make open triall of it, and to cure the boy'. Although this offer was accepted, Thomas's mother later refused to accept the help of some good witches, believing them to be unlawful and 'detesting the divells helpe'. This did not stop others going to the witches to ask for their advice in this case, demonstrating both the reliance upon cunning folk for help and information, and their widespread reputations. The interest in such matters is evidenced by the attendance of 'manie worshipful Personages' who came to see a cunning man attempt to cure Thomas and

³⁹ Weisner, M.E., Women and Gender, 95. The study of urine was based on the dominant medical theory of the humours of the body. The body was thought to be made up of four humours, and it was believed possible to tell from studying urine what the cause of ailment was, even without examining the patient. Sim, A., The Tudor Housewife, 83. Cunning men also practised this form of diagnosis, Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 10-12. This emphasises the overlap between licensed and unlicensed healing. Gibson notes that it was conventional in possession narratives to stress that all natural cures had been accepted before an explanation of witchcraft was accepted. This ensured that the family were not accused of deliberately scapegoating suspects, Gibson, M., 'Now the Witch is Dead', 11.

⁴⁰ Joan Throckmorton of Warboys was also originally diagnosed with worms, Witches of Warboys, A3.

prove that Alice Gooderige was guilty.⁴¹ This indicates that the populace were well aware of the consequences of resorting to cunning people, however, Mrs Darling seems fairly unusual in refusing their help. This also emphasises the complexity of witchcraft beliefs, that there was not a clear-cut distinction between elite and popular beliefs, since Mrs Darling here expresses views which could be seen as closer to elite than popular.⁴²

In the case of William Perry of Bilson, Staffordshire, in 1620, his parents saw nothing wrong with continuing to consult white witches while priests were attempting to exorcise their son. In fact, there was apparently some discussion of whom to consult when William first became ill, William confessing that 'my father sought helpe for mee in divers places'. At one point the priest involved claimed that he told the father:

if hee would not deale with *Witches* and *Sorcerers*, I would come as often as I could. The father said, he would seeke of *Witches*, or of any other for help. I being very sorry to heare his bad resolution, told him that I would not mingle God and the devill together: and then got his promise that if hee would not use holy water and oyle blessed, if they meddled with *Witches*. Yet I heare, that he hath not complyend with his promise, in extremities of the Boyes fits, having recourse to blessed things...yea till shortly after they entertained many *Witches* and *Sorcerers*; notwithstanding whose helpe sought in vaine, hee is more grievously tormented then ever before.⁴³

This demonstrates two important points for the purposes of this study, firstly, that the use of counter-magic was frowned upon by Catholics as well as the establishment. This is illuminating since the Protestant elite associated counter-magic and folk magic with Catholicism and popery. Secondly, the popular reliance upon cunning people or white witches is clearly demonstrated. The recourse to cunning people was evidently seen to be a common, and acceptable, reaction to a lingering illness

⁴¹ Most wonderfull and true storie. (1597), 2, 14, 18, 22-24.

⁴² Other cases where medical experts were resorted to first include the case of Richard Dugdale of Surey, Lancashire in 1689, whose parents consulted doctors before turning to ministers for help as the doctors were too expensive and were unsuccessful, The Surey Demoniack. (1697), 62.

⁴³ The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 63, 57-54 (irregular pagination).

for which there appeared to be no normal explanation. As has been demonstrated, people felt that they had recourse to a range of sources of help, of which the appeal to cunning people was just as legitimate at a community level.

Finally, the recourse to cunning folk can also be seen in the evidence from Lancashire. Peter Chaddock of Windle consulted 'one *James a Glover*' of the same town in 1612 when he got pains in his neck after his wife argued with Isabel Robey, a suspected witch. James came to him again when he was unable to drink, and repeated the following charm, 'take that drinke, and in the name of the *Father*, the *Sonne*, and the *Holy Ghost*, drinke it, saying; The Devill and Witches are not able to prevaile against GOD and his Word'. This indicates the adaptation of religious phraseology into popular religion and folk-magic, which is discussed further below. Peter's wife also consulted a wiseman, named Hasleworth, who reassured her that Isabel was not a witch, but Peter believed that he would not recover until he had asked for her forgiveness.⁴⁴ This indicates both the reliance upon cunning people, and the belief in appeasement as an effective form of counter-magic.

The widespread knowledge, and acceptance, of a range of healing activities in the community is demonstrated by the frequent mention of them in contemporary pamphlet literature. These references were not always made in connection with accusations of witchcraft, thus demonstrating how these activities were not inevitably connected with magic. In 1686, Robert Plot described remedies for sick cattle in his *Natural History of Stafford-shire* which involved hanging up pieces of turf in the North wind which the animal had trodden upon. This, Plot recounted, was believed to be successful and worked 'by a *Sympathetic* return of the *Spirits* of this impostumed matter, now mixt with the cold and dry *Atoms* of the *North* wind'.⁴⁵ The use of a variety of herbs thought 'to have a vertue to dispell the power of witch-craft'

⁴⁴ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), T3-4.

⁴⁵ Plot, R., *The Natural History of Stafford-shire*, (1686), 388.

also seems to have been widespread in Europe, demonstrating how the belief in witchcraft became a part of life, another matter to deal with in the best way possible through a range of remedies.⁴⁶ The widespread beliefs in sympathetic magic, are demonstrated here, as well as the point that magic of this kind was not always connected with demonic witchcraft, even at an educated or elite level.

In various cases, however, there does appear to have been some connection made between a reputation for healing and a reputation for magic. When brought to the house of Thomas Darling of Burton, Staffordshire, in 1596, Elizabeth Wright claimed that she could not help him, but that 'her daughter had that at home, that she could doo good with'. Elizabeth Wright herself was believed to have healed a cow which Alice, her daughter, had bewitched.⁴⁷ Connections were made between witchcraft and healing in the first Pendle witch trial of 1612. Anne Whittle confessed to various healing activities. She said that being asked to help the wife of John Moore whose drink was bewitched, she used the following charm: '*Three Biters hast thou bitten, The Hart, ill Eye, ill Tonge: Three bitter shall by thy Boote, Father, Sonne, and Holy Ghost a Gods name. Five Pater-nosters, five Avies, and a Creede, In worship of five wounds of our Lord*'. This charm is indicative of the religious context of Lancashire at this time, which remained strongly Catholic in most areas despite the Protestant Reformation.⁴⁸ This confession indicates that Anne was known to have some skill as a healer in the community, and that accordingly she was also believed to be able to use this power to kill.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Heers, H., The most true and wonderfull Narration of two women bewitched in Yorkshire, (1658), 12.

⁴⁷ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 8, 9-10.

⁴⁸ The 'Five Wounds of Christ' were a popular image earlier during the Pilgrimage of Grace in the Midlands and the North in protest to the religious innovations which were taking place under Henry VIII. Davies, C.S.L., 'Popular Religion and the Pilgrimage of Grace', in Fletcher, A. & Stevenson, J. (eds.), Order and Disorder.

⁴⁹ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), E3; Elizabeth Southern was also connected with healing activities, C.

In March 1618, Joan Willimot of Goadby, Leicestershire, confessed that she could cure ills, for which some paid her but she did not charge others. Joan claimed to use her spirit's magic for good, stating that 'shee never hurt any body, but did helpe divers that sent for her, which were stricken and fore-spoken'. She further stated that she helped people with her own prayers and not by using the spirit.⁵⁰ Finally, Taylor, writing in 1697, criticised the activities of a Dr Crabtree, a Lancashire wise-man who gave 'physick' to the country people, claiming that he was a conjuror who used unlawful methods.⁵¹ These examples indicate that in some cases an ambiguous reputation for healing could lead to suspicion of maleficia. This does not, however, necessarily run counter to de Blecourt's argument that the persecution of cunning folk was a myth. It is merely that those practitioners of whom we have evidence were frequently those whose activities were suspected. Many other cunning folk may have practised without suspicion, thus the only evidence that we have of these people are references to people resorting to cunning folk for advice when others were suspected.

Counter-magic

The pamphlets of the Midlands and the North provide extensive evidence of the use of counter-magic by the populace. A common method of counter-magic was to confront the suspected witch and attempt appeasement. There are many instances of suspects being brought to the house of the victim and being persuaded to apologise or ask for forgiveness to help them. In the case of the apparent possession of Thomas Darling of Burton, Staffordshire, from 1595-7, Alice Gooderige and her mother Elizabeth were brought to the victim's house for a mixture of counter-magic remedies including scratching and appeasement. On one occasion Elizabeth was persuaded to go into Thomas's chamber, although she was unwilling to, and kneeled down to pray for him. This did not work so she was taken away and searched.⁵²

⁵⁰ The Wonderful Discoverie, (1619), 17.

⁵¹ Taylor, Z., The Surev Impostor, (1697), 19.

⁵² Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 8.

Further examples of the use of appeasement as a form of counter-magic can be seen in the accusations against Alizon Device of Pendle in 1612. Henry Bullock came to her house accusing her of bewitching his child, and 'desired her that she would goe with him to his house; which accordingly she did'. Once there she 'fell downe on her knees, & asked the said *Bullocke* forgiveness, and confessed to him that she had bewitched the said child'. Alizon was also taken to John Law, whom she was accused of bewitching, where she begged his forgiveness which he gave.⁵³ In an additional example of attempted confrontation and appeasement Margaret Wait was brought to Edward Fairfax's house in Fewston, Yorkshire in 1621 and told of their suspicions, which she denied. On another occasion Margaret Wait, junior, came and kneeled before his daughter asking her forgiveness in front of an audience of neighbours. Other methods of counter-magic are referred to in this case. Maud Jeffray of the same town, also believed to be bewitched, was taken to St. Mungo's Well, and to the wiseman who gave her twelve peaches and told her to eat three a day.⁵⁴

The use of counter-magic in the community can also be seen in two accusations made against Anne Baker of Bottesford, Leicestershire, in March 1618. She claimed to have seen a blue planet strike Thomas, the eldest son of William Fairebarne of Bottesford, but that after William had beaten her Thomas had recovered. Further, it was claimed that:

Being examined concerning a Childe of Anne Stannidge, which she was suspected to have bewitched to death; saith, the said Anne Stannidge did deliver her Childe into her hands, and that she did lay it upon her skirt, but did no harme unto it; And being charged by the Mother of the Childe, that upon the burning of the haire and the paring of the nailes of the said Childe, the said Anne Baker came in and set her donne, and for one houres spaces could speake nothing; confesseth she came into the house of the said Anne Stannidge in great paine, but did not know of the burning of the haire and nailes of

⁵³ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), C2, S2, S.

⁵⁴ Fairfax, E., *Demonologia: 1621*, 49, 79-80, 121. The well, which was a spring, was evidently used as a magical shrine.

*the said Childe; but said she was sicke that she did not know whither she went.*⁵⁵

It seems that after Anne Stannidge's child died she had resorted to counter-magic to discover who had bewitched her child. It was believed that by burning certain items belonging to the witch they would be made to appear, as Anne Baker seems to have unfortunately done. Burning objects belonging to the witch also provided a means of access to the witch, through her body in this case, which allowed the victim to regain control over her.⁵⁶ The perceived permeability of the witch's body is further demonstrated here.

A parallel of the method of burning objects as a form of counter-magic can be seen in the case of William Perry, the Bilson Boy, of Staffordshire in 1620. The priests who came to help him recounted that 'finding that they had used *sorceries* of Witches, which made the Child offer violence to himselfe, wee would not meddle with him, till they had burned those Sorceries applyed to him'. This appears to be a reference to attempts at counter-magic, which the priests evidently did not find an acceptable resource. The various objects which the boy vomited were also burned, described by the priest as 'those *maleficialia*, Sorceries, those filthy things that came from him'.⁵⁷ The latter again stresses the images of pollution which have been so evident in connection to witchcraft throughout this study.

Religious Tension

The recourse to, and involvement of, certain 'experts' in cases of bewitchment and possession, particularly those involving children, has been explored in the previous chapter. But this involvement also had an important religious element which highlights the continuing religious tensions in England. There was considerable

⁵⁵ *The Wonderful Discoverie*, (1619), 15. Items such as hair and nails were also frequently placed into 'witch bottles' under doorsteps to keep witches at bay. Macfarlane, A., *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England*, 104; Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 544.

⁵⁶ Dolan, F.E., *Dangerous Familiars*, 188.

⁵⁷ *The Boy of Bilson*, (1622), 47, 49, 67.

contemporary debate over the involvement of certain people in these cases from a religious viewpoint. John Webster wrote in 1677 deploring the prevalence of cases of people pretending to be bewitched, and that 'when such strange impostures or false miracles are pretended, there is commonly some sinister and corrupt end aimed at, under the colour of Religion, and that those that are most ready to publish such things as true Miracles and Divine Revelations, are generally those that did complot and devise them'.⁵⁸ Francis Hutchinson, writing in 1718, also bemoaned the fact that 'We clergymen are not thought to have kept our Order altogether free from Blame in this Matter', noting particularly the Darrell cases leading up to the 72nd Canon banning unlicensed exorcisms.⁵⁹

This point is demonstrated by many of the cases involving supposedly bewitched and possessed people in the Midlands and North of England which were subsequently recounted in pamphlets. Webster himself related his arguments to a number of cases explored throughout this study, mentioning the Darrell cases, the Boy of Bilson, Grace Sowerbutts of Salmsbury and Edmund Robinson of Pendle. He demonstrated how each of the experts involved used the children to advance their own brand of religion; papists 'to advance their superstitious courses' and non-conformists 'to gain credit and repute to their way'.⁶⁰ Samuel Harsnett wrote a damning attack on the practices of exorcists, aiming his assault at Darrell in particular. He derided the use of exorcism by Presbyterians aiming to further their cause, and Catholics with 'their fustie reliques: their conjured holy water', claiming that these 'false Impostors, and juggling Exorcists' abused the church with their activities. Indeed, he implicitly linked the practices of people like Darrell with those of cunning folk when discussing the propensity of common people to attribute illnesses to possession.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Webster, J., *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, (1677), 273.

⁵⁹ Hutchinson, F., *An Historical Essay*, (1718), viii; Hoyt, O., *Exorcism*, (London, 1978), 32.

⁶⁰ Webster, J., *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, (1677), 273.

⁶¹ Harsnett, S., *A Discovery*, (1599), 14, 16-17, 208, 22.

Radical Protestants such as John Darrell were thus seen to be utilising exorcism by prayer and fasting to prove that theirs was the true religion. The opening epistle to the pamphlet detailing the possession of Thomas Darling asserted both that possession should be seen as a test by God, and that this case demonstrated that not only Papists could exorcise victims of possession. When John Darrell came to give advice in this case he urged the family to devote themselves to prayers and fasting, claiming that there was no need for him to stay since the child was of 'firme faithe' and he himself had no wish for 'vaine glorie'.⁶² In the case of William Somers of Nottingham the following year, in 1597, again the possession was portrayed by Darrell as an internal religious battle. Darrell urged Somers to 'prepare and stir himself up to a speritual fight agaist satan, or resistance of him in faith'.⁶³ As has been stated in the previous chapter, Darrell was widely believed by his detractors, particularly Samuel Harsnett, to have tutored these, and other children, in order to enhance his own reputation, and to advance the popularity and legitimacy of his religion. Darrell claimed that Somers' dispossession was 'a most glorious Work; the like to it had not been since the Reformation; It strengthened our Hands against the Papists, who upbraided us for want of such Works; it gave proof to the Gospel'.⁶⁴ George More, Darrell's partner in dispossessing the seven at Leigh, Lancashire in 1596, claimed that if Protestants could cast out devils, it proved that Catholicism was a false church. He stressed the efficacy of fasting and prayer, rather than the 'delusions, juglings, exorcismes...vayne and ridiculous fooleries' used by Catholic priests.⁶⁵

In many cases the involvement of Catholic priests was derided, and this helped to discredit those particular cases. Of William Perry, the Boy of Bilson, it was said that his bewitchment was a 'condition as he had been taught, and so left by the Popish

⁶² Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), A2, 33.

⁶³ Darrell, J., A True Narration, (1600), 18.

⁶⁴ Hutchinson, F., An Historical Essay, (1718), 203.

⁶⁵ More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 4-5, 63.

Priests'. The pamphlet detailing this case, *The Boy of Bilson*, subtitled *A True Discovery of the Late Notorious Impostures of Certain Romish Priests in their pretended Exorcisme, or expulsion of the Divell out of a young Boy*, was evidently written in order that further 'popish jugglings' could be discovered and avoided. The pamphlet was written in reply to an account of the boy's dispossession by the priests which was published by them in 1620, and is included in the present pamphlet. The early sections of the pamphlet consist of arguments made against 'Romish practices' which are said to be false, and derision of Priests' claims to the powers of exorcism. Exorcism, it was claimed, is 'Magicall incantation', and thus 'grosse Superstition'. In concluding, the author criticised Catholics' use of exorcism to try and win people over, and also noted how Bilson was in the jurisdiction of Wolverhampton which was said to be 'much infected with Popery and Popish Priests'.⁶⁶ This further indicates how contemporary discussion of witchcraft went beyond the actual trials, but embraced a range of religious, political and philosophical debates.

The image of each case as a mini propaganda exercise for the relevant religion is evident in this case when William Perry, apparently cured by the Priests, declared that he wished his family to become Catholics, and that the Devil came near again when some Puritans were present. Considerable emotional pressure was placed on the parents of the child to convert; the priest claimed that William was suffering for their lack of faith, and pressed them to convert whilst William was screaming 'Father, mother, helpe me, helpe me'. William later confessed that he followed the priests' wishes and did what was expected of him, underlining some of the issues behind the victim's motives discussed in the previous chapter.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Webster, J., *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, (1677), 274; *The Boy of Bilson*, (1622), 1-46, 71-2.

⁶⁷ *The Boy of Bilson*, (1622), 50-57, 66; John Starkey of Leigh, Lancashire also exhorted his family to become more religious, More, G., *A True Discourse*, (1600), 25.

In the case of the Salmesbury witches of Lancashire in 1612, the involvement of a Jesuit priest named Mr Thompson, alias Christopher Southworth, was more pronounced in *The Wonderfull Discoverie* (1613). When Grace Sowerbutts retracted the accusations she had made against her aunt, grandmother and Jane Southworth, she claimed that Christopher Southworth 'to whom she was sent to say her prayers, did perswade, counsel and advise her, to deal as formerly hath been said against her said Grandmother, Aunt and *Southworths* wife'. The motive behind Southworth persuading Grace to testify was apparently that the three women 'were once obstinate Papists, and now came to Church'. This indicates the importance of religious tension as a factor leading to accusations. It also demonstrates again the fundamental importance of issues of power discussed in the previous chapter; Southworth evidently felt the need to regain power over the three women over whom he had lost religious influence. Grace herself admitted that she never went to church, but promised that she would in the future, thus leaving his control too.⁶⁸

Thomas Potts used this case to criticise the activities of Catholics, or 'Hereticks'. He agreed with the Judge's declaration that 'if a Priest or Jesuit had a hand in one end of it, there would appeare to bee knaverie, and practise in the other end of it'. Potts even claimed that 'very seldome hath any mischievous attempt beene under-taken without the direction or assistance of a Jesuit'. The involvement of the Jesuit priest in this case was undoubtedly an important factor which meant that these accusations were discredited, while those made against the Pendle witches recounted in the same pamphlet, again made predominantly by a young girl, were fully believed.⁶⁹

The use of possession cases as religious propaganda for varying religious viewpoints can be seen in the case of the Surey Demoniack, Richard Dugdale, in Lancashire, as

⁶⁸ Webster, J., *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, (1677), 276; Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), M3-4, N.

⁶⁹ Potts, T., *The Wonderfull Discoverie*, (1613), M3-4; Webster, J., *The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft*, (1677), 276

late as 1689. The influence of Catholics was suspected by the non-conformist ministers involved in his dispossession, and the subsequent pamphlet account of it, since although his family were Protestants, it was claimed that he had been 'Popishly brought up'. The authors further claimed that Richard's father and the spectators were 'driven to Christ' by watching the dispossession, and believed that their actions were being hindered by Romanists and witches. The activities of these dissenting ministers were themselves brought into question. When it was rumoured that Richard was pretending, they provided testimonials declaring that he was genuinely possessed.⁷⁰

Taylor, writing in 1697, claimed that dissenting ministers were as bad as papists in their use of exorcism, and that the case of Dugdale showed a revival of these practices which had died down after the disgracing of Darrell in 1600. He saw exorcism as a means to 'ensnare honest and well-meaning, but easy People', and claimed that dispossessions were staged for the glory of dissenting ministers. In writing his expose of the Surey Imposter, as he termed Richard, he hoped to show 'the Weakness of our Dissenting Ministers Judgment' and 'their Insincerity', hoping that this would convince people to go to the true church.⁷¹ These examples of the use of witchcraft beliefs by both Protestants and Catholics in attempts to further the influence of their religion emphasise the continuing religious tensions throughout the century following the Reformation.

Evidence of specifically religious tensions associated with bewitchment and possession are prevalent in pamphlet accounts. Victims of bewitchment and possession were said to be tormented when they tried to attempt anything godly, underlining the perceived evil that was thought to be present, since the victims were unable to do anything of a godly nature. For instance, Thomas Darling of Burton,

⁷⁰ The Surey Demoniack, (1697), 1, 17, 49, 64.

⁷¹ Taylor, Z., The Surey Impostor, (1697), preface, 1, 75.

Staffordshire had fits when Jesse Bee, the local preacher, read from St. John's gospel to him, but ceased when he stopped.⁷² This aversion to religion can also be seen in the case of the Lancashire seven at Leigh in 1597. Margaret Byrom had a long fit in the middle of the sermon in church the day before Edmund Hartley's execution. The children were all said to be fine when playing, but fell into fits if the scriptures were read, thus they did not go to church for about two years until they recovered. Furthermore, after John Darrell's arrival it is said that '.3. or .4. of them gave themselves to Scoffing and Blasphemy, calling the holy Bible being brought up bible bable, bible bable'. They also pulled faces, mocked the religious words and blasphemed God.⁷³ This aversion to religious authority through the scriptures or the church could indicate pretended possession as a means of rebelling against religious authority, as suggested in the previous chapter. Samuel Harsnett criticised this feature as a method of proof for possession since it was so easily pretended.⁷⁴

Another common motif of these narratives was that witches were believed to be unable to recite the Lord's prayer. The inability to pray was taken as proof in court that an accused person was a witch.⁷⁵ In January 1596, whilst Hartley was praying over Margaret who was in a fit, a preacher from Manchester, M. Palmer, questioned him as to what he was doing, and then which prayers he knew. Although Hartley claimed only to know the Lord's Prayer, he was unable to repeat it to the preacher.⁷⁶

⁷² Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 3-4, 16.

⁷³ More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 40, 44-45; Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 7, 9; This motif of reacting to religious passages was common not only to narratives of bewitchment in England, but across Europe. A German case recounted in an English pamphlet detailing witchcraft in Yorkshire also described the victim having convulsions when the Gospel was read, although she lay 'sencelesse' before. Heers, H., The most true and wonderfull Narration of two women bewitched in Yorkshire, (1658). Back in England, others who displayed similar reactions to religious authority included William Perry of Bilson, Staffordshire who appeared to fall into fits when certain Bible passages were read. Plot, R., The Natural History of Stafford-shire, (1686), 282; Webster, J., The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft, (1677), 275; The Boy of Bilson, (1622), 47, 60, 59; and Richard Dugdale of Surey, Lancashire, in 1697, who was violent towards the ministers who came to help him, The Surey Demoniac, (1697), 1, 5.

⁷⁴ Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 32-33.

⁷⁵ Robbins, R. H., The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology, 176; Harrison, G. B., The Trial of the Lancaster Witches, xxxiv.

⁷⁶ More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 19.

Alice Gooderige of Stapenhill, Staffordshire, was found unable to say the Lord's Prayer in 1596, and also confessed that she had not received communion for a year. Her mother Elizabeth Wright, also a suspected witch, could not repeat the Lord's Prayer either.⁷⁷ Finally, Margaret Thorpe was questioned by the justice of the peace as to her knowledge of the Lord's prayer. He claimed at Fewston in 1621 that 'if she were a witch...in the repetition of that prayer she could not say the words, 'Forgive us our trespasses''. When asked to repeat the prayer, she was indeed unable to say the words.⁷⁸ Taylor, writing in 1697, criticised the belief that the inability to say the Lord's prayer could be used as evidence against suspected people. He cited a case of a woman who was unable to remember the prayer because since changes in the church the minister rarely repeated it.⁷⁹

The suspicion of Catholicism involved in several cases has been alluded to above, but requires some further investigation. Several of the cases examined made specific references to Catholicism. For instance, after around nine or ten weeks of his children's illnesses in 1596 Mr Starkey of Leigh, Lancashire, turned to Edmund Hartley, a conjuror, who came and 'used certaine popish charmes and hearbs' to quieten the children. This reference to 'popish charmes' is significant since Lancashire remained a hotbed of Catholicism despite the Protestant Reformation. Darrell as a Presbyterian minister was rather derisive towards Catholicism, as demonstrated by his comments on the later life of Jane Ashton, the maid in the Starkey household, of whom he noted that she was well until she 'went and dwelt in a place of ignorance and among papists, & became popish herselfe...for which oportunitie & advatage the devil watching...he then recovered her, & now dwelleth ther'. Jane later travelled about with seminary priests who, it was argued, used her to

⁷⁷ Most wonderfull and true storie, (1597), 6, 9.

⁷⁸ Fairfax, E., Demonologia: 1621, 87-88.

⁷⁹ Taylor, Z., The Surey Impostor, (1697), 22; victims of possession also claimed to be unable to repeat the Lord's Prayer, including William Somers of Nottingham, and John Starkey of Leigh, Lancashire, Darrell, J., A True Narration, (1600), 16; More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 56.

further their religion.⁸⁰ Darrell's stance here was ironic since exorcism itself was seen by extreme Protestants as a popish superstition in itself, a fact which Darrell persistently rejected in his works. More further noted how some of Mrs Starkey's family were Papists.⁸¹ This emphasises the important connection between religious beliefs and witchcraft beliefs.

The continuity of traditional practices, if not Catholicism, in Lancashire in particular can be seen in the use of prayers for magical purposes.⁸² Jennet Device of Pendle claimed in 1612 that her mother Elizabeth taught her two 'prayers', 'the one to cure the bewitched, and the other to get drinke'. She further claimed that her brother James had used them. The prayer, or charm, to cure the bewitched includes the adaptation of various religious images and phrases; including fasting on Good Friday, images of the crucifixion and the angel Gabriel.⁸³ The use of prayers for healing or cursing appear to be a much more dominant feature of trials in Lancashire. A further indication of the adaptation of religious images connected with Catholicism in particular can be seen in the importance attached to the communion bread in this case. The communion bread was believed to be invested with magical properties through the belief in transubstantiation. James Device claimed that two years before the trials his grandmother told him to receive communion but to bring her the bread instead of eating it. On the way home a Hare appeared to him and

⁸⁰ Darrell, J., A True Narration (1600), 13; More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 71; Harsnett, S., A Discovery, (1599), 2, this is similar to the use of victims of bewitchment being used to further religious causes as examined above.

⁸¹ More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 11.

⁸² Hutton notes that northern Lancashire was the most notable stronghold of popular Catholicism in post-Reformation England, Hutton, R., 'The English Reformation and the Evidence of Folklore', 105. Haigh notes that accusations of witchcraft in Lancashire were predominantly made in conservative areas. This challenges Thomas's theory that popular magic rituals were turned to when Protestantism swept away recourse to the magical elements of traditional religion. Haigh, C., Reformation and Resistance, 321-3. This emphasises that the reliance on cunning folk may be a continuity rather than an increase. This was acknowledged by contemporaries, More claimed in 1600 that he wrote 'in respect of papists who doe more maligne this particular of Lancashire', More, G., A True Discourse, (1600), 4. See also Harrison, G.B., The Trial of the Lancashire Witches, xli. Further discussion of links between Catholic rituals and popular magic see Purkiss, D., The Witch in History, 154-9.

⁸³ Potts, T., The Wonderfull Discoverie, (1613), G4, K-K2.

asked for the bread but he crossed himself and it went.⁸⁴ This appears to be indicative of the different religious context of the county of Lancashire, which remained more Catholic in composition than the other counties examined in this study.

Religious confusion and tension is thus evident in the pamphlet material of the Midlands and the North, through the use of witchcraft beliefs as propaganda for both Protestantism and Catholicism, the indications of rebellion against religious authority in apparently bewitched victims, and the connections made between witchcraft and Catholicism. These elements, as well as the evidence of the continued popular reliance upon cunning people and counter-magic, emphasise the complexity of witchcraft and popular religious beliefs as argued in the introduction to this chapter.

The Midlands and the North - Non-Pamphlet Accounts

The extent of popular beliefs in white as well as black magic, and the extent of religious tensions prevalent in late sixteenth and seventeenth-century England has been demonstrated with reference to the pamphlet material examined above. Much of the non-pamphlet material concerns elements of popular religion and folk beliefs which ecclesiastical authorities were keen to eradicate for the sake of religious conformity. Many of these practices involved activities which the authorities would have regarded as superstition, witchcraft or popery. Three main areas will again be focused upon, recourse to cunning people and the practice of folk magic, including finding lost or stolen goods, healing, and fortune telling; popular use of counter magic, and religious tension.

⁸⁴ Ibid., H3. As Harper-Bill notes, 'it was popularly believed that a communicant who could carry away the consecrated Host in his mouth possessed an immense source of power which could be used for good or ill', Harper-Bill, C., The pre-Reformation Church in England 1400-1530, (Essex, 1989), 66.

Cunning Folk

Several cases demonstrate the popular recourse to cunning people. In 1603 Thomas Johnson, the curate of Cranwell, Lincolnshire was indicted for acting as a wiseman, as was Raph Tompson of Sutton Bonnington, Nottinghamshire, in 1587 who was presented 'for a wiseman, sorcerer or southsayer, and for not receavinge at Easter laste'. Thomas Johnson was further accused of administering 'physic' to sick people without a licence, calling up spirits, using witchcraft, charms and conjuration, deceiving the poor that he could foretell the future and find stolen goods and not fulfilling his religious duties in instructing the youth and people of Cranwell, Lincolnshire, on the articles of Faith as laid down in the Elizabethan Religious Settlement.⁸⁵ This connection between white magic and a failure to observe the religious protocol as laid down in the Act of Uniformity of 1559 is important, as it suggests that some people were still clinging to traditional forms of religious practice, of either Catholic or popular persuasion. This demonstrates the fear on the part of the authorities of people undertaking these types of unlicensed and unapproved activities, it must have been particularly embarrassing that in this case it was a member of the clergy who had transgressed. Connections made between the clergy and magic may, however, have been more understandable to contemporaries, since the clergy fulfilled an almost magic role in people's lives.⁸⁶

The case of Alice Smith also supports this assertion. In 1604 she was indicted for visiting Thomas Groves of Bellargate, Nottingham, who was a wiseman. The record notes that 'he sendes them Sayntt Johnes gospell for to kepe them from the blacke artt'.⁸⁷ Again, with the use of the gospels to protect his clients from black magic, Grove's case demonstrates both the reliance of people upon these practitioners, and

⁸⁵ Wood, A.C., 'The Nottinghamshire Presentment Bills of 1587', Thoroton Society Record Series, vol. XI, Part I, A Miscellany (1943), p22; L.A., Diocesan Court Papers 58/2/70.

⁸⁶ Catholic priests in particular were thought to have curing abilities. Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 329-30. For further discussion of the proportion of 'cunning clergy', see de Blecourt, W., 'Witches, soothsayers and priests', 299-300.

⁸⁷ Stevenson, W.H. & Raine, J. (eds.), Records of the Borough of Nottingham, 275

the adaptation of orthodox religion to popular belief and practice. Both Thomas and Alice were fined ten shillings. Alice Smith may herself have been the same Alice Smith accused of scolding in 1627, or recusancy in 1629, aligning her with the assertion that those accused were suspected of a range of non-conformist activities, and emphasising the connections between popular magic and traditional religious belief.⁸⁸

People in the community clearly differentiated between black and white magic, unlike more learned writers, relying upon cunning people for help when they believed themselves bewitched. In the case of the suspicions surrounding Jane, Joseph and Mary Clarke of Great Wigston, Leicestershire, in 1717, a cunning man was consulted for help in finding the source of the bewitchments, and for help in methods of counter-magic to counteract the bad magic. It is noted in the assize records that:

The parties so afflicted had the minister brought to pray by them but that did not availe them, so they went to a very able man in the neighbourhood, one Tho' Wood, a white witch, and this Dr Wood did assure, and so also did one Dr.Ffarren that they were under an Evil Tongue.⁸⁹

Thus in this case the people evidently found recourse to orthodox religion rather wanting.

Prosecutions against people visiting or 'resorting' to witches, soothsayers or wizards indicate the efforts of the ecclesiastical courts to eradicate this form of popular religious belief. The Nottinghamshire Archdeaconry courts include twenty-six people presented for this type of misdemeanour. The accused gave various reasons for going to these practitioners. William Awmond of Carlton-in-Lindrick was presented on 22 February 1583 'for seeking to Southsayers or Socerers for certayne

⁸⁸ N.A.R., M463 f440, 447.

⁸⁹ Le.R.O., OS 133.

Jewelless that he lost'. He denied this and was dismissed.⁹⁰ William Downyng and his mother from Sookholme were presented on 5 March 1583 and William admitted 'that he went to a certayn woman, Cammes wyfe, to knowe whither his child were forspoken or not'. He was ordered to acknowledge his fault in Worksop church the following Sunday.⁹¹ Reasons such as these, along with the presentments for folk magic above, demonstrate people's concern for knowledge and order in their lives, which perhaps was not being addressed by the newer Protestant religion.

Others denied the charge of resorting to cunning people. Most of these people were dismissed with a warning, again indicating the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities towards transgressions of this type as they attempted to reduce the influence of people acting as cunning people. On 29 May 1587 John Eastwood of Kirton, Nottinghamshire was presented 'for going to Soothsayers'. He pleaded not guilty 'at whose petition the judge, for certain reasons him moving, dismissed the same Eastwood "admonyshing hym yf there was any such falt in hym hear after not to use yt"'.⁹² Likewise William Ellis of Mattersey, Nottinghamshire, was dismissed with a warning on 9 June 1612 after 'resorting to witches'.⁹³

But people evidently continued to see cunning people as a valid source of help. In January 1619 Richard Jinkinson and John Oswell of Mansfield Woodhouse were presented 'for resortinge to a wisard'.⁹⁴ Robert Shawe of Bramcote, Nottinghamshire, was presented on 22 November 1623 'for consulting with a wisard', and Francis Winfeild of Nottingham was excommunicated on 29 July 1626 'for goeing to a wisard'.⁹⁵ These cases indicate that the ecclesiastical courts certainly saw the reliance on cunning people as a problem. In a case presented on 26 February

⁹⁰ N.A.R., M461 f54-40.

⁹¹ N.A.R., M461 f54-41.

⁹² N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/2 f28.

⁹³ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/13 f66d.

⁹⁴ N.A.R., M463 f394.

⁹⁵ N.A.R., M463 f416, DDTS 14/26/19 f201d.

1619 John Ludlam of Trowell, Nottinghamshire, was accused of 'sending Richard Nixston to a wisard', and Richard Nixston himself was accused of 'resorting to a wisard'. These two did not produce any compurgators and were ordered to do penance on 11 March.⁹⁶ This case highlights the importance of information networks in the community as people clearly told each other about cunning people who had helped them.

People in the community evidently had public knowledge of who to turn to in times of need, and trusted in their powers. Although in several of these cases the 'wise-man or woman' was named primarily because suspicion had fallen onto them, in other cases the person resorted to was not named, perhaps to protect their identity in an acknowledgement of the court's mistrust of these people. For instance, John Willson of Ellill, Lancashire, who believed himself to have been bewitched by Jennett Wilkinson, deposed on 20 August 1629 that 'suspectinge hee was bewitched hee sent his wyfe twoe severall tymes to a woman whose name hee knoweth not who dwelleth in Forton, which was holden to be a skillfull woman'.⁹⁷ John may have genuinely not known her name, or been protecting her identity, but he certainly knew where to turn for help in this situation.

That cunning people had a widespread reputation is indicated by the presentment of fifteen people for going to the 'wise boy' at Wisall, Nottinghamshire in 1623. These people travelled from as far afield as Wollaton, Lenton, Broughton Soulney, West Bridgford and Trowell to visit the 'boy' so evidently his reputation was widespread. It cannot be proved whether or not the 'boy' was a person, rather than some kind of monument or stone which people stroked for luck, but the people obviously believed in his powers. Richard Garton of Bassingfield, in the parish of West Bridgford, Nottinghamshire, was presented 'for carryinge his childe to Wysall to be cured by

⁹⁶ N.A.R., M463 f396.

⁹⁷ L.R.O., QSB 1/64/21.

the stroakinge boye'.⁹⁸ The powers attributed to this figure make it clear to see why the ecclesiastical courts were keen to stamp out this kind of activity and belief which, to the Protestant authorities, must have smacked of popish superstition. This type of activity supports Thomas's claim that people turned to cunning people after recourse to the magical elements of Catholicism, such as the use of holy water and the belief in the intercessionary power of the saints, was swept away by the Protestant Reformation.

The punishments for consulting with sorcerers are significant since of those presented, few were punished. This is important, particularly as the majority of those presented were male. From a gender angle it could be argued that this is in complete inverse to the more serious accusations involving malicious witchcraft, or maleficia, which were predominantly directed at women and involved, at the worst, the death penalty. Therefore it appears to be the case that while women were predominant in the more serious cases of witchcraft involving harsher punishments, almost the opposite can be seen for men.

As well as a popular knowledge of whom to turn to for help of this kind, there also appears to have been a popular knowledge of forms of folk magic such as divination, healing and fortune telling. The finding of lost or stolen goods through divination, or the use of the 'sieve and shears' was clearly looked down upon by the ecclesiastical authorities.⁹⁹ Dorothy Devell and her brother John Casson of Carlton-in-Lindrick, Nottinghamshire, were presented on 1 April 1598. Dorothy denied 'that she doth or ever did use sorcerie or witchcrafte or doth knowe what yt doth meane, but she sayth that she with her brother John Casson did make a jeasta [gesture] with a Syve and a

⁹⁸ N.A.R., M463 f415-6. A European pamphlet from 1520 refers to a three year old child called 'the wyse chylde' who displayed an uncanny knowledge of theology, but it is not certain whether this could be a similar case. A Lvtell treatyse called the wyse chylde, (1520). People who healed by touching were also called stokers, Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 236-42.

⁹⁹ Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 252-9.

payre of Sheeres which she never did but once'.¹⁰⁰ Her brother John was more informative and admitted that:

about three quarters of a yeare since, a weather [sheep] beinge loste in their parishe aforesaid there was a devise used to knowe what was become of the said weather, by taking of a Syve and a payre of sheeres and sayinge, In the name of the fater and of the sonne and of the holie ghoste, after which wordes the Syve would tourne aboute, which devise he and his Syster Dorothie Devell once without anie yll intent made triall of.¹⁰¹

Both were sentenced to do penance. Importantly, religious phraseology was again used here in the 'magic', this appears to have been a common feature of popular religion and practice. Religious terms appear, therefore, to have been adapted to quite different functions by the populace.

The use of the sieve and shears, along with the adaptation of various religious terms, appears to have been a well known and popular method of divination. On 29 May 1632 Anne Wright, and Isobel Briggs, both of Hayton, Nottinghamshire, pleaded guilty to 'practising to finde out stolen goodes by using sorcerous conjuracion or witchcraft by the seive and sheares'.¹⁰² In Leicestershire, Anne Garland was presented on August 17, 1624, accused of using 'unlawful meanes to tell one Robert Roberts what was become of a peece of gould which he had lost, confesseth that at the request of one Sara Hall she did use a meanes by repeatinge parte of the fiftieth Psalme, and other words and prayers and a hollowe key to knowe who had the sayd gould'.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/6 f79d.

¹⁰¹ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/6 f174d. Dorothy Devell was not the only person accused with an unfortunate name; a Dorothy Magicke of Holburn was tried before the Middlesex sessions in 1614 for witchcraft and imprisoned for a year, Jeaffreson, J.C., Middlesex County Records (Old Series), volII, 1603-25, (1887, republished London, 1974), liii, 91, 218.

¹⁰² N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/20 f174d.

¹⁰³ Leicestershire, Hall Papers VII, no.400, in Stocks, H.(ed.), Records of the Borough of Leicester, 210

These practices of folk magic were strongly disliked by the authorities, and could be directly linked to accusations of witchcraft, as indicated in the case of Dorothy Devell and her brother above. On 25 April 1598, Christopher Slater of Fishlake, Yorkshire, was ordered at Pontefract to find sufficient sureties 'for many misdemeanors & especially for suspicion of Witchcrafte & telling what was becomed of goods lost or stollen &c'.¹⁰⁴ And on 11 August 1641, Alice Scholfield of Castleton, Lancashire, confessed that:

she did learne to set the sive and a pare of sheeres of Jane Brearly alias Ogden. And that together with the sayd Jane did practise to know whether Mary Feilden...were with child. And whether the said Jane Brearley...were with Child. And who stole James Newbold his sheepe - and who stole John Feilden his hen. And that the sive did turne about when John Chadwicke of Belfield, and Samuell Greene alias Nichaltie his servant were named.¹⁰⁵

These two cases of folk magic demonstrate the mistrust on the part of the authorities of these types of activities associated with popular religion, and which, in some cases, seemed suspiciously like remnants of Catholicism. There seems to have been common knowledge of these types of folk magic; as has been demonstrated in this chapter, the use of the sieve and sheers for divination purposes was known in various counties. These cases further demonstrate people's desire for more knowledge of, and thus more power and control, over their surroundings and lives.

These cases are also significant as they involve connections made between men and magic in a similar way to the accusations made against wisemen at the beginning of this section.¹⁰⁶ Luke Bosworth, a labourer, was presented before the Borough courts of Nottingham on May 19, 1638 on an accusation that he was a wizard 'for tellinge

¹⁰⁴ Yorkshire Archaeological Association Record Series, vol.III - West Riding Session Rolls 1597/8-1602, 79.

¹⁰⁵ L.R.O., QSB 1/255/38, 70-1.

¹⁰⁶ For discussion of ratios of male to female cunning people in Europe see De Blecourt, 'Witches, soothsayers and priests', 301.

where the Cloth was, that was taken from the Becke side'.¹⁰⁷ Five people from the Wolverhampton area gave information against one Butler to the Staffordshire justices in 1652 concerning his ability to find lost or stolen goods, which he claimed to be able to do on a Friday. The presentment read 'I thought it my duty to acquaint ye wors[hi]ps wth this discovery and shall leave it to yor wor[shi]ps consideracons to judge of it'.¹⁰⁸ Clearly, although no direct acts of maleficium were suspected, these activities were suspicious enough to be reported. Similarly in the case of Anthony Ledgard of Heckmondwick, Yorkshire, in January 1649, information was given about his propensity to find lost or stolen goods. Anthony was said to be 'a man comonly reputed and taken to be one whoe can tell where goods lost or stolne may be founde', and apparently did this by using certain almanacs and books in his house.¹⁰⁹

These cases demonstrate both that people believed in the ability to find lost or stolen goods by magic, a popular belief which was both a threat to religious conformity and, after 1604, against the law, and that there was a common knowledge of devices by which this could be carried out.¹¹⁰ It could also be argued that certain people had a propensity to these powers, either through family connections, or because of something that marked them apart from others in the community. In March 1651 two men from the Heffield area, Yorkshire, gave evidence about a deaf-mute man who seemed to have been some kind of cunning man. Lancelot Mitnor deposed that the man had stayed in his house for a week, during which time:

divers from severall pts, of the Country, came to enquire, the wenches which husbandes they should have, whence they should come, whether they should bee widdowes...some men to enquire of stollen horses...all which questions he answered by signs in chalke, and poyntinge with his hand...and of those persons so resorteinge to him,

¹⁰⁷ Baker, W.T. (ed.), Records of the Borough of Nottingham, Being a Series of Extracts from the Archives of the Corporation of Nottingham. vol.V. King Charles I to King William III 1625-1702. (Nottingham, 1900), p189.

¹⁰⁸ S.Q.S.R., Q/SR/278.

¹⁰⁹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/2/97.

¹¹⁰ James I's 1604 Act Against Conjuraton, Witchcraft and Dealing with Evil and Wicked Spirits.

of some of them he tooke a penny, of others two pence, of others a can of Ale, and of some nothinge.¹¹¹

Therefore, both the community and the authorities found certain types of behaviour suspicious enough to act upon, even if it did not involve maleficium, despite the fact that many found recourse to these people useful, if not necessary.

Healing was another form of popular practice which, when unlicensed or involving elements of magic or popular religion, was faced with strong disapproval by the authorities.¹¹² Although the argument against the witch trials as a direct victimisation of female healers has been strongly, and convincingly, made, it is nevertheless the case that recourse to these popular practitioners was mistrusted by the authorities at a local level. The case of Joan Bettyson, widow, from Bilsthorpe, Nottinghamshire, serves as a good example of the connections made between witchcraft, healing and popular forms of religion and belief in the community. Joan was presented before the ecclesiastical court in Nottinghamshire on 21 February 1594, and was said to be 'publicly infamed (as it is said) for witchcraft'. She admitted that :

shee divers times within two yeres last past when she was required to help cattle that were forespoken, did for their recovery use 15 paternosters, 15 aves and three credes in honour of the father and the son and of the holie ghoste, and that theruppon the cattle amended, and for every of them she had usually a penie, poore folkes exeped, of whome she tooke nothinge, denienge that she used in that behalf anie other ceremonie, and was taught this by her late grandfather Robert Meakin late of Mansfield Woodhous deceased, and otherwise then this shee saieth shee cannot lawfully bee charged with any unlawfull practices in this behalf, neither will hereafter use this anie more.

¹¹¹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/2/70. This is similar to the case of Thomas Smith of Staffordshire, who was a deaf-mute wizard accused in 1616. Deaf-mute people may have been seen to be invested with special powers to allow them a place in society, I am grateful to Joyce Miller of Stirling University for her comments on this issue.

¹¹² The importance of popular healing, and the threat which it posed to the church is demonstrated with reference to Mexico in Megged, A., 'Magic, popular medicine and gender', 189-207.

After being warned not to undertake such activities in the future she was dismissed until any further complaint was made of her.¹¹³ It is interesting that Joan claims to have been taught this by her male relative, when the pamphlet material tends to emphasise passing knowledge of this type between female relations. As in the case of Dorothy Devell and John Casson, and of Anne Garland above, this demonstrates how people were adapting religious phrases to their own practices in order to make sense of them. In this case in particular the religious terms seems to tend more to the Catholic, which could indicate a survival of traditional belief and practice in this area. Thus the case of Joan Bettyson could also be part of an attack by the Church courts against residual Catholicism.

That people were believed to have healing talents, and that others were prepared to pay for them, presented a danger to orthodoxy and uniformity which the authorities were keen to eradicate. Joan Bettyson appears to have had a widespread clientele and reputation showing how people in the community continued to rely on the activities of cunning people. This is further reinforced by a case from Bakewell, Derbyshire in the mid-seventeenth-century. The vicar of Bakewell, John Rowlandson, presented a certificate to the justices of the quarter sessions concerning the suspicious activities of a Mr Hall, who appears to have been known as a healer. John Rowlandson's suspicions were aroused when he found a charm given to one of his parishioners. He claimed that:

about five yeeres since one Ellen Gregory of Over Haddon in the parish of Bakewell, and seemes to be much troubled with a thinge that was sowed up in a cloth and hung in a stringe about her neck; wch being opened, there was found in it a paper to wch...there were about tenne lynes written...The wrighting (as I conceaved) was intended for a charme.

He discovered that Ellen's husband had given three pounds to Mr Hall, and was to give him three pounds more if she was cured of her 'lunacy'. The vicar took the

¹¹³ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/5 f110.

charm away, but she was given another which turned out to be a fragment of the Lord's Prayer.¹¹⁴ This case again demonstrates both the apparent reliance of the community upon people like Mr Hall in times of need, and the adoption of religious terminology to add weight and legitimacy to their activities.

There were a number of people acting as unofficial healers who appear to have been well known in the community for healing both animals and people. Mary Shawe of Crofte, Lancashire, was presented on 22 July, 1630 for healing. Anne Urmeston deposed that Mary Shawe had said to her 'that shee might gyve god thankes for her amendment, for shee had not amended but for other helpe the which shee this examinante did not know of'. This claim to have personal knowledge of another's health and well-being would itself have been perceived as suspicious, as it showed inappropriate over-interest in another's affairs. Mary furthermore told Anne about how she had cured a pig of Nicholas Hadfield's, saying that 'she hadd done good, and never did any Hurt, but that shee could doe some litle thinges, but never tooke any money, but what they would geve her of good will'. Robert Gaskell deposed that he had seen Mary 'helpe upp a Cow of the said Nicholas Hadfeilds, but did not see her blowe in the Cowes mouth, nor use any Charme to his knowledge, but further saith that shee ys generallie suspected to bee a blesser'.¹¹⁵ This case shows both that Mary's healing, or blessing, activities were well known by her neighbours, and that she was quick to insist that she was not making any monetary gain out of these actions. This seems to have been a device which people used when presented before

¹¹⁴ Cox, J.S., Three Centuries of Derbyshire Annals, as illustrated by the Records of the Quarter Sessions of the Countv of Derby, from Queen Elizabeth to Queen Victoria, vol.1, (London, 1890), 88. The hanging of charms around the neck was a traditional practice, Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 33.

¹¹⁵ L.R.O., QSB 1/78/49. This blowing in the mouth of the cow emphasises the importance of the body, see Chapter Three for further discussion. Another healer, Thomas Hope of Aspull, Lancashire was similarly suspected when he showed too much interest in the health of Margery Mullineux's family, L.R.O., QSB 1/202/33, 38, 89.

the courts to show that they were not embezzling people through their activities but were acting for good.¹¹⁶

Likewise Henerie Baggilie of Oldham, Lancashire, presented on 26 May 1634, confessed to healing or blessing people and animals and appeared to have had a widespread reputation for his activities. He stated that 'frequently for theese two yeares last paste,...people have come to him this examinat to bless there freindes or cattell', and that 'what hee hath blessed hath recovered and that he hath onely receaved Meale, or sheep, or comodities of that nature but never did take silver or anie other [payment]'. A note at the bottom of the deposition states 'witchcrafte'.¹¹⁷ Jane Kighley of Fole, Yorkshire, was accused of bewitching two members of a family in 1649. In her examination it was stated that 'being asked whether or noe she used to goe to Cattell that are sicke confessed she doth...she imployeth such grasse or the like for the reliefe of them, but denyth yt she useth any unlawfull Arte therein'.¹¹⁸ Thus again it can be seen how these healers had a widespread reputation in the community but that this ambiguous connection with magic could turn into suspicion of something more malevolent.

The mother of Richard Nuttall, of Great Bolton, Lancashire, appears to have been connected with healing or knowledge of counter-magic also. When brought to the house of William Chisnall in 1634, whom she was suspected of bewitching after he insulted her, she said that she would help him but that 'she could not tell when she could come because that she was very busy for that a man had ridden his horse sixe dayes about to get some body to helpe his wife beinge overwrought'.¹¹⁹ This shows both her reputation for aiding the bewitched, and that she was believed to have the

¹¹⁶ Briggs states that local healers often provided a free service as part of the community exchange of services, Briggs, R., Witches and Neighbours, 71; while Thomas noted that the fees of cunning folk in his study varied, but were generally less than those of physicians, Thomas, K., Religion and the Decline of Magic, 244-5, 296-9.

¹¹⁷ L.R.O., QSB 1/139/81.

¹¹⁸ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/1/244.

¹¹⁹ L.R.O., QSB 1/139/85.

power to bewitch in the first instance. Thus the ambiguous, and vulnerable, reputation which healers cultivated can be seen. Issues of power are also evident in the power which a request for help could give the 'healer'. Mrs Nuttall had the power to withhold her help until she saw fit, influenced no doubt by the fact that the bewitching was believed to have started with an insult against her character.

Another case which emphasises this fine line between a connection with healing and suspicion of witchcraft can be seen in the case of Elizabeth Hodgson of Scarborough, Yorkshire, in March 1652. When the young daughter of John Allen started to suffer from strange fits, it was deposed that 'the mother of the said child was advised to send for Elizabeth Hodgson of this town to looke or charme the said child...to which woman the mother Anne Allan gave two pence who tould her the child should mend before twelve of the clock that night'. Elizabeth told the mother that the child was bewitched by Anne Marchant, and later said that 'shee had cured the child but because the saide mother did lett off that cure shee the saide child is not curable'. This again demonstrates the reputation for healing in the community, and the power that the healer was believed to have had over the victim's family, to heal or not at will. In this case again trust turned to suspicion, despite the indictment of Anne Marchant for witchcraft. Anne denied practising witchcraft on 9 August 1652, which was followed by the presentment of Elizabeth Hodgson for she did 'practise or exercise the vocation or conjuration of evill and wicked spiritts and consult and covenant therewith concerneing Frances Allen daughter of John Allen of Scarbrough'.¹²⁰

Ann Green of Gargrave, Yorkshire, was prosecuted against in the assize court in February 1653. Like Mary Shawe above, she claimed to have knowledge of another's health and well-being, and offered to help them if they would give her

¹²⁰ N.Y.R.O., MIC 1348/1307; MIC 1348/1331, MIC 1348/1318 in Ashcroft, M.Y., Scarborough Records 1641-1660.

some of their hair. Thomas Tatterton told how after he had fallen sick Ann 'told this Informant yt hee was bewicht & told him shee could take in hand to cure him desireinge his water & a locke of his heire out of his necke...she tould him that never a doctor in England could cure him'. Ann admitted to using charms to heal people using their water and hair which she burnt.¹²¹ This shows clearly how a reputation for healing could easily turn into a suspicion for witchcraft. The power invested in parts of the body, or items belonging to a person can also be seen. Possession of something like hair could allow one to use it for a variety of magical means, including maleficia and counter-magic.

Thus despite the fact that the notion of the midwife-witch has been strongly dismissed, it appears to be the case that there was some connection made between healing practices and suspicion for witchcraft in the community where suspicious actions, words or knowledge about another's health could lead to mistrust. As noted above, with reference to pamphlet accounts, the prevalence of connections made between healing and witchcraft here may present a false image, since there is no way of eliciting how many healers there were who practised without suspicion of maleficia ever being attributed to them.

The practice of unlicensed healing or treating others was taken seriously by the courts even when not directly associated with witchcraft and sorcery. Richard Ashley of Bloxwich Magna, Staffordshire, was accused of getting a woman dwelling in his house pregnant, and that he 'procured part of a tree called Savin to the entent the woman shold have eate of it whereby to have spoyled and made away or killed the childe in the wombe'.¹²² In 1676 in Leicestershire, Samuel Browne and Walter

¹²¹ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/1/31-9. A further example of a known healer being suspected of witchcraft is Joan Jurdie of Rossington, Yorkshire in 1605. Although she denied skill in healing, she appeared to have foreknowledge of the illness of her 'victim'. 'Alleged Witchcraft at Rossington, near Doncaster, 1605', 593-5.

¹²² W.S.Q.S.R., QS14, roll 11, no.60. He was also accused of violence and selling ale without a licence, the latter charge being acted upon by the court.

Grace were indicted in the quarter sessions court 'for practising physick without licence', and in the same year John Kay of Leeds was one of five men indicted for the same offence.¹²³ Popular healing was, therefore, undoubtedly a concern for the authorities.

The third element of popular religion to be discussed here is fortune telling, which the authorities, particularly the ecclesiastical courts, wished to eradicate.¹²⁴ Michael Gibson of North Collingham, Nottinghamshire, was presented before the Nottingham Archdeaconry court on 4 June 1617 'for taking upon him to be a fortune teller', but was dismissed.¹²⁵ Prudence Knaggs of Gringley, Nottinghamshire, was presented on 6 March 1631 'for fortelling of thinges to come as the death of people and such like'. She pleaded not guilty and was ordered to purge herself, but afterwards admitted 'that shee did report what shee heard another body say'. Prudence was then ordered to do penance before the minister and the churchwardens.¹²⁶ This case highlights again the neighbourhood gossip and information networks. On 20 May 1634 Margaret, the wife of Michael Dewell of Ordsall, Nottinghamshire, appeared before the same court accused of 'Soothsaying or telling of fortunes'. She pleaded guilty, and on 1 July was ordered to acknowledge her fault.¹²⁷ And on 13 October 1606 at Richmond Quarter Sessions, Yorkshire, it was recorded that: 'Ralph Milner of Rashe, yoman, being accused of sorcerie, witchcraft, inchantment and telling of fortunes, shall make his submissions at Mewkarr Church upon Sonday next'.¹²⁸

The above cases demonstrate the efforts and concern of the ecclesiastical authorities in particular with people acting as fortune tellers. A later case in the

¹²³ Le.R.O., QS 7/1; Raine, J., 'Depositions from York Castle', 224-5. It is significant, perhaps, that these cases of unlicensed healing which were not directly associated with sorcery concerned men exclusively.

¹²⁴ See Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 282-91.

¹²⁵ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/16 f53.

¹²⁶ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/20 f159.

¹²⁷ N.A.R., DDTS 14/26/21 f117.

¹²⁸ Atkinson, J.C.(ed.), *North Riding Quarter Sessions Records*, 58.

Nottinghamshire quarter sessions records highlights one reason why the authorities were so concerned, because people clearly believed in their talents and were prepared to pay. On 27 July, 1732, Ann Knowland, alias Gwyn, of Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, appeared before the court 'upon three Severall Indictments found against her for Defrauding and Cheating Three Severall persons of Money and Goods Under Colour and pretence of Telling them their ffortunes'. Ann pleaded guilty and was ordered to:

be Strippd from the Waste Upwards and whipped in a Cart from the County Gaole to the Malt Cross in Nottingham afd [aforesaid] till her body be Bloody. And Shall in the same manner be Whipped at Mansfield Cross the Thursday following till her body be bloody and then sent to the House of Correcon at Southwell in this County and there be kept to hard labour.

On 2 October 1732 Ann sent a petition to the court claiming that 'she is big with child'. Thus she was released in order 'to prevent any Charge being brought upon the County in Case She Shall be Delivered of a child in the said House of Correction'.¹²⁹ This demonstrates the reluctance of the authorities and individual communities at this time to be left to pay for children born in their area of jurisdiction.¹³⁰

This was not the end of the case of Ann Knowland, for in 1733 the Master of the House of Correction, William North, was charged with allowing Ann to go at large and allowing people to come and have their fortunes told, including one William Bull, from whom she was said to have defrauded the sum of £19:6:8.¹³¹ Evidently she was very convincing and people were prepared to pay her considerable amounts of money for her talents. These accusations of fortune telling, while not explicitly linked to accusations of witchcraft were, in the case of the first three in particular,

¹²⁹ N.A.R., C/QSM 1/25, 70, 93

¹³⁰ This is clearly illustrated by the case of Diana Standley, a heavily pregnant woman who was tied to a chair and rushed across the parish boundaries in Warwickshire in order to avoid the expense falling on the original parish. Ratcliffe, S.C. & Johnson, H.C. (eds.), Warwick County Records vol.III. Quarter Sessions Order Book Easter 1650- Epiphany 1657, 96.

¹³¹ N.A.R., C/QSM 1/79/3.

bound up with features of popular religion and belief which the authorities were keen to reduce.

Counter-magic

As well as people having a common knowledge of certain practices of folk magic like the use of the sieve and shears, there also seems to have been a common knowledge of forms of counter-magic, to try to counteract bad magic. Ann Wagg, who appeared before the Derbyshire quarter sessions in June 1650, evidently had a bad reputation in the community for many years, and was believed to be the cause of various illnesses over a long period of time. People in her community seem to have developed ways of dealing with her powers through a mixture of appeasing tactics and attempts at counter-magic. Alices Day told how when Elizabeth Webster took ill two or three years previously she had told her to ask forgiveness of Ann Wagg but she refused, and died. Likewise, Ann Ancoke told how when her fifteen year old daughter had fallen ill ten days before how she, and some of the neighbours, had feared that Ann had harmed her. She sent for Ann Wagg and asked her forgiveness but 'the Girle dyed'.¹³²

Francis Torratt claimed that his maid Elizabeth Parkson had fallen sick after Ann had given 'forth some speeches against' her, describing how on the way to church 'the said Anne Wagg stood in the way & frowned upon the said maide butt uttered noe words'. The maid believed that she was being tormented by a cat, so they attempted some counter-magic to find out who the culprit was, 'the mayd haveinge formerly heard that the putting the tongues into the fire the Woman if she was a witch could not goe. She did put the tongues in the fire & the said Anne did not goe till they were taken forth againe'.¹³³ This method of counter-magic through burning an item is similar to many of those detailed in the pamphlet material above. This case also

¹³² D.R.O., Q/SB 2/1213.

¹³³ D.R.O., Q/SB 2/170. The 'tongues' were probably fire tongs.

indicates the power that words and looks of a witch were perceived to have, and thus how the only way to regain control was through counter-magic or formal accusation.

Methods of appeasement and counter-magic are prevalent in the assize records for the Northern Circuit. Suspected witches were brought to the victim's house either to be scratched, as seen in Chapter Three, or in attempts at reconciliation. After an argument between Mary Midgeley and Richard Wood's wife over some alms of wool some of their milking cows fell sick. Mrs Wood met Mary and 'tould her shee hadd made the faulte & desired her to remedie it if shee could', after which Mary took five pence from her and told her how to help her cattle recover with salt. Soon afterwards, Richard met Mary in an alehouse in Heptenstall, Yorkshire. He deposed in 1646 that he 'tould her there hadd beene some litle fault made by her since hee wente from home...shee thereupon gave him an apple & confessed she had done him hurte diverse tymes but never would doe more'.¹³⁴

The Yorkshire records provide much evidence of the use of counter-magic in the community. Jane Kighley of Fole, Yorkshire, was brought to the bedside of Abraham Hobson the younger whom she was suspected of bewitching. At first she refused to go 'saying hange him he nev' loved me', but going to the bedside she told Abraham that 'he could not passe out of the world till hee Asked her forgiveness'.¹³⁵ Mary and William Waide of Studley, Yorkshire, were brought to Elizabeth Mallory's bedside to ask her forgiveness, however when Elizabeth appeared to recover Mary withdrew her words fearing that the rapid recovery could provide proof of witchcraft.¹³⁶ Elizabeth Lambe, of Reedness, Yorkshire, accused in 1692, evidently knew of her bad reputation and tried to reconcile herself with her neighbours, but in doing so increased suspicions of her. After Thomas Rennard's wife told some of her neighbours that she suspected Elizabeth to have bewitched her child, Elizabeth 'did

¹³⁴ P.R.O., ASSI 45/1/5/38.

¹³⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/3/1/242.

¹³⁶ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/3/132-4.

fall downe on her knees & asked her forgiveness' after which the child appeared to recover. When asked why she begged forgiveness if she denied bewitching the child, she replied that she did so because the child was sick.¹³⁷ Some people refused to go to a victim's bedside, perhaps in the knowledge that they would be entering a no-win situation as in the cases above. Elizabeth Roberts of Beverley, Yorkshire, accused in 1654, refused to go to the chamber of Walter Greenliffe who was believed to have been bewitched, and denied all of the charges of witchcraft made against her.¹³⁸ Non-pamphlet evidence, therefore, provides copious evidence of the popular use of counter-magic, as well as the use of folk magic in the community, indicating that there was a widespread knowledge of what to do and whom to turn to when a suspicion of witchcraft was raised.

Religious Tension

Finally, the use of religious words and phraseology in folk magic should be examined, since this demonstrates the prevalence and continuance of popular religion through attempts to adopt or assimilate orthodox religious terms into people's lives. The use of religious terms in folk magic has been indicated above. In several cases this could be seen as latent Catholicism, particularly so in a county such as Lancashire which was notable for the survival of Catholicism, as noted previously. People engaged in healing appear to have used these religious terms in an attempt to add some legitimacy to their actions, or to add to the magical feel of their rituals.¹³⁹

¹³⁷ P.R.O., ASSI 45/16/3/55-6. Mother Samuel of Warboys likewise refused to go to the Throckmorton household when she realised that she was suspected of bewitching the occupants, *Witches of Warboys*, A4.

¹³⁸ P.R.O., ASSI 45/5/1/88.

¹³⁹ The late medieval church recommended the use of prayers when healing or gathering herbs, and the belief in the efficacy of these appears to have continued despite the opprobrium of the Protestant elite, Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 46-51. Holmes argues that the apparent ability of cunning people to use these religious symbols added to their efficacy in the eyes of the people, Holmes, C., 'Popular Culture?', 103. Religious language was also seen as a vehicle of power, Briggs, R., *Witches and Neighbours*, 121. Connections made between Catholic rituals and symbols and witchcraft from other counties include the cases of Margaret Pilton of Wiltshire in 1613, and Mistress Pepper of Newcastle in 1664, Ewen, C.L., *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, 439; Raine, J., 'Depositions from York Castle', 127. At the other end of the religious spectrum, Jane Philips of Cambridgeshire

Henerie Baggilie of Oldham, Lancashire, deposed on 26 May 1634 that his father had taught him to use the following words to heal: 'I tell thou forspoken Toothe and Tonge: Hearte and Heartkorth: Thrit thinge thee Boote moste the father, sonne, and Holighnoste with the Lordes praier and the Beleeve three tymes over'. He also stated that he 'pronounced the wordes and praier aforesd in utteringe of wch wordes and duringe all the tyme of his blessinge'.¹⁴⁰ Thomas Hope of Aspull, Lancashire, told Margery Mullineux that he did his healing 'by the name of Jesus'.¹⁴¹ Alice Schofield of Castleton, Lancashire, was accused in August 1641 of divining pregnancy and the whereabouts of stolen goods. Jane Brearley, or Ogden, claimed that 'Alis Scholfeild did use many strang words, which this Examinant did not nowe nor understand', and Mary Fielden of Belfield deposed that 'the syd Ales did say divers words wch were to this effect. That if Samuel Greane al Nichaltie stoule the hen Saint Peter sayd soe, St Paule sayd noe'.¹⁴² This recourse to the power of the saints in particular could be seen as an indication of Catholicism, or continuing traditional beliefs in the community.

The remnants of some healing remedies from around 1750 also involved religious terms; a remedy to stop bleeding in people or animals states that the following words should be said over the remedy:

There was a Man Born in Bethlem of Judea whose name was called Christ Baptized in the River Jordan In the Water of the flood and this Child also was Meak and good and as the Watter Stood so I Desire thee the Blood of Such a person or Beast to stand in their Bodie in the name of the Father Son and Holy Ghost.

believed that she had been bewitched by Quakers after she joined them for a few weeks, Ewen, C.L., *Witchcraft and Demonianism*, 456-7. These cases further emphasis the fear and confusion aroused by religious change. The appropriation of religious terms and symbols by healers and cunning folk was evident in other countries, see Megged, A 'Magic, popular medicine and gender', 197-8. Megged states how the use of prayer in particular by healers 'posed a clear alternative to the priest's eminence as a mediator with the other world'.

¹⁴⁰ L.R.O., QSB 1/139/81.

¹⁴¹ L.R.O., QSB 1/202/89.

¹⁴² L.R.O., QSB 1/255/38, 70-71.

This later form of sympathetic magic aimed to turn powder into blood in a rag to stop the bleeding in the victim.¹⁴³ Thus it is evident that the adoption of religious terms to popular belief and magic continued not only through the seventeenth century but well into the eighteenth.

As in pamphlet evidence, there are indications about the belief in the efficacy of God's protection. When Hester Spring's servant Elizabeth believed that she had been bewitched by Hester France in 1651, the former said 'she hoped she had a bettr faith then to feare either witch or devill'.¹⁴⁴ Margaret Wilson deposed in Yorkshire in 1670 that after falling out with Ann Wilkinson she told her mother what had happened to which her mother 'bad her put her trust in God, & she hoped she could doe her noe harme'.¹⁴⁵ Non-pamphlet material from the Midlands and the North of England thus demonstrates the arguments made throughout this chapter about the complexity of religious and witchcraft beliefs in this period, and the continuation of religious tensions over a century after the Reformation.

Conclusion

This chapter began with the assertion that further research into the practices of cunning folk and the use of counter-magic and folk magic is necessary for a fuller understanding of witchcraft beliefs in early modern England. To focus solely upon witch trials and crimes of maleficia gives only a narrow view of what constituted witchcraft. Furthermore, to ignore the role of those considered as experts in dealing with witchcraft in the community is to neglect a crucial element of witchcraft beliefs.

¹⁴³ L.R.O., DDX 412/66.

¹⁴⁴ P.R.O., ASSI 45/4/2/13.

¹⁴⁵ P.R.O., ASSI 45/9/3/97. See Thomas, K., *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. 102.

Despite the dislike of these beliefs by elite groups, it has been demonstrated that the populace continued to distinguish between black and white magic, resorting to the latter for help and advice in dealing with the former. Evidence of popular reliance upon cunning people has been demonstrated in the three types of material. People went to cunning folk for a variety of reasons; advice in cases of illness, help in finding lost or stolen goods, or aid in cases of suspected witchcraft. As de Blecourt has argued, cunning folk were undoubtedly disliked by the authorities because of their popularity, as well as because of the elite argument that their powers were still demonic at source.

The evidence of recourse to cunning folk indicates that this was both a frequent and acceptable action in the community. Evidently there was a widespread knowledge of whom to turn to for help. It has also been indicated that cunning folk were just one of a number of groups of people seen as 'experts' in cases of witchcraft, including medical doctors and clerics. In a number of cases, such as the case of the seven bewitched at Leigh, Lancashire and Thomas Darling of Burton, the parents of those afflicted visited doctors first before turning to cunning folk. Thus cunning folk were seen as a legitimate source of advice and practical help.

Non-pamphlet evidence of the Midlands and the North emphasises the reliance upon cunning folk in particular, since it becomes apparent that people were subject to punishment for resorting to them. Court cases involving people presented for going to cunning people indicates both that the authorities were keen to eradicate these practices, and that people continued to resort to cunning folk despite the possibility of punishment. Cunning folk were turned to not only for practical help however, but also to try and determine who was the source of acts of maleficia. De Blecourt has used this factor to argue against the myth that the witch trials constituted the direct persecution of this group, since they themselves participated in naming suspects. Determining the source of evil could be done either directly, by naming a suspect, or

indirectly, by providing a remedy which would cause the guilty party to appear. A myth which runs parallel to this is the notion that the witch trials constituted a direct attack upon female healers, as discussed in Chapter One. Again, however, evidence is presented of the popular reliance upon, and trust in popular healers in the community, who would be turned to in order to provide remedies for witchcraft. Healers were essential practitioners of both human and animal healthcare in the community.

Despite these points, it is indisputable that in a number of cases an ambiguous reputation and connection with magic, frequently healing, could turn to suspicion. Several cases, in both pamphlet and non-pamphlet sources from the Midlands and the North, provide evidence of this possibility. However, as it has been argued, to concentrate on these cases could give a distorted image since we have no method of determining how many cunning folk or healers practised without ever falling under suspicion. The frequent references to the reliance upon cunning folk and healers suggests that the practitioners who appear in these records constitute a small minority of those who existed. Since their services were valued, it is to be supposed that the populace would attempt to conceal their identities.

As well as practices carried out by cunning people, the non-pamphlet material of the Midlands and the North proved to be a rich source of evidence about various kinds of folk magic carried out by amateurs as well as cunning people, mainly the finding of lost and stolen goods through divination, and fortune telling. Divination, using the method of the sieve and shears, appears to have been a particularly well known and widespread method of finding lost or stolen goods or determining a baby's father or sex. This, and the recourse to fortune tellers, emphasises the popular desire for more knowledge, and thus more control over an individual's circumstances and surroundings.

As well as highlighting a desire for more knowledge about people's lives, the reliance upon cunning people also indicates that there were times when the authority of the church or medicine was found lacking. This would appear to support Thomas's assertion that people increasingly turned to cunning people after the Reformation swept away recourse to other 'magical' remedies offered by the Catholic church, such as the use of holy water and the belief in the intercessory power of the saints. On the other hand, what we are seeing may merely be a continuation of traditional or folk practices in the face of religious change. Certainly, the frequent use of religious terms and symbols used in the practices of cunning folk would seem to back up this assertion of a need for religious remedies.

The examination of cunning folk, particularly in the non-pamphlet evidence of the Midlands and the North, has also highlighted its usefulness in examining the role of men in magic. This demonstrates how a concentration solely upon malefic witchcraft neglects the involvement of men in witchcraft beliefs. As has been argued, this issue is significant from a gender angle, since while women were almost exclusively the focus of beliefs about malefic witchcraft, men were more prevalent both as cunning practitioners and as visitors to cunning folk. Thus the more serious cases of witchcraft were associated with women. Obviously, men were responsible for formulating and administering the law, and for defining who were the guilty parties, but the traditional notion of the woman being more prey to the temptations of evil, as noted in Chapter One, appears to have been generally accepted.

The second main issue examined in this chapter was the popular use of counter-magic. Again, as in the recourse to cunning people, this was frowned upon by elite writers since to practise any form of magic blurred the distinctions between witches and their victims. Certainly there were those, such as Edward Fairfax, who refused to resort to counter-magic because he believed that it was ungodly. However, Fairfax was in the minority in the material examined, as recourse to counter-magic

seems to have been popular, and knowledge of counter-magic techniques such as burning items or appeasement, as well as scratching as discussed in Chapter Three, were widespread. Counter-magic was generally used both to break the effect of the bad magic, and to regain control over the malefic witch. This emphasises the importance of the issue of power as discussed in the previous chapter.

The third issue discussed in this chapter is the notion that this material indicates the continuation of religious tensions and confusion in the century following the Reformation. This has been demonstrated through the use of religious terms in the rituals of folk magic which were undoubtedly used to give the rituals legitimacy, justification and a magical element. This further supports Thomas's assertion that people resorted to cunning folk as an alternative to the recourse to the more magical elements of the Catholic church. Several of the cases discussed in the three types of evidence alluded to Catholic terms and symbols, notably the use of Latin by Agnes Waterhouse of Essex, and the power attributed to the communion wafer by James Device of Lancashire. The explicit connections made between witchcraft and Catholicism underline the concern over religious uniformity and conformity, and the perceived similarity between the magical elements of the two portrayed by Protestant propaganda.

Religious tension was also indicated by confusion surrounding the role of God, especially confusion over whether God could protect people against witches or not, as discussed in relation to the Essex pamphlets in particular. Religious tension was further highlighted by the attempts at rebellion against religious authority by young people pretending to be bewitched or possessed. The reaction of those people to religious texts and the clergy, and their inability to repeat the Lord's Prayer highlights both the opportunities bewitchment provided to transgress acceptable behaviour, and the portrayal of witchcraft, by elite writers in particular, as a threat to the church. Finally, the issue of religious tension is underlined by the use of cases of

apparent bewitchment by both Catholic and Protestant clerics in order to further their own power, and the influence of their religion. The pamphlet material of the Midlands and the North, through examples such as John Darrell, Christopher Southworth, and the priests involved in the William Perry case, highlight the continuing friction between Protestants and Catholics, played out over the stage of witchcraft beliefs.

Overall, this chapter, through its discussion of cunning folk, counter-magic and expressions of religious tensions in the community, has demonstrated the complexity of witchcraft beliefs, and the necessity of examining another aspect of them, which is typically neglected. The importance of considering non-pamphlet as well as pamphlet evidence has further been indicated, as the former was found to provide rich information on the activities of cunning folk and the recourse of people to them. The examination of material from the Midlands and the North has enabled a fuller discussion and the possibility of gaining a fuller understanding of witchcraft beliefs in early modern England.

Conclusion

Chapter One indicated three main areas of witchcraft debate; religious factors, community issues and gender perspectives. It is thus necessary now to demonstrate how this study constitutes a development of these three areas and a contribution to existing knowledge and understanding of the subject.

It has been argued, particularly in Chapter Two, that while witchcraft accusations are best understood in their local social context, and that a concern over economic interactions was frequently a factor in leading to such accusations, that these factors cannot be fully understood if the role of gender is negated. Previous community based studies have ignored or glossed over the role of gender, explaining the predominance of women accused in terms of their economic vulnerability. Clearly the role of gender requires further assessment. The processes of economic exchange cited in accusations were clearly situated in the female domain, thus explaining why women were predominant both as the accused, and as accusers and witnesses. Lending, borrowing and begging of household goods were primarily female activities. Significantly, the transfer of these goods between parties was believed itself to be dangerous, since one could gain power over another through the very act of exchange. This gaining of power was associated predominantly with household issues, and thus women.

As has been argued, there has perhaps been an over-emphasis on the issue of events claimed to have led to misfortune. It would have been natural for the victim to try and rationalise why misfortune had happened to them, since acts of witchcraft were rarely thought to be motiveless. Despite this, a community focus is essential for exploring the social relationships which formed the context of accusations. Moreover, accusations did not arise solely from economic disputes. Chapter Two has demonstrated that reputation was a crucial factor both in forming suspicions of who was likely to be a witch, and in leading to conflicts over insults and slander. Reputations and suspicions of maleficia surrounded women almost exclusively, and

it was believed that this reputation could also be passed on through kinship ties. The strong popular belief in the hereditary nature of witchcraft ensured that successive generations of women also came under suspicion. Reputations were also formed in a female context, women being responsible for the reputations of others. Insults, either verbal or social, appear to have been strongly gendered. Verbal insults such as 'witch', 'whore' and 'jade' were strongly associated with each other in the minds of the populace, while exclusion from female social gatherings such as those surrounding childbirth was deemed hurtful enough to lead to conflict.

Links between disorderliness and witchcraft have also been examined in Chapter Two, and it has been concluded that whilst witchcraft was theoretically associated with other disorderly acts, certainly not all suspected witches were accused of other anti-social behaviour. Where accusations of witchcraft were associated with other accusations, these were predominantly verbal, typically scolding, rather than sexual. This emphasises the perceived power of words and suggests that the feminist focus upon sexual elements of witch trials may be overemphasised. Significantly, men accused of witchcraft do appear to have been associated with other forms of disorderly behaviour, most commonly drunkenness. These conclusions would seem to demonstrate that witchcraft was popularly understood to be an anti-social crime within the context of the community, rather than as the crime of heresy against church and society which it was perceived to be by elite writers.

The importance of reputation in the community is demonstrated both by the many examples of people involved in cases of slander and defamation in attempts to clear their name, and by the emphasis placed upon reputation in securing either a conviction or acquittal. Non-pamphlet evidence was found to be especially illuminating on this issue. Thus, reputation and good neighbourly behaviour were crucial factors, especially for women, if they were to avoid suspicion of witchcraft. Witchcraft accusations were more an issue of intra-gender relations than of economic tensions in the community, which underlines the importance of gender analysis in developing our understanding of the community context from which accusations arose.

Gender theories and analysis have been central to the entire work, thus this thesis constitutes the first full length gender history of the early modern witch trials in England. Chapter Three in particular involved the development of feminist and gender theories of the phenomenon focusing on the body. The emphasis upon sexual elements of many feminist writers was not fully supported by the examination of texts from the Midlands and the North, particularly non-pamphlet evidence. It was found that although elements such as the demonic sabbat and copulation figured in some sources, they did so rarely and almost exclusively in sources influenced by elite discourse of witchcraft beliefs, most notably *The Wonderfull Discoverie* of 1613, authored by the assize clerk Thomas Potts, and the anonymous *The Wonderful Discoverie* of 1619. The more endemic trials did not involve sexual elements in a prominent way. The closest the English sources examined come to issues of deviant sexuality appears to be the notion that witches suckled demon familiars, typically on sexual areas of the body.

More effective than a focus on sexuality then, is a focus on the body. Examination of these three features has demonstrated that contemporaries used the locus of the body to express their understanding of the ostensibly invisible crime of witchcraft, which was understood in physical terms. The belief in witches suckling demon familiars led to the practice of searching suspected women's bodies for evidence of witch's marks, or any 'unnatural' features. This indicates two important points. Firstly, the need to establish proof in this invisible crime focused on the witch's body, emphasising the blurred distinction between the witch's natural body and the supernatural world. Secondly, the process of searching empowered other women who were appointed as experts of women's bodies. Significantly, their good reputation was juxtaposed with that of the evil witch. The witch's body was also the focus of attempts at counter-magic through scratching, again emphasising the positioning of the witch's body on the boundaries of natural and supernatural. Finally, the victim's body was the central focus of bewitchment and possession narratives, demonstrating further that the power of witchcraft was expressed through physical means.

Significantly, these elements were focused upon to differing extents according to the type of evidence. While bewitchment and possession narratives were a central feature in most of the pamphlets examined, non-pamphlet evidence provided a useful insight into the processes of searching and scratching suspects, and thus an indication of popular ideas about witchcraft. Thus, although sexual elements were not found to be central to witchcraft beliefs in the Midlands and the North, the development of gender history and a history of the body has enabled us to gain a wider understanding of these issues.

The importance of more recent gender theories pertaining to the witch as an evil mother figure were explored in Chapter Four, which argued that the witch can be seen as the opposite to the ideal woman in all of her guises - wife, housewife and mother. The effectiveness of these theories was demonstrated to varying extents according to the source material used. In particular, while there was certainly an emphasis on the notion of witches nurturing demonic familiars as substitute children in pamphlet evidence, non-pamphlet material did not involve any sustained discussion of this, although spirits were still portrayed as carrying out the evil deeds of witches. The Essex pamphlet material, upon which feminist interpretations of the witch as evil mother have been based, provides clear descriptions of witches caring for their familiars, feeding them essential food items and giving them pet names. The lack of supporting evidence for this model from the Midlands and the North indicates that the evil mother model clearly requires some modification on this point.

The other elements of the evil mother model studied were, however, found to be effective. Witches were evidently perceived as anti-housewives through their association with pollution, uncleanness, filth and poison. Also, the evidence demonstrates a continuing concern over the perceived danger which witchcraft posed to the carrying out of certain (female) household activities such as brewing, baking and dairying, and the caring for children. Finally, the attack on livestock can be seen as a two-fold attack on the boundaries of the household and the livelihoods of the occupants. Importantly, all of these images highlight the themes of disorder and inversion common to witchcraft beliefs at both a popular and elite level.

Furthermore these images were framed in a gendered way, aimed specifically at women and female contexts.

Chapter Five continued the central theme of gender, in an examination of the images of power inherent in witchcraft beliefs. The centrality of issues of power has been discussed and it has been argued that witchcraft beliefs and accusations provided the opportunity to gain power, however illusory, for all participants - the witch, the accuser and various experts called in. Thus witchcraft beliefs essentially focused on concerns over power, particularly for powerless groups of people; women, children and servants in particular. There is some difference here between real and imagined power. Witchcraft beliefs were one way of expressing a desire or fantasy of power for women. Accused women spoke of the devil offering them food, wealth and social power, understandable fantasies for these economically and socially maligned individuals. Apparent victims of bewitchment and possession gained power over their families, neighbours and ultimately the perceived source of evil, the witch. Significantly, children and servants were over-represented in possession cases from the Midlands and the North, indicating the desire for power by people in a marginalised position in society. For these groups to gain power in this way emphasises the inversion of witchcraft, that the powerless could magically gain power and overturn the proper order.

The gendered nature of this power has also been established. Whilst the witch was portrayed as the agent of power in popular belief, in elite discourse she was merely the dupe of the Devil, who in turn was ruled ultimately by God. The male power of the law was also significant, since witches were believed to lose their powers once apprehended. Issues of power, however, were not found to be so prominent or explicit in non-pamphlet sources. This indicates that pamphlet sources engaged more directly with elite discourse over the nature and location of power than did community popular beliefs. Chapters Three to Five thus continued the emphasis on gender highlighted in Chapter Two, demonstrating the effectiveness of the concept as a tool of analysis for furthering our understanding of witchcraft beliefs in this period.

Thirdly, it has been demonstrated that a focus on popular religion and belief is necessary to further our knowledge of witchcraft beliefs and to understand the complexity and range of beliefs in magic. As it has been argued, an over-emphasis upon witchcraft trials has led to the neglect of a crucial element of early modern beliefs in magic; the possibility of white witchcraft. This has resulted in a distorted view of witchcraft beliefs in this period. Thus this study, in examining the practices of, and belief in, cunning people, counter-magic and folk magic, constitutes a vital contribution to existing knowledge of this neglected phenomenon.

The issue of popular reliance upon cunning folk, counter-magic and folk magic emphasises the distinction between elite discourse and popular belief. Whilst learned writers bemoaned the propensity of ignorant folk to rely on such superstitions, the records reveal the continuity of popular use of these elements even in the face of possible prosecution for doing so. Knowledge of whom to turn to for various types of aid was evidently widespread, and the recourse to cunning folk by the populace appears to have been a frequent, and legitimate, action in times of adversity. Cunning folk were regarded as one of a number of groups of experts who could be consulted in times of need, including medical doctors and clerics. Non-pamphlet evidence was found to be particularly useful in determining the practices and popularity of cunning folk, as well as some of the reasons for resorting to them. Cunning people existed because there was a need for them in the community. Healers were relied upon due to the scarcity, and expense, of trained doctors, and the popular use of divination and fortune telling indicates a desire on the part of the people to have more knowledge, and thus control, over their lives.

A further significant issue examined, was the relation of these popular beliefs to religious concerns. The use of rituals and prayers indicates the continuity of popular reliance on these elements, which, after the Reformation, the church no longer provided. Several examples have been discussed of people adapting religious phraseology and symbols to the practice of folk magic in order to add to the legitimacy and mystery of their rituals. These cases further indicate the desire of people for more knowledge and control over their world. This supports the notion of

Thomas, that popular beliefs were strengthened in response to the removal of the quasi-magical elements of religion from the church. Religious tensions were also evident in the popular confusion over the efficacy of faith as protection against witchcraft, and the use of witchcraft and possession cases by clerics to boost the influence of their religious persuasions, notably John Darrell and Christopher Southworth.

The discussion of popular belief has also involved the examination of two important debates; the association of witchcraft with healing, and the role of men in magic. Although there is evidence that the ambiguous reputation surrounding healers sometimes left them vulnerable to accusations of witchcraft, it is important not to overemphasise this feature since we have no way of establishing the numbers of healers who practised without suspicion ever falling upon them. It has further been indicated that men played a decisive role both as cunning practitioners and as clients, emphasising the necessity of acknowledging beliefs in beneficial as well as maleficent witchcraft for a truly gendered reading of witchcraft beliefs. Thus, this study has contributed both to historical debates over these issues, and to existing knowledge of the role of popular religion and belief. Ultimately, the complexity and vitality of witchcraft beliefs has been established which undermines the more traditional view of witchcraft as 'Death by divelische demonstracion'. In popular eyes magic involved good and bad elements and belief focused upon the practitioners and their actions, rather than upon the source of their powers.

A discussion of the three issues of community, gender and religion has hopefully demonstrated the contribution made by this study to historical debate and existing knowledge of the subject of witchcraft beliefs. A further note on the methodological approach utilised is pertinent. By examining the sources in three separate groups, the necessity of examining material from previously un- or under-researched geographical areas, the Midlands counties in particular, and the necessity of researching non-pamphlet as well as pamphlet evidence has been established. Clearly the material from the Midlands and the North does not support certain theories, notably the feminist emphasis on sexual elements of witchcraft material, as

strongly as the Essex pamphlet sources upon which these theories are predominantly based. This calls for some reassessment of the use of Essex cases as a model for English witchcraft beliefs. Furthermore, whilst the pamphlet material involved more discussion of elements of elite discourse such as pacts and possession, non-pamphlet evidence was found to be invaluable for gaining an insight into witchcraft beliefs at a local level, notably with the processes of searching witches and the popular recourse to counter-magic and cunning folk. Thus an appreciation of non-pamphlet sources has been found essential, both for modifying and developing existing theories, and for furthering our knowledge of witchcraft beliefs at a community level.

Finally, a consideration of the implications of this study for future research is needed. A number of areas needing further clarification have been highlighted. Firstly, further consideration of the role of men in witchcraft is required. This should not detract from the fact that witchcraft prosecutions overwhelmingly targeted women, however, in order for us to fully understand the gendered nature of witchcraft beliefs, a consideration of why some men were accused is necessary. The association of men with witchcraft practices has been explored in Chapters Two and Six in particular, and would prove a fruitful avenue of future research.

Secondly, Chapter Three in particular demonstrated that a focus on the body was effective for developing our knowledge of how contemporaries understood and expressed their beliefs about witchcraft. Recent years have seen a burgeoning history of the body, which is evidently an effective way of learning more about early modern mentalities also. Thirdly, the necessity of further research into beliefs in folk magic and white witchcraft has been established. An over-emphasis on malefic witchcraft has distorted our view of witchcraft beliefs in this period, and led to a neglect of this crucial element of popular belief.

Finally, this thesis has emphasised the importance of researching new geographical areas and cases for developing our understanding of English witchcraft beliefs. Future research may involve a detailed social geography of each county, to ascertain whether particular religious, political, social or economic climates determined the

rate of prosecution in each county. This was outside the scope of the present study. Clearly, the Essex experience of witch trials is not a typical model for the whole of England. Thus, this study and further research will enable the modification of existing interpretations.

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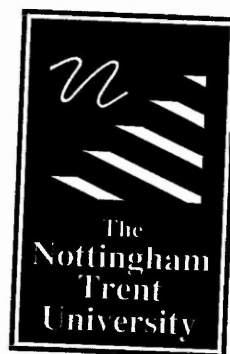
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